

GUIDELINES

SUITABLE TEXT AND MEDIA RESOURCES IN SCHOOLS

Responsibility of: Quality Teaching and Learning
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Target Audience: Staff, parents and students

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1. INTRODUCTION

All schools are to ensure that teaching and learning resources balance the need to provide challenging and engaging learning programs for students with the use of resources that do not offend students or the community due to highly offensive, obscene or overly controversial material.

These guidelines have been developed to assist teachers and principals make informed decisions when selecting spoken, written or visual text and media to be used by, or conducted by, the school. This could include:

- text books and novels
- film and television
- radio programs
- digital media including text, audio, video and graphics as well as news
- internet
- computer games
- plays and performances
- lectures/speeches
- music
- dance and human movement
- objects and artefacts.

All schools are required to adhere to the [Classification \(Publication, Films and Computer Games\) Act 1995 \(C'ith\)](#) and the supplementary regulations to the Act, the [National Classification Code](#). Additionally, students and parents have the right to make a conscientious objection to a resource or program and the school will follow these guidelines to manage such objections.

These guidelines apply to all NT government schools and covers Families as First Teachers through to Year 12, as well as the delivery of outside school hours care and holiday care programs run at school.

2. DEFINITIONS

Conscientious objection is an objection based on sincerely-held beliefs, religious grounds or moral concerns, not self-interest or discrimination.

Controversial or contentious for the purpose of these guidelines, describes materials about which there are strong opposing opinions or where there is strong disagreement.

Highly offensive or obscene for the purpose of these guidelines, describes any unacceptable material considered to be insulting, repugnant or disgusting by accepted standards of morality and decency.

Mandatory part of the curriculum refers to the teaching and learning of required student outcomes that form part of a student's progression through an Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) or Northern Territory Board of Studies (NTBOS) approved curriculum such as:

- Australian Curriculum
- Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training
- Vocational Education and Training
- Employment Pathways.

Mature age students, for the purposes of these guidelines, are those students who are 18 years of age or older who have been enrolled in a school as a mature age student.

Parent means a child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for the child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customary law or tradition.

Parental responsibility (in regards to the definition of parent) refers to a person who has:

- a) daily care and control of the child, or
- b) is entitled to exercise all the powers and rights, and has all the responsibilities, in relation to the long-term care and development of the child, or
- c) has daily care and control of the child and the entitlement and responsibilities at (b) and includes a person who has been given the above responsibilities under another state or territory law.

Student living independently is a child who is of or above the age of 14 years and not living with a parent. A child is also considered independent, although living with the parent, if the parent is **unable to control** the child's behaviour in relation to enrolment, attendance and participation.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Principals will:

- review and make determinations on controversial resources that may cause objections from some students or their parents, or delegate this authority to an assistant principal or appropriate senior teacher
- ensure that the parents are informed of possible controversial resources and their right to object
- endeavour to resolve any objections with the parent and/or student
- reassess and remove resources from the school learning program if they are found to be highly offensive, regardless of the educational value
- escalate an objection that cannot be resolved to the Senior Director School Improvement and Leadership.

Classroom teachers will:

- implement these guidelines to prevent students being exposed to highly offensive, obscene or overly controversial materials
- consult with Aboriginal staff and educators to ensure the appropriateness of resources based on community and cultural sensitivities
- identify and review resources for student use as part of the the curriculum and program mapping process and, where required, obtain principal approval and parental permissions at the earliest possible stage

- endeavour to resolve any objections with the student or the parent in the first instance
- report details of the objection to the relevant teacher(s), coordinator(s) and the principal
- escalate an objection that cannot be resolved to the principal.

Assistant teachers will:

- provide advice to the classroom teacher on cultural protocols and appropriateness of resources based on community and cultural sensitivities.

4. PRINCIPLES FOR SELECTING RESOURCES

Teachers and/or teaching teams will utilise the curriculum and program mapping process to identify appropriate resources and to refer resources containing controversial issues that may cause objections to the principal for approval. All resources must be reviewed in consideration of the words, behaviour, images and themes contained within the resource in terms of:

- context
- impact on the intended student age group
- literary, artistic or educational merit of the resource
- intention of the author and general character of the resource
- how parents might react to their children being exposed to the content
- standards of morality and decency generally accepted by adults
- impact on persons from different ethnic, religious, social and cultural backgrounds.

5. CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS OR THEMES

When selecting resources teachers should be aware of the following controversial topics or themes about which objections sometimes occur:

- sexual activity, nudity and related themes
- drug misuse or addiction
- crime, violence and cruelty including radicalisation and violent extremism
- suicide and excessively bleak scenarios
- satirical or comparative perspectives on race, religion or gender
- themes related to magic or fantasy
- images of deceased persons in the case of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students and staff
- local issues, contexts, language and culture that may cause sensitivities within the community.



Controversial topics will often be appropriate and important subjects of study in schools and, at times, cannot be avoided in the context of teaching and learning.

It is not the intention of these guidelines to provide rigid definitions of controversial, offensive, objectionable or inappropriate resources. The above list is for awareness and consideration, not a basis for excluding a

resource.

6. DECISION MAKING GUIDE

Decision making will be guided by the table below and resources will be referred to the principal, or their delegate, for a final determination and parental permission will be sought where appropriate.

<p>Question 1. (obscene or offensive)</p>	<p>Are the themes within the resource likely to be regarded as offensive or obscene by the school community?</p>	<p>If so, then the resource cannot be used irrespective of any possible educational value.</p> <p>Note: Aboriginal cultures often have their own view of what is obscene or offensive.</p>
<p>Question 2. (highly controversial)</p>	<p>Are the themes within the resource likely to be regarded as highly controversial or inappropriate by some students or their parents?</p>	<p>If objections are anticipated on the grounds that the materials/ themes / images may be regarded as inappropriate, the teacher must obtain:</p> <p>a) principal approval b) parental permission.</p>
<p>Question 3. (classification codes)</p>	<p>Does the resource have an Australian classification category?</p>	<p>If so, the classification category advice must be followed as outlined below.</p> <p>If the resource contains an international classification category, check the title using the Australian classification database www.classification.gov.au.</p> <p>Note: Some films and computer games are exempt from classification if they contain mild content and fall within certain categories such as: educational, current affairs, musical, sporting, science and community/cultural. Such resources may be used openly within the school without restriction.</p> <p>Fact sheets for teachers, parents and students are available on the Australian Classification website.</p>
		<p>May be used for all age groups where the teacher deems appropriate.</p>
		<p>Prior to using any PG or M rated resource, the teacher must obtain:</p> <p>a) principal approval b) parental permission for students under 15 years of age.</p>

<p>Question 3. (classification codes) continued...</p>	 <p>MA15+ materials are legally restricted and cannot be shown to persons under 15 years of age unless they are accompanied by a parent or guardian. Parents cannot delegate this responsibility to school staff.</p>	<p>MA15+ materials must not be shown to students under 15 years of age.</p> <p>Prior to using any MA15+ rated resource for students over 15 years of age, the teacher must obtain:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> principal approval parental permission.
	 <p>R18+ materials are legally restricted and cannot be shown to persons under 18 years of age.</p>	<p>The resource cannot be used in schools, including for students over 18 years of age.</p>
<p>Question 4. (school performances) Also refer to section 9</p>	<p>Are themes within the performance controversial or not suitable for general exhibition for small children and family groups?</p>	<p>If so, the teacher must refer the content to the principal who may choose to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> not permit the performance, event or display, or recommend restricted entry.
<p>Question 5. (internet) Also refer to section 10</p>	<p>Is the site blocked by the department central content filter?</p>	<p>If yes, the teacher must ensure that there is no inappropriate content, images or pop ups on, or associated with, the site and where the educational value of the resource deems it appropriate, the teacher may:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> complete the Whitelist Request Form to have the site unblocked the form will be forwarded for principal approval IT operations will review the request and process where appropriate. <p>Note: Similarly, a school can seek to have a specific website blocked by logging a job through the Schools Support Desk.</p>

7. PARENTAL PERMISSION

In seeking parental permission, the teacher must inform the parent in writing:

- of the controversial nature of the resource (include a link to resource where possible)
- that they have the right to object to the resource
- of the contact details for the teacher to discuss any concerns and possible alternative resources.

Where the student is a mature age student or a student living independently, the student is able to provide their own permission or objection.



The decision to implement an opt-in or opt-out model for parental permission regarding the use of a resource is a school based decision.

• **Opt-in model** – students will not engage with resource without returned parental permission. In the event that a parent does not respond to a permission request, the student must be provided with an alternative resource. **Attachment A: Opt-in Parent Permission Form template.**

Opt-out model – all students will engage with resource unless a parent objects. In the event that the parent objects, the student must be provided with an alternative resource. **Attachment B: Opt-out Parent Permission Form template.**

7.1 Alternative resources

Where individual students are given alternative materials or activities, teachers should endeavor to integrate the alternative study or activity into the classroom program to ensure that students are supported and not isolated from other classmates while being screened from the offending resource.

8. PLAYING FILMS FOR NON-EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

The [Copyright Act 1968 \(C'wth\) s.28\(1-7\)](#) permits teachers to play films in their classroom (or other teaching venue) as part of a course of instruction. This does not cover schools playing films for non-educational purposes.

However, the department holds a central licence called the Co-Curricular Licence. This allows all Northern Territory government schools to play films to students, teachers and parents undertaking a supervisory role for the following purposes:

- at school for entertainment purposes (e.g. lunchtime on a rainy day)
- on bus excursions, where the school provides the DVD
- at school camps and excursions, including outdoor screenings at camp, where the school provides the DVD
- at outside school hours care and holiday care programs conducted by the school.

9. SCHOOL PERFORMANCES

9.1 Restricted entry public school performances

Some materials or themes may be considered to be an appropriate focus of study for some students, for example, Year 11 and 12 students, but inappropriate for others. In this event, the principal may approve the staging of the performance, display or event provided that:

- the school community is informed well in advance of the event that the material is inappropriate for some age groups
- the warning is repeated immediately prior to the performance, display or event.

Warnings, if required, should explain the reason for the restriction in general terms, for example, 'inappropriate language', 'sexual references', 'violence'.



Guest presenters and performers must be approved by the principal. The principal must review the script in line with these guidelines and follow the [External Providers Engaged for Teaching and Learning guidelines](#)

10. INTERNET

All internet access to Northern Territory government schools is filtered through central content filters that block specific categories of sites. By utilising content filtering, the department seeks to ensure that students are not exposed to inappropriate web content while at school.

As outlined in section 6 above, where a specific site that falls under a blocked category is needed for educational purposes the teacher can request to have the site made available.

10.1 YouTube

YouTube is available for all staff, but blocked from student access. For students to be granted access to YouTube clips, teachers need to embed links to the clips in Moodle or SharePoint after ensuring that the clip aligns with the principles of these guidelines. For further information on embedding YouTube clips go to [Department of Education – Internet Access and Content Filtering](#).

10.2 Cyber safety

In addition to content filtering, schools should ensure appropriate supervision of students accessing the internet while at school.

Teachers will also ensure that all students have signed and understand the [Acceptable Use Agreement](#) and the actions they must take to stay safe on the internet.

Resources for teachers to assist with teaching cyber safety are available at:

- [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [Department of Education – Cyber Safety SharePoint](#).



Where a school chooses to remove content filters from whole sites, such as YouTube or ClickView, the school is accepting full responsibility for ensuring that students are not exposed to inappropriate web content while at school.

11. RESOLVING OBJECTIONS

Even with the framework outlined within these guidelines in place, a school may receive an objection to the use of a specific resource or program. Parents and students have the right to object, particularly where the objection is based on their sincerely-held beliefs, religious grounds or moral concerns i.e. a conscientious objection.

In responding to objections schools are to conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner.

11.1 Process for resolving objections

Stage 1 (initial conversation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before considering action in relation to the objection, it should be established whether the objection is in relation to a mandatory part of the curriculum. <i>Students cannot be withdrawn from a course or part of a course that is a mandatory part of the curriculum (see Section 2 Definitions). This is stipulated within the Education Act 2018 (NT) s.87(2)(b)(ii).</i> 2. Provided the objection is not in relation to a mandatory part of the curriculum, the teacher will work to understand the basis of the objection in an effort to resolve the matter. 3. If the objection is not withdrawn after the initial discussion, the teacher will refer the matter to the principal for action.
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Stage 2 (reassessment)	4. Principal will liaise further with the objector in an effort to resolve the matter however if this is unsuccessful a reassessment of the text/media/activity/program will be conducted.		
	5. If the text/media/activity/program is found to be offensive or obscene, regardless of the educational value.		The text/media/activity/program is removed from the school teaching and learning program.
	6. If it is found that, regardless of any educational value, the text/media/activity/program could be reasonably held to be objectionable or inappropriate to the objecting student or parent.		Alternative text/media/activity/program or program is offered.



Stage 3 (issue remains unresolved)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. If the alternative material that has been offered to the objector is unacceptable to the objector and the issue remains unresolved: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the principal may refer the matter to the appropriate Director/Manager Quality Schools Systems and Support for further action, or b. the objector may access the department's Make a Complaint about a School for further information.
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12. RELATED POLICY, LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Territory Education Act • Classifications (publications, films and computer games) Act • Copyright Act
Policy and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Providers Engaged for Teaching and Learning guidelines • Religious Education in Schools policy and guidelines • Complaints in Schools policy and guidelines

Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Australian Classification Factsheets for parents, teachers, students and schools• Smartcopying – The Official Guide to Copyright Issues for Australian Schools and TAFE• Department of Education – Internet Access and Content Filtering
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