



## **ACT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT**

School based decision making has been a feature of ACT public schools since 1976. Since 1997 global budgeting has been in place, and responsibility and budget for most operational matters have been devolved to schools.

There have been significant changes to the school operational environment in the last few years. This includes the changing nature of ICT in schools, the introduction of new models of schooling, changes to operational arrangements for managing areas such as school records, school cleaning and maintenance of fire and ventilation systems, and the amalgamation of preschools with primary schools.

In 2009 the Allen Consulting Group was engaged to conduct a review of School Based Management (SBM) to ensure resources are allocated and used in the most efficient and effective way possible. The review included extensive consultation across school communities, including teachers and principals, the Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations, Canberra Preschool Society, unions, other ACT Government agencies and the broader community.

The review's 18 recommendations are considered under four themes:

- Autonomy (Recommendation 17);
- Building system capacity (Recommendations 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18);
- Schools governance (Recommendations 7, 8, 9, 14); and
- Resourcing mechanisms (Recommendations 1, 2, 3).

### **1. AUTONOMY**

This is the most significant theme raised in the review. While recommending a move towards greater school autonomy, it emphasises that this autonomy should be accompanied by greater accountability and an obligation to build capacity across the system.

#### **Recommendation 17**

*Where a school demonstrates sustained high performance, principals be given the opportunity to opt in to gain autonomy over an increasing range of areas of expenditure (capital spending and staffing) based on their judgment of what would best contribute to school outcomes. Such flexibility should be accompanied by an obligation to contribute actively to building system capacity in other schools and would be subject to continued strong performance (assessed as part of performance management of principals). Appointment of a new principal would*

*trigger a review of the extent of devolved decision making afforded to the school in question. Conversely, where a school demonstrates sustained low performance against government and community expectations, there would be a case for greater management guidance to be provided from the central office of DET to that school and its principal in relation to the spending of any discretionary funding under SBM.*

The Government agrees to build additional autonomy in the area of school staffing, although not in the area of capital works.

In conjunction with work committed to under the *Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership*, a tiered system of principal autonomy for recruiting and managing school-based staff, based on demonstrated sustained high performance, will be implemented from 2011.

New staffing processes will be developed and a move to single line budgets (including staffing) implemented as part of the new approach.

Stakeholders will be consulted in the roll-out of the reforms.

Additional funding of \$0.6m over the next two years, provided in the 2010-11 Budget, will fund implementation through establishment of an expert support team and development of a simplified global funding model.

## **2. BUILDING SYSTEM CAPACITY**

The core principle and rationale for school based management is the concept that those at the fore of school operations are best placed to make decisions that support the needs of students and the community.

The responses to recommendations relating to building system capacity have been made on this basis. This will be achieved through improved engagement and collaboration across schools as well as building capacity to achieve resource management efficiency within individual schools.

### **Recommendations 4 and 5**

*Schools should be encouraged to re-evaluate their business manager positions, based on changes in workloads and responsibilities and if appropriate these positions should be reclassified. Administrative staff be provided with professional development opportunities that build towards career pathways within the government school system, including training on CRS, SBM and exploration of the flexibility available under SBM.*

The Government agrees to the development of a minimum classification for all business managers, possibly based on different school structures. The Government also agrees to the establishment of cluster arrangements within school groups to provide a career path and increase on-the-job professional development to support a

higher level of succession planning. Changes in the mix of schools' staffing structures to support clustering elements of administrative support to schools can be considered within existing school based resources due to anticipated efficiencies generated through the centralisation of ICT (as outlined at Recommendation 10 below).

The 2010-11 Budget has provided \$0.5 million for an integrated school staff management system (SiMS) to replace a number of currently disparate human resource management systems with a single data source. The system will provide a high level of support to schools and its rollout will be accompanied by training.

Annual mandatory training programs for administrative staff in financial and contract management commenced in early 2010 and will be extended into other areas, such as staff resource management.

### **Recommendation 6**

*Establishment of extensive professional development programs such as a principals' college for continuing and aspiring principals that includes exploration of creative use of the flexibility afforded schools under SBM.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation and is developing a more comprehensive leadership strategy that will include support for aspiring and current principals in areas where they may have greater flexibility.

### **Recommendation 10**

*Responsibility for ICT systems, implementation and maintenance be centralised.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation. This aligns with the SchoolsNET centralised network model which is based on the principle that InTACT will deliver ICT services to schools. This includes the provision of network connectivity, account provisioning, centralised storage, centralised hosting of the Virtual Learning Environment and the digital repository. Fundamental to this model is the principle of all procurement being managed through InTACT so that there is a known hardware platform in order to deliver the efficiencies.

The SchoolsNET model has been developed using funds from existing projects and will not require any contribution from schools. The first phases of the model will be introduced from term 3 in 2010 and include storage and identity management.

Schools currently employ ICT specialists directly in schools. The centralised management of all school networks will provide schools with increased staffing flexibility.

### **Recommendation 11**

*Major capital works continue to be managed centrally. All schools should be encouraged to include facilities development in their strategic planning. Where a school's strategic plan encompasses capital and infrastructure needs, and realistically allocates priorities to future*

*development, that plan should be used to drive the future capital works program for the school concerned.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation, which supports existing practice.

### **Recommendation 12**

*All unscheduled maintenance and some scheduled maintenance (in the areas of gutter cleaning, play equipment, testing and tagging of electrical equipment) continue to be managed by schools, or transferred from central control to primary schools in the circumstances of preschool maintenance. The limit on unscheduled per item maintenance works managed at the school level be increased and an annual cap system introduced to replace the current \$5000 per event excess. Grounds maintenance should be integrated with other areas of maintenance and funded in the same way.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation in part. All scheduled maintenance and tree maintenance will be transferred from schools to central office, and preschool ground maintenance will be transferred from central office to schools, with existing funding provisions to follow the transfer of responsibility.

However, the use of an annual cap is not supported. Instead, the \$5000 per event excess policy will be maintained, with consideration of special circumstances on a case by case basis.

Roll out of the changed responsibility variations and funding adjustment will commence from the start of the 2011 school year.

### **Recommendation 13**

*Primary responsibility for scheduled maintenance that leads to material improvements or upgrades in school grounds/facilities continue to be managed and funded centrally, but informed by school strategic plans. Schools maintain the capacity to use surplus funding for major capital works, however all major works be managed in consultation with DET central office.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation, which supports existing practice.

### **Recommendation 15**

*Responsibility for letting of cleaning contracts remain centralised with schools involved in the decision making including consideration of costs. Management of the relationship with cleaners should continue to be handled at the school level. This includes maintaining school level flexibility to enter into clustering arrangements. Allocation of funding for cleaning should be revised as part of the review of the SBM funding calculation.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation in part. A pilot clustering of cleaning contracts will be implemented during the 2011 school year. The proposed

pilot cluster will be geographically based around a college and include a number of high and primary schools.

### **Recommendation 16**

*School reporting requirements be refined to clearly link schools' long term (4 year) strategic plans with annual reporting of performance in student outcomes, staff outcomes, community satisfaction and financial performance. This should involve a refocusing of current reporting rather than imposition of significant additional reporting.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation, which supports existing practice.

### **Recommendation 18**

*Existing efforts to rationalise the administrative burden associated with central office/school interactions be encouraged. In particular, a consolidated calendar of reporting and compliance requirements should be developed and promulgated.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation.

## **3. SCHOOLS GOVERNANCE**

Good governance is critical to the success of any organisation. In the ACT each school plays a fundamental role in its own governance, with responsibilities including:

- establishing strategic direction and priorities
- monitoring and reviewing school performance
- developing, maintaining and reviewing curriculum
- approving budgets and policies for the effective and efficient use of school resources and management of financial risk.

The capacity of school boards to effectively perform their governance role was a key concern raised in consultation with board members and other key stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 7**

*School board members be provided with increased training opportunities, including on-line materials to ensure they are appropriately skilled to carry out their duties.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation. Training for school board members is provided on an annual basis following elections. Separate sessions are provided for Parents and Citizens' Association members, staff and student members on school boards. Information about the role of school board members is provided in the school board manual. Information and training through links on the Department's website will be improved.

## **Recommendation 8**

*DET should aim to ensure that departmental board appointees are selected - where possible to complement school board's existing skills mix, and broaden the governance capacity of the board (targeting appointees with skills in areas such as strategy, planning and financial management as well as education and community representation).*

The Government agrees to this recommendation, which supports existing practice. It should be recognised that departmental board appointees undertake this role on a voluntary basis and represent the wider community. Nominations from interested individuals are sought from the wider community, including public and private sector organisations. Appointment of departmental representatives is made in consultation with school principals.

## **Recommendation 9**

*School boards be encouraged to use their powers to co-opt members with requisite skills to ensure boards are adequately skilled to perform their role.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation. This will be reinforced in school board member training.

## **Recommendation 14**

*Management of all aspects of preschools, including funding, staffing and maintenance be fully integrated with the management of primary schools. In addition, the governance structures of pre and primary schools must reflect this integration.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation, which supports existing practice. The management of preschools is fully integrated within primary schools. (The proposed response to Recommendation 12 documents new responsibilities for maintenance based upon who is best placed to undertake the role.)

Primary School Boards with governance responsibilities for amalgamated preschools will include a member of the Preschool Parents Association.

## **4. RESOURCING MECHANISMS**

An important element of the review was the examination of how resources are distributed between schools. The review key finding in this area was 'The current funding arrangements focus too heavily on inputs not outcomes. This draws ongoing criticism from stakeholders about the total quantum of school funding being sufficient to achieve operational objectives rather than the impact on outcomes being achieved.'

The responses to funding mechanism recommendations have been developed on the basis of increasing transparency and moving the focus from inputs to outcomes.

### **Recommendation 1**

*An appropriate index be identified and used to adjust annual funding allocations. In place of the present CPI adjustments, SBM indexation should be based on a mix of public sector capital and staff costs as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). If sufficient data is available this should be related specifically to trends in ACT education costs. The index should be developed in consultation with the ACT Treasury and ABS.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation in principle. ACT Government will review and report on the validity of the existing use of CPI for SBM indexation in consultation with stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 2**

*The funding formula used to determine SBM payments be revised every four years to reflect current costs in line with the following principles: reduced complexity; increased transparency; alignment with needs; recalibration of baseline cost.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation in part. It is proposed that this work occur through the development of a simplified global funding model based upon the principles of reduced complexity, increased transparency and alignment with need. The new funding model and ongoing issue of recalibration to baseline will be met by the proposed response to Recommendation 1.

### **Recommendation 3**

*The transparency of staffing allocation mechanisms be improved through simplification and clear explanation of the allocation formula and notification to schools by central office of all transfers of CRS days into and out of school accounts. This would include improvement of the integration of key systems used to monitor and report staffing allocations at the school level.*

The Government agrees to this recommendation and is reviewing the existing staffing points allocation model for managing schools staffing levels with a view to phasing this out. Key elements of the review include increasing transparency of existing arrangements, and consolidation of the number of resource allocations to reduce complexity. Supporting this review are developments in the management of casual relief through the integrated school staff management system (SiMS) information technology project.