



CALL TO EMBRACE ASIA

Some of the nation's top educators have warned the Federal Government that unless all students leave school "Asia literate", Australia's business and economic prowess in Asia will come under threat.

The group — representing principals, teachers, parents, education deans and the state, Catholic and independent school sectors — argues that without urgent investment to boost the linguistic and cultural know-how of school leavers, Australia's future trade, business and cultural links to our nearest neighbours will diminish as the region booms.

In a "call to action" to be sent to education minister Julia Gillard's office later this month, the group urges the government to "embed studies of Asia" as core elements in subjects such as English, history and geography and to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching students about Asia and Asian languages. The Asia Literacy Alliance will also call on the Rudd Government to ensure that the so-called "digital revolution" provides local teachers and students the opportunity to be connected with their peers in Asia.

Signatories include the Australian Council of Deans of Education, the Australian Secondary Principals Association, the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia.

The group claims that just 25% of Australian students have the opportunity to study an Asian language and that 50% of schools include studies of Asia in their curriculum, while the majority of teachers have not learnt about Asia in their training. Kathe Kirby, executive director of Asialink and the Asia Education Foundation, says Asian language, history and geography need a greater presence in Australian classrooms, adding that now is the time to act, as the federal government considers a national curriculum.

Ms Kirby welcomes the \$62.4million to boost Asian languages in schools over the next three years, delivered in May's federal budget, but says more needs to be done — and soon.