



Letter to the Minister of Education Jay Weatherill, August 20 2011

Dear Mr Weatherill,

I am writing to express my deep concern, and, I am quite certain, that of every French teacher in South Australia, at the effect that the reduction to studying four subjects at SACE Stage 2 level has had on the number of students studying French in our state.

As a direct result of this reduction, many students who would have chosen to study French in Year 11 and 12 under the former system are now not doing so. It is hard to dispute this fact when one considers the alarming reduction in numbers of students enrolling for French, and other languages, at Stage 2 level this year. This situation, which, I am sure you will agree, is most regrettable, is a direct and inevitable consequence of the changes made to the new SACE. Furthermore, such a narrowing of the curriculum is in direct opposition to the recommendations of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Dec.2008), with which I am sure you agree, and which states:

“Ministers of Education are committed to the vision of quality languages education for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country. We believe that through learning languages our students and the broader community gain important benefits”.

Given today’s need for global citizenship, and considering the nature of Australia’s multicultural society, it is imperative that we, as educators, continue to develop intercultural understanding, sensitivity and enriched communication skills, in order to help our students play their part as well-informed and culturally tolerant adults. Taking steps which have as their direct consequence a serious weakening of language programmes in our schools would seem to undermine seriously the laudable aims I have just outlined.

In our multicultural Australia we need to continue to develop language skills and inter-cultural sensitivity. The National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools (2005-2008) articulates the many benefits of learning a language, including the development of literacy skills, in both the first and second language, and the enhancement of cognitive and thinking skills. Competence in more than one language can also enhance employment and career prospects in an increasingly sophisticated and competitive job market.

It is our duty as educators to give our students the opportunity to broaden their understanding of the world in which they live. Providing them with effective languages education in a balanced school curriculum goes some way to achieving this aim. The reduction of the curriculum at Stage 2 from five subjects to four has led to a serious undermining of French and other language programmes, as such subjects were, in the past, often the “last” chosen by students once they had opted for other subjects which were prerequisites for likely courses of study in a post-secondary context. I ask for your support in once again providing space in the SACE Stage 2 programme for students to study French in their final, senior secondary years, in our schools.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my views.

I look forward to a positive outcome for French and a healthier balance of academic disciplines in the SACE programme in the not-too-distant future.

Yours faithfully

Cc: Opposition Spokesman for Education, Mr David Pisoni

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Australian
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