

2018
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO
AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT - FIVE ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS' ENGAGEMENT
WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND
COMMUNITY
REPORT NO. 7/2018**

Presented by
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Introduction

The ACT government is committed to meeting the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, purposefully moving to strengths-based approaches and a focus on developing cultural integrity in every school and classroom.

Cultural integrity represents a break from the negative discourse that has dominated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for many years. Cultural integrity is positive and constructive and benefits the whole school community through developing knowledge and understanding.

Cultural integrity describes the environment a school creates to demonstrate both respect and high regard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, knowledge systems and languages; to welcome and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and local community members.

Research is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enjoy greater success when they can see their cultures and languages reflected in the curriculum and school environment. Schools continue to work towards embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all subject areas.

ACT school leaders are change agents building a culture of high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and ensuring that improving cultural integrity is a priority.

Canberra public schools are working with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and local communities to identify their cultural integrity priorities.

The ACT Government established and continues to support the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group which provides advice to ACT Government on education and training matters that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities.

The importance of cultural integrity and providing learning environments that cater for diversity and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been acknowledged in the Future of Education Strategy.

During 2017 and 2018 the ACT Audit Office conducted a performance audit on schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. The Audit Office selected five ACT public schools and spoke to over 127 stakeholders. Stakeholders represented were: students, family members, community members, the chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, staff, academics and training professionals.

The Auditor-General made twelve recommendations and recognised the implementation of cultural integrity and the shift to positive discourse. The report concludes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are fearful of mandatory reporting if they identify they need help. It notes the Community Services Directorate is leading the Our Booris, Our Way review into the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

It also concludes that not all the audited schools strategic and action plans mirrored Directorate strategies and actions; that while all schools engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, the perception of this engagement varied.

The government acknowledges the work of the Auditor-General to identify opportunities and provide recommendations to strengthen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and the community. This document outlines the government's response to those twelve recommendations.

Recommendation 1

School Strategic Plan and Annual Action Plan

The Education Directorate should improve the quality and comprehensiveness of ACT public Schools' Strategic Plan and annual Action Plans with respect to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community by requiring:

- a) an explicit strategy and objective for a school's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community; and
- b) performance measures to monitor and evaluate the school's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Government response:

- a) Agree

The development of the ACT Government's Cultural Integrity Policy and the Directorate's Cultural Integrity Continuum demonstrates the commitment to a strength based, non-deficit approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Cultural integrity describes the environment a school creates to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to welcome and engage their families and communities. From 2019 all school plans will detail the school's approach to inclusion including cultural integrity.

- b) Agree

Schools have been provided with a range of resources to support them to build cultural integrity. This has included a self-assessment tool which schools can use to identify areas for improvement, monitor their progress and engage with families and community to develop a deep understanding of what success looks like.

Recommendation 2

Experiences that can affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

The ACT Government should continue with the process it has adopted for developing the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, and note the concerns expressed during the audit about intergenerational trauma, unconscious bias and deficit discourse.

Government response:

Agree

The ACT Government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT in actively influencing and participating in the social, economic and cultural life of the community.

The *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-18* will expire at the end of 2018. The next Agreement will commence in 2019 and set the long term (ten year) direction for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities in the ACT.

The refreshed Agreement is being shaped by priorities as decided by the community, with a focus on self determination, empowering individuals, improved engagement with community, cultural integrity, co-design of culturally appropriate services and equality of access.

Recommendation 3

Mandatory Reporting for Children and Young People for Harm or Risk of Harm in the ACT

The ACT Government should continue to progress the work of the review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people known to the child protection system, Our Booris, Our Way, and note the concerns expressed during the audit about the fear of mandatory reporting when help is sought.

Government response

Agreed

The ACT Government will continue to progress the work of the review and will note the recommendation from the Audit.

The primary focus of the review is to inform systemic improvements to child protection systems, policies and practices. The review seeks to understand the reasons for children and young people entering care and to then develop strategies to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care, improve their experience and outcomes while in care, and exit children from care through restorations.

The Steering Committee in August 2018 published an Interim Report and made four recommendations to accelerate improvements to the child protection system. The Community Services Directorate has commenced implementation of these recommendations. The final report is due to the ACT Government in September 2019.

Recommendation 4

Mandatory Reporting for Children and Young People for Harm or Risk of Harm in the ACT

The Education Directorate and Community Services Directorate (including the Office for Family Safety) should, within the context of the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, develop training that emphasises the provision of support for children and families based on 'a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations'.

Government response

Agree

Children, Youth and Families have been working in consultation with Health, Education, and ACT Policing to create a Mandated Reporter eLearning course. This course, titled Keeping our Children and Young People Safe, is in the final stages of development and is aligned closely with the *Keeping Our Children and Young People Safe Guide* produced in 2017.

The Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety is developing a Frontline Worker Training (FWT) Strategy for Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) so workers can respond effectively to both children and adults experiencing DFV. The frontline training will equip teachers to understand the complexity of DFV, engage sensitively with children and young people and assist them through accessing internal and external supportive pathways.

The FWT Strategy will also include a specialised training module for workers such as school psychologists. The specialised module will focus on how the system can work cohesively to provide an integrated multi-agency service response.

A Child Protection Education Liaison Officer has been appointed to provide a point of contact for schools to talk through individual matters and can coordinate and collaborate with Children, Youth and Families. The officer is collocated with Children, Youth and Families. Advice about other support services is also available through OneLink.

Recommendation 5

Sharing Successful Engagement Approaches Among Schools

The Education Directorate should request all schools to share information about their engagement methods, successful or not, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community by posting the information on the ACT Education's Google Community website. The ACT Education Directorate should monitor and analyse this information to inform engagement strategies.

Government Response

Agree

The Education Directorate is working to make sharing illustrations of best practice between schools, including strategies for engaging with parents, families and communities, easier. One resource that all Education Directorate staff can access and share these examples is the *Cultural Integrity in ACT public schools* Google Community (Google Community). It is intended that this is used to share best practice examples and experiences of what is working in schools, including engagement with families and communities.

Recommendation 6

Provision of Information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families

The Education Directorate should develop, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community, a range of information, in different formats and in ways that are easily accessible, including information on:

- c) the ACT school curriculum; and
- d) support funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, how it is accessed and in what circumstances.

Government Response

Agree

The Education Directorate is committed to ensuring parents and families are able to easily access information on what their children are learning and how schools are meeting the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In consultation with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group, the Directorate is developing fact sheets on the Australian Curriculum Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priorities and the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership Professional Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

A fact sheet outlining cultural integrity and the funding arrangements associated with the policy is currently available on the Directorate's website. In consultation with the Advisory Group, this fact sheet will be reviewed and updated later this year.

It is anticipated, these fact sheets will be finalised by February 2019 and shared with families and communities through schools, service providers and other networks by the end of March 2019.

Recommendation 7

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan

The Education Directorate should finalise and implement the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and support action plan and, in so doing, give particular emphasis to increasing the number of, and support provided for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders.

Government Response

Agree

The Directorate received a commendation for its first employment action plan by the *Inquiry into ACT Public Service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Report* handed down in March 2014.

The Directorate is currently evaluating the success of its first employment action plan and informed by feedback from the annual *Our Mob: Our Voices* staff survey, will build upon successes to refresh and strengthen initiatives in the next employment and action plan due for completion in June 2019.

Recommendation 8

Cultural Awareness

The Education Directorate should develop and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development and cultural awareness training strategy for staff that:

- a) covers all staff;
- b) sets targets and timeframes for staff to complete training;
- c) has quality control principles for guiding the training;
- d) guides how to monitor and evaluate training; and

This strategy should be supported by a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training.

Government Response

Agree

Cultural integrity training is available to all staff. Each semester, staff are offered the opportunity to complete an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competence course provided through the Centre for Cultural Competence Australia. The online course is supplemented with three workshops designed to integrate the local (Ngunnawal) context and provide opportunities for sharing practice, reflection and action planning.

Principals and corporate executives have also participated in intensive cultural integrity training. The Directorate is investigating options to extend this training further and embed the principles of cultural integrity into the induction processes for new teachers and school leaders in 2019.

In 2018 the Directorate released its Strategic Plan 2018-21: *A Leading Learning Organisation*. The Annual Action Plan 2018-19 articulates initiatives that include the development of a cultural integrity training program. The development of baseline and targeted cultural integrity programs for all staff is a key project within the core strategic goal of a Learning Culture. This deliverable will include the following elements, to be finalised by December 2019:

- A Directorate Cultural Integrity Implementation Plan articulating policies, outcomes, resources and accountabilities regarding environments of strong cultural integrity across the organisation.
- A cultural integrity development program for School Principals and Corporate Executive Staff.
- A cultural integrity training schedule available to all staff.

All school plans will be required to detail clear school approaches to cultural integrity by December 2019. These initiatives will complement and expand upon the cultural integrity training already offered to the Corporate Executive, School Principals and Education Directorate staff generally. In addition, the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan will include actions to strengthen cultural integrity and training across the Directorate.

Recommendation 9

Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student, Families and Community

The Education Directorate should identify a means of providing culturally appropriate direct support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community at schools. In doing so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community should be requested to provide direction on what would assist them and how this could be done.

Government Response

Agree

All school staff provide appropriate supports for students. Through the provision of cultural integrity training mentioned above, staff build their capability to provide these supports, in a culturally appropriate way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities.

In addition to cultural integrity training, the Directorate currently employs 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs) based across 12 schools who also work with feeder schools in their area. IEOs support schools to build their cultural integrity by:

- supporting schools to engage with families and community;
- supporting teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum;
- providing advice and leadership to schools on celebrating significant events and milestones for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- supporting schools to grow a culture of high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
- facilitating successful student transitions between year levels, between schools and post school study or work.

Recommendation 10

Allocation of Indigenous Education Officers to Schools

The Education Directorate should place information on its website to inform families about the IEO support provided for students, including where this is available. This information should also be provided through other formats to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Government Response

Agree

In consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, a fact sheet on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, including the role of IEOs, is currently in development and will be shared with families and communities through schools, service providers and other networks in March 2019 to ensure that families are able to easily access

this information. This fact sheet will also include relevant links to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and service providers.

Recommendation 11

Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018

The Education Directorate should review and finalise *its Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* and, in so doing, provide greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the IEOs and outline how and when the Guidelines are to be monitored, evaluated and updated.

Government Response

Agree (completed)

The IEO Guidelines were finalised in February 2018 and aims to ensure school staff have clarity and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of IEOs.

To ensure this happens, meetings have been held between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, IEOs and their school-based supervisors to present the new IEO guidelines and clarify the role of IEOs in schools.

The role of the IEOs may evolve as the cultural integrity in ACT Public Schools policy direction in implemented and embedded in schools and as such will be reviewed and evaluated as needed.

Recommendation 12

Summary Document of the Draft Guidelines

The Education Directorate should produce a summary document from its *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* and share widely via the website and off-line.

Government Response

Agree

The fact sheet on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, mentioned in recommendation 10 will include a summary of the roles and responsibilities of IEOs and will be shared with families and communities through schools, service providers and other networks in March 2019.