



OPEN LETTER TO EDUCATION MINISTER

The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

RE: The Arts and the Review of the Australian Curriculum

Australian and international research has demonstrated unequivocally that the Arts play an essential role in schooling. Among many other outcomes, Drama plays a highly significant role in developing language, and literacy. Many highly respected international education experts including Professor John O'Toole and Professor Robyn Ewing argue that Drama is essential to the early years of schooling and should be mandated as part of the core curriculum.

We support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum currently developed for the Arts and support its central principle of the *entitlement of every young Australian to an arts education*, an entitlement that includes all five art forms – Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art. This central principle is now under threat.

The review of the Australian Curriculum released on 12th October outlines recommendations relating to the Arts. The most alarming recommendation is that;

Two of the arts strands should be mandatory and we recommend music and visual arts. The other three strands should be elective subjects and schools would choose which to offer according to their resources and wishes of the parents and nature of the school context.
(P.219)

This is a retrograde step harking back to the late 19th century and the 1950s in most states and territories. This recommendation disregards the fact that rich experiences in the arts, and distinctive ways of communicating and making meaning are central to the social and emotional wellbeing of ALL children and will enhance their academic potential. It is also a blatant disregard for the integrity of Dance, Drama and Media Arts and neglects their distinctive pedagogies.

As educators, arts professionals, parents and students we express our deep concern at this recommendation as it is less than what is currently offered in most states and territories in Australia.

We urge the Government and state education ministers to reject this recommendation. We believe that all five Arts areas should be mandatory in the curriculum from Foundation to Year 6 and that schools are best placed to make localised decisions regarding delivery.



DRAMA AUSTRALIA

The Australian Curriculum: the Arts was written in consultation with thousands of teachers and subject matter specialists with extensive teaching experience. The writers are acknowledged as curriculum specialists who worked collaboratively through the development process with arts teachers, arts organisations, arts professional teaching associations, primary generalist teachers, primary specialist teachers – all of these individuals and groups were consulted. We question the credibility of the ‘subject matter specialists’ who reviewed the arts curriculum; two teachers are not representative of the education community, particularly when reviewing a curriculum document that had input from thousands of stakeholders.

A ‘back to basics’ curriculum will not adequately prepare young Australians for life after school, nor is it going to give them a competitive edge in the international workforce. To prepare for the diverse and unknown futures facing our students, Australia needs a comprehensive curriculum that provides children with foundational skills and experiences that cater to their multiple intelligences, accessing all the modes of communication our culture offers. Students need to learn creative and critical thinking skills, the ability to work collaboratively to solve problems, the ability to effectively communicate, and empathise with others. Students in the twenty-first century will need to find multiple solutions to a problem and access creative and engaging technologies if they are to address the challenges of our world. Rigorous and longitudinal Australian and international research unequivocally states that arts education offers this, and so much more. If we fail to offer experiences of all the arts within the school curriculum we are denying opportunities for personal and social growth, limiting academic success, as well as the pathways for innovation and future prosperity.

We, the undersigned, strongly advocate for the five Arts to be mandatory in the curriculum from Foundation to Year 8, letting schools choose how they can implement them. All five arts disciplines must play an important role in the education of Australia’s children and young people and provide vital skills and knowledge that contribute to building a great nation.

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Member Associations of Drama Australia:

ACTDA – Australian Capital Territory Drama Association
Drama NSW – Drama Education Association of New South Wales
Drama Queensland – Queensland Drama in Education Association
Drama TAS, Tasmanian Association for Drama in Education
Drama VIC, Drama in Education Association of Victoria
Drama West – Association of Drama Educators Western Australia
SAADIE – South Australian Association for Drama in Education