



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mr Jonathan Davis MLA (Deputy  
Chair), Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT

**Submission Number: 02**

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17 March 2023

Mr Jonathan Davis MLA  
Acting Chair  
Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion  
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Via: LAcommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Mr Davis

**Re: Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT**

Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input on the future of ACT school infrastructure.

Education infrastructure - buildings, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment - are crucial elements of learning environments for students. There is strong evidence that high-quality infrastructure facilitates better instruction, improves student outcomes, protects the health of students and staff, and reduces dropout rates. Features like the quality of air and light, temperature, acoustic environment and facility design all influence the quality of infrastructure. Safe and healthy schools should also be environmentally friendly schools, which use less energy, produce fewer pollutants, and model environmental responsibility for teachers and students.

GBCA's purpose is to lead the sustainable transformation of the built environment. We do this primarily through our core functions:

- We rate the sustainability of buildings, fitouts and communities through Australia's largest national, voluntary, holistic rating system – Green Star.
- We educate industry, government practitioners and decision-makers, and promote green building programs, technologies, design practices and operations.
- We advocate policies and programs that support our vision and purpose.
- We collaborate with our members and other stakeholders to achieve our mission and strategic objectives.

Green Star is Australia's most widely used sustainability rating system for the design, construction and performance of buildings – including social infrastructure – fitouts and communities. Green Star aims to transform the built environment by:

- reducing the impact of climate change
- enhancing our health and quality of life
- restoring and protecting our planet's biodiversity and ecosystems
- driving resilient outcomes for buildings, fitouts, and communities
- contributing to market transformation and a sustainable economy.

The ACT Government has been a leader in using Green Star for education facilities with several education facilities certified with the Green Star Education Design rating tool, such as:

- Gungahlin College
- Harrison Secondary School
- Gold Creek Primary School – Environment Centre
- Coombs Primary School
- Canberra Institute of Technology – Sustainable Skills Training Hub

Much was learnt by the ACT Government, GBCA and the local industry during the certification process for these education facilities. GBCA has listened to the experiences of people working on these projects, along with many others as we regularly refresh and update the Green Star rating tools. We also continuously look to enhance our certification process to build in efficiencies and certainty of outcomes for the project owners, as well as increased satisfaction and positive experiences for our partners on their Green Star journey. This iterative process means that GBCA and Green Star continue to grow as an effective pathway for the ACT Government to achieve sustainability objectives in its school infrastructure.

### **Working together towards Green Star certification**

The ACT Government is a leader in Australia for its commitment to sustainable, net zero outcomes. Green Star aligns with ACT Government goals and can help to achieve your objectives and provide independent measurement and verification of those achievements.

The NSW Government is another example of a jurisdiction using Green Star to support sustainability targets and policy objectives. To demonstrate their commitment to sustainability across government operations, NSW Department of Education has set nine sustainability goals for 2030 which will be delivered through 27 specific actions. Action (9c) mandates all new schools and upgraded school buildings (of ≥\$10m) will be in the top two bands of industry sustainability ratings, wherever possible. This means that Schools Infrastructure New South Wales (SINSW) has committed to achieving 5 or 6 Star Green Star certification for all appropriate school infrastructure projects.

Over the last three years, GBCA has collaborated with SINSW to customise aspects of the certification process which has enabled:

- registration of large volumes of projects through a simplified and discounted fee structure
- a campus approach to certify multiple buildings on one site as part of single certification
- approved alternate pathways for achieving credits to recognise existing assessment processes used by SFINSW to assess critical issues such as transportation
- innovation pathways to recognise the sustainability initiatives undertaken voluntarily.

Understanding the NSW Education Facilities Standards & Guidelines and their procurement process has helped GBCA to streamline the Green Star certification process to deliver tailored and scalable services that helps SINSW deliver on its sustainability commitments. GBCA's partnership with SINSW has also enabled us to develop similar partnerships with other states and territories across Australia to support delivery of sustainable social infrastructure.

We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the ACT Government to improve the social and environmental outcomes of future schools infrastructure in the region. The third-party verification provided by Green Star will provide certainty of sustainability outcomes and increase accountability of the parties delivering such projects. For example, under the Green Star Climate Positive roadmap, all project registering for Green Star certification from 2026 onwards must be powered with 100% renewable electricity and switch away from fossil fuel use. They must also increase the use of on-site, or near site, renewables, and measures to support the decarbonisation of the grid. This aligns with the ACT Government's commitment to net zero emissions by 2045.

### **We provide additional comments for several of the terms of reference below:**

#### **Access to safe and healthy schools, including distance (travel to school)**

All children have the right to experience quality education and care in a safe and healthy environment, be it physical, emotional or social. A supportive and caring school environment optimises the academic results and allows pupils to develop to their full potential.

High-performance school buildings are designed to be efficient in their use of energy, water, and materials. They are intended to be not only adaptable and easy to operate and maintain but also comfortable, safe, secure, and healthy for teachers and students. The characteristics of a high-performance school building include buildings that are healthy; thermally, acoustically, and visually comfortable; energy efficient, materials efficient, water efficient, and easy to maintain and operate.

The trip to school is very much a part of the school environment and we know schools take their responsibility to get students to school safely very seriously. Green Star recognises and rewards provision of appropriate end of trip facilities and enabling access to alternative transport (such as walking, cycling, public transport).

**Consideration of the external environment, including climate awareness**

When learning environments are well designed, they can contribute to success and wellbeing at school. School designs can include community gardens, nature and jogging trails, pathways, and areas for growing plants, including food, where students can experience land stewardship and understand the impact of climate change. School facilities can become learning resources themselves. For example, including interactive displays on energy and water use, teaching students about why design decisions and material choices have been made, and learning about renewable energy installed within the school.

**Use of technology**

Technology has already become an integral part of school infrastructure. Classrooms, lecture rooms, research labs and sports arenas are now purpose-built to promote student growth and advance teaching. Technology will also play an increasing role in creating and managing information for buildings and infrastructure assets. Technologies for designing, metering and monitoring of assets are encouraged and rewarded within Green Star and will help the ACT Government to tune facilities, assist occupant understanding and behaviour and optimise operational performance and manage budgets.

GBCA welcomes the opportunity for further consultation. To arrange further discussion or for additional clarification of the points made above, please do not hesitate to contact Shay Singh, Senior Manager Policy and Government Relations, [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Davina Rooney  
Chief Executive  
Green Building Council of Australia