

## Chief Executive's review



Dr Jim Watterston

The writing of this review comes toward the end of my first year in the ACT Department of Education and Training. As I reflect on that year, not a day has gone by where I have not marvelled at the strengths and achievements of ACT school students and their teachers. This *2009–10 Annual Report* includes a selection of those achievements, as well as some of the challenges we faced, and our plans for moving forward over the next year.

The ACT public school system has a heritage of excellence, a heritage that we strive to maintain, and wherever possible improve, by focusing on what matters. Our mission is connected to our city's future and integrated into its planning. Our starting point and expectations are high. The challenge is to maximise everyone's potential so that we can continue to enjoy the social and economic benefits that come with being a clever and innovative city.

Given our performance-based culture the Department is keen to take an evidence-based approach to decision making. It is from this view point that we have strategically established our priorities and directed our resources. I am confident that this Annual Report will reflect a system that is consciously turning its attention towards high-level achievements.

Our outcomes are important to us all: collectively we are ensuring that students have safe and inspiring learning environments; we are recruiting, developing and retaining high-quality teachers; enhancing the capacity of instructional leaders; and fostering community participation.

This year we recognised some of our high achievers through the inaugural Public Education Awards. The awards, a joint initiative between the Department and the Australian Education Union, were in recognition of our Outstanding Principal, Outstanding Teacher and School Hero. In addition, the union's Public Education Award was made, as was the Outstanding Education Support Award.

The recipients of these awards represent just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the quality of leadership and depth of experience within the Department. I have recently appointed some of our most high achieving educators as inaugural principals at the new Gungahlin College and the P-10 school in Kambah. Both schools will open in 2011 with the highest standard of leadership, innovation and facilities to enable students to receive a high-quality, 21st century education.

To continue to draw on the expertise of our teachers, during the year we implemented a new model to strengthen leadership in our schools. The school network model replaces the role of School Directors with School Network Leaders. The Network Leaders use their experience as principals to improve school performance throughout their network, with a key role in guiding school planning, performance measurement, and further developing instructional leadership. The schools within each network work closely together under a collaborative model.

To support our teachers and leaders, and to provide clear direction to our clients and stakeholders, this year we launched our new *Strategic Plan 2010-2013: Everyone matters*. The plan outlines a number of priorities for the four-year period under our key goals of learning and teaching, school environment, student pathways and transitions, and leadership and corporate development.

The strategic purpose of *Everyone matters* is to constructively engage our parents and the community in the process of education. Their participation in the education process is an important driver of student success. We continue to work with parents and measure community satisfaction to better inform our progress towards ensuring students are supported and engaged to achieve their full potential.

I was made very aware of the interest of parents and the community in our education system following the release of information on the national *My School* website. While the information release did stretch us in understanding and explaining a large volume of data to our community, the wealth of that information cannot be underestimated. In the lead up to the NAPLAN testing in 2010 it was evident that there was still substantial debate about the most appropriate way to make information about schools available. Many teachers felt strongly that the integrity of the assessment was compromised by the reporting through the website. In the end, agreement was reached on the way forward and testing went ahead as planned.

Refinements to the *My School* website are currently being made, including plans for the release of additional information such as school financial data. No doubt the next release of information, in late 2010, will draw as much interest as did the first release.

The long-term sustainability of our schools relies on contemporary learning environments; our schools must be fit for 21st century learning. The Australian

Government's Building the Education Revolution program continues to refurbish, renew and modernise our educational sites. In a major challenge for the Department, during 2009-10 we undertook an unprecedented \$200 million worth of renewal and refurbishment work.

A review of the range of capital works projects completed or underway in this reporting period reveals an impressive output. The Primary Schools for the 21st Century funding has delivered new libraries, upgraded classrooms and hall refurbishments. In addition the National School Pride funding has continued to ensure students have learning environments that are safe, stimulating and contemporary.

Maintaining our schools is one thing; forward planning to meet future schooling needs is another. We have continued to plan for the changing demographics of our city so that new suburbs and reconfigured inner suburbs have access to great schools with great facilities.

I continue to have very favourable feedback on our early learning and development centres. With the opening of the Lyons Early Childhood School in late 2009, there are now five sites conveniently located across Canberra.

Strong enrolments confirm that these schools are serving a need and delivering a leading approach to the early years of learning that will give our children a great start to their education.

Our executive leadership team has been strengthened with the arrival of our new Deputy Chief Executive, Ms Diane Joseph, and through the creation of an Executive Director to lead our tertiary and international education program. Ms Leanne Cover joined the Department in this role. Our new senior executive team, coupled with a new organisational structure, are significant as they enable greater collaboration across the Department. The new arrangements are logically associated with our functions to support greater teamwork and foster integrated activities.

An outcome of the new arrangements is a stronger focus on training and tertiary education. Although we have a strong culture of training in our schools, the release of the Review of Australian Higher Education Report (the Bradley Review) challenged us to reconsider our future directions. We know that the training and tertiary landscape will be transformed in the years ahead. The Bradley Review provides us with a unique opportunity to create a truly connected and integrated education environment.

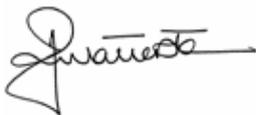
As chair of the Tertiary Taskforce, made up of industry representatives and educational professionals, I look forward to responding to the Bradley Review. Through community consultation and discussion the Taskforce will develop a vision for positioning the ACT as Australia's lifelong learning capital. This will be presented as a report to the ACT Government.

Our new directions with training and tertiary education will be supported by a current review of our high schools and colleges. This will see the development of a strategic plan for the provision of secondary education for ACT public school students. The plan will describe how we can better direct and use our resources to provide students with clear learning pathways towards fulfilling careers. It will help us to deliver students who are well educated and skilled – ready to fully participate and contribute to the future economic, workforce and community needs of the ACT region.

During 2009-10, the Department experienced difficulty with the implementation of a new system to process payments to training providers. Implementation issues highlighted weaknesses in administrative processes, which have since been reviewed and streamlined. Business practices within the Department will continue to be reviewed and aligned to meet the needs of clients in 2010-11.

To assist principals with harnessing the collective capacity of their school communities during 2010-11 we will be acting on recommendations arising from the Review of School Based Management. The new initiatives recognise that principals are foremost education experts and should be granted every opportunity to decide how to use their resources to get the best results for their students. Principals will be given the power to self-manage their funding and staff according to the needs of their school.

The Department's achievements over the last 12 months are the result of efforts of a very dedicated team of staff. We also rely on, and appreciate the assistance of, a variety of interested community partners and volunteers. Based on our achievements this year I have no doubt that the Department is well placed to meet the directions, opportunities and challenges that 2010-11 will bring.



Dr Jim Watterston  
Chief Executive  
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