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'Indoctrination' claim as schools take voice to classrooms

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EXCLUSIVE

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Victoria will back the Indigenous voice being promoted in schools as part of the state's "journey to Treaty", as schools across the nation instruct students to memorise the Uluru Statement from the Heart, welcome voice advocates to speak in assemblies and work the referendum into classroom lessons.

South Australia's Education Department is also "supportive of the Uluru Statement, the Indigenous voice ... and the referendum" being taught and discussed by teachers in schools, while the Queensland government has encouraged open discussion with students ahead of this year's vote.

NSW teachers, by contrast, will be restricted to teaching within

current programs. Most schools intend to educate children on the referendum and the Education Department of the biggest Labor state has declared it "important" to discuss in classrooms.

"Conversations about the proposed Indigenous voice to parliament at school are important for students understanding Victoria's journey to Treaty and the important work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission," a Victorian

Education Department spokesman said.

State Education Minister Natalie Hutchins said it was "normal and important" for students to talk about current affairs in class.

"Victoria supports the Uluru Statement and we've committed to supporting the voice to parliament, along with all other states and territories in Australia," Ms Hutchins said.

"The voice referendum will be a defining moment in our nation's history and classroom conversations around major current affairs are a normal and important part of students' understanding and education."

A South Australian Education

Department spokesman said teaching students about "important public issues, along with how society and government address these issues", was a specific focus of humanities and social sciences within the curriculum. "The voice to parliament is an opportunity for students to learn about how society engages with and resolves issues of national significance," the spokesperson said.

However, while they were supportive of the voice being taught in schools, teachers must "ensure students are provided with unbiased and objective information to form their own critical analysis".

Queensland will support open discussion of the voice in schools, and help "teachers to ensure students have the skills and knowledge to become active and informed citizens".

"The Uluru Statement and proposed constitutional recognition of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in the Australian parliament would be topical for students to explore as part of curriculum-based learning activities,"

a Queensland Education Department spokesperson said. "The Queensland government, through a motion of parliament, has voiced support for the Uluru Statement and voice to parliament."

The NSW Education Department has taken a more conservative approach, with teachers

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permitted "the flexibility to teach about current events within their teaching and learning programs". "Critical thinking is embedded across the curriculum and students develop the skills to analyse arguments relating to current

events," a NSW Education Standards Authority spokesperson said.

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare said it was up to states and territories to implement their curriculum.

"Separate to this, the government will provide public information ... about referendum processes and constitutional change," a spokesperson said.

Leading advocates for the No campaign have accused teachers of "indoctrinating" students to support the Yes case.

Students at Shearwater Mullumbimby Steiner School on the NSW north coast are able to recite the Uluru Statement by heart, having learnt it during year 5 history studies, principal James Goodiel said. "Yes, we are supportive of the voice and the Uluru Statement from the Heart," he said. "Support for listening to First Nations people, truth-telling and truth-seeking regarding First Nations history, First Nations representation and constitutional recognition are important to us."

Videos from ABC journalist Stan Grant have been used as educational tools for St Andrews Cathedral School students in Sydney, and teachers discussed the voice with their students when the Albanese government was elected.

"In all of our subjects, the issue was addressed through multiple perspectives, though the students in general came to our discussion in favour of the voice," said SACS head of humanities Michael Neate.

The school also welcomed

Thomas Mayor, voice advocate and author of *Finding the Heart of the Nation*, to speak with Indigenous students in years K-6. A spokeswoman told The Australian Indigenous voice to parliament design group co-chair Marcia Langton would be invited to speak this year.

St Mary's Cathedral College



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also invited Mr Mayor to speak.

"Mayor's insights were used to frame NAIDOC week activities," principal Kerrie McDiarmid said. "Staff engaged students with an understanding of why the voice is important and the history that led us to this point. Significant to 2023 is the appointment of the college's first Indigenous Student Leader, who will continue the conversation

and awareness as a significant voice at the college."

A leader of the No campaign, Warren Mundine, told The Australian he "didn't believe" schools would facilitate fair discussion on the topic.

"It's total propaganda. When I went to school, if you spoke about political issues and propaganda, you lost your job. These kids are only getting one side of the story and, frankly, it's time for heads to roll.

"People have told me ... their kids are coming home totally indoctrinated by it. If you're going to teach students about the voice, you have to have representation from both sides. It's that, or don't talk about it."

Catholic Schools NSW said teachers should aim to support students to develop their worldviews, not prescribe personal opinions.

"One of our goals in Catholic education is to support students to grow in wisdom and the development of a worldview informed by their faith," CEO Dallas McInerney said.

'Critical thinking is embedded across the curriculum'

NSW EDUCATION STANDARDS
AUTHORITY SPOKESPERSON