



25 October 2023

The Hon Jason Clare  
Minister for Education  
Parliament Office,  
PO Box 6022  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Mr Clare,

**Re: Australian Council of TESOL Association (ACTA) Follow Up to NSRA Ministerial Reference Meeting, Hobart 6 Oct 2023**

I am writing as President of the Australian Council of TESOL Association (ACTA) to follow up our conversation at the end of the NSRA Ministerial Reference Meeting in Hobart on 6 Oct 2023 in which you invited us to request a meeting about the draft report from the Expert Panel this month, if possible, before it is released to the public.

The purpose of this meeting would be to provide a small group of ACTA representatives from across States and Territories, including from both our Schools and Indigenous EAL/D Consultancy Groups, with the opportunity to discuss with you the extent to which the report addresses the needs of some of the most disadvantaged student groups in the country including new arrivals with little or no English, mainstream EAL/D learners from low socio-economic and refugee backgrounds, and Indigenous and Pasifika students learning EAL/D, in particular those in regional and remote locations.

While I was delighted to help make a contribution to the work of the Expert Panel through the Ministerial Reference Group, I did feel that one issue was not given sufficient prominence in our discussions – the role of the English language as a medium of instruction in Australian schools. As you know, the Australian school system uses Standard Australian English as the medium of instruction, but it is often assumed that all students enter the school system with levels of spoken English equivalent to their age. As you would know from your own schooling experiences, the assumption of competence in Australian standard English means any inability to communicate effectively in English is a major source of disadvantage for our 600,000 EALD students, particularly if they lack access to specialist TESOL teacher support, and/or have severely interrupted school, and/or little or no literacy in their first language and/or have experienced war/trauma.

Furthermore, as you know, the ability to maintain and develop the main language(s) spoken at home as well as communicate effectively in English is as important to healthy well-being as good nutrition and sleep. If a child is no longer able to communicate with their immediate family members as they have lost their first language (or refused to learn it as they feel stigmatised), and their parents and caregivers cannot speak English then this opens up a devastating gap in communication in the family that can progressively undermine the health of the child's most important relationships and have a very negative effect on well-being. At school also, language is a critical component of cultural responsiveness – if a child does not understand English and has no access to mother tongue maintenance and development programs they will not even know their Australian teacher (or curriculum) is trying to be culturally responsive.

I have attached a short table that highlights some of these points and their evidence-based proven solutions in a more formal way and hope that it can be useful as you consider the Expert Panel's report and recommendations.

I look forward to hearing from your office at their earliest convenience about potential dates for a meeting so we have the opportunity to discuss some of these important issues in person - many thanks again for making time to prioritise our request.

Warm regards,

Chris

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Davison', followed by a period.

Chris Davison, Emeritus Professor, School of Education, UNSW

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