# Suggested support in English for controversial issues

## Text requirements in schools

NSW public schools are committed to providing high quality education for every student.

The Department of Education’s School Excellence Framework guides school planning to deliver quality teaching and learning to meet the learning needs of all students. Principals, in consultation with their school community, are responsible for choosing appropriate teaching and learning materials and programs for implementation and support of mandatory syllabus documents.

Text requirements are mandatory for English syllabus implementation in schools. In the K-10 syllabus, the [Content and text requirements](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10/content-and-text-requirements) outlines all the mandatory aspects that must be included.

In Stage 6, each [English course](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-english/!ut/p/z1/jZDLDoJADEW_xQVLaWfkpbsxKiomLJSI3RgwOJAgYxAl_r1EVhJf3bU5t729QBACFdEtk1GVqSLKm35H1p4LZrG5wTyHTxmKgTdfsfWKT4QJ21fAd50G2PjM4kub-4EJ9I8eP5TA__RfAPq-fgvUOWE_P7CYPx2OERd2F8AWMAzPnCFzbaMLvMngl4slkMxV3AYuinjgSKAyOSZlUurXshmnVXW-jDTUsK5rXSol80Q_qJOG7ySpulQQvpJwPgVBiNmiT_G9Fr3eA3WuD7s!/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/) has its own text requirement. It is recommended that teachers know their course prescription requirements for Year 11 and Year 12. Each requirement should be backward mapped through each year to ensure all requirements are met across the stage.

All K-12 texts must be reviewed by teachers prior to use with students. The reviewer should give particular consideration to the suitability of the material in the educational context, relevance to the English syllabus, and the age and maturity of the intended audience.

## Text decision note

Dear parent/guardian,

The English syllabus integrates the study of quality texts as an important and assessable component of students’ English studies. The [Content and text requirements](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10/content-and-text-requirements) from the syllabus are a mandatory requirement for English faculties to implement.

Schools make decisions at a local level for the types of texts studied in their schools. These decisions are based on student needs, community context and resources. From time to time, students in [Year xx] may be required to study a text that may be considered controversial.

The study of controversial issues is acceptable for educational purposes consistent with the delivery of curriculum and provision of school programs and activities.

School staff will manage controversial issues that may arise in the curriculum. Material presented to students as part of school programs and school activities should be:

* age appropriate
* sensitive to student needs
* relevant to the curriculum
* relevant to the school’s purpose and goals
* consistent with the core values outlined in Values in NSW public schools policy.

Schools are places where students are preparing for active informed and reasoned involvement in community life through the co-operative study of social issues.

As stated above, English texts are carefully selected and are used to best illustrate the outcomes and objectives of the syllabus.

If you have any concerns please discuss this with the school.

Yours sincerely,

Head teacher name/signature

Principal name/signature

## Audio-Visual Materials in schools – Procedures for use

### Classification of film and computer games

Under the National Classification Scheme, the states and territories are responsible for the enforcement of classification decisions. Each State and Territory has classification enforcement legislation to complement the Commonwealth Classification Act. In New South Wales legislation, it is called the [Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Enforcement Act 1995(NSW)](https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1995-063).

In general, films and computer games are classified as G, PG, M and MA15+. Films may also be classified R18+ or X18+.  G, PG and M are **advisory classifications** recommending the appropriate audience. MA15+, R18+ and X18+ are **legally restricted classifications.**

Details of the classifications can be found on the Commonwealth’s [Australian classification website](https://www.classification.gov.au/). Information for schools is also provided on the Australian [Attorney-General’s website](https://www.ag.gov.au/) and includes fact sheets for schools, teachers, students and libraries.

### Classification of television material (other than films)

The [Broadcasting Services Act 1992](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/bsa1992214/) (Cth) provides the framework legislation for television and radio broadcasts. While films that appear on television are generally covered under the National Classification Board guidelines, television programs are classified using Television Classification Guidelines, including in the [Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice](https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2019-10/rules/commercial-television-industry-code-practice-2015) coordinated by the [Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).](https://www.acma.gov.au/) Classification systems for television are similar to those used in the national classification system and include C, P, G, PG, M, MA15+, AV15+. Details are available from the [Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice](https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2019-10/rules/commercial-television-industry-code-practice-2015).

### Directions for schools

All audio-visual materials and computer games must be previewed by teachers prior to use with students. The reviewer should give particular consideration to the suitability of the material in the educational context, relevance to the English syllabus, and the age and maturity of the intended audience.

Consumer advice found adjacent to classification markings may assist schools when previewing materials. Schools should also be sensitive to cultural protocols that may be relevant to certain members of intended audiences when previewing materials.

The use of classified films, programs and computer games in schools requires the approval of the principal. The principal may delegate the approval of the use of C, P, G, and PG material to an executive member of staff, but must not delegate approval relating to use of M and MA15+ material.

Material classified G is classified for general viewing. There may be some material in this category that is of no interest to students.

Material classified PG should only be used with students after careful consideration by teaching staff and approval in accordance with [Audio-visual materials in schools - procedures for use](https://policies.education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/controversial-issues-in-schools), given that material in this classification might upset, frighten or confuse some students and an adult may be required to provide guidance to students. Staff may wish to inform parents in advance of the presentation of this material to allow parents the opportunity to withdraw their child from the viewing.

Material classified M should only be considered for students who are 15 years and over. Material in this classification may contain themes and scenes which require a mature perspective. The material should have particular relevance to the course of study and should only be considered when other related resource material is limited.

Decisions about whether the use of M classified films, television materials and computer games in the school will be approved, must be made by the principal. The principal may delegate the task of previewing the material to an appropriate member of the teaching staff who will advise the principal as to its suitability for students 15 years and over.

Parents are to be informed in advance of the presentation so that they have the opportunity to withdraw their child from the viewing. For students in Years 11 and 12, informing parents in advance may take the form of a notification to parents at the beginning of the course that material classified M may be shown during the course.

Material classified MA15+ should only be considered for students who are 15 years and over. This classification is legally restricted. The material should have particular relevance to the course of study and should only be considered when other related resource material is unavailable.

Decisions about whether the use of MA15+ classified films, television materials and computer games in the school will be approved, must be made by the principal. The principal may delegate the task of previewing the material to an appropriate member of the teaching staff who will advise the principal as to its suitability.

In advance of presentation, parents are to be informed in writing of the content and classification of the material. Parents’ written approval will be required for their child’s participation in viewing this material. Students who are 18 years or older and living apart from their parents may sign their own approval. Principals should refer to section 7 of the department’s [Family Law Guidelines](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/rights-and-accountability/legal-issues-bulletins/family-law-guidelines#Summary_0) in circumstances where students under 18 may be living independently.

Regardless of the students’ ages, films classified R18+ and X18+ must not be shown to school students under any circumstances.

Principals and teachers should note that this advice should also be applied to any approved school excursions that may involve visits to cinemas, video game venues, associated coach/air travel, or other related activity that may involve film screenings or television viewing.

Schools must ensure that no breaches of copyright eventuate when screening any material considered suitable following review within the conditions outlined above. Schools can play films for educational instruction by way of an exemption in copyright law, provided the audience is limited to persons who are receiving the educational instruction or are otherwise directly connected with the place where the instruction is given.

However, this exemption does not cover playing film for non-educational purposes. Principals are reminded that schools are directly responsible for purchase of a Co-curricular Licence, to cover copyright provisions for screening of any video material on excursion bus travel, school camps, sport rainy day or lunchtime activities, and other similar events.

Table 1 – Audio-visual materials in schools classification guidelines

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Year group | Classification |
| Years 7, 8 and 9 | Only G and PG permitted  Students under 13 need parental approval |
| Year 10 | M rated films – needs principal approval and a permission note |
| Years 11 and 12 | MA – needs principal approval and a permission note |

## Film note

Based on the policy above, teachers are required to send home a note for any M rated films in Year 10 and are reminded that only G and PG films are to be used in Years 7, 8 and 9. Any enquiries regarding MA films in Stage 6 need to be discussed with the Head Teacher and, if permission is given, a separate opt-in note must be issued.

If a student returns a note claiming that they are not permitted to watch a film, an alternative activity or film must be organised for that student.

Films should be used as a teaching tool. Viewing films in class is time intensive and although a necessary aspect of the English curriculum (each stage only mandates the study of two), this should be limited to accommodate the study of texts in all mediums. Using short films and snippets of clips to assist with teaching and learning is strongly encouraged.

Sample permission notes for M rated and MA15+ rated audio-visual material are provided on the following pages.

### Sample permission note – M audio-visual material

Dear parent/carer,

The English syllabus integrates the study of film as an important and assessable component of students’ English studies. From time-to-time, students in [Year 10/11/12] may be required to watch films that carry an ‘M’ rating. These films are always carefully selected and are only used to best illustrate learning content. Teachers will always be sensitive to students in the class and guide them through the themes and issues presented in the film.

The Department of Education requires the school seek parental permission to show films in secondary schools that carry a rating of ‘M’. Please note that ‘MA’ films are age restricted and will never be shown without separate written consent, and are in fact, only to be used by teachers in the senior English course when they are included in their HSC study.

Please sign the consent below for your child to view carefully selected films rated ‘M’. If you would like to discuss this issue further or would like further clarification, please contact me at [X] High School on [email address or phone number].

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher English [name or signature]

Principal [name or signature]

I give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of English class \_\_\_\_\_\_\_to:

View carefully selected film that carries an ‘M’ rating.

or

I would like a separate note sent home for viewing parts, or whole videos that carry an ‘M’ rating.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

### Sample permission note – MA15+ audio-visual material

Dear parent/carer,

The Department of Education requires the school to notify parents/carers prior to viewing audio-visual content in secondary schools that carry a rating of ‘MA15+’. ‘MA15+’ films are legally restricted and will never be shown without separate written parental consent. They are to be used by teachers when addressing HSC course prescriptions approved by the NSW Education Standards Authority.

Please sign the consent below for your child to view carefully selected content. If you would like to discuss this issue further or would like further clarification, please contact me at [name of high school] High School on [number].

Yours sincerely,

Head teacher name/signature

Principal name/signature

I give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of class \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to:

view carefully selected [select an option] that are equivalent to/carry an ‘MA15+’ rating.

or

I would like a separate note sent home for each ‘MA15+’ rated select an option studied throughout the year.

Name:

Signed:

Date: