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'Holocaust studies must be mandatory part of curriculum'

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An education official in Australia's largest state has called for Holocaust studies to become a mandatory part of the curriculum.

Michael Coutts-Trotter, the director-general of the New South Wales education department, said he was appalled to discover that students did not know about the genocide of the Jews of Europe.

"To live life, you need to know the Holocaust happened," he told a conference of school principals last week. "You can get through compulsory schooling in NSW and never know that the Holocaust, the destruction of Jews in Europe, actually happened."

The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies welcomed Coutts-Trotter's comments.

"This is a matter of great concern to the Jewish community, which works towards social cohesion as a matter of principle," the board's CEO, Vic Alhadeff, said in a statement.

"To this end, the Board of Deputies is working in consultation with the NSW Department of Education, the NSW Board of Studies and other community groups, especially those whose histories include experiences of state-sponsored terror and genocide."

A spokesperson for the New South Wales Board of Studies denied that students do not learn about the Holocaust.

However, the selection of genocide and racism as part of the history curriculum depends on individual school policy and requires special initiative from the teacher. German history ends in 1939 for older students, although an opportunity to study the Holocaust arises in English - but only if teachers choose texts that contain Holocaust themes.

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