

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**Report on Annual and Financial Reports
2006-2007**

JULY 2008

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Resolution of Appointment

To examine matters related to early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary education and vocational training, non-government education, youth and family services, technology, arts and culture, sport and recreation.

Terms of Reference

On 25 September 2007 the following reports for the financial year 2006 – 2007 and the calendar year 2007 were referred by the Legislative Assembly to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People:

- Canberra Institute of Technology Annual Report
- Department of Education and Training Annual Report
- ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority Annual Report
- Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, as a section of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services Annual Report;
- Official Visitor, as a subsumed report in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services Annual Report

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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

2.18 The Committee recommends that statistics detailing the number of reported critical incidents in ACT schools be provided in future annual reports.

RECOMMENDATION 2

4.10 The Committee recommends that the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support review data collection methods so that the quantum of vulnerable families in the ACT requiring support from a families-at-risk service delivery model can be estimated.

RECOMMENDATION 3

5.7 The Committee recommends that the improvements to the therapeutic capacity of Marlow House proposed by the Official Visitor be addressed as a matter of urgency.

RECOMMENDATION 4

5.10 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government confirm with the Official Visitors future intentions and proposed timeframe for co-location with the ACT Public Advocate.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUNG
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 25 September 2007, departmental and agency annual reports for 2006-2007 were referred to the Assembly's standing committees for inquiry and report. Annual reports for the calendar year 2006 were referred by the Assembly on 16 October 2006.
- 1.2 The Standing Committee on Education, Training & Young People received the following reports:
 - Department of Education & Training Annual Report 2006-2007;
 - Sections of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services Annual Report 2006-2007 relating to the Office of Children, Youth & Family Support ¹ and the Official Visitor;²
 - Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Annual Report 2006³; and
 - Building & Construction Industry Training Fund Authority Annual Report 2006-2007.
- 1.3 The Committee resolved to inquire into all referred reports. However, the Committee subsequently determined not to call on the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority having no specific issues to raise with this agency at the time of the hearing.
- 1.4 The Committee held public hearings on 26 and 27 February 2008 at which Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Education and Training and Ms Katy Gallagher MLA, Minister for Children and Young People and officials from the relevant agencies appeared before the Committee (see Appendix A: Witnesses).
- 1.5 The schedule of hearings was posted on the Legislative Assembly website and the Committee Office issued a media alert regarding the forthcoming hearings on 25 February 2008.

¹ Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, *Annual Report 2005-2006*, Vol 1, pp. 38-49 and Vol 2, pp. 189 – 262. These pages report against Output Class 1 Children, Youth and Family Support and Output Class 2 Early Intervention.

² Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, *Annual Report 2005-2006*, Vol 1, pp. 250-264.

³ The Canberra Institute of Technology reports by calendar year.

- 1.6 Following the hearings, a total 11 supplementary questions (with 28 component parts) were forwarded to the respective Ministers. The Committee received responses to all questions and details are provided in Appendix B: Supplementary questions. Responses to supplementary questions are published on the Inquiry website.⁴ The Committee resolved to publish all but one response which remains confidential.

Purpose and intent of annual reports

- 1.7 Agency reporting requirements are set out in the Annual Report (Government Agencies) Notice 2007.⁵ This Notice includes the Chief Minister's Annual Reports Directions (the *Directions*) which are issued under the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004*.
- 1.8 As specified in the *Directions*, annual reports should be 'an objective account, primarily to the Legislative Assembly, of how the entity has performed during the reporting year'.⁶
- 1.9 The Directions also specify that an effective annual report will:
- Provide a clear picture of the agency's purpose, priorities, outputs and achievements;
 - Focus on results and outcomes – communicate the success or otherwise, including shortfalls, of the agency's activities in achieving government policy outcomes in the reporting year, while accounting for the resources used in the process;
 - Discuss results against expectations – provide sufficient information and analysis for the Assembly and community to make a fully informed judgement on agency performance clearly identify any changes to structures or functions of the agency in the reporting period and explain changes in performance over time;

⁴ Responses to supplementary questions can be accessed at

<<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=53&inquiry=727&category=15>>

⁵ Accessible at <<http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/ni/2007-206/current/pdf/2007-206.pdf>>

⁶ *Annual Report (Government Agencies) Notice 2006*, p. 7.

- Report on agency financial and operational performance and clearly link with budgeted priorities and financial projections as set out in annual Budget Estimate Papers and the agency Statement of Intent and Corporate Plan;
 - Provide performance information that is complete and informative, linking costs and results to provide evidence of value for money;
 - Discuss risks and environmental factors affecting the agency's ability to achieve objectives including any strategies employed to manage these factors, and
 - Forecast future needs and expectations;
 - Recognise the diverse needs and backgrounds of stakeholder groups and present information in a manner that is responsive to the maximum number of users while maintaining a suitable level of detail;
 - Comply with any specific legislative reporting requirement; and
 - Comply with the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004* and the Chief Minister's Annual Report Directions.
- 1.10 The content of annual reports reflects the requirements of the *Directions* and is also influenced by comments provided by Legislative Assembly standing committees, the Institute of Public Administration's annual review of reports, the Auditor General's report on the effectiveness of annual reporting, as well as practices and publications from other jurisdictions.⁷
- 1.11 Each year, annual reports are assessed by the Institute of Public Administration (ACT Division) for their compliance with formal guidelines and requirements and against internationally recognised characteristics of good reporting.⁸
- 1.12 In considering the referred annual reports, the Committee agreed to adopt a broad approach to the conduct of the Inquiry, allowing Members to focus on general issues of program management and on the clear reporting of this management rather than on technical adherence to reporting guidelines.

⁷ ACT Auditor General (2003) *The Effectiveness of Annual Reporting*, accessible at <http://www.audit.act.gov.au/auditreports/reports2003/Rpt1_2003.pdf>

⁸ See <<http://www.act.ipaa.org.au/>>

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- 1.13 The Annual Reports Inquiry process and the public hearings in particular, provide Legislative Assembly members with an opportunity to seek clarification about the activities that have been undertaken by the ACT Government and to ascertain how agencies are managing their program performance from one year to the next.

2 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- 2.1 The services provided by the Department of Education and Training (DET) include 'government school education, registration of non-government schools, registration of home education, planning and coordination of vocational education and training, and the provision of preschool and early intervention education programs.'⁹

Overview

- 2.2 At the public hearing held on 26 February 2008, the Committee heard from the Minister for Education and Training and officials from the Department. A list of witnesses is provided in Appendix A.
- 2.3 In outlining the significant features of the reporting year (2006-2007), the Minister highlighted the Government's investment in public education, especially in the area of information and communication technology. He also noted the difficulties associated with the school renewal process which has led to an overall reduction of the number of schools in the ACT. He confirmed the integrity of the policy rationale behind that decision citing declining enrolments and the inefficient use of public education resources as reasons for school closures.¹⁰
- 2.4 As a highlight from the reporting period, the Minister noted the collaboration achieved with the non-government school system in the development and trial of a new curriculum framework in 2007. The collaboration had, the Minister believed, provided the foundation for its successful implementation during the 2008 school year.
- 2.5 The Committee sought clarification on a number of the outputs for the

⁹ Department of Education and Training (2007) *Annual Report-2006-2007*, Canberra. p. 123.

¹⁰ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, pp. 2-3.

reporting period and an update on any subsequent developments. Issues raised, some of which are outlined in more detail below, included:

- School renewal project;
- Schools Excellence Initiative;
- School closures;
- Amalgamation of preschools;
- Establishment of P-2 schools;
- Safe school environments;
- Pastoral care of students;
- Indigenous education outcomes;
- Equity strategies in the delivery of educational services;
- Sustainability issues;
- The new curriculum framework;
- Drift between public and private education sectors; and
- Teacher recruitment and retention.

Schools excellence initiative

2.6 The Committee was informed that the Schools Excellence Initiative involved a three year cycle of self assessment undertaken by the whole school community and incorporating the views of students, parents and staff on the practices, standards and achievements of the school within four areas:

- Teaching and learning;
- Student environment;
- Leadership and management; and
- Community involvement.

2.7 The Minister advised the Committee that government schools had embraced this initiative as they valued the direct feedback on their performance.¹¹

¹¹ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 3,

- 2.8 For the first time since the initiative was introduced, schools in their third year of the cycle had been involved in an external validation process. One of the themes that emerged from the external evaluation report was the value of data to inform practices and decision-making within the school environment.¹²

Preschool amalgamations and P-2 schools

- 2.9 The Department informed the Committee that the amalgamation of a number of preschools into the administrative structure of primary schools had progressed following constructive consultation with the Canberra Preschool Society and the preschool parents' associations.¹³ Following negotiations, arrangements for the disbursement of pre-school assets to primary or other schools had been finalised.
- 2.10 The Committee was also assured that school principals carefully monitored the dispersal of funding to ensure 'that the dollars that were there for the early years remain there.'¹⁴
- 2.11 The Committee also inquired about the model for P-2 schools in the ACT and was advised that a P-2 reference group had provided guidance for the establishment of the new configuration for four existing schools as P-2 schools. The Minister foreshadowed that:
- ...historically, these reforms will be seen as being as significant for the ACT education system as the establishment of the college system.¹⁵
- 2.12 The Committee was informed that an interagency group had been established, to provide advice on the range of services that would be required to support the model being developed and to achieve the broad social outcomes anticipated. Membership of this group included parents, teachers, academics, and representatives from the Department of Education and Training, ACT Health and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

¹² Dr Bruniges, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 3. Further information can be found on the Department's website at < http://www.det.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/publications_a-z >

¹³ Dr Bruniges, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 4.

School closures

- 2.13 The Committee sought details about savings from the closure of a number of schools and preschools during the 2006-2007 financial year and was advised that the anticipated saving of \$2.2 million was achieved. The Minister further informed the Committee that:

...there is a variance of between 10 and 20 per cent—on particular sites but that the total across all sites was the \$2.2 million. The reason for that is that we had to make some assumptions about where students would move following the school closures and the pattern of movement was not exactly as we anticipated school by school. However, the total package and the total savings were exactly as we expected.¹⁶

- 2.14 Further details of the savings achieved for each school were provided by the Minister following the hearing and are as follows:

Table 1: Savings achieved 2006-2007 per school closed¹⁷

School	Total Savings (\$) 2006-07
Ginninderra District High	1,046,826
Flynn Primary	272,245
Hall Primary	193,084
Melrose Primary	260,251
Mt Neighbour Primary	219,938
Rivett Primary	273,317
Tharwa Primary	139,643
Weston Creek Primary	265,839
Preschools	111,179
Less	
Closure Costs	-547,509
	2,234,813

Safe school environments

- 2.15 The Committee was advised that the improvement of policies and protocols to

¹⁶ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 16.

¹⁷ Response to supplementary question ETYP 08-03. Accessible at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=53&inquiry=727&category=15>

support safe school environments had been a priority for the reporting period. The Department had established the Safe Schools Taskforce with membership from the Department, the Australian Education Union, the Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the ACT Principals Association and advice and assistance from ACT Policing, Therapy ACT and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.¹⁸ The purpose of the Taskforce was to ensure effective leadership on these matters and had provided a range of recommendations to Government.

- 2.16 Two new policies were produced during 2006-2007 regarding safe school environments¹⁹ and the Minister advised the Committee that a Code of Conduct for people on government school premises had been produced. The Committee was also advised that better procedures and protocols had been developed and clear guidelines for mandatory reporting established. There have been provisions of additional resources for pastoral care in all schools and training for all staff was an ongoing activity being supported by the Department.²⁰
- 2.17 The Committee was advised that the Department was now able to keep data regarding the number and nature of incidents reported by schools.²¹ Following the hearing, the Minister provided to the Committee details of the critical incidents reported during the final quarter of the 2006-2007. Of the 31 critical incidents reported during this time, 28 were classified as an assault or an act of violent. Of this number, 20 were reported to the police. While the Minister was able to advise that none of the incidence required hospitalisation, it was not known whether any formal charges had been laid by police as this was a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.²²

¹⁸ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 6.

¹⁹ The policies are: *Providing safe schools P-12* and *Countering bullying, harassment and violence in ACT public schools*. DET policies can be accessed via the website at http://www.det.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/policy_a-z

²⁰ Mr Barr and Dr Bruniges, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, pp. 6 - 8.

²¹ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 15.

²² Mr Barr, *Answer to supplementary question no. ETYP 08-10*.

RECOMMENDATION 1

2.18 **The Committee recommends that statistics detailing the number of reported critical incidents in ACT schools be provided in future annual reports.**

2.19 The Committee sought details of the Minister's role in ensuring safe schools and responding to particular incidents at individual school and was advised that:

...it is important, when incidents like these occur, to look at the appropriate responses...I indicated, as I have on a number of occasions, in response to a variety of concerns, that last year we established the safe schools task force and that we put in place new guidelines, protocols and mandatory reporting and sought to work with police, with parents, with teachers and with a range of key stakeholders to implement these new policies. Since the implementation of these policies, the number of incidents at schools has reduced, which I am pleased to be able to advise the committee. We will continue to work with stakeholders to address these issues.²³

Equity in education

2.20 Strategies for achieving equitable educational outcomes for students from economically or socially disadvantaged backgrounds were discussed and the Minister advised that:

...the government has put in place the schools equity fund, the student support fund and the secondary bursary scheme. We have also discussed the additional funding for Indigenous education in recent budgets. You would be aware of the learning assistance program, the English as a second language program, and the provision of early literacy and numeracy officers to support students who have low literacy and numeracy standards. You would be aware of the reading recovery program as well. There are a range of initiatives that the government has put in place to assist students.²⁴

2.21 The Committee was informed that other assistance is also provided for individual students, or groups of students, in particular schools, on the advice

²³ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, pp. 11-12.

²⁴ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 22.

of the Schools Resources Committee.

- 2.22 Concerns were also raised during the hearing about the connection between the literacy and numeracy achievements of students and their socio-economic status. A comparative national study indicated significant differentials in maths, science and reading achievement levels across socioeconomic quartiles.²⁵ The Minister highlighted the distinctive socioeconomic characteristics of the ACT population compared to the rest of Australia and advised that an independent assessment of this data would be undertaken before the Government would consider the appropriate response to the findings.²⁶ He also observed that the data presented in the study included achievement levels in the Catholic and independent schools sector as well as the government sector. The Department advised that the new national assessment system would allow for the disaggregation of the data and hence, improve the versatility of the data for comparative and strategic planning purposes.²⁷
- 2.23 The Committee noted that national data indicated that the proportion of ACT government school student who achieve above the benchmark seemed very high.²⁸ The Department confirmed a higher than average level of achievement by ACT students.
- 2.24 Following the hearing, the Committee asked the Minister to comment on claims that there had been no improvement in literacy and numeracy standards over the last 40 years. The Minister advised the Committee that:
- Students are facing increasing challenges as literacy demands change, partly due to new technology. As a result, students are being taught a broader range of literacy skills including a focus on contextual understanding. There are a range of areas currently measured that were not measured in the 1960s. It is therefore not possible to draw any meaningful comparison between the results currently being achieved by student and those achieved by students in the 1960s. However, ACT students continue to perform well against national reading,

²⁵ Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Report, see <<http://www.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/>>

²⁶ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, pp. 23 - 24

²⁷ Dr Bruniges, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 30

²⁸ Mr Gentlemen, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 30.

writing and numeracy benchmarks. The 2006 benchmark results show that the performance of ACT students in years 3, 5 and 7 in reading and numeracy was amongst the highest in the country.²⁹

Movement between school sectors

- 2.25 Pursuing a line of inquiry regarding educational standards, the Minister was asked about the movement of students between school sectors, particularly the drift from public schools to private schools.
- 2.26 The Minister advised of the following results from the school movement survey:
- ...52 per cent of those surveyed, indicated that the quality of education is the major determining factor in their move away from the public system. Forty-six per cent identified peer relationships and 46 per cent also identified professional standards of staff. Some of the other factors that came up were school culture and the quality of school facilities...People gave multiple answers, of course, but what came through clearly was the quality of education, peer relationships, school facilities.³⁰
- 2.27 The Committee was advised that the Government had responded to these concerns with significant investment since 2006 in public education facilities, the quality of teaching, and information and communications technology. Furthermore, the Minister pointed out that 'part of our challenge also is simply public relations' and that this was addressed in part through a \$100,000 marketing campaign highlighting the achievements of the public education sector.³¹

Sustainable schools

- 2.28 The Committee sought more detail about the measures used to ensure that

²⁹ Mr Barr, *Answer to supplementary question no. ETYP 08-05*.

³⁰ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 28. See also p. 32. The *School Movement Survey 2007* is accessible from the Department of Education and Training website <http://www.det.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/17968/Final_SMS_31_03.pdf>

³¹ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, pp. 28 - 29.

new schools were environmentally sustainable and was advised that 'all new schools must meet the benchmarks that have been set out in both the Chief Minister's climate change strategy and our desire to get all schools in the ACT carbon neutral by 2070.'³² Furthermore, the Government had provided funding through the school renewal program to upgrade existing school facilities to improve energy efficiency. The Minister informed the Committee that 75 schools had joined the sustainable schools program.³³

- 2.29 The Department has also been working with the Green Building Council to ensure that air quality in school was of a high level and that low volatile, organic compound, low emitting material were used in carpet glues and fibres.³⁴

³² Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 34.

³³ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 35.

³⁴ Mr Donnelly, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 35.

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3 CANBERRA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

- 3.1 At the public hearing held on 26 February 2008, the Committee heard from the Minister for Education and Training and officials from the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). Further details are provided in Appendix A. Some of the issues raised during the hearing are discussed below.

Graduate satisfaction survey

- 3.2 The Committee was particularly interested in the student achievement and stakeholder satisfaction surveys reported.³⁵ CIT advised that the surveys are undertaken by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and that the results reflected positively on the CIT's performance. Dr Adrian commented that:

As the figures show, we have been very happy with our performance on our satisfaction surveys. They have been getting better in recent years across all those satisfaction surveys.³⁶

Responses to skills shortages

- 3.3 More detail was sought by the Committee about the initiatives introduced by CIT to address skills shortages in the ACT. A number of new approaches were outlined in the annual report³⁷ and the Minister and officials provided an update on some more recent initiatives such as:
- The CIT vocational college, which caters for young people whose educational needs are not met by mainstream settings;
 - Certificate IV course for allied health professionals;

³⁵ Canberra Institute of Technology, *Annual Report 2006*, p. 22.

³⁶ Dr Adrian, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 45.

³⁷ Canberra Institute of Technology, *Annual Report 2006*, pp. 19-21.

- Improvements to the training pathways available to enrolled nurses; and
- Accelerated apprenticeships.

Accelerated apprenticeships

- 3.4 Since the successful introduction of the accelerated chefs training program,³⁸ other trade training programs were being reviewed. Hairdressing and panel beating were currently being assessed by CIT and discussions about the possible application of an accelerated training strategy to other areas of skills shortages, such as electrical trades, had occurred. The Minister advised that:

...pulling together these sorts of responses is not something that is easily done and in some instances it requires a real change of mindset in terms of how programs are delivered, and also engagement with a number of the key stakeholders in each industry sector to ensure that there is not only acceptance of a changed delivery but also strong support and encouragement for a new delivery mechanism for a program. Particularly in some of these areas that are competency based there must be an assurance, and it must be accepted across all of the stakeholders, that, say, by accelerating a program, you are not compromising on the quality of skills that will be obtained by graduates.³⁹

Sustainability initiatives

- 3.5 The Committee was pleased to hear about sustainability initiatives being undertaken by CIT including support for Earth Hour on 29 March, the introduction of better waster sorting and recycling system across CIT campuses and the potential development of an environmental management courses delivered through the Centre for Building and Environment.⁴⁰

Other issues

- 3.6 During the hearing, the Committee also sought clarification on the following

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁹ Mr Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 45.

⁴⁰ Dr Adrian, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 February 2008, p. 49.

issues:

- Collaborations with diverse organisations and institutions;
- Bushfire management plans for all CIT campuses; and
- The age profile of staff and CIT workforce planning.

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4 OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

- 4.1 At the public hearing held on 27 February 2008, the Committee discussed the following matters with the Minister for Children and Young People and officials from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. Details of witness are provided in Appendix A.

Family Centres

- 4.2 The Committee was particularly pleased to hear of the success of the Child and Family Centres and that a third centre for the West Belconnen area was being considered. The Minister also advised that staff shortages are not experienced in this area. According the Minister:

One of the things we are seeing in the organisation is that people are wanting maybe to have a break from other areas in the department but they want to stay within the department, and the child and family centre is one of the desirable locations to go to. For example, if a child protection worker is exhausted and needs a break, that would be a different type of work but would mean staying within the same area. Whilst staffing is an issue in other areas of the department, it is not an issue in child and family centres.⁴¹

Youth justice centre

- 4.3 The Committee heard that proposed date for the commissioning of Bimberi, the new youth justice centre was August 2008. The project was on budget and high quality building and facilities would be provided. Despite the high cost of establishing this infrastructure (\$42.5 million), the Minister observed that the investment was warranted to ensure the durability of the facility and to maximise the potential rehabilitative potential for those young people who will be detained in the facility over the coming years.

⁴¹ Ms Gallagher, *Transcript of evidence*, 27 February 2008, p. 62.

- 4.4 The Minister invited the Committee to visit the new facility and following the hearings a visit was undertaken on Wednesday 30 April to both Quamby Youth Detention Centre and Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. The Committee noticed considerable differences between the functionality of both centres. The Committee was very impressed with the planning and construction of the Bimberi Centre and for the efforts being made by the staff of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to ensure that the conditions and potential outcomes for young people detained are an improvement on those possible at Quamby.

Family support program

- 4.5 The Committee heard that the family support programs will be refocused towards families with complex needs. The objective of the review was to ensure that vulnerable families are targeted and supported by the programs provided by the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS). Currently, \$2 million funding is made available to twenty-one organisations and these organisations will be asked to work closely with OCYFS to ensure that those most in need are supported by the program. According to the Minister:

...as the office continues to have referrals of very, very complex families under significant stress we need to make sure that our community providers are supporting us in terms of how we support those people in the community. This is an obvious program where we would look for that cooperation and collaboration.⁴²

- 4.6 The Committee asked about the influence of previous reports concerning vulnerable children and was advised that the 50 of the 55 recommendations from the Murray-Mackie report had been implemented.⁴³ The remaining

⁴² Minister for Children and Young People, *Transcript of evidence*, 27 February 2008, p. 70.

⁴³ An independent study undertaken by Gwenn Murray and Craig Mackie concerning the interventions by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support in matters concerning the death or near deaths of children in the ACT. Regular progress reports have been tabled in the Legislative Assembly, the final report being provided on 3 April 2008. See Legislative Assembly for the ACT: 2008 Week 3 Hansard (3 April), p. 961.

recommendations are substantially ongoing matters, such as support for workers, and the Department was close to establishing adequate structures to deal with these recurrent issues. The Minister advised the Committee that following the Murray–Mackie study and the Vardon reports⁴⁴, the Government was aware that:

...our most vulnerable families need a whole-of-government response. It is not just a child protection response. It is about making sure we are supporting them in the community, in some of these instances from very early in the pregnancy. I think that alone has made this an extremely beneficial experience. We will commission these reports as we need to to continue our learning journey.⁴⁵

Funding and services for Indigenous families

- 4.7 An update on a program funded in 2006-2007 to establish an integrated service model for services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was provided to the Committee. A cross-agency working group had been established across three departments – Disability, Housing and Community Services, Education and Training and ACT Health. A good practice model has been developed which focuses on empowerment strategies for Indigenous people and which is flexible enough to meet the individual needs of different families. An specific assessment tool has been devised:

...to work with the families around what are all the issues faced by the families, not just focus on risk behaviour like drug and alcohol use. It also looks at their housing circumstances, their income and things like that. So we developed the assessment tool. We also developed a model of case management where we could have a panel of service providers come together to look at the circumstances of the family and also to contribute to and develop the case management plan to address some of those issues. The three agencies—health, education and us—will be regular members of that service delivery panel and so each of the agencies will be able to look at what they can bring to the table in

⁴⁴ Cheryl Vardon (2004) *The Territory as Parent: Review of the Safety of Children in Care in the ACT and of ACT Child Protection Management*, accessible at:

<http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/4901/Review_safety_children_in_care.pdf>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

terms of supporting families.⁴⁶

- 4.8 The Committee heard that this model is being trialled with four ACT families with 24 child members.

Supporting families at risk

- 4.9 In the financial year 2006-2007, there were 9,630 care and protection reports were made, but the Department was not able to advise the Committee how many families, in general terms, might be represented in this figure. The Department advised that families use departmental services in a number of different ways that makes it difficult to estimate the precise number.⁴⁷ The Committee acknowledges this difficulty but suggests that the refocus towards community support programmes for vulnerable families being pursued by the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support would benefit from better indicators of the quantum of families-at-risk.

RECOMMENDATION 2

- 4.10 **The Committee recommends that the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support review data collection methods so that the quantum of vulnerable families in the ACT requiring support from a families-at-risk service delivery model can be estimated.**
- 4.11 During the hearing, the Committee also sought clarification on the following matters:
- Youth Advisory Council;
 - Childrens Services Forum;
 - Schools as Community program;
 - Sustainability issues; and
 - Service to young people in the context of violence in schools.

⁴⁶ Mr Harwood, *Transcript of evidence*, 27 February 2008, p. 75.

⁴⁷ *Response to supplementary question ETYP 08-09*.

5 OFFICIAL VISITORS FOR THE ACT

- 5.1 The function of the Official Visitors is established and defined under the *Children and Young People Act 1999*. The role includes visiting and inspecting designated facilities, hearing complaints about these facilities from residents and investigating these complaints as appropriate.⁴⁸
- 5.2 The Official Visitors appeared before the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People for the first time. At the public hearing held on 27 February 2008, the Committee discussed the following matters the current Official Visitors, Ms Mary Hyndman and Ms Narelle Hargreaves.

Overview

- 5.3 The Official Visitors advised the Committee that a range of issues arise during their regular, fortnightly visits to Quamby Youth Detention Centre, Marlow Cottage and the Living Skills Program, which is operated by the Richmond Fellowship. Matters raised by residents during these visits can range from:
- day to day issues such as the quality of food or access to recreational facilities which can be resolved through negotiation with the staff; or
 - substantial issues which can require additional investigation and external intervention.⁴⁹
- 5.4 Regular meetings with and reporting to key individuals including the Minister and the Public Advocate ensured that issues were appropriately communicated when necessary. The Committee was pleased to hear from Ms Hyndman that, within the jurisdiction of the Official Visitors, 'there has been a diminution in complaints about staff in the last 24 months.'⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Official Visitor's Annual Report 2006-2007, Section 6.1 of the Department of Disability Housing and Community Services Annual Report 2006-2007, p. 182.

⁴⁹ Ms Hargreaves & Ms Hyndman, *Transcript of evidence*, 27 February 2008, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Ms Hyndman, *Transcript of evidence*, 27 February 2008, p. 84.

Marlow Cottage

- 5.5 The Committee sought further details about the observations made in the Official Visitors' report regarding Marlow House.⁵¹ The Committee noted that long-standing recommendations for additional therapeutic capacity have not been progressed to the satisfaction of the Official Visitor. At hearing, the Committee was advised that:

We do understand indirectly that there is a step-up, step-down program at the moment, which I think partly fulfils that need. But we are hoping there will also be other types of programs facilities or options available for those higher level needs clients.⁵²

- 5.6 The Committee is concerned that better outcomes for complex needs clients at Marlow Cottage could be achieved with the provision of additional therapeutic services.

RECOMMENDATION 3

- 5.7 **The Committee recommends that the improvements to the therapeutic capacity of Marlow House proposed by the Official Visitor be addressed as a matter of urgency.**

Administrative arrangements

- 5.8 Another area of long-standing concern raised by the Official Visitors was the administrative arrangements. The Official Visitor has been administered by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Services. However, a preferred arrangement would be co-location with the Public Advocate of the ACT.⁵³ The preference for co-location reflects a recommendation made following a review conducted by the Foundation for Effective Markets and Governance (FEMAG) into community advocacy and oversight agencies. Recommendation 9 of the FEMAG report proposed that a co-location arrangement would safeguard the independence of the Official Visitors.⁵⁴ The Committee was concerned that the

⁵¹ Official Visitor's Annual Report 2006-2007, Attachment 6.1, *Department of Disability Housing and Community Services ACT Annual Report 2006-2007*, volume one, p. 184.

⁵² Ms Hyndman, *Transcript of evidence*, 27 February 2008, p. 83.

Official Visitors have not been advised about the Government's intention in relation to this long-standing recommendation.

- 5.9 The Committee notes, however, that the Government's response to the FEMAG report stated that:

There are currently no significant changes proposed to the structure of the Office of the Community Advocate (OCA), except for the inclusion of Official Visitors within its responsibilities. In order to better reflect its role, however, the Government considers that it is timely to change the title of the Community Advocate to the "ACT Public Advocate". Official Visitors will be given additional powers including the right to require the provision of information from those running a visited facility. Official Visitors will be located with the ACT Public Advocate. The similarity of functions and availability of collegiate support are advantages to locating with the ACT Public Advocate.⁵⁵

RECOMMENDATION 4

- 5.10 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government confirm with the Official Visitors future intentions and proposed timeframe for co-location with the ACT Public Advocate.**

Mary Porter AM MLA

Chair

2 July 2008

⁵³ Official Visitor's Annual Report 2006-2007, Attachment 6.1, *Department of Disability Housing and Community Services ACT Annual Report 2006-2007*, volume one, p. 187.

⁵⁴ FEMAG (2003) *Review of Community Advocacy and Statutory Oversight Agencies*, p. 15. accessible at <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/7675/Final_Report_3-10-0311.pdf> (accessed 13 May 2008)

⁵⁵ ACT Government, (2004) *The Right System for Rights Protection*, p. v, accessible at <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/wac/policy_and_engagement/review_statutory_oversight> (accessed 13 May 2008).

APPENDIX A: Witnesses

Tuesday 26 February 2008

Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Education and Training

Department of Education and Training

Dr Michele Bruniges, Chief Executive

Ms Janet Davy, Deputy Chief Executive

Mr Craig Curry, Executive Director

Mr Rob Donnelly, Director, Finance and Facilities

Canberra Institute of Technology

Dr Colin Adrian, Chief Executive

Mr Peter Kowald, Deputy Chief Executive, Operations

Ms Leanne Cover, Executive Director, Corporate Governance, Organisational
Capability

Wednesday 27 February 2008

Ms Katy Gallagher MLA, Minister for Children and Young People

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Sandra Lambert, Chief Executive

Ms Megan Mitchell, Executive Director, Office for Children, Youth and
Family Support (OCYFS)

Ms Jenny Kitchin, Director, OCYFS – Service and Sector Development

Mr Paul Wyles, Director, OCYFS – Youth Directorate

Mr Neil Harwood, Director, OCYFS - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Services

Ms Helen Pappas, Senior Manager, Early Intervention and Prevention Services

Mr David Collett, Director, Asset Management

Ms Meredith Whitten, Senior Director, Government, Advocacy and
Community Policy

Mr Paul Wyles, Director, OCYFS – Youth Directorate

Mr Neil Harwood, Director, OCYFS - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Services

Ms Mary Hyndman, Official Visitor

Ms Narelle Hargreaves, Official Visitor

APPENDIX B: Supplementary Questions

No.	Responses to Supplementary Question
ETYP -08-01	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: Savings to CIT following changes to car fleet
ETYP 08-02	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: DET staff movements
ETYP -08-03	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: Savings following closures on a per school basis
ETYP 08-04	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: Regarding language programmes
ETYP 08-05	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: Literacy and numeracy standards
ETYP 08-06	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: Participation rates from 17 year olds
ETYP 08-07	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: PISA scores
ETYP 08-08	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding: Risk management process
ETYP 08-09	From the Minister for Children & Young People regarding: Number of at risk families
ETYP 08-10	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding School safety
ETYP 08-11 (not published)	From the Minister for Education and Training regarding Confidential safe school issues

Published supplementary questions can be accessed at the Legislative Assembly website:
<<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=53&inquiry=727&category=15>>