The Honourable Yvette Berry MLA  
Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development  
GPO Box 100  
CANBERRA 2601  

1 August 2019  
Via email: berry@act.gov.au  

Dear Minister Berry  

The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) represents teachers of languages in the pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary and community school sectors. We have a membership of over 3500 teachers across the nation, as the umbrella association (federation) for languages teacher associations in all eight Australian states and territories.  

We write in support of the German Immersion Program Parents and Friends group, seeking to establish a German language and culture program in a public school in Canberra. We understand the proposal is to include a German Immersion Program (80% German K-Year 2 and 50% German Years 3-6), along with a German language program for students outside the immersion program, and a German cultural events program for the whole school community.  

Bilingual education has a long history of success internationally, and in Australia, for enriching learning for students. New and increasing research including from neurolinguistics (using brain imaging), teaching, linguistics and social science disciplines points consistently to short term and lifelong benefits for bilinguals, and of school programs with bilingual immersion (with a least 50% in the additional language) and second language (with at least two hours a week learning time) approaches.  

Benefits of bilingual education include improvement in cognition skills and learning in general; the outperformance of bilingual children over monolingual children on standardised tests including NAPLAN; increased focus and attention spans in learning; superior English skills and understanding, even in an 80/20 time split; increased knowledge of grammar, speech sounds and sentence structures, applicable to learning in all languages; improved communicative skills including non-verbal skills and interpersonal understanding; deeper cultural, geographical and worldview knowledge and perspectives; improved self-esteem; enhanced empathy, awareness of diversity and a greater sense of social justice; and greater economic earning capacity and employability prospects (O’Brien et al, 2017, Literature review on the impact of second-language learning, Second Languages and Intercultural Council of The Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)).  

Both the German immersion program, and a German second language program proposed respond to the need for more Australian children to have access to quality language programs, as a national priority in schooling for all governments of Australia, and to enhance community engagement in the school. The proposal from the Parents and Friends group meets the criteria for quality programs as outlined in the AFMLTA Program Standards (AFMLTA, 2005, available on the AFMLTA website), and the aims and rationale of the Australian Curriculum: Languages, which can also provide comprehensive curricula for the second language program and the foundations for the immersion program. The program and teachers would also be supported by the MLTA ACT and AFMLTA professional associations through our comprehensive professional learning programs and member services.

Yours faithfully  

Amanda Pentti  
President, AFMLTA