2.2 An outcomes approach to teaching and learning

Teaching and learning practice in NSW government schools is characterised by an approach that focuses on outcomes. This approach uses a standards based curriculum framework for Years K–10 and Stage 6 (i.e. Years 11–12).

Standards fall into two categories: those that identify and describe what is to be learned — referred to as ‘syllabus standards’ and those that indicate how well students have achieved the syllabus standards — referred to as ‘performance standards’.

Syllabus standards — what has to be learnt?

Syllabuses and support documents clearly articulate what students at each stage of schooling:

- are to learn about (as outlined in syllabus content)
- are expected to know and be able to do (as outlined in syllabus outcomes). Both of these aspects are linked. The Board of Studies defines syllabus outcomes as statements that express the specific intended results of the teaching of the syllabus. Outcomes provide clear statements of the knowledge and understandings and skills expected to be gained by most students as a result of effective teaching and learning. Outcomes are derived from the syllabus content.

The commitment to an outcomes-based approach has implications for planning and preparation. If students are to achieve syllabus outcomes, the essence of teachers’ work is to help students work towards them. This means that teachers should be able to link all of the learning that takes place in classrooms to specific syllabus outcomes.

You must thoroughly understand the syllabus documents with which you will be working in order to formulate a concept of what students are expected to learn in relation to syllabus outcomes.

Performance standards — the extent to which the students have achieved syllabus standards

Performance standards are descriptions of student achievement of syllabus outcomes against which the progress of individual students can be measured and described.

Teachers of K–6 students can gauge levels of student achievement from sources including:

- stage statements in syllabuses: these describe the achievements of typical students at the end of each stage
- suggested indicators in syllabuses: these are statements of behaviour that students might display as they work towards the achievement of syllabus outcomes
• support documents containing information such as annotated student work samples which show levels of achievement at particular levels.

Teachers of students in Stages 4–6 can gauge levels of student achievement from sources including:

• course performance descriptors (for Stage 5 students) published by the Board of Studies
• performance bands (for Stage 6 students) published by the Board of Studies
• sample examination papers and responses (for Stage 5 and 6 students)
• support documents and other information related to assessment and reporting
• student work samples.