



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT

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## ACT Climate Change Council

# Submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion: Inquiry into the future of ACT school infrastructure

## Introduction

### School infrastructure climate adaptation context

In accordance with the Australian Building Code<sup>1</sup>, the design life of built infrastructure, including schools, is at least 50 years. Because of climate change, buildings constructed today will exist in a climate that is different from the climate in 2023. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: Working Group II Impacts, Actions and Vulnerability [Australasian Factsheet](#) sets out key future risks. These risks in the ACT context are explained in the ACT Climate Change Strategy<sup>2</sup>. In the next 50 years we expect to see more extreme weather events:

- Heatwaves will become hotter, more frequent and last longer.
- Droughts will increase in severity and frequency, potentially resulting in increased frequency of dust storms.
- Storms will become more intense, causing flash flooding.
- Bushfire weather will become more dangerous, driving an increasing frequency of dangerous smoke events.

The [ACT Government Climate Change Strategy](#) 2019 – 2025 includes some actions around adaptation, notably around improving building energy efficiency and increasing tree cover. The [ACT Government's Climate Adaptation Strategy](#) (2016 - 2020) which has now expired includes a more comprehensive plan for adaptation.

### School infrastructure climate mitigation context

School infrastructure is a significant portion of the ACT government's physical footprint. Schools have an important role in the government's target of net zero by 2035 for government operations. [ACT Government Climate Change Strategy](#) 2019 – 2025, 5.12 commits to establishing a pathway to zero emissions from schools by 2035, supported by an interim emissions reduction plan to 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> [National Construction Code](#), Part 2

<sup>2</sup> ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019 – 2025, pp31



ACT Climate Change Council

The primary function of the ACT Climate Change Council is to advise the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction on matters relating to greenhouse gas emissions; and addressing and adapting to climate change. This submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion on the future of ACT school infrastructure is at the specific invitation of the Standing Committee.

## Recommendations

Recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee on Education and Inclusion are grouped into four themes.

### 1. School infrastructure to create a climate-safe refuge for students and the community

A climate-safe environment is one that provides a refuge and play space in times of extended heat waves, bushfire smoke, dust storms and extreme rainfall. This could be in the form of climate controlled and air filtered large school halls, providing co-benefits to children's education experience. Outside play spaces would also need to be well shaded by appropriate trees and/or deterioration-resistant shade cloths protecting traditional playing fields. Including community batteries and water tanks would allow these school halls and outdoor sheltered areas to be also used as evacuation and broader community refuges in the event of fire, smoke or major infrastructure failure.

Recommendation 1: By 2040, every school in the ACT has a climate-safe refuge in the form of a hall or halls, suitable to house all teachers and students on days of extreme weather

Recommendation 2: When schools are not open, including after hours, climate-safe school halls are available for the ACT Government to provide a climate-safe refuge for community members.

### 2. Climate suitability of ACT government school infrastructure

There is an existing climate change focused sustainability program in place, with details provided on the [Education Directorate website](#). This program acknowledges to role of schools in a net zero government and in sustainability education.

Recommendation 3: Continue to fund integration of sustainable design for new schools, major projects and capital upgrades that support the ACT government's 2045 net zero target.

Recommendation 4: Continue the program of targeted upgrades and building audits to improve energy efficiency of all school buildings. Extend this program to enable every school to be at least six stars by 2040.



Recommendation 5: Continue funding programs to select and establish appropriate tree species and improve safe tree canopy around schools to provide seasonal shade in outdoor play spaces and improve building efficiency.

Recommendation 6: That the Education Directorate set an annual target for the number of schools that will meet the energy efficiency standard in 100% of the school, with all schools to be completed by 2045. Further, that progress towards these targets is reported annually in the Education Directorate's annual report.

Recommendation 7: That the energy efficiency of each school is reported annually on a school-by-school basis, so local communities can understand the building standard for their school and that every school in the ACT can be compared.

### 3. Schools as community hubs

ACT government schools already function as community hubs, in varying capacities. Examples include the hiring of school facilities after hours and midwifery programs that operate from some schools. As action to address scope 3 emissions starts to increase, we expect demand for community hubs that enable hyper localized connections within the community for sharing, reuse and food production to increase. Extending the use of schools to include refuges and community programs also decreases the impacts of changing demographics – a reduction in school children numbers may not threaten the survival of the school if its facilities are still used by the rest of the community.

Recommendation 8: Pilot 5 schools as community hubs that enable repair, re-use and local food production, in partnership with school communities to test models of schools as community hubs to reduce scope 3 emissions.

### 4. Schools as an opportunity for climate action

Delivery of net zero emissions by 2045 and a reduction in scope 3 emissions will depend on substantial social and behavioural change. Achieving such widespread changes in behaviour is one of the biggest challenges of the Net Zero transition. Schools are places that set the culture of our community for the future. In this capacity, they have a role enabling climate-related behaviour change.

#### *Active transport*

Active travel will be discouraged by extended heatwaves, especially if foot/bike paths are not shaded and otherwise relatively comfortable. Similarly, public transport will be discouraged if bus stops are not sheltered from sun on hot days. Many routes to schools also pass close to or through flood ways as the increased chances of sudden, large floods is hazardous.



Recommendation 9: Continue and extend programs that support children to walk, ride or take public transport to government and non-government schools in a safe and comfortable environment, setting an active travel habit early in life.

Recommendation 10: Consider whether a climate and congestion levy or 'out of area fee' would encourage parents to choose enrolment options that enable active travel and whether this levy could be used to fund active travel promotion in schools.

*Food security and curriculum*

Recommendation 11: Practical aspects of sustainable living are incorporated into the curriculum, including kitchen gardening, basic repairs and understanding the climate impact of lifestyle choices.