

A3 Highlights

Improving learning and teaching

Improving learning and teaching is the core business of the Directorate. In 2011, Phase 1 of the Australian Curriculum was successfully implemented. Kindergarten to year 6 students studied English and science, year 7 students studied English, mathematics, science and history and year 9 students studied English, mathematics and science from the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum will be released in three phases and fully implemented in ACT schools by the start of 2013. The curriculum will offer mobile families access to consistent study programs and streamlined pathways throughout the years of schooling and beyond. With more standardised approaches to teaching and learning, the curriculum contributes to the development of a portable education sector; more open to the employment of suitably qualified and registered teachers, regardless of origin.

In April 2011, the third National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) report confirmed that the ACT continued to be the highest performing jurisdiction. Students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 at all ACT schools undertook tests in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy. The headline summary indicated that for all year levels and domains in terms of mean score, with the exception of years 5 and 7 spelling, the ACT ranked first in the nation, or equal first with New South Wales and Victoria (see Figures A9.1-A9.3). The Directorate's *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013* continued to guide us in building quality teaching and school leadership in order to improve students' literacy and numeracy outcomes. To deliver ongoing improvements, public schools' literacy and numeracy coordinators accessed a range of professional learning programs such as Tactical Teaching Reading, Tactical Teaching Speaking and Listening and Incorporating Strategies for an Inclusive Curriculum.

To encourage intercultural understanding and multilingual capabilities in children and young people, all ACT primary schools delivered 60 minutes per week of language instruction to students in years 3 to 6 and 150 minutes per week was offered to all students in years 7 and 8. The Directorate introduced improved processes and procedures to ensure recruitment and retention of staff with appropriate language and pedagogy skills. Foreign embassies also provided support in this initiative. During the year, teachers of Chinese and Japanese languages attended workshops focusing on pedagogy and student engagement.

As a result of the Review of Special Education in the ACT, the Directorate developed the *Excellence in Disability Education in ACT Public Schools: Strategic Plan 2010-2013*. The plan, which was launched on 7 September 2010, provides direction for special education improvement in public schools. More broadly, a cross-sectoral Disability Education Working Group comprising representatives of the Catholic, independent and public school systems was established. The Working Group built closer collaboration between the school sectors.

Box A3.1: Leading literacy learning at Charles Conder Primary School

At Charles Conder Primary School, each day begins with an uninterrupted literacy block which focuses on tasks within a balanced literacy program. Physical Education, Band and teacher's release are all timetabled after 11am. Every morning the whole school engages in WALRUS (We All Learn to Read with Understanding and Support). During this time students are encouraged to select their own reading material, share a book with a friend or reading buddy or read to the teacher. This provides an opportunity for parents, carers and teachers to read with the children in the classroom.

The Chief Minister's Reading Challenge provided an additional incentive for the students at Charles Conder Primary School to focus on reading. This year the ambassador for the Chief Minister's Reading Challenge, Virginia Haussegger, visited the school to encourage children to read for the love of it. This annual event which started in 2006, challenges children to read 12 books in a year, with eight books coming from the Chief Minister's booklist. In 2011, 56 schools registered for the Challenge with a total of 16,910 students participating in the event. This was more than double the participants from the previous year.



Virginia Haussegger encouraging students to read for the love of it.

In NAPLAN 2010, Aboriginal and Torres Islander students attending ACT schools achieved above the national minimum standard in all tests and all year levels when compared with the national results. To close the achievement gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students, six Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Officers were deployed. Five of these officers supported teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Kindergarten to year 4. The other officer focused on transition support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from year 6 to year 7.

The trend of improving the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from year 10 to year 12 continued during the year, with 94 percent of students progressing with their studies. This compared with 85 percent in 2009. Of the 44 students, 41 achieved a Year 12 and/or a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Certificate. To maintain this positive momentum, attendance and participation were identified as key priorities in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Matters: Strategic Plan 2010-2013*, launched in September 2010. Programs such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Aspirations Program, and appointment of Indigenous education officers and workers, took place in schools to support attendance and participation.

Box A3.2: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Scholarship Program

In its second year, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Scholarship Program invited year 11 students who were interested in pursuing a career in teaching to apply and present evidence to demonstrate their commitment to their studies. The aim of this scholarship was to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in ACT public schools. The five scholarships of \$5,000 per annum support college students to focus on their studies, including through the purchase of a laptop computer or other equipment to support their educational pathway.

This year a strong field of candidates applied and the application process was rigorous. Students presented evidence across seven key competencies at a roundtable selection panel. The panel reported that all applicants presented very well, making the selection process competitive.

The recipients for 2011, pictured with the Minister for Education and Training Mr Andrew Barr were: Alex Leon, Kiriwai Howe, Jesse Williams (Stromlo High School students, who are all currently attending Canberra College), Jinneecka Klenka (Canberra High School student, now studying at Melba Copland Secondary School) and Stephanie Pollard (who attended Campbell High School and is currently studying at Dickson College).



Improving the school environment

Improving the school environment is a key enabler for learning and teaching in schools. The Directorate is committed to providing students and teaching staff with schools and facilities that promote student-centred learning, support student health and wellbeing, embed environmental sustainability principles, support integration of information and communication technology into learning and teaching, promote safety and security of students, staff and visitors by minimising security risks, be eco-friendly and provide suitable spaces for joint community use. These principles were applied in the design of all new buildings and refurbishments completed during the year.

At the start of the 2011 school year, the Directorate opened two schools, Gungahlin College and Namadgi School. These schools are equipped with seamless access to innovative ICT learning resources through flexible learning spaces. Construction of the new Harrison Secondary School commenced in July 2010 and school facilities were progressively handed over to the school during the year. All 68 Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) projects, funded through Australian Government's Building the Education Revolution program were completed.

Other completed capital works included a new performing arts centre at Calwell High School; a new language learning centre at Narrabundah College; a refurbished canteen at Copland campus of Melba Copland Secondary School; and an artificial sports field at Gold Creek School. Water tanks and security fences were installed at six schools.

During the year, solar power systems were installed at 25 public schools. Under the ACT Solar Schools program, solar panels capable of generating around 1 megawatt (1,000 kilowatts) of power were installed at schools across the ACT public school system. This installation will continue over the next three years. When complete, it will be the largest solar photovoltaic project in Canberra and one of the largest in Australia. It will generate about 1,500 megawatt hours of electricity back into the grid and help to offset about 1,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. The energy generated is enough to power about 200 houses for a year.

Student wellbeing and behaviour support have been enhanced during the year through the introduction of the *Essential Skills for Classroom Teachers Learning Package*. The package was developed for new teachers and outlines the fundamental skills required for establishing and maintaining positive classrooms. Positive responses were received from over 200 new teachers regarding the training package. The program will continue in 2012 and will be further enhanced by a Train-the-Trainer module for executive staff, and an advanced skills course for ongoing development.

In collaboration with ACT Health, the School Youth Health Nurse Program was successfully implemented in all ACT public high schools. The program provided support for students to quit smoking. The nurse became the first point of contact for young people, their families and school community members seeking information, advice and support in health matters. During its second year of operation the program provided 1,896 individual consultations with students and facilitated over 400 groups with approximately 6,000 students participating. Of these consultations,

52 percent related to mental health issues, 20 percent to general health and adolescent development, 16 percent to sexual health and 12 percent to drug and alcohol issues.

In recognition of the benefits that information and communication technology and infrastructure contribute to education, and to facilitate ACT students adapting to a digital world, wireless networks were enabled in all ACT public schools and colleges. A ratio of 1:1 in terms of students to computers in years 9 to 12 was also achieved. The Directorate successfully deployed 1,532 new ACT Government-funded computers to public primary schools.

The Connected Learning Communities (cLc) virtual learning environment was successfully implemented during the year. The cLc incorporates five key elements of the Smart Schools: Smart Students initiative: podcasting; video conferencing; parent portal; digital portfolio and video on demand. Other features include wikis, blogs, surveys, online quizzes, online tasks, and instant messaging across all schools. In April 2011, GaggleMail (the student email component of the cLc) went live for 38,000 users. The email system allows students to use a unique email address from any cLc accessible location. GaggleMail will also allow schools to create distribution lists for parents and outside organisations.

Box A3.3: Summit on cyber safety, Who R u in the Digital World?

As more ACT students go online the Directorate's imperative is to continue to raise cyber safety awareness. On 18 March 2011, 280 participants attended the National Convention Centre to be part of the ACT's first student summit on cyber safety, *Who R U in the Digital World?* Sponsored by the Directorate, InTACT and the Australian Federal Police, the Summit was an initiative of the ACT Safe School Taskforce and provided the opportunity for year 9 students and their teachers to discuss the academic, social and wellbeing potential of new technologies and the issues that affect them as citizens of the digital age.



Ms Robyn Moore presenting at the summit

Students and teachers at the summit took part in workshops and had the opportunity to hear from leading speakers in cyber safety. The summit concluded with the students making a declaration to the Minister about what it takes to lead responsibly in a digital world, and a school-based commitment to action. The summit received outstanding feedback from participants with the summit deemed to be a great success. Schools are now implementing the declaration and commitments through a variety of engagement strategies.

A new library software solution commenced roll out to all ACT public schools. The software, Oliver, is a centralised web-based library solution which will allow all school libraries to interact with each other and will improve the sharing of resources. Oliver will be introduced on a school by school basis with a goal of 16 schools per term being transferred to the new system. It will be used in all ACT schools by the end of 2011.

Improving student pathways and transitions

Improving student pathways and transitions is a key strategy in ensuring that our schools continue to develop engaging, coherent learning programs that cater for the increasing diversity of interests and needs of our students.

In May 2010, the Minister announced an ACT Tertiary Taskforce, chaired by the Director-General with representation from ACT industry and education institutions and other stakeholders. In preparing its report on a vision for ACT tertiary education, the taskforce consulted extensively with approximately 100 stakeholders. Additional community consultation was also invited via the Directorate website.

In December 2010, the taskforce provided its report *Learning Capital: An integrated tertiary education system for the ACT*, which included 12 recommendations to the ACT Government. The Minister launched the report on 9 February 2011. The ACT Government formally responded to the taskforce report in April 2011. The response agreed to establish a Learning Capital Council to support greater integration of the ACT tertiary system which was a critical element of the taskforce recommendations.

The publication, *Excellence and Enterprise: Advancing Public Schools of Distinction*, was released on 24 May 2011, and is the Directorate's framework for improving secondary schooling in the ACT. The publication outlines eleven key directions that are organised under three broad themes: advancing distinctive public secondary schools; flexibility, pathways and partnerships; and strengthening the system.

The aim of this framework is to ensure high schools and colleges continue to adapt to meet the changing needs of students. Innovation, such as different models of schooling will be encouraged. An example is already in action with the partnership between the University of Canberra, Lake Ginninderra College and Kaleen High School.

In the 21 months since the Directorate began implementing the National Partnership (NP) Agreement for the Productivity Places Program (PPP) between the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, the ACT has seen unprecedented successes in terms of training outcomes for participants. In particular, the ACT has seen a very low rate of attrition of participants, compared with the national attrition rate of 65 percent. The attrition rate of the first PPP cohort was 18 percent for job seekers and 11 percent for existing workers. The low attrition rate had significant consequences for the ACT's PPP budget in 2010-11, due to the assumptions underlying the Commonwealth's NP funding model regarding anticipated attrition rates.

Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASBAs) offer students the opportunity to achieve a nationally recognised vocational qualification by combining paid work and training as part of their education program, contributing towards their Year 12

Certificate. In 2007 the ACT Government set a target of 500 new ASBAs in the ACT each year. In 2010 there were 524 ASBA commencements in the ACT. This was a 30 percent increase on the previous year.

The ACT Youth Commitment Signing Ceremony took place on 18 May 2011. The Youth Commitment aims to establish a shared responsibility between stakeholders and organisations who serve young people to ensure that no young person is lost from education, training or employment. Approximately 140 stakeholders, including representatives from government, educational institutions, community and youth agencies and business, signed a statement demonstrating their commitment to increasing the educational engagement, attainment and successful post-school transitioning of young people in the ACT. This Statement of Commitment included a pledge to use the Pathways Planning process.

Coinciding with the introduction of the ACT youth participation and attainment requirements, enrolments in years 10 and 12 have increased in ACT public schools. According to the August 2010 census, year 10 enrolments were up by 8.8 percent since the August 2009 census. Similarly, year 12 enrolments were up by 6.4 percent since the August 2009 census.

To lay the foundation for a child's future success in learning and life more access to high quality early childhood education was provided during the year. In 2010, eight schools joined the existing five early childhood schools in offering 15 hours per week of early childhood education. The schools achieved increased enrolments, positive learning outcomes for children and an increased sense of cross-family connectedness. The number of classes provided at each school was increased to meet demand in 2010 and 2011. To ensure access to well trained and qualified staff for preschools, the ACT Government negotiated a training package with the Canberra Institute of Technology to provide Certificate III in Children's Services. During the year, 117 out of 120 school assistants completed the course.

Improving leadership and corporate development

Improving leadership and corporate development is a key enabler for achieving improvements in the three other priority areas outlined in the Strategic Plan. Highlights and achievements made during the year in this priority area are discussed below.

Attracting, retaining and developing our leaders, teachers and support staff are critical activities of the Directorate. During the year, 450 casual teachers and school support staff were assessed and approved to work in our schools. In addition, 221 new teachers took up temporary and permanent positions in ACT public schools.

In 2010-11, work commenced to develop a framework for school autonomy in relation to staffing. School autonomy will involve principals in making decisions and being responsible for the selection, development and management of staff. School autonomy is being introduced in several phases:

- Phase 1 in 2010 involved the two new schools opening in 2011, Gungahlin College and Namadgi School.

- Phase 2 in 2011 involved Amaroo School, Calwell High School, Dickson College, Duffy Primary School, Gungahlin College, Namadgi School, Turner Primary School and Weetangera Primary School.
- Phase 3 will involve additional schools from 2012.

At 30 June 2011, 3,283 teachers were employed in ACT public schools. This represented an increase of 1 percent over the previous year when 3,249 teachers were employed. Importantly, the Directorate achieved a 94 percent staff retention rate. This continues the positive trend recorded in 2009 when a retention rate of 93 percent was achieved.

The Directorate's Strategic Plan, Operational Plans for 2010 and 2011, and the *School Improvement Strategy – Core Principles*, provided the main drivers for the professional learning and development of teaching staff. In the reporting period, the main priorities were in the areas of: teaching and learning; the school environment (including information and communication technologies); student pathways and transitions; and leadership development.

The New Educator Support Program for new teachers builds capability and confidence of teachers in their first three years of teaching. It provided up to 15 days training for each new teacher. Four modules were offered. The attendance numbers for the four modules was in excess of 500 participants.

In 2010-11, the Leading to Leadership program was delivered to 130 staff aspiring to be principals, deputies and executive teachers. In addition, 11 new principals, 15 deputy principals and 57 executive teachers participated in the School Leadership Orientation programs.

Professional development workshops for school leaders continued in the areas of ICT, financial management, evidence-based practice and meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and special needs students.

Targeted scholarships build teacher capability in specific areas of educational need. In 2010-11, teacher scholarships were given for the:

- Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Education at the University of Canberra. This program commenced in February 2010 with 32 enrolments. Twenty-one teachers graduated in December 2010, a further six are expected to graduate in December 2011 and five teachers withdrew from the course. Eighteen teachers commenced the Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Education at the University of Canberra in February 2011.
- Graduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. This course commenced in semester 2 of 2010 with 25 enrolments. Eighteen teachers completed this course in June 2011 and seven teachers withdrew from the course. Nine teachers commenced the year long Graduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages in February 2011.

Individual scholarships were awarded to 12 teachers in February 2011. Some of the fields in which tertiary studies are being pursued include educational leadership, quality teaching and education for the sensory impaired.

Box A3.4: 2011 Public Education Awards

The 2011 Public Education Awards ceremony was held on 27 May 2011 as part of the Public Education Week celebrations to honour some of the ACT's leading teachers and support staff. The awards were a testament to the quality of education and training in ACT public schools.

The 2011 awards were a partnership between the Directorate, the Australian Education Union and the Canberra Institute of Technology.

School-based non-teaching staff were offered training in areas such as information technology, first aid, building maintenance and repairs, and also personal skills, such as writing job applications for promotion positions. A total of 72 courses were offered, with approximately 600 participants.

The delivery of Respectful Workplaces training to approximately 1,000 employees during 2011 was a key element of the Directorate's implementation of the ACT Public Service's *Respect, Equity and Diversity Framework*. It demonstrates the Directorate's commitment to reducing the risk of psychological injury to employees, as required under the *Workplace Safety Act 2008* and the *Workplace Health Strategic Plan 2008-12*. The provision of high quality, easy to use systems, processes and procedures that embed best practice were advanced during the period.

On 12 October 2010, our *Contractor Management Framework* won the *Safe Work ACT Award* for the Best Workplace Health and Safety Management System—Public Sector category. The Framework was automatically nominated for the *National Safe Work Australia Awards*.

The early intervention focus adopted by the Directorate has seen a sustained reduction in the incidence of workplace injuries reaching five days incapacity and average time lost (average number of weeks off for workers' compensation per 1,000 employees). The number of five day claims reduced from 80 claims (in the previous year) to 74 claims in 2010-11. This continues the downward trend from 2006-07 when 101 claims were made. The average number of weeks lost decreased from 2,104 in 2009-10, to 2,071 in 2010-11.

A total of 533 staff Accident/Incident Reports were received during the 2010-11, which is a decrease from the previous year's figure of 732. For students and third parties, the number decreased from 1,043 in 2009-10 to 966 during the reporting period.

High quality client, community and stakeholder engagement is critical to creating a school system that is supported and delivers expected outcomes. The Directorate has a number of specific partnership programs with ACT community groups and leaders who support public education. These include ACT Children's Week, the Returned and Services League of Australia Woden Valley Sub-Branch Incorporated, School Volunteer Program ACT Incorporated, and the Australian Business Community Network.

In 2010, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group developed an operational plan that articulated three priorities for the period 2010-12. These priorities aim to provide increased opportunities for parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in ACT schools in curriculum and policy advice.

The Disability Education Reference Group had significant involvement in providing feedback during the development of the Directorate's disability education Strategic Plan 2010-2013.

Box A3.5: Launch of the Reconciliation Action Plan 2010

On 6 July 2010 during NAIDOC week at Birrigai Outdoor School, the Minister for Education and Training Mr Andrew Barr MLA launched the Directorate's inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan, *Reconciliation Matters*. The launch was a success with over 300 families, schools and central office staff and community organisations attending to celebrate together and offer their support. Aunty Laura Bell welcomed attendees to Ngunnawal Country and showed her support for the commitment to the reconciliation journey. Mr Terry Williams, Chairperson of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, Mr Bradley Bell, Chairperson of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Committee and the United Ngunnawal Elder Council were present. The event served to promote and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders.



Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance at the launch of the Reconciliation Action Plan

