



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
MICHAEL PETTERSSON MLA (CHAIR), ELIZABETH KICKERT MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), ELIZABETH LEE MLA

Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by: Elizabeth Kikkert MLA

In relation to: mental health support at schools

1. Minister Rattenbury mentioned that, across schools, there is a range of staff, roles, counsellors and various others who provide support in the emotional wellbeing space, not just psychologists. What evidence did you have that school chaplains were not supporting students' emotional wellbeing?
2. Is there a program in ACT schools to help students of any faith to feel included at school?
3. Is there a program in ACT schools to help students from CALD backgrounds to feel included at school?
4. Is there a program in ACT schools to help students with disabilities to feel included at school?

Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Yvette Berry: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

1. When the ACT Government withdrew ACT public schools from the National School Chaplaincy Program, chaplains were offered positions as secular Wellbeing Support Workers. Chaplains who chose to accept the role of Wellbeing Support Worker continue to provide wellbeing support to students and school communities without the obligation of religious affiliation or endorsement. These staff continue to play an important role in supporting students' emotional wellbeing.
2. ACT public schools welcomes and supports all students, whether of any faith or no faith. Schools recognise the value of diversity among students. Where parents of children in a public school seek religious education for their children in a specific religion, this is made available as required under the *Education Act 2004*. Where requested, schools organise religious education in collaboration with religious institutions in their local community. Students in ACT public schools can also be appropriately given an understanding of religion through the study of different religions, which is distinct from religious instruction.
3. Public schools plan teaching and learning programs that incorporate the development of intercultural understanding and personal and social capability for all students. Specialist teachers of EAL/D students, including those in an Introductory English Centre (IEC), support the academic and wellbeing needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Targeted support to newly arrived students with minimal English is provided in IECs through intensive language teaching. IECs provide a safe and supportive introduction to school life in Australia for students with little or no English.

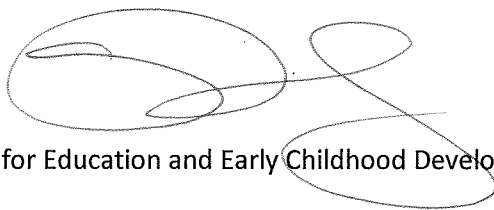
Public schools provide additional opportunity for students to connect with peers and further develop the capabilities through extra-curricular activities and lunchtime groups. Some language-specific school examples include mother tongue clubs, lunchtime English group connecting peers, sharing cultural activities and stories, supporting English conversation and language practice and celebration of national days and Harmony Day. Public schools actively promote parental engagement and develop partnerships with their parents and communities as integral to supporting students at school and as valuable contributors to developing an inclusive school.

4. Inclusion of all students is a founding pillar of the *Future of Education Strategy*. All schools are committed to providing an inclusive environment where all students are valued and provided equal access to opportunities. Public schools ensure all students are accommodated and a universal sense of belonging fostered. In partnership with the student and parents/carers, public schools make reasonable adjustments for students with disability throughout their learning journey, supporting them to access, engage and participate in the school curriculum, school programs and other activities on the same basis as their peers.

Students with disability participate in wellbeing and inclusion programs that are delivered for all students at their schools. *Everyone Everyday* is an example of an available program that supports schools to create inclusive school environments.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs

Signature:



Date: 17/06/20

By the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Yvette Berry MLA