

National Cultural Policy Submission

1469095

Public

Organisation

Dymocks Children's Charities

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Dymocks Children's Charities welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to ensuring Australian stories, creativity and cultural participation remain accessible to all Australians through the next National Cultural Policy.

We strongly support the policy's focus on access, inclusion, audience engagement and strengthening cultural infrastructure. However, we believe reading and literacy must play a more central role within Australia's cultural policy framework, particularly for children and young people experiencing disadvantage.

As a national children's literacy charity, Dymocks Children's Charities works with schools in the lowest 25% of ICSEA nationally, providing access to brand-new books, supporting school library collections, and helping schools build stronger reading cultures.

What we see consistently is that access to books remains deeply unequal across Australia.

Many schools we support operate with extremely limited library budgets, ageing collections and reduced access to library staff and reading support. In some communities, children have little or no access to books at home, and educators are working hard to foster reading engagement with very limited resources.

At the same time, national reading engagement is declining. One in three Australian children cannot read proficiently, and many children are growing up without regular access to books or positive reading experiences.

We believe this is not simply an education issue. It is also a cultural participation issue.

Cultural participation begins long before attending galleries, festivals or performances. For many children, it begins with access to books, stories and the ability to read confidently. Books are often a child's first connection to imagination, empathy, creativity and Australian storytelling.

If children do not have access to books, contemporary library collections or positive reading experiences, they are less likely to engage with Australian stories, literature and the broader cultural sector throughout their lives.

We welcome the increased recognition of literature, writers and audience development within the cultural sector and encourage the Australian Government to further recognise reading as essential cultural infrastructure.

In particular, we would encourage the next National Cultural Policy to include:

- Greater investment in school libraries, including professional staffing and contemporary collections.
- National reading engagement campaigns that support children, young people and families to build lifelong reading habits.
- Increased support for community reading initiatives and partnerships that improve access to books in disadvantaged and regional communities.
- Continued investment in Australian writers, illustrators and storytellers so children can see themselves, their communities and their experiences reflected in contemporary Australian literature.
- Stronger recognition of literacy and reading as critical enablers of cultural participation, creativity and social connection.

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Reading is not separate from culture. It is one of the primary ways Australians access, experience and participate in culture throughout their lives.

If Australia wants a strong cultural future, we must also invest in building a strong reading nation.

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General Manager

Dymocks Children's Charities

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