



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the ACT Auditor General's report No 6
of 2021: Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools

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

**Inquiry into the ACT Auditor-General's Report No. 6 of 2021:
Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools**

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GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION – TEACHING QUALITY IN ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Government is committed to developing and delivering educational services to empower each child and young person in the ACT to learn for life. The ACT Audit Office’s report on Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools (audit report) acknowledges the significant continuous improvement the Education Directorate has sustained. As quality teaching is a key predictor of positive student outcomes, the systems supporting quality teaching in ACT Public Schools continue to mature with a clear focus on teachers who have in-depth educational knowledge and skills supporting individual student achievement rather than programmatic ‘one size fits all’ education.

The audit report notes the Directorate “recognises the importance of improving teaching quality for the purpose of enhancing student performance. Since 2014, strategic planning and government-led initiatives have identified priorities to improve the quality of teaching practices across ACT public schools.” It also notes the Directorate has established “a comprehensive school improvement process which provides effective support to schools to plan, deliver and evaluate activities that are intended to improve student educational outcomes, including activities to improve teaching quality.”

ACT public school teachers continue to perform their roles incredibly well and have shown great dedication and resilience throughout the challenges brought by COVID-19. The ACT community asks much of teachers and they continue to deliver with enthusiasm, commitment, and compassion. Recommendations from the audit will help the Directorate continue its program of improvement to ensure our high performing system continues to progress.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING QUALITY

The ACT Government established its ten-year commitment to improving education for ACT students through the *Future of Education Strategy* in 2018. The Future of Education Strategy provides the direction for ACT Public Schools and the foundation for a strong system that prioritises student learning. The Strategy has placed students at the centre with systems that empower learning professionals and supports strong communities for learning. The Strategy is underpinned by the principles of equity, student agency, access, and inclusion.

“The ACT education system of the future will be personalised to each child. It will celebrate the differences that affect needs, abilities, motivations, interests and aspirations. It will take a holistic view of the people it serves—our children and young people. The Strategy is about developing capable adults who have learnt to learn, live productively in society, think, create and work in an increasingly digital future. The future of education in the ACT will achieve this through increasingly investing in and empowering teachers. Teachers change lives”.¹

As noted in the audit report, the foundational ecosystem for ACT Public Schools is multifaceted and includes the Future of Education Strategy, the Strategic Plan, the Workforce Strategy, People, Practice and Performance Framework, Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan, Australian Professional Standards, National School Improvement Tool, and the Enterprise Agreement. This foundation ensures staff are working together from a position of belief and shared values.

The Phase 2 Action Plan for the Strategy has been developed and will be launched by the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs early in 2022. Likewise, the next iteration of the Directorate’s Strategic Plan

¹ <https://www.education.act.gov.au/our-priorities/future-of-education/resources/The-Future-of-Education-An-ACT-Education-Strategy-for-the-Next-Ten-Years>

will be finalised early in 2022. These plans will guide key programs and supports to schools over the coming years.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Education Directorate's Integrated School Improvement Model aligns system-level and school-based improvement planning using evidence and data with a spiral of inquiry approach. The Directorate supports schools to improve their practice against the domains in the National School Improvement Tool. This tool provides a robust model, based on a five-year cycle, that assists schools in their continuous cycle of improvement, including teaching practice.

Significant investment has been made in supporting schools in their improvement cycle including comprehensive professional learning in understanding and leading evidence-based processes and utilising multiple sources of evidence and the spiral of inquiry in Professional Learning Communities to drive excellence in teaching practice. Teaching improves when teachers learn from each other and use data and evidence of student learning. Research indicates that professional learning communities have a direct impact on continuous improvement of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The Education Support Office supports schools through coaching and mentoring opportunities that provide expertise to the school improvement cycle and Professional Learning Communities:

- Instructional Mentors provide invaluable support to school leaders to implement the improvement agenda in their school. These expert educators deliver targeted and differentiated support to school leaders through coaching conversations that build adaptive expertise, evaluative thinking, and mutual accountability.
- Acknowledging the importance of developing leadership at all levels specific sessions for middle-level school managers (School Leader C) were developed in 2020. The SLC level position is critical in guiding professional learning in their teams.
- Pedagogy Coaches provide tailored expertise to schools as part of their everyday teaching practices, professional learning plans and Professional Learning Communities. These coaches use high impact teaching strategies designed to support teachers and school leaders deliver the strategic intent of their school plan and improve student learning outcomes. These strategies are outlined in the ACT Education Directorate's Enabling Pedagogies initiative, are grounded in research and are curated by experienced educators.

Consultation and codesign for a strengthened model of school improvement and review will be developed across 2022 for implementation in 2023. This process will address the recommendations of the audit and build on the foundations in place to drive improvement and innovation in ACT public schools.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Education Directorate and the ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) collaborate extensively to ensure the ongoing professional learning requirements of ACT public school teachers are met. The Directorate provides TQI accredited professional learning, designed by expert educators in the Education Support Office, that supports the teaching workforce to improve their professional practice and the delivery of key school improvement priorities. ACT teachers are also able to source professional learning that is facilitated by external providers that may be TQI accredited.

Targeted, sequential and high-quality professional learning is inexplicably linked to school improvement. All ACT public schools have a professional learning plan that is closely aligned with their school improvement journey. Narrow and deep focus on school goals, coupled with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in key areas is supported by universal and targeted professional learning. The focus of all professional learning is to ensure knowledge and practice is growing, recognising that highly competent teachers improve student outcomes.

Professional Learning Communities use the Spiral of Inquiry model to enter "into a new professional learning space. It asks you to engage in a process that will be full of surprises and also deeply satisfying, because you will make tangible progress in addressing real learner-related challenges. It also asks you to suspend judgement on how to 'fix' things that are not going well, because we cannot work out more

effective ways to do things until we have a clear understanding of what is currently happening and why”.² When teachers are invested in this approach teaching quality improves and student achievement rises.

Professional learning programs and other services in place to support ACT Public Schools are available to schools through the Directorate’s Service Portal (intranet). The Service Portal provides a central access point to approved resources, work instructions, service contact points and links to other ACT Education Directorate platforms such as ConnectED and the ACT Education website in addition to other external approved teacher resources.

The Education Support Office invested significant time and resources throughout 2020 and 2021 to provide targeted professional learning and resources to support ACT Public School teachers to deliver remote learning to students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Directorate worked closely with TQI to ensure professional learning was accredited.

The Education Directorate also provides targeted professional learning and support for new and early career educators to strengthen their practice and create a culture of on-going learning and development of practice. A revised three-year induction program will commence in 2022. It includes:

- guidelines to define clear roles and responsibilities
- adaptation of Enabling Pedagogies to measure highly effective pedagogical competencies
- professional learning opportunities focusing on teaching and learning, student engagement and roles and responsibilities as ACT Public Servants
- structured mentoring program
- coaching support from the Directorate to assist new educators to move from Graduate to Proficient level.

WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

The *Education Directorate Workforce Strategy 2021-2023: delivering the workforce for the future of education* has been designed to deliver improved planning of workforce requirements, participation, and student learning outcomes through an integrated and evidence-based workforce planning framework. It provides a shared vision for the workforce that aligns our strategic priorities and drives the capability of our people to deliver learning outcomes.

The implementation of the Workforce Strategy will support ACT Public Schools with the teaching workforce needed to deliver quality learning experiences for all students. The Workforce Strategy has six focus areas:

1. Strategic recruitment of teachers and education professionals to meet current and emerging needs
2. Evidence-driven and integrated workforce planning to enable our service delivery model
3. A highly capable, skilled and future-focused workforce
4. Leadership excellence and development at all levels
5. Workforce Safety and Wellbeing
6. A diverse and inclusive workforce to reflect the communities we serve.

The Workforce Strategy aims to attract and retain teachers in the profession by building a strong performance culture in every school supported by the Classroom Teacher, School Leader and Principal Performance and Development Framework (PD Framework). The PD Framework is grounded on the principles of motivating and engaging teachers and school leaders in a performance and development process that builds their capabilities and strives for teaching and leadership excellence. Further, it reflects our commitment to improving student outcomes, fostering individual accountability and critical reflection, and supporting individual action on performance information. It focuses on the achievement of system and school priorities, and individual professional growth. The Directorate will continue to strengthen engagement across schools on the PD Framework and develop best practice guidelines to support principals and managers in managing staff underperformance.

The Directorate is committed to supporting staff and schools in the implementation and management of performance and under performance. In addition, the Directorate values employee representation and will continue to work with the Australian Education Union (AEU) engaging in cooperative working

² Timperley, H, Kaser, L & Halbert, J (2014) *A Framework for Transforming Learning in Schools: Innovation and the Spiral of Inquiry*. Centre for Strategic Education Seminar Series Paper No. 243, Victoria.

relationships, consistently maintaining open and constructive dialogues with staff and the union. Further and consistent with the ACTPS Union Encouragement Policy, the Directorate continues to work closely with the Australian Education Union (AEU) in the implementation of Section H – Underperformance of the ACTPS Staff Enterprise Agreements to ensure staff continue to be represented in underperformance processes and appropriate supports are put in place. This is consistent with the partnership between the AEU and the Directorate through the Teacher Shortage Taskforce to address critical workforce challenges through continued collaboration and engagement.