



Mr Tom Duncan
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure
ACT Legislative Assembly

Dear Mr Duncan,

I write to provide input to the review into protocols in place for MLAs to visit or attend school events. I agree that the current process restricts the ability of members to perform their function as a community representative.

As noted in the motion debated on 14 February 2019, visits to Government schools serve a valuable purpose in increasing an MLA's knowledge of the ACT schooling system and developing an appreciation of the talent and enthusiasm of students and teachers in ACT schools. There are 88 government schools in the ACT, with an enrolment of 48,000 students who are supported by over 5,000 teachers and associated support staff. This is an extremely important segment of our community.

Equally I believe it is important for the students, staff and broader school community to see that their elected representatives are accessible, engaged and involved in celebrating milestones within our Government schools. Here I feel an obligation demonstrate to students they are able to influence and be involved in politics and issues impacting on their daily lives. It may be old fashioned however civic studies was a core part of the curriculum many years ago and this enabled students to learn about the theoretical, political and practical aspects of citizenship, as well as its rights and duties. If this is no longer part of our education system then surely we have a duty to expose students to a broad range of elected representatives and processes to ensure they are given a more comprehensive picture of political life in Australia.

This is not to say that visits by members should have a political connotation; in fact I believe MLAs can be involved in their local schools communities without making the occasion political. Here the role of the School principal is most important and with adequate guidelines, they would be able to determine the most appropriate way to manage a visit. Handing out student awards at an assembly, watching students participate in a sports carnival or touring classrooms on special occasions are not political activities. As local representatives, MLAs, particularly Opposition MLAs should be afforded the same access as members of the Government.

Any assertion that MLAs would not respect the unique position of ACT Government public servants in terms of impartiality and obligations of confidentiality are insulting. As with any interaction there would be the upmost respect for the work and contributing these individuals make to the life of every Canberran.

In its current state the ACT protocol significantly restricts school Principals in their capacity as school leaders and managers. They should have the autonomy and trust from the ACT Education Directorate and Minister to extend invitations and/or respond to requests. It is important here to note that no such restrictions are applied by independent and Catholic schools for visits by interested parliamentarians, at the Territory or at the Federal level. So too with Government schools in other jurisdictions across the country, these types of restrictions are either not in place or not as severe.

At all times I believe that the best interests of students, including the duty of care and education benefits to students as well as the appropriateness of the proposed visit should be deciding factors. However here I believe the decision should be delegated to the leadership within each individual school community. They are best placed to understand what is happening in their respective schools, and if for any reason they need advice or escalation, perhaps this is the role of the Education Directorate. Certainly here, I do not see the relevance or efficiency of involving the Minister for Education.

In conclusion, I believe that the current protocol should be amended to reflect the best interests of students, staff and the broader school community. It is only right that the management of school visits in the ACT is aligned to practice in other jurisdictions and across independent and Catholic schools.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Milligan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James Milligan
Member for Yerrabi
Shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs

8 May 2019