

2010

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH
AFFAIRS REPORT: *INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN THE ACT*, MAY 2010**

**Presented by
Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training**

Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs –*Inquiry into the Educational Achievement Gap in the ACT – Final Report*

Government Response Overview

	Recommendations	Response
1.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide pre-service training or professional development for teachers in interpreting standardised testing results.	AGREED
2.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that teachers are aware and able to access expert advice and services to support them in adapting their pedagogical practice to suit the different educational needs of their students.	AGREED
3.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training provide to the Legislative Assembly an analysis of ACT NAPLAN results using comparable 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN data from NSW and Victorian urban schools.	AGREED IN PART
4.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training encourage schools to reflect on and respond to standard assessment results by quantifying and reporting on the qualitative measures used to support improvement in the achievement of their students.	AGREED
5.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government to provide Members of the Legislative Assembly copies of the response to the Report on the outcomes of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Elected Body Estimates Hearings 2008-09.	AGREED
6.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training establish cross-cultural awareness training options for ACT teachers and negotiate with the Faculty of Education at the University of Canberra for the inclusion of pre-service courses in Indigenous studies.	AGREED
7.	The Committee recommends that further analysis be undertaken by the Department of Education and Training into the need for a specialist Indigenous language and creoles support program in the ACT education system.	AGREED IN PART
8.	The Committee recommends that any programs or initiatives developed should be undertaken in consultation with ESL teachers and Indigenous educators and community leaders and that these programs should be funded independently of the existing ESL funding model.	AGREED
9.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that multiagency funding arrangements do not have a detrimental impact on services delivered to disadvantaged students and, where required outputs are being met and continued funding is anticipated, the disruption and uncertainty of contract changes are resolved by the government in a timely manner.	AGREED
10.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate options for expanding the Gudan Gulwan program to include Years 11 and 12 students.	NOTED
11.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training undertake a full review and assessment of the EAL/D profile in the ACT education system including a breakdown of the groups of students within the broader category and a clear articulation of the sort of supports these students are likely to need.	NOTED
12.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training undertake a review of the funding model for EAL/D students with particular attention to the capacity of the model to meet the needs of the broader group of students identified by the profile review and	NOTED

	Recommendations	Response
	whether targeted funds are able to meet all needs.	
13.	The Committee recommends that any reviews of programs, services or funding models should be undertaken in consultation with students directly affected.	NOTED
14.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake to monitor and evaluate the early childhood schools success in preparing students, particularly those at risk of educational disadvantage, for learning and enhancing the capacity of families to support educational engagement.	AGREED
15.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government, bearing in mind the outcomes of the evaluation, commits to extending successful strategies of early childhood education into other areas of the school system as appropriate.	AGREED
16.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government work closely with the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools to ensure that early learning and school transition advantages can be extended to all ACT students.	AGREED
17.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training facilitate forums on best practice in family engagement with student learning and provide resources to support teacher initiatives in this area of school activity.	AGREED
18.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training ensure that the diverse backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances of families are recognised as a factor influencing any family engagement strategies undertaken by schools and that schools are resourced to respond to the diverse needs of the school community.	AGREED IN PART
19.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training, in consultation with the Centre for Research on Education, Poverty and Social Inclusion, develop strategic indicators to measure the performance of the education system in meeting identified equity challenges.	AGREED IN PART
20.	The Committee recommends that that ACT Government provide details to the Legislative Assembly of how the quality teaching strategy will address the specific needs of educationally disadvantaged students.	AGREED
21.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government commission an assessment of how well targeted programs for educationally disadvantaged or at risk students are meeting social inclusion objectives and priority 5.3 of the Canberra Social Plan and that the assessment be made publicly available.	NOTED
22.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government advocate through COAG for longitudinal studies to be conducted as a means of expanding the national research base for quality teaching strategies.	AGREED
23.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that equity and need are given priority in Commonwealth – State/Territory funding negotiations.	AGREED
24.	The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training provide a comprehensive assessment of current methods and outcomes for meeting identified need in the education system and develop a coherent strategy in which all programs can be reviewed against the objective of improving the educational engagement and achievement of disadvantaged students and enhancing equity within the system	NOTED

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide pre-service training or professional development for teachers in interpreting standardised testing results

Agreed

The Department provides professional development for teachers in interpreting National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) standardised testing through the use of the School Measurement Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART), the database that stores NAPLAN results for access by schools. A team of three school improvement officers provides professional learning sessions, and work directly with school leaders and teachers to assist the interpretation of class and school-level data.

The ACT Government does not have responsibility for providing pre-service teacher training. Under the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership, agreed to by the ACT Government, the ACT Teacher Education Committee and the Professional Experience Committee have been established. The University of Canberra, the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Department are represented on these committees. The committees will oversee the implementation of reforms to improve pre-service and in-service teacher education and Departmental representatives will promote the inclusion of training on the interpretation of standardised testing results in pre-service and in-service courses.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that teachers are aware and able to access expert advice and services to support them in adapting their pedagogical practice to suit the different educational needs of their students.

Agreed

The Department provides support for teachers in developing and adapting their pedagogical practice through the Quality Teaching model. The Quality Teaching model has been systematically introduced and implemented in all ACT public schools over the past three years. Consultants work across all sectors to improve pedagogy through increasing teachers' understanding of the elements involved in effective teaching and supporting them to increase their repertoire of teaching strategies to improve student learning.

The *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009 -2013* identifies best practice in the teaching of literacy and numeracy and each school has a literacy and numeracy coordinator who works with teachers to improve their practice. In addition 21 Field Officers work in identified schools to provide additional coaching support for teachers. The educational needs of gifted and talented students have also been recognised and a specialist officer is working with teachers to support the implementation of the *Gifted and Talented Policy (2008)*.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training provide to the Legislative Assembly an analysis of ACT NAPLAN results using comparable 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN data from NSW and Victorian urban schools.

Agreed in part

The ACT NAPLAN results are already analysed using comparable 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN data from NSW and Victorian schools. However, while it is true that the ACT's student

population is only metropolitan, this does not make it directly comparable with NSW and Victorian metropolitan student populations. The Socio-Economic Status (SES) distribution across the ACT makes the ACT population quite different to NSW/Victorian metropolitan communities, where SES is more intensely clustered by location. Comparison between these groups is unlikely to yield worthwhile analysis.

Currently, the best form of comparison available is that based on the information collected by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and reported on the *My School* website. *My School* provides a profile of almost 10 000 Australian schools and can be searched by name, location and sector. To compare academic performance, each school has its own group of 60 statistically similar schools - derived from an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). While the ACT considers that the ICSEA scale does not entirely address the SES peculiarities of the ACT population, national collaboration will lead to continuous improvement of the website, addressing the issues related to the ICSEA scale, as well as vocational education and training outcomes reporting, post-school destinations, parent satisfaction, and school financial reporting.

The Department is also currently exploring the development of new school performance measures. These measures will provide greater rigour regarding the comparison of school performance, taking into account the specific ACT context.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training encourage schools to reflect on and respond to standard assessment results by quantifying and reporting on the qualitative measures used to support improvement in the achievement of their students.

Agreed

The Department strongly supports the use of data to inform school improvement practices and monitor progress in schools. In March 2010 *School Improvement in ACT Public Schools Directions 2010-2013* was launched. It describes a more systematic and targeted approach to school improvement by:

- o organising public schools into four networks, each led by a school network leader
- o enhancing the accountability of principals and school network leaders
- o increasing the availability and use of data to inform school improvement practices and monitor progress
- o providing support for our principals to ensure they are highly effective instructional leaders
- o building the capacity of our teachers, particularly in literacy and numeracy teaching.

This framework encourages schools to report on measures in place to support the achievement of their students. The Department understands that teachers require professional development in drawing together quantitative and qualitative assessment information for teaching purposes and continues to deliver training related to evidence-based practice, in both classroom and leadership contexts.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government to provide Members of the Legislative Assembly copies of the response to the Report on the outcomes of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Elected Body Estimates Hearings 2008-09.

Agreed

The Government Response to the Report on the outcomes of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Elected Body Estimates Hearings 2008-09 is forecast for tabling out of session in August 2010.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training establish cross-cultural awareness training options for ACT teachers and negotiate with the Faculty of Education at the University of Canberra for the inclusion of pre-service courses in Indigenous studies.

Agreed

The ACT Department of Education and Training is committed to developing and implementing a cultural awareness program that will encourage the development of cultural understanding and proficiency among all Departmental staff. This commitment will be reflected in the Department's *Reconciliation Action Plan* to be launched in July 2010 during NAIDOC week, the Department's *Equity and Diversity Plan 2010-2103* and the ACT *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2010-2013*. Teacher education courses are offered in the ACT by both the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University. This includes meeting requirements for identified mandatory areas of study, one of which is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

In 2010, the Department will commence work to produce a professional development package for all staff, involving a series of modules covering cultural competencies. This approach will allow flexibility of delivery while also recognising that all employees are at different stages of understanding and levels of competency regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, peoples and cultures.

The development of this program will support staff across the Department and in schools to build and enhance relationships, understanding, awareness and connectedness with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents, staff and community, including the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommends that further analysis be undertaken by the Department of Education and Training into the need for a specialist Indigenous language and creoles support program in the ACT education system.

Agreed in part

The Department will continue to consult with the peak Indigenous body, The *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group*, to investigate ways to develop teachers' capacity to work with speakers of Indigenous languages and creoles. The University of New England has completed research into the language acquisition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preschool children. The Department will be meeting

with the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group* to consider recommendations from the report.

The 2009-10 Budget provided funding over four years to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and teachers' assistants in ACT public schools. The staff recruited under this initiative will be consulted when considering ways to develop teachers' capacity to support speakers of Indigenous languages and creoles.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Committee recommends that any programs or initiatives developed should be undertaken in consultation with ESL teachers and Indigenous educators and community leaders and that these programs should be funded independently of the existing ESL funding model.

Agreed

The Department is developing an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*, which will form strong and consistent links to the national partnership agreements, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* and the Department's strategic plan, *Everyone Matters*. The strategy will assist staff in achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literacy and Numeracy Program Officers are appointed to a school based on the number of identified students enrolled. The aim of the support provided is to build teacher capacity to effectively differentiate the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of all students. These officers jointly plan with teachers, model effective literacy and numeracy practices and work shoulder to shoulder with classroom teachers. A transition program was introduced in 2009 and has continued in 2010 to support students in year 6 and 7. These programs are funded outside of the ESL funding model.

The *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009 – 2013* focus area 'Improve literacy and numeracy learning' requires all schools to develop programs that will support target groups. Indigenous students and students for whom English is an additional language are two of the identified target groups. The support includes:

- enhancing the development and implementation of Individual Learning Plans and Personalised Learning Plans with emphasis on literacy and numeracy strategies
- engaging, monitoring and providing appropriate intervention programs for students at risk of not reaching their potential
- building teacher understanding of effective pedagogy
- encouraging teachers to work collaboratively to provide targeted support for identified students

In addition, the Department is undertaking an audit of the provision of support for students whose first language is not English. The audit will assist the Department to review the mechanisms for providing appropriate support for ESL students.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that multiagency funding arrangements do not have a detrimental impact on services delivered to disadvantaged students and, where required outputs are being met and continued funding is anticipated, the disruption and uncertainty of contract changes are resolved by the government in a timely manner.

Agreed

All ACT government agencies strive to deliver coordinated services and work closely together to address areas of shared responsibility. The Department of Education and Training has strong relationships with other ACT government agencies involved in delivering services to disadvantaged students and will continue to consult appropriately with relevant agencies in the development of, and changes to, major policy and programs.

The Department will continue to work with other Government departments and external providers to ensure continuity of effective service delivery within available resources.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate options for expanding the Gudan Gulwan program to include Years 11 and 12 students.

Noted

The Department is continuing to develop its partnership with Gudan Gulwan, including through the work of the Indigenous Student Aspiration Officers employed by the Department. These officers work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, supporting them in reaching their potential by successfully completing secondary school, and progressing to higher education, training and employment options. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from as early as year 6 are supported in the development of strategies that target their successful completion of schooling.

The Department continues to look for further funding opportunities to support the work of Gudan Gulwan, and is currently developing a proposal for Australian Government funding focusing on students in years 7-10, with a view to developing a stronger program for high school students with low literacy and the retention of students in these years.

The Department has a strong focus on the continued engagement of all year 11 and 12 students through the development of the Youth Commitment, that will ensure that the needs of each young person are at the heart of agency activities. If a student moves from school to further education and training or work, he/she continues to be accounted for, cared for and supported. The Youth Commitment will require all agencies and service providers that serve young people to the age of 17 to commit to ensuring that no young person is lost from education, training or employment.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training undertake a full review and assessment of the EAL/D profile in the ACT education system including a breakdown of the groups of students within the broader category and a clear articulation of the sort of supports these students are likely to need.

Noted

Students' literacy needs, including learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), are assessed at the school level and through external tests including Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) and the National Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The Literacy needs of these students are met through a range of strategies and supports that have been put in place through the Department's *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013*. A focus area within the strategy, 'Improve literacy and numeracy teaching,' acknowledges that the largest in-school determinant of variation in student achievement is the quality of teaching. Strengthening the capacity of all teachers, including building their knowledge of effective intervention strategies, so that every teacher can meet the learning needs of all students and assist them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills is imperative and is the platform of the strategy. A three pronged educational approach is being used to ensure all students are being supported. This approach involves:

- high quality instruction by every classroom teacher
- additional in-class support provided by literacy and numeracy coordinators in every school and the Field Officers in 21 identified schools
- intensive, short-term support for individual students when required.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training undertake a review of the funding model for EAL/D students with particular attention to the capacity of the model to meet the needs of the broader group of students identified by the profile review and whether targeted funds are able to meet all needs.

Noted

As part of the ACT DET *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009 – 2013* each school is required to appoint a literacy and numeracy coordinator. A rigorous program of professional learning has been provided to support these coordinators in performing their role to support the capacity building of teachers and provide targeted student intervention in their schools. The professional learning program has included a number of modules to support coordinators in building understanding of the diverse needs of students within our target groups. ESL students are one of these groups.

In addition, a targeted scholarship through the Department of Education and Training has just enrolled 25 teachers in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Graduate Certificate through the University of Canberra. This graduate certificate qualification will support the capacity building of teachers throughout the ACT education system to provide programs that will meet the diverse needs of our students, particularly EAL/D learners.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Committee recommends that any reviews of programs, services or funding models should be undertaken in consultation with students directly affected.

Noted

The Department regularly includes students and their parents/carers in reviews and consultations where appropriate. For example, students were represented on the Disability Education Reference Group during the Special Education Review. The Department will continue to include students in major reviews of programs where appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake to monitor and evaluate the early childhood schools' success in preparing students, particularly those at risk of educational disadvantage, for learning and enhancing the capacity of families to support educational engagement.

Agreed

The ACT Government's investment in early years learning reflects the understanding that the engagement of children and their parents/carers in high quality early learning programs will enhance their success in the later years of schooling.

The Department has commissioned a framework for the review of the early childhood schools. In addition early childhood schools are subject to the School Improvement Process which has a four year cycle of ongoing self assessment and external review. Community engagement is an important factor in these schools and the allocation of services is one method of engaging families in the educational process.

The *Early Years Learning Framework*, developed nationally as part of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) reform agenda for early childhood education and care, is being used by ACT primary and early childhood schools to evaluate and improve their programs. In addition, early intervention programs are in place to support at risk students through playgroups and additional preschool involvement. Five Koori preschools also provide additional programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to support their entry into formal education.

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government, bearing in mind the outcomes of the evaluation, commits to extending successful strategies of early childhood education into other areas of the school system as appropriate.

Agreed

The Government is committed to continuing the early childhood schooling model with planning in place for an early childhood school at Franklin. The 2010-11 Budget provided \$1.4 million over two years for the forward design of the Franklin Early Childhood School, which will provide services for children from birth to eight years of age residing in Franklin and surrounding areas, from 2013. The commissioned framework for a review of the early childhood schools, amalgamation of preschools into primary schools, the introduction of the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the introduction of the *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care*, provide the opportunity for

strategies used and lessons learned from the early childhood model to be adapted and used in all public primary schools as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government work closely with the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools to ensure that early learning and school transition advantages can be extended to all ACT students.

Agreed

The Department has established a Universal Access Governance Committee so that all sectors can work together to improve access to high quality preschool education. The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) data, collected across all communities, has been provided to public and non-government schools to support the transition into school. The AEDI is a population measure of early childhood development at school entry, derived from teacher-completed checklists. The ACT AEDI Coordinating Committee has developed a comprehensive strategy for disseminating AEDI results across ACT government and non-government agencies, including schools. The evidence provided by the AEDI will inform policy and program development for all areas of early childhood development, and AEDI champions will work with communities to use the data to develop programs to meet identified needs.

RECOMMENDATION 17

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training facilitate forums on best practice in family engagement with student learning and provide resources to support teacher initiatives in this area of school activity.

Agreed

From 2011, the Virtual Learning Environment currently being piloted in eight schools across the ACT, will provide parents with access, through a parent portal, to what their child is doing at school. It is anticipated that the parent portal will be available during 2011. This will support far greater levels of family engagement with student learning. In addition, schools provide forums for parents at various times throughout the school year to support parental engagement in the educational process.

The Low Socio-economic Status (SES) School Communities National Partnership (NP) funds a range of within-school and out-of-school reforms to support the educational needs and wellbeing of students in schools in low SES communities. One of the reforms is to build partnerships with parents. The four schools included in this NP are considering strategies for building partnerships with parents and the school community including: the provision of materials for parents to read and books suitable for reading to children and the delivery of parent information sessions and workshops across the four schools on relevant educational topics. The results of this work will be shared across the Department.

The *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013* provides additional funding for the National Capital Centre for Literacy Research. This Centre, a joint initiative between the University of Canberra and the ACT Department of Education and Training, has been established to support literacy learning by working with parents and schools and is known as *UCAN Read*. This program provides parents with the necessary skills to work with their child/ren to support literacy development. This research-based program provides parents with training to help them assist their child to develop literacy skills. It is available for children in years 3-10 who are experiencing significant literacy difficulties. Parents attend training sessions and

then bring their child for the Individual Assistance Program where the parent works with the child.

RECOMMENDATION 18

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training ensure that the diverse backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances of families are recognised as a factor influencing any family engagement strategies undertaken by schools and that schools are resourced to respond to the diverse needs of the school community.

Agreed in part

The Department recognises the diverse backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances of students and the need to consider their diversity in any engagement strategies. Schools are resourced to respond to the diverse needs of their community, and approximately \$500 000 is allocated annually, through the *Student Support Fund* to public schools to support individual students from disadvantaged families. Principals determine how best these funds can be used to support disadvantaged students in their school. The *Schools Equity Fund* (SEF) is provided to 15 schools identified as serving the most disadvantaged communities. Schools use SEF funding for a range of whole of school activities such as targeted literacy and numeracy programs and cultural events, and establishing stronger community connections through programs to encourage parent participation.

These two funds provide additional resources to support individual students and enrich educational programs for students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION 19

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training, in consultation with the Centre for Research on Education, Poverty and Social Inclusion, develop strategic indicators to measure the performance of the education system in meeting identified equity challenges.

Agreed in part

In 2009, the Department formalised an agreement with the University of Canberra to share research interests in education. To facilitate this agreement, a Collaborative Research Group (CRG) was established and is co-chaired by Professor Cathryn McConaghy, program leader for Centre for Research on Education, Poverty and Social Inclusion. Through the CRG a research program is being developed and is likely to include the development of indicators to measure the performance of the education system. The initial focus of this work is the development of the methodology for compiling the indicators and the ways results can be best used.

Through the *Low SES School Communities* and *Literacy and Numeracy* National Partnerships and the *Closing the Gap* initiative, the Department is required to report against performance measures that provide a framework to monitor the performance of the public school system in meeting specified targets. Furthermore, the Department conducts an annual review of its Budget performance measures, including the strategic and accountability indicators reported against in the budget papers, which are used to monitor the performance of the Department against its stated aims. This year the review aimed to improve the indicators and to ensure they align with the Department's *Strategic Plan 2010-2013: everyone matters*, and was guided by Treasury advice, comments arising from the 2009 budget hearings, and feedback from the ACT Auditor-General.

RECOMMENDATION 20

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide details to the Legislative Assembly of how the quality teaching strategy will address the specific needs of educationally disadvantaged students.

Agreed

The employment of quality teaching to address the specific needs of educationally disadvantaged students is based on sound research. A study by the University of Newcastle, *Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in New South Wales Public Schools* (SIPA), was conducted over 2004 – 2007 in collaboration with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET). The study examined the relationship between the quality of teaching and student achievement. A central research question concerned equity and the impact of use of the quality teaching model for educationally disadvantaged students. There was significant evidence that, when such students were given work to do of high intellectual quality and assessment tasks that encouraged high levels of authentic achievement (i.e. when expectations were high within a supportive learning environment), achievement by students from disadvantaged situations significantly improved. Details are available at: www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/qt_gor04814.pdf and www.aare.edu.au/07pap/amo07284.pdf. This research was considered when the Quality Teaching Model was adapted by the ACT Department of Education and Training.

RECOMMENDATION 21

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government commission an assessment of how well targeted programs for educationally disadvantaged or at risk students are meeting social inclusion objectives and priority 5.3 of the Canberra Social Plan and that the assessment be made publicly available.

Noted

The ACT Government has a strong and ongoing commitment to promoting community inclusion and assessing how well targeted programs are meeting their objectives. The *Building our Community: Canberra Social Plan* released in 2004 is an expression of the ACT Government's vision that we become a place where: *All people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of our community*. The Plan includes seven priority areas:

1. Economic opportunity for all Canberrans
2. Respect, diversity and human rights
3. A safe, strong and cohesive community
4. Improve health and well being
5. Lead Australian in education, training and lifelong learning
6. Housing for a future Canberra
7. Respect and protect the environment.

These priorities have guided ACT Government decision making and action since 2004 and there have been significant achievements in these areas. Progress Reports are released publically every two years (in 2005, 2007 and 2009) to provide an update on ACT Government achievements and progress against the *2004 Canberra Social Plan* actions and targets.

Building on evidence-based research and advice developed by the ACT Community Inclusion Board between 2004-2009, the forward policy agenda for community inclusion has been an integral part of the current review of the *Canberra Social Plan*. Work on the development of a new *Canberra Social Plan* commenced last year and will be finalised in 2010. This work will include development of community inclusion goals and a high level action plan targeting key across-government action areas. It is anticipated that public reporting of progress by the ACT Government will again form a key part of performance assessment against the new plan.

The ACT Government will continue to utilise a range of comprehensive data sources, including NAPLAN and the *Australian Early Development Index*, to inform the efficacy of targeted programs for disadvantaged and at risk students. Enhancing data capacity and capability will continue in accordance with the joint ACT Government Australian Bureau of Statistics *Information Development Plan 2008-2011*. The *Information Development Steering Committee* overseeing the implementation of the Plan recognised children and young people as a policy priority and this is reflected accordingly in their forward work plan.

As noted in response to Recommendation 19, through the *Low SES School Communities* and *Literacy and Numeracy* National Partnerships and the Closing the Gap initiative, the Department of Education and Training is required to report against performance measures that provide a framework to monitor the performance of the public school system in meeting specified targets. Furthermore, the Department conducts an annual review of its Budget performance measures, including the strategic and accountability indicators reported against in the budget papers, which are used to monitor the performance of the Department against its stated aims.

RECOMMENDATION 22

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government advocate through COAG for longitudinal studies to be conducted as a means of expanding the national research base for quality teaching strategies.

Agreed

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership was established in 2010 to provide national leadership in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. Conducting research into improving teacher quality is part of that responsibility and the work of AITSL will be used to inform quality teaching strategies across Australia.

COAG has agreed to the development and implementation of a national professional teacher standards framework and accreditation process for accomplished and leading teachers. This reform is a compulsory element of the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality, which was established to drive and reward systemic reforms to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in Australian Schools. Consideration is being given to the development of a national database which will facilitate more systematic longitudinal study of the quality of teaching and the factors that influence it.

The ACT 2010-11 Budget provided \$3.941 million over four years for the establishment of the Teacher Quality Institute. The Teacher Quality Institute will establish processes to register all teachers (government, Catholic and independent) in the ACT, accredit pre-service education programs and certify the skills and knowledge of teachers against nationally agreed teacher standards.

RECOMMENDATION 23

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that equity and need are given priority in Commonwealth – State/Territory funding negotiations.

Agreed

The Australian and ACT Governments recognise that ensuring all young people have the best possible start in life is vital to the well-being of families, communities and the nation as a whole. High-quality schooling supported by strong community engagement is central to future prosperity and social cohesion.

As part of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, National agreements have been created that commit the ACT to addressing the issue of social inclusion and reduce the educational disadvantage of children.

The National Education Agreement has been established to pursue this agenda. The Commonwealth and ACT Governments have agreed to reform directions which address the provision of support to students with additional needs, reducing the educational disadvantage of children and integrated educational strategies for low socio-economic school communities. This Agreement will also drive reform directions to 'Close the Gap' in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, a key outcome as part of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement - which the ACT will pursue through the broadest possible spectrum of government action.

RECOMMENDATION 24

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training provide a comprehensive assessment of current methods and outcomes for meeting identified need in the education system and develop a coherent strategy in which all programs can be reviewed against the objective of improving the educational engagement and achievement of disadvantaged students and enhancing equity within the system.

Noted

The Department of Education and Training has developed a new strategic plan to provide high level direction for education and training in the ACT for the period 2010 to 2013. Launched in December 2009, the plan incorporates strong links to the current School Improvement Framework and National Partnership commitments to allow schools to incorporate the priorities and performance measures into existing planning structures.

The vision for the plan is *"That all young people in the ACT learn, thrive and are equipped with the skills to lead fulfilling, productive and responsible lives."* Under the broad theme of 'everyone matters', the plan notes the importance of how we can better support and engage with students, teachers and support staff, leaders and parents and the community. The four values highlighted in the plan are: Honesty, Excellence, Fairness and Respect. The plan also highlights priorities and lists performance measures under the categories of: Learning and teaching, School environment, student pathways and transitions, and Leadership and corporate development. The objective of improving the educational engagement and achievement of disadvantaged students and enhancing equity is central to the strategic directions.

To drive the achievement of the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan, the Department has increased its focus on school accountability and improvement. In March 2010 *School Improvement in ACT Public Schools Directions 2010-2013* was launched. It describes a more systematic and targeted approach to school improvement by:

- o organising public schools into four networks, each led by a school network leader
- o enhancing the accountability of principals and school network leaders
- o increasing the availability and use of data to inform school improvement practices and monitor progress
- o providing support for our principals to ensure they are highly effective instructional leaders
- o building the capacity of our teachers, particularly in literacy and numeracy teaching.

School networks will provide a platform for developing common understandings of effective teaching and learning, sharing successful practices and offering opportunities for leadership and teacher development.

The *School Improvement Framework* describes a four-year cycle of review based on four key processes of:

- o self-assessment to evaluate progress and identify school priorities
- o planning for improvement through a four year school plan and annual operating plans, including accountability measures and targets
- o reporting on progress through the Annual School Board report
- o participating in an external review of process over a four-year cycle.

The *School Improvement Framework* and Directions paper strengthens the role of the Department in meeting its obligations under the *Education Act 2004* and the national partnerships with the Australian Government.