

Media Release
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Languages teaching – a key priority for the future of Western Australia

The Western Australia Policy Forum (WAPF) has released an insightful and cogent plea for greater priority to be given to languages teaching in Western Australian schools.

The essay is written by Claire Leong, (Languages Consultant for Independent schools in WA) From her practical experience in language teaching she argues that this important subject has been too long neglected in our schools. This is despite the fact that multilingual children are highly represented in our schools. According to the last census Chinese is the second most commonly spoken language at home in Australia. Yet little effort is devoted to improving what language teachers call 'Cultural Intelligence', the lack of which is often the cause of miscommunication and confrontation.

Her recommendations to the WA Government are far-reaching. She wants a coherent, sustained policy starting from early childhood, backed up by Government advertising, the recruitment of teachers who speak the language most of the time in the classroom and three lessons every week as a minimum. This front line delivery needs backing up by access for children to native speakers and access to language education and support for school Principals and other teachers so that language teaching is fully integrated into school curricula.

Claire Leong said: "Now is the time for direct action. We are fuelled with information from numerous past reviews and reports. We know exactly what is needed. Now is the time for governments to support systems and sectors across the country to make this a reality." Julian Roche, Director of WAPF, said that: "At this time of global recession it might be all too easy for Governments in Australia not to think of the long-term, but now is precisely when investment in languages and other aspects of education needs to be made. No recession can be an excuse for the comparative deskilling of a generation by comparison to other countries in Asia and worldwide".

Claire Leong's essay may be downloaded free from wapolicyforum.org.au/publications.

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