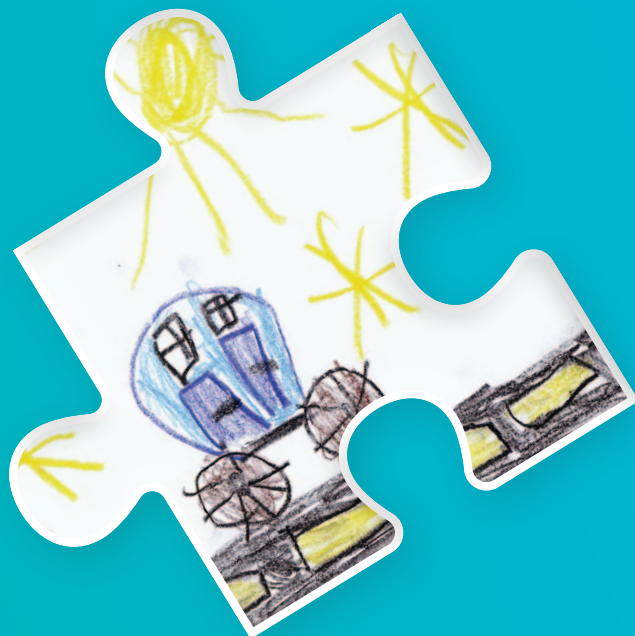




The future of **EDUCATION**

An ACT community conversation

Discussion Paper 1



High performing education systems have a key thing in common: they make explicit their focus on equity. The life circumstances and background of a child showing up to school cannot be allowed to determine whether they will succeed or not.

One quote among many points to the importance of equity in our education system and why I'm focused on this direction in the ACT:

"The evidence is conclusive: equity in education pays off. The highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine high quality and equity. In such education systems, the vast majority of students can attain high level skills and knowledge that depend on their ability and drive, more than on their socio-economic background... the benefits of investing in equity in education outweigh the costs for both individuals and societies and... equity can and should go hand-in-hand with quality."

- *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and School*, OECD (2012)

This theme was central to the 2008 Melbourne Declaration and Gonski report of 2011 and other leaders in Australian education consistently point to this goal as fundamental to the overall success of school systems. When you look around the world you find similar things and these points are fleshed out in the paper.

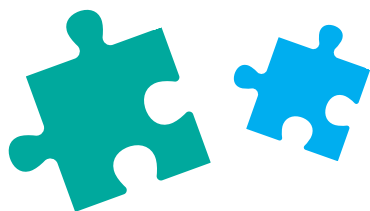
The key questions come to be around the best ways to pursue equity. In the ACT we're proud of our schools as high performers which have set generations of students up for great lives. We've come a long way on needs-based funding and the ACT Government will keep progressing towards this goal. There are other key policy and cultural issues which come into this conversation, for example the growing trend of enrolling out of area and the ways we measure 'success' in a school.

In this first paper of a series I will release this year as part of the ACT Government's Future of Education process, I'm keen to stimulate a conversation with people right through the Canberra community on these issues.

The paper has been shaped with leaders in the education and broader community sectors with the goal of engaging people, seeing what the community thinks and moving towards a strategy which takes the ACT education system ahead as a leader in Australia and the world. It focuses particularly on the needs of children early in life – an issue so vital to educational equity that the government is working on a dedicated early childhood strategy – and the fact that many face challenges outside of school which affect their learning. Future papers will look deeper into the role of schools in our community and the factors which influence teaching and school leadership.

Thanks for getting involved!

Yvette Berry MLA
Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

School education provides a key foundation in a child's path to adulthood. Looking to the future of education in the ACT requires consideration of key milestones along this journey.

Ready to start school education?

A child's development and learning starts before formal school. Cognitive, social and emotional progress during this time, as well as physical health and wellbeing, directly affects the ability of a child to engage in school education and learn. Each child reaches school with different factors influencing their early development. Each child, therefore, has a different level of readiness for school.

In the ACT, early childhood education and care is delivered by for-profit providers, community not-for-profit providers, and a range of standalone services. The ACT Government offers 15 hours a week of free preschool for those families who want it. This contributes significantly to the very high levels of uptake of quality preschool programs in the ACT and is supplemented by non-government programs.

In 2009, the Government established a number of Early Childhood Schools for children in preschool to year 2, with a dedicated focus on integrating high quality learning, family support and participation, and integrated service delivery. These schools are intended to focus on learning and development during birth to eight for children from vulnerable backgrounds and there is an opportunity to renew this focus.

The 2015 Australian Early Development Census shows that 1,161 ACT children (22.5 per cent) were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain at the start of kindergarten. Boys, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, or children from a language background other than English are over-represented among this group.

ACT public schools use the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) tool to assess the literacy and numeracy skills of new students as they begin their primary school education. This information, along with other information available to schools, enables the early identification of students who would benefit from extra support or extension, and provides a valuable baseline to guide classroom teachers' practice and the delivery of support.

Further reading:

Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD) 2015
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/starting-strong-iv-9789264233515-en.htm>

Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education
http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/starting-strong-v_9789264276253-en

2015 Australian Early Development Census National Report
<https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report>

Discussion points:

- > What are the key points of disadvantage and possible areas of child and family support for children between 0 and 4?
- > How could the ACT's education and care sector provide more equitable access for all children?
- > What kinds of issues in the early childhood education and care sector affect the quality and accessibility of services?

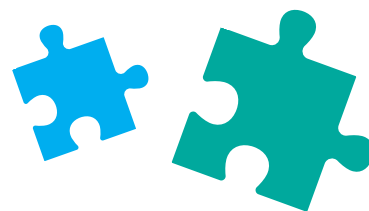
Enabled and supported to learn each day?

Factors outside school influence how a child learns during school. These factors may relate to the child or circumstances around them, and could be incidental, episodic or enduring. Teachers need space to focus on teaching and facilitating learning, supported by strong school communities that change factors which can be changed and manage those which cannot.

The diversity and inclusiveness of the ACT's education system and the individuality of each person is evident in every classroom. All children learn differently and have different talents. Some children are gifted intellectually, creatively, socially or physically. Some children have disability; some experience physical or mental health challenges.

In 2013-14 13.9 per cent of Australians between ages 4 to 17 experienced a mental health disorder. Others come from families without the financial means to properly provide for psychological or physiological needs. Social and environmental issues such as insecure housing, trauma and abuse are also present in the lives of some children.

Whatever the case, understanding and responding to the individual experiences of students is an important part of promoting educational equity.



However there are limits to the ability of schools to teach and restore equity in the face of these external factors, particularly schools with high proportions of students experiencing disadvantage. Teachers need to focus on student learning and need support to make sure all children get the most from each day. Further, and despite the high quality of public schools across Canberra, enrolment patterns (38 per cent of public school students attend school outside their enrolment area) contribute to a growing degree of socioeconomic stratification.

Policy responses to stratification are difficult without limiting the choices available to families within and between school sectors. On the other hand, it could be that simple options such as free healthy food, longer access to school grounds or greater psychological and counselling support make a significant difference. These things are often observable in leading systems outside Australia.

Measuring the ACT's success in this area is difficult. Learning gain as measured in academic indicators like NAPLAN provides some insight – a child who isn't equipped and supported to learn will see their academic performance and growth suffer. Similarly, post education outcomes like the proportion of students transitioning to work or further study provide an indication of success.

Among the factors, analysis of the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment makes clear that the social composition of schools has a strong impact on student learning outcomes. Evidence from the OECD supports this analysis. When children learn alongside people who are very different to themselves, the whole community benefits.

Further reading:

Gifted and Talented Students Policy
http://www.education.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/g-and-talented-education

Schools for All Children & Young People, Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour, November 2015
http://www.education.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/856254/Attach-4-Expert-Panel-Report-Web.pdf

OECD (2012), Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools, OECD Publishing.
<https://www.oecd.org/education/school/50293148.pdf>

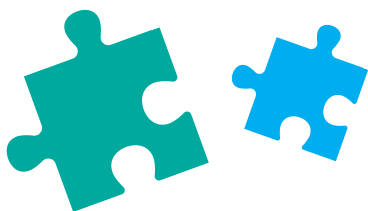
Discussion points:

- > What are the key points of disadvantage outside school for children between 5 and 17?
- > Do current public school enrolment area settings need reconsideration? If so, in what ways?
- > Which connections between schools and other community services could be strengthened?
- > What individual successful school responses to these challenges could be more systematically applied across the ACT?

A year's learning from a year's schooling?

The outcome of school education should be that every young person is equipped to enter life and work, either directly, or via further training or study. A child who does not gain a year's worth of learning from each year of school will, over time, be left further behind and not have equal access to the same opportunities beyond school. An underperforming student has both the capacity and the need to gain more in a given year if they are to achieve this outcome. Importantly, a year's learning from each year of school looks different, depending on the starting point of each child or young person. Ensuring that these students can gain more is a significant challenge for teachers, schools, and the community.

The ACT has a high quality and diverse schooling sector. All schools access a robust national curriculum, teachers meet rigorous professional standards and build on their skills and knowledge each and every year, and schools are well resourced. The children and young people in ACT schools are well placed to learn, succeed and thrive.



ACT students perform well when tested through national and international assessments. However, there is room for improvement. When differences in student characteristics and backgrounds are considered, the ACT's performance is less positive. Unacceptably, lower educational performance in schools is correlated with a higher proportions of students from a low socioeconomic background (Lamb 2016).

Students who are more engaged with school achieve better learning outcomes. Making schools more engaging for all students is one way to contribute to enhanced equity. Engaging schools actively build engaging cultures, support individualised learning, promote student voice and agency, have meaningful connections with their community, and have high expectations for students and staff.

Exploring some of the factors that cause variation in learning growth between students will support the ACT moving forward in school education.

Further reading:

NAPLAN

<https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

<http://www.nap.edu.au/>

PISA

PISA 2015: Reporting Australia's results/Sue Thomson, Lisa De Bortoli, Catherine Underwood

<http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=ozpisa>

<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

John Hattie, (2015) *What Doesn't Work in Education: The Politics of Distraction*

<https://visible-learning.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/John-Hattie-Visible-Learning-creative-commons-book-free-PDF-download-What-doesn-t-work-in-education-the-politics-of-distraction-pearson-2015.pdf>

Great Teaching by Design

http://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/854466/Great-Teaching-by-Design.pdf

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http://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/854465/Great-Teachers-by-Design.pdf

Discussion points:

- > On what basis should success in year on year growth be measured?
- > How should parents and schools treat NAPLAN?
- > How are ACT teachers and educators equipped and supported to deliver the best learning outcomes?
- > How do policies around school structures and assessments interact with school improvement and learning gain?

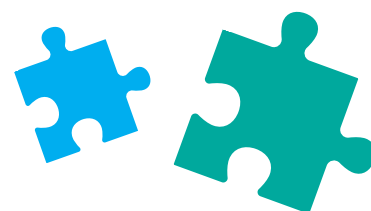
Set up for work and life?

Ultimately the goal of school education is to provide all children with opportunity to be included, contributing and secure participants in society. Academic skills are an expected and necessary focus, particularly core skills like literacy and numeracy. Beyond these skills, children must be enabled with more general capabilities like critical and creative thinking as well as personal and social maturity. A sound ability to engage with information and communication technology is also vital in modern society. Taken together, successful school students are able to go on to further learning or work as key parts of a rewarding life.

The 2017 Report on Government Services (ROGS) highlights that the vast majority of ACT students continue through to the end of senior secondary school. For 2015, the apparent retention rate from year 10 to year 12 for full time and part time students in the ACT was 95.1 per cent compared with 84.7 per cent nationally. However, the results are less favourable when looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (87.4 per cent), and males (92 per cent). This report also indicated that 87 per cent of ACT year 12 students attained a Senior Secondary Certificate.

An annual voluntary survey of the ACT's year 12 graduates and school leavers supports the relatively positive evidence in ROGS, with 92 per cent of 2015 year 12 graduates employed and/or studying in 2016. Performance in this measure improves over a longer period, with 97 per cent of 2013 year 12 graduates employed and/or studying in 2016. However, school leavers (students who leave school prior to completing year 12) compare much less favourably. Nearly 20 per cent of students leaving school in 2013 were not participating in work or study in 2016.

The importance of educational attainment can also be seen in the intergenerational impact of success in school education and further study. Parental occupation, school education and non-school education have a positive influence on a student's outcomes at school.



Further reading:

Report on Government Services 2017
<http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2017/child-care-education-and-training>

ACT Post school destinations and pathways in 2016
http://www.education.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1023370/Post-School-Destination-s-and-Pathways-2016.pdf

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Education and Work, Australia, May 2016
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6227.0>

Discussion points:

- > What blend of academic skills and emotional resilience should ACT school leavers have?
- > How might school leavers be best prepared for the needs of employers, vocational and higher education?
- > How does the community view the effectiveness of ACT schools?

CONCLUSION

Education in the ACT is diverse, providing high quality options from early learning, through school education and into post-school pathways. It has clear strengths and a history of success but there will always be room for improvement and a need to focus on the future. As the world evolves, as expectations shift and new opportunities and challenges emerge, the ACT education system must adapt.

There is lots of research and evidence about what high performing education systems do to achieve across many measures of success. The ACT community needs to identify the things that next need attention and the transformation that is required.

GETTING INVOLVED

The *Future of Education* community conversation invites comment about how the ACT can build in its strengths in school education to tackle some emerging challenges. The goal is to achieve an education system that sets all children up for a good life.

The Government has committed to undertaking this extensive process throughout 2017, reaching beyond those who usually get to have a say. A range of resources and methods are being used to encourage and support wide participation.

Share your views:

Project Team Email: futureofeducation@act.gov.au

Project Team Phone: 02 6205 4124

Your Say: yoursay.act.gov.au/futureofeducation

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