



**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  
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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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# Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools

Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

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

March 2022



**ACT Council of  
Parents & Citizens  
Associations**

*The parent voice on public education*

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the representative body for Parent & Citizen associations in the ACT. Council represents parents and carers in ACT public schools.

*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters where we live, work and learn, and pay my respects to elders past, present, and future.*

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Authorised by Veronica Elliott for the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

## Executive summary

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council) is a non-profit, non-government representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, provide support services for affiliate parent & citizens associations (P&Cs) and make representations to government on behalf of parents and carers across all ACT public schools.

Council was a stakeholder in the performance audit report that is the subject of this Inquiry via an interview process with the Audit Office. We are pleased now to have the opportunity to provide this submission into the ACT Auditor-General's Report 6/2021: Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools (the report).

This submission is based on engagement with our member P&Cs, the ongoing business of Council, and targeted consultation with internal stakeholders.

A summary of recommendations is included below.

Should the committee require clarification or more information please contact our office on 6241 5759 or via email: [contact@actparents.org.au](mailto:contact@actparents.org.au)

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

Clearly define what “teaching quality” means in a measurable way. Define constraints on teaching quality that are within the control of schools, and those that are not, and develop plans to address and overcome these constraints.

### Recommendation 2

Key performance indicators should be seen as opportunities to enhance the skill sets of all educators, including fostering an organisational culture of investing in educators.

### Recommendation 3

All educators need targeted, useful, and strategic Professional Learning to identify and meet the needs of all students, including inclusive education practices.

### Recommendation 4

All educators need professional learning to develop and implement quality individual learning plans.

### Recommendation 5

The implementation of Annual Professional Learning Programs needs to be linked to the School Improvement Process.

### Recommendation 6

Invest in and support school leaders to ensure they have the capability to implement, review, and measure Annual Professional Learning Programs.

### Recommendation 7

All educators need access to quality professional learning to continually update and improve their behavioural management strategies and tools.

### Recommendation 8

Increase resourcing to accommodate “reasonable adjustments” in the classroom to clear barriers to quality teaching.

### Recommendation 9

Implement the full findings of the previous Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools.

### Recommendation 10

The Education Directorate should invest in parental engagement strategies, resources, staff, partnerships, and professional learning for educators.

### Recommendation 11

Invest in further capacity and capability to bring allied health practitioners into schools to work with students and teachers.

### Recommendation 12

The ACT Government should recognise the wider issues with access to allied health practitioners in Canberra and the flow on effects this has in schools, families, and communities, and invest to improve access for all of Canberra.

## Introduction

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations values the contributions of all educators in ACT public schools, and the supports provided by the ACT Education Directorate and other stakeholders.

Council concurs with the auditor-general's report that education systems need to demonstrate a systemic approach to improving the educational experiences of students, supporting students to reach their potential.

Council's members provide a unique insight into the lived experience of families, and how teaching quality impacts their children's education. Our members experience teachers that are the culmination of Education Directorate systems and policies and can provide an important perspective into the practical results.

The report acknowledged teaching quality as the single most important factor influencing student performance *within the control of education systems*. The performance audit examined the effectiveness of the ACT Education Directorate's strategies and activities to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools. We note that while this is a well-defined and focussed scope, our members have raised several other factors that contribute to teaching quality, that ought to be considered by the Inquiry.

The report makes conclusions in three areas: Strategy for teaching quality, School Improvement, and Teaching workforce management. In the first two areas, it is noted that the Education Directorate has comprehensive processes and structures to facilitate improvements, however these were found to be applied inconsistently across schools, and baseline data was not captured to assess results against. The third area – teaching workforce management – was found to have structures that recognise the importance of teacher experience and to mentor new educators, however the Education Directorate does not centrally plan or monitor the distribution of experienced teachers.

These conclusions are consistent with the experiences lived by families.

## Teaching quality

The report defines "teaching quality" by noting when it is successfully demonstrated:

*Teaching quality is demonstrated when the effectiveness of a teacher's pedagogical practices (the methods and practices they use to teach) facilitates students' learning and positively impacts student outcomes.*

There are many factors that can inhibit the effectiveness of a teacher's pedagogical practices that are outside the control of the teacher themselves, the school, or the Education Directorate. Some of these are examined in the audit report, though some appear to be out of scope.

Our members report a wide range of personal experiences, from wonderful teaching, to good, to unsatisfactory. Whatever the reasons for those poor experiences, parents want to see educators improve through support and opportunity. We would like to recognise that quality teaching can often be impacted by factors outside the control of teachers themselves.

## Recommendation 1

Clearly define what "teaching quality" means in a measurable way. Define constraints on teaching quality that are within the control of schools, and those that are not, and develop plans to address and overcome these constraints.

## **Investing in educators**

Performance indicators are one tool that can be used to enhance the skills of all educators, both new and experienced alike. Identifying underperformance should be seen as an opportunity to enhance educators' skills, and high performance should not be seen as a place to stop developing. Council believes there is always value in investing in educators.

Council is surprised to see that only 1 staff member from over 4,000 was formally identified as underperforming in 2019/20. Our members believe that educators should have the same opportunity to improve their performance as employees in other workplaces and, it appears that not all poor teaching is being addressed.

Council strongly believes that educators need to be supported and encouraged to enhance their skills and practices. Perhaps this points to the need for a cultural shift, where school leaders and educators are better supported to identify and address underperformance.

### **Recommendation 2**

Key performance indicators should be seen as opportunities to enhance the skill sets of all educators, including fostering an organisational culture of investing in educators.

## **Individual learning needs**

Feedback from members suggests that teaching quality affects all students, with some students feeling this more than others. Especially students with learning differences or difficulties, students from a trauma or low socioeconomic background, culturally and linguistically diverse students, indigenous students, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students all can be affected in different ways by teaching quality.

Traditional delivery of one-size-fits-all broadcast teaching is unsuited to and unable to support or meet the diverse needs of all our students. As highlighted and discussed at the Australian Inclusive Schools Conference in 2021, unfortunately, differentiated teaching and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) have not been sufficiently developed amongst our teachers. Council contends that quality teaching must cater for all students individual learning needs. This includes the development and implementation of quality reasonable adjustments as documented in Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). Council also considers that quality teaching values the expertise and engagement of parents and carers in the development of such plans.

The Future of Education strategy includes a priority to strengthen inclusive education. This is and always will be an ongoing journey for schools, teachers, and families. Staff need to be supported to engage in meaningful opportunities to develop their understanding and skills to meet diverse needs of students.

### **Recommendation 3**

All educators need targeted, useful, and strategic Professional Learning to identify and meet the needs of all students, including inclusive education practices.

### **Recommendation 4**

All educators need professional learning to develop and implement quality individual learning plans.

## **Annual Professional Learning Programs**

Our members acknowledge and agree with the importance of Professional Learning (PL), though there is a perception that teachers are not provided with adequate PL opportunities. Annual programs should help to address this when implemented consistently across the Directorate. As the report notes, resources are available for schools to implement annual plans, however on the ground level this appears to not occur (see paragraph 4.44 of the report). Annual PL Programs are a strategic tool which can be used in line with the School Improvement process.

It is specified in teachers' Enterprise Agreement that Annual PL Programs are implemented, it is supported by the Education Support Office, and mandated by the Education Directorate. If these are still not being implemented, the Directorate should consider if school leaders have adequate support and resources in this space. It may be that further PL is required at the school leader level, as this should also be part of continually investing in our educators.

### **Recommendation 5**

The implementation of Annual Professional Learning Programs needs to be linked to the School Improvement Process.

### **Recommendation 6**

Invest in and support school leaders to ensure they have the capability to implement, review, and measure Annual Professional Learning Programs.

## **Quality teaching creates safe learning environments**

Behaviour management is a critical tool in an educators' toolbelt, and a safe classroom is vital for quality teaching.

To deliver quality teaching, schools need to be a safe place for teachers, staff, and students. This element is not considered by the report, though feedback from our members indicates that it is often a significant barrier to the educational outcomes of their children, and it must be considered when considering teaching quality. This highlights the wholistic nature of teaching quality.

Council contends that all teachers and learning support assistants would benefit from professional learning in behaviour management including escalation and de-escalation strategies, understanding behaviour as a form of communication, and effective strategies to support students with disabilities and diverse learning needs. Additionally, Council supports the continuation of Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL) in ACT schools.

### **Recommendation 7**

All educators need access to quality professional learning to continually update and improve their behavioural management strategies and tools.

### **Recommendation 8**

Increase resourcing to accommodate "reasonable adjustments" in the classroom to clear barriers to quality teaching.

### **Recommendation 9**

Implement the full findings of the previous Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools.

## Parental engagement

Council considers, teaching quality is enhanced when parents are an effective partner in the education of their children. Teachers get a better understanding of the needs of individual children, what supports they either have or lack outside of school and can adjust their pedagogical practices accordingly.

Some parents have the capability to drive this partnership themselves, while others rely on schools, teachers, and P&Cs. This perpetuates inequality, as the families who already have strong support structures are usually best placed to invest additional time and effort into their children's education.

As with other aspects of the education system, parents report a wide range of experiences when it comes to parental engagement. The Education Directorate should make further investment in parental engagement to lessen the burden on teachers and Council would be happy to assist with this.

### Recommendation 10

The Education Directorate should invest in parental engagement strategies, resources, staff, partnerships, and professional learning for educators.

## Access to allied health practitioners

Students need access to timely assessment, diagnosis, and treatment strategies for a range of health concerns. When this doesn't happen, there is a direct impact on teaching quality that a student can receive.

Public access to allied health practitioners is difficult. Psychologists, speech pathologists, and occupational therapists are in very high demand, with wait lists extending out as far as 6, 12, or even 24 months. If a child does not yet have a formal diagnosis which is covered financially by NDIS, the cost can be prohibitive. If a specialist practitioner is required (for example an OT with specific experience with autism), then wait times can be pushed out even further.

This can lead to students with complex needs either being diagnosed too late or not being diagnosed at all. Families and teachers are then left guessing as to the most appropriate strategies to use to teach to those students. While teaching should be differentiated based on individual students and not broadly on a diagnosis, a diagnosis may be a vital part of that differentiation.

This difficulty in accessing allied health practitioners has flow-on effects that quickly reaches the classroom and impacts teaching quality available to students with diverse needs.

### Recommendation 11

Invest in further capacity and capability to bring allied health practitioners into schools to work with students and teachers.

### Recommendation 12

The ACT Government should recognise the wider issues with access to allied health practitioners in Canberra and the flow on effects this has in schools, families, and communities, and invest to improve access for all of Canberra.