

Auslan national curriculum for Australian schools hailed as 'huge step' for deaf community

By Stephanie Dalzell

The first national curriculum for Auslan, the language of the deaf community in Australia, will soon be rolled out in schools across Australia, in a move being described as a "huge step for equality".

Since it was officially recognised as a language by the Federal Government in 1987, the use of Auslan for deaf children in Australian schools has been largely inconsistent, with teachers forced to rely on a general framework for languages such as Japanese and French.

For years parents have been lobbying for a formal curriculum to be implemented in schools.

Following ministerial endorsement, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) officially published the first curriculum in Auslan on Monday.

"That's a fantastic achievement for us, it's an opportunity for the signing community to have a curriculum in schools, an opportunity for young deaf students to learn about that," ACARA chief executive Rob Randall said. Dr Breda Carty, from the Royal Institute of Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) Renwick Centre, was involved in writing the curriculum. She described the introduction of the new guidelines as a "wonderful development".

"Certainly for the Australian deaf community, it's significant, it's a huge step for equality, it's a wonderful feeling that our language is now included in the school curriculum," she said.

A group of children watch on as Louise de Beuzeville teaches them sign language. The curriculum will also give hearing students the opportunity to learn Auslan, allowing them to communicate with their deaf peers.

Rima Akanj, 16, who attends the RIDBC Thomas Pattison School in Sydney, said it would significantly improve the social skills of deaf students. "In hearing world there are few deaf people scattered around and a lot of hearing people having conversations, and deaf people have no idea what's going on because it's a spoken language and deaf people don't have the access," she said.

"They feel a bit of a deficit with that, so they feel less confident, maybe a bit depressed, so when there's Auslan being used everywhere deaf people are more confident, they're more involved, they feel they have equal access."

Dr Carty said the introduction of a curriculum was especially momentous given deaf people were cruelly tormented for using sign language in years past.

ABC News, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-19/deaf-community-hails-school-rollout-of-auslan-curriculum/8132474>