Eureka! History lessons return

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HISTORY will be compulsory from Prep to Year 10 in a dramatic overhaul of how the subject is taught across Australia.

Students will learn Australian and world topics such as the early humans, the Roman Empire, Industrial Revolution, Eureka Stockade, Gallipoli campaign, Hitler’s Holocaust and the Whitlam dismissal.

The Iraq war, Australia’s stolen generation debate, our Asian neighbours, terrorism and major religions, including Islam, are expected to feature strongly in the curriculum.

Children from kindergarten age also will be exposed to Aboriginal culture.

Under proposed Rudd Government reforms to be released by the National Curriculum Board for public comment today:

- Primary school teachers must devote 10 per cent of time to history lessons.
- Secondary students in years 7 to 10 must take 100 history classes a year.
- Students in years 11 and 12 will be encouraged, but not forced to study history.
- Early Aboriginal, convict and white settler history will be taught as part of world history.
- Dedicated Australian history will be reserved for year 10 and concentrate on the period from 1901.

The plan to make history a priority is part of a Federal Government demand for a national curriculum in key areas that also include English, maths and science.

The discussion paper highlights concerns that less than half of all secondary students are learning history.

It also points to a serious shortage of properly qualified teachers and calls for upgrades in their training.

The new national curriculum will be tested in some schools from late next year, and is expected to be adopted nationwide by 2011.
Currently most Queensland schools teach history to Year 10 as part of the studies of society and environment subject, which also integrates geography and social studies.

The history guidelines were prepared by an advisory group led by Melbourne University’s Professor Stuart Macintyre and included Brisbane Girls Grammar School head of history Julie Hennessey.

World history is stressed, and Professor Macintyre said the importance of Australian history also was recognised.

“Restricting national curriculum to Australian history is inappropriate. If only to equip students to operate in the world in which they live, they need to understand world history,” the paper reads.

“Students should have an appreciation of the major civilisations of Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australia.”

Professor Macintyre said history lessons should encourage investigation and debate over conflicting versions of events.