



Youth Disability Advocacy Network Inc

Perth, Western Australia | www.ydan.com.au | ABN: 73 373 467 358

Honourable Sue Ellery MLC
Minister for Education and Training

13th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

11 March 2019

TEACHING AUSLAN IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Dear Minister

The Youth Disability Advocacy Network Inc. (YDAN) is Western Australia's peak representative organisation for young people with disabilities. YDAN operates primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people with disability in a rapidly changing society. YDAN is becoming widely acknowledged as a leader in the field of current youth participation and advocacy and has received awards to this effect – namely a 2018 WA Youth Award and the 2018 Senses Australia Teresa Way Award.

As part of our ongoing commitment to advancing the rights of young people with disabilities in WA, YDAN delivers knowledge and skill development through a variety of presentations, workshops, events and services, including professional learning for teaching staff.

It is through this professional learning and consultation with our members we have seen an increase in engagement with Australian Sign Language (Auslan) in WA schools.

We are pleased to see this increase occur, as more people becoming aware of Auslan is beneficial to creating a more inclusive society. As you may already be aware, there is a shortage of Auslan interpreters across Australia, including Western Australia. Through teaching Auslan in schools it is hoped this may lead more students to continue studying Auslan as a post-school pathway. This could be further aided if Auslan was offered in tertiary institutions as an elective, especially for education degrees.

Auslan is not only beneficial for those who are Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing but also for other members of the community such as those with other disabilities, who may be non-verbal, who use Key Word Sign, people whose first language is not English, older people who have lost their hearing, and young children who are learning how to communicate.

We are aware of the Department of Education's School of Special Education Needs: Sensory, who provide support to schools and educational support for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and appreciate the ongoing supports and services such as these that the Department provides to schools.

Our concern, and the reason we are writing to you today, is that teachers and students in schools have reported to us that Auslan is being taught by those who are not themselves Deaf, or are not adequately trained in Auslan. In some reported instances, teachers are using materials online through resources via YouTube and other non-regulated sources. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority K-10 Auslan curriculum states that:

“Engagement and appropriate consultation with the local Deaf community in an ethical, respectful and sustainable manner is the cornerstone of respectful Auslan program development and key to a successful Auslan teaching program.”

It is imperative to fully realise inclusive education and in developing students understanding of inclusion that any school/classroom engaging in learning Auslan as a language needs to:

- a. Ensure that the teacher holds a minimum qualification of Certificate III from TAFE or a Certificate from the WA Deaf Society Intermediate Auslan course; and/or
- b. be culturally Deaf themselves or raised in a culturally Deaf household and are proficient in Auslan; and
- c. implement activities and sessions which include Deaf people and focuses on Deaf culture.

Could you please confirm:

1. The current professional qualification/accreditation requirements by the Department for teachers who teach Auslan as a language in public schools? If there is none, why not?
2. What resources are available from the Department for those who teach Auslan as a language in public schools?
3. What level of engagement/consultation is carried out with the Deaf community when Auslan is taught as a language in public schools? If there is none, why not?

The Youth Disability Advocacy Network Inc. appreciates your efforts as Minister for Education working with the Department of Education in improving the schooling experiences of students with disability. It is our hope that the quality of programs that aid inclusion, such as Auslan as a language subject, continues to increase.

Yours faithfully



Rebecca Evans

YDAN Deputy-Chair

Youth Disability Advocacy Network Inc.

w: www.ydan.com.au

e: hello@ydan.com.au

a: PO Box 276, Leederville 6007

"Dedicated young people advocating for the rights and inclusion of all youth living with disabilities in WA"

