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

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE ACT AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT**

**No. 04/2017**

**PERFORMANCE INFORMATION IN ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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## **Government Response to Auditor-General's Report 04/2017:**

### **Performance Information in ACT Public Schools**

#### **Introduction/Background**

The ACT Government welcomes the Auditor-General's report number 4 of 2017 – Performance Information in ACT Public Schools (the Report) provided to the Speaker of the Assembly on 31 May 2017. The report made seven recommendations.

The Auditor-General provided an independent opinion on the extent to which the Education Directorate and ACT public schools use performance information to improve schools' and students' performance.

The Report highlighted that ACT Public Schools are performing below similar schools in other jurisdictions and that there was a high level of variability in the use of student performance information and management information systems. The Report also found that the Education Directorate has commenced initiatives to improve governance and administrative arrangements for the use of student performance information in schools. Initiatives include developing sound principles for school improvement, identifying better ways to manage and use student performance information and developing systems and tools to support student performance information collection and analysis.

The Education Directorate's Strategic Plan outlines the five core strategies for delivering a high performing education and care system. Core strategies include:

- Quality Learning.
- Inspirational Teaching and Leadership.
- High Expectations, High Performance.
- Connecting with Families and the Community.
- Business Innovation and improvement.

The government has a core focus on school improvement as demonstrated in the Education Directorate framework *People, Practice and Performance* which was launched on 1 April 2016. The school improvement framework, along with *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* articulates that system-wide improvement in student outcomes requires

an explicit improvement agenda grounded in evidence from research and practice and measured, in part, by improvements in student outcomes, through systematic assessments.

The Education Directorate's school improvement model is designed to sustainably accelerate school improvement, by implementing strategies to support schools to further improve and to embed robust and continuously improved professional practices.

The school improvement framework also provides the sound principles for the management and use of student performance information. It identifies the importance of using evidence to support school improvement and the need for systems to collect and analyse school level data. It also identifies the need to provide accurate, accessible and consistent information about students' achievements to families/carers.

The government's strong commitment to school improvement is informed by an evidence based approach through the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT). The nine domains of the NSIT provide a global understanding of what constitutes a high performing school.

Through a rigorous external review process, an Australian Council of Educational Research expert reviewer and an experienced ACT school principal provide explicit recommendations for improvement which inform the schools' five-year strategic plan. As a result of using the NSIT, system and school leaders can identify specific areas for improvement and provide differentiated responses through professional learning, coaching and Education Support Office (ESO) support.

Also in 2016 system publications, Great Teaching by Design and Great Teachers by Design were provided to all Education Directorate staff. The Education Directorate is currently scoping a platform of professional learning to roll out in 2018 to empower and enhance the quality and impact of teaching in our schools. Ensuring that all students have opportunities and support to learn and thrive.

## **Government Position on Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1 – Strategic Plan performance objectives and indicators**

The Education Directorate should provide guidance on how performance indicators in its Strategic Planning cycle 2018-2020 are to be measured as well as associated quantitative targets associated with the indicators.

#### **Government response**

##### **Agreed.**

The Education Directorate has commenced its planning for the 2018-2020 Education Directorate Strategic Plan. The government's policy agenda and election commitments, supported by this Auditor-General's report, the Education Directorate's analysis of past and current performance and the Future of Education conversation, are key inputs to the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan.

The Directorate has initiated a process to implement the next stage of improvements to data analytics and accountability that incorporates systemic reporting and use of data sets with direct connection between the Education Directorate's strategic planning, school strategic planning and school achievement.

In practice, this will provide a set of performance indicators with a clear line of sight between government priorities and achievements in each school based on student and school performance data over time, including academic, stakeholder perception, student engagement and wellbeing indicators.

### **Recommendation 2 – NAPLAN Indicators**

The Education Directorate should develop new Strategic Indicators which are based on measuring student progress over time.

#### **Government response**

##### **Agreed-in-principle.**

NAPLAN provides a point in time indication of student performance in the key areas of literacy and numeracy. NAPLAN is the best available, nationally consistent and standardised measure of student achievement in these key areas. Literacy and numeracy are

foundational skills and also support broader learning towards wider educational objectives. Measuring student attainment against these wider objectives, such as general capabilities, must also form part of the Education Directorate's Strategic Indicators in the medium and long term.

The current national measures for State and Territory reporting against NAPLAN are '% of students at or above national minimum standard' and 'mean scale score' (the average).

There is not yet a nationally agreed measure for system-level reporting of student gain, despite this being the most effective measure of school improvement, and only one of the three current school-level gain measures would be appropriate for national reporting.

The Education Directorate has sought assistance from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority to develop additional NAPLAN indicators that will demonstrate growth achieved by students in ACT public schools. These measures are likely to include a longitudinal measure that compares the growth of ACT public students between NAPLAN assessment points, such as between years 3 and 5 and years 7 and 9, compared with the growth achieved by students in other jurisdictions with the same starting scores.

The government is also examining an indicator that compares student performance in ACT public schools against individual student socio-educational advantage (SEA) over time, benchmarked against the equivalent measure for public school students in capital cities. This indicator is a measure of the equity in ACT public schools, with an objective of greater equity, or a smaller differential in NAPLAN outcomes between students with different SEA.

### **Recommendation 3 – School Strategic and Annual Action Plans**

The Education Directorate should improve the quality and comprehensiveness of schools' Strategic Plans and Annual Action Plans by requiring:

- a) explicit objectives and strategies in relation to student performance information and its use in driving school improvement; and
- b) performance measures based on students' educational progress.

## Government response

### **Agreed.**

In 2016, the government implemented a more rigorous school review process based on the nine domains of the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT). In order to establish the strongest possible implementation of this process, the Education Directorate commissioned trained experts from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) as external review panel chairs. Each panel also includes one Principal and an external expert.

This improved approach to school review builds on extensive work undertaken over the past ten years, and has provided significantly enhanced precision for school improvement planning. Since the commencement of 2017, all schools have transitioned to a new Annual Action Plan approach which is substantially supported by consultation and guidance from the Education Support Office to ensure the efficacy of performance planning for each school.

The new school review approach, and more specifically the nine domains of the NSIT, enables closer interrogation of each school's evidence against each of its priorities and importantly enables an explicit examination of each school's overall performance based on system data.

### **Recommendation 4 – Guidance and support for schools**

The Education Directorate should examine what may be the appropriate level of support for school Principals with respect to the use of student performance information to drive school improvement and determine how this is to be provided. This should recognise the balance between school autonomy and accountability and central oversight and support from the Education Support Office.

## Government response

### **Agreed.**

In order to improve support for school improvement and strengthen accountability the Education Directorate undertook a restructure during late 2016 and early 2017.

The restructure clearly puts students and schools at the centre. This restructure includes the recalibration of the role of Directors of School Improvement with a focus on greater support

to schools within a centrally authorised environment. The importance of both empowerment and accountability has been addressed, including:

- Consistency of support: ensuring the opportunities that happen in one network are open to all, that we bring back a strong sense of being one system; the development of a common charter to inform consistent approaches to Principal Performance Development Agreement development, Annual Action Plan conversations, frequency of visits, and the provision of written feedback.
- Targeted and differentiated engagement & support: There are a range of schools, each at a different point on the school improvement journey, who are benefiting from additional support with implementing their priorities. Early career principals are receiving support on specific points of need, across the operational, relational, systemic and strategic emphasises in their leadership capabilities.

Balancing school autonomy and accountability and central oversight and support is emerging as a theme in the government's Future of Education consultation and will receive consideration as the Future of Education strategy is developed.

### **Recommendation 5 – NAPLAN participation**

The Education Directorate should develop strategies to address the low participation rates in NAPLAN testing in some ACT public schools, specifically with respect to Year 9 participation.

#### Government response

#### **Noted.**

Non-participating students may have been formally withdrawn by parents or carers or could be absent on the day of testing for one or more NAPLAN tests.

The overall difference in NAPLAN participation rates between the ACT and the national rate is fully attributable to higher levels of withdrawal by parents in the ACT (Tables 1 & 2 refer). For 2016, withdrawal rates for the ACT public system ranged from 4.1 percent for year 7 students to 6.2 percent for year 9 students compared with the national average of 2.0 and 2.5 percent respectively.

**Table 1: NAPLAN 2016 reading participation rates (%)**

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
ACT public	92.7	92.8	92.0	87.6
Australia (all schools)	95.0	95.4	94.5	91.2

**Table 2: NAPLAN 2016 Reading - Withdrawal rates (%)**

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
ACT public	4.7	4.3	4.1	6.2
Aust (public & non-gov)	2.7	2.3	2.0	2.5

The proportion of students in ACT public schools recorded as absent is generally similar to the rate nationally across all schools (Table 3 refers). In 2016, 2.6 percent of year 3 ACT public school students were absent from NAPLAN testing compared to 2.3 percent nationally. Absence rates increase with year levels nationally, and in the ACT rising to 6.2 percent in year 9 which is consistent with the 2016 national average.

**Table 3: NAPLAN 2016 Reading - Absent rates (%)**

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
ACT public	2.6	2.8	3.9	6.2
Aust (all schools)	2.3	2.4	3.4	6.2

The Education Support Office will continue to work with principals and school communities to ensure the highest possible level of engagement with NAPLAN testing. The transition to NAPLAN online provides an opportune time to revisit the system benefits of participation.

### **Recommendation 6 – A to E Reporting**

The Education Directorate should implement a standards-based moderation process across schools and school networks in order to achieve consistency in A to E grading and reporting.

## Government response

### **Agreed-in-principle.**

The government recognises that improved consistency in student grading an important part of ensuring that teachers accurately assess student learning and progress. Care in the approach to grading and reporting is required to ensure that student engagement in learning is not impaired.

Following its completion by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2016, the Australian Curriculum has been progressively implemented in the ACT. The final phase of implementation will be completed at the end of 2018.

Achievement Standards and grade level descriptors in the Australian Curriculum assign a 'C' grade when a student demonstrates the expected level of learning for a year level. This level of achievement should be celebrated, alongside recognising the endeavour of all learning achievement and encouraging the pursuit of excellence. Improving the understanding of parents, students and the community of what the curriculum achievement standards represent is an important part of this process.

Planning, teaching and assessing using standards is a change of practice for ACT teachers. Teachers will continue to be supported to develop effective and coherent planning and assessment practices that utilise ACARA's work samples and promote consistency of teacher judgement against the achievement standards across the ACT.

The initial focus is on improving teachers' understanding of the year level standards and increasing the consistency of their judgement of student work at each year level standard ('C' grade), then identifying work above or below the standard, and then to differentiating how much above or below the standard to accommodate the full range of A to E grades.

Moderation through teacher collaboration around standards-based assessment is evidentially correlated with reducing in-school variation of student achievement and will achieve the consistency sought by this recommendation.

## **Recommendation 7 – Professional learning for use and analysis of data**

The Education Directorate should develop a comprehensive professional learning program for school Principals and teachers on the use of student performance information and how it can be used to inform differentiated teaching and learning to students and overall school improvement.

### Government response

#### **Agreed.**

The priority for the government is to increase the effective use of data to ensure students, schools and the system continues to be high performing and improves education achievement for all students, irrespective of their background.

In 2017 the Education Directorate commenced an initiative titled ‘Enabling Evidence Based Improvement in Canberra Public Schools – Valuing Data as Evidence to Inform Great Teaching’. The initiative is designed to:

- a) align school and system data for planning and accountability;
- b) develop a set of strategic indicators based on performance data over time, including other student performance, engagement and wellbeing indicators;
- c) clarify the agreed data sets and their presentation to ensure that they are fit for purpose and meet the specific needs of teachers, school leaders and the Education Support Office;
- d) increase teacher and school leader knowledge and skill in the use of data analytics including the use of the achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum to drive planning, assessment and reporting of student achievement; and
- e) provide timely and differentiated professional learning and support for school leaders in the use of data to inform improvement student and overall school performance.