

ACT EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

Inclusive Education for Children and Young People with Disability in ACT Public Schools

INFORMATION PAPER

A 2021 Point in time snapshot - to recognise the work to date
and guide our future work

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ACT Education Directorate Snapshot 2021

89 public schools

nine combined schools (preschool to year 10 including two Koori preschools)

flexible education programs and distance education

6,500 staff including 4,300 teachers and school leaders

ten year 7 to 10 high schools

four specialist schools

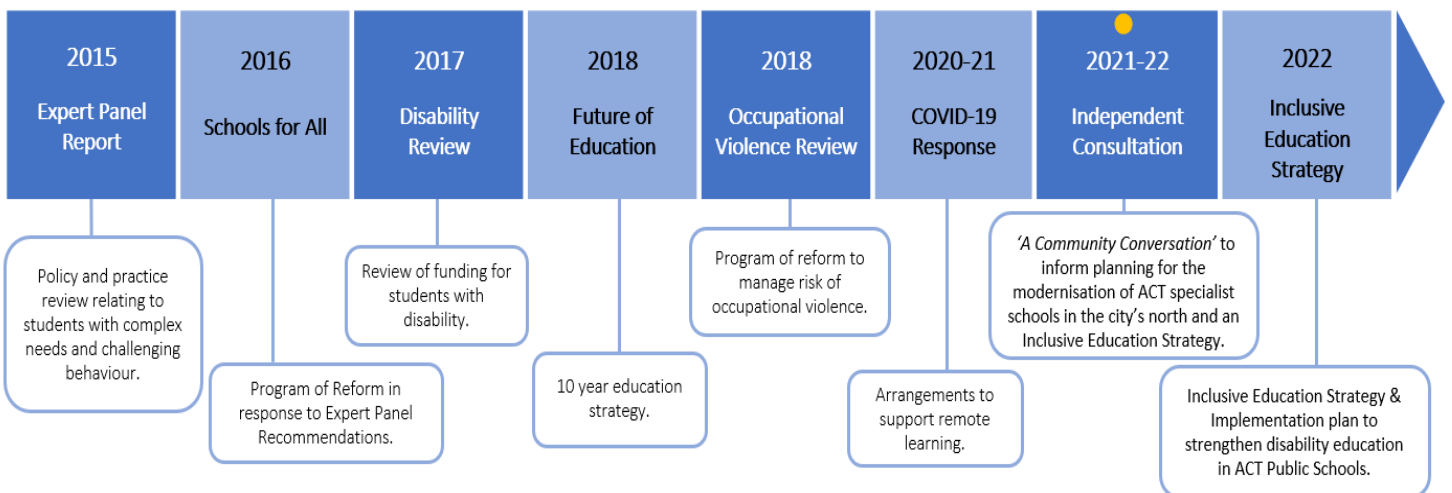
almost **51,000** students

51 preschool to year 6 schools (including two Koori preschools)

eight year 11 and 12 secondary colleges

six early childhood schools (preschool to year 2 including one Koori preschool)

Timeline of Reform and Policy in the ACT



Purpose

This Information Paper provides an overview of policy reform, strategic planning and investment that has taken place in the ACT's public education sector since 2015. Collectively these measures have directly and indirectly impacted on students with disability over the past five years.

Background

Current State

In 2021, the ACT Government's Education Directorate oversaw 89 public schools, educating almost 51,000 students from early childhood through to college. The Education Directorate employed more than 6,500 staff, including in excess of 4,300 teachers and school leaders, and 78 full time equivalent psychologists and more than 40 full time equivalent allied health staff, including physiotherapists, social workers, occupational therapists and speech pathologists. At August 2021, there were 2879 students,¹ accessing disability education programs at either mainstream or specialist public schools (representing 5.7 per cent of the total student population across the Territory).

The ACT has four specialist public schools for students with high and complex needs who have a moderate to profound intellectual disability or Autism. There are two preschool to year 6 specialist schools and two year 7 to year 12 specialist schools. The Education Directorate also delivers a range of programs and supports for students from preschool to year 12 who meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria. These programs and supports include:

Hearing and Vision Support

- Hearing and Vision support is provided to students from preschool to year 12. Specialist staff work with the child's school and other involved services to support the student's access to the curriculum.

Inclusion Support Program

- The Inclusion Support Program provides additional resourcing to schools to facilitate reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of students at their local school from kindergarten to year 12.

¹ [Census of ACT public schools August 2021](#)

Small group programs are provided at a range of ACT public schools for students from kindergarten to year 12:

Learning Support Centres (LSC)

- LSCs are small group programs for students with a significant learning delay, a mild intellectual disability or who meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria for Autism. They are located in various primary schools, high schools and colleges.

Learning Support Units (LSU)

- LSUs are small group programs located in various primary schools, high schools and colleges. Students must meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria for Intellectual Disability or Autism to be eligible for a placement in these programs.

Learning Support Units Autism (LSU-A)

- LSU-As are small group programs located in various primary and high schools for students who meet the ACT Student Disability criteria for Autism.

P-10 School Disability Program

- The School Disability Program provides a range of flexible supports to meet the needs of students living in their priority enrolment area, who are eligible to access LSU and LSUA programs, from the time of their enrolment through to their transition to year 11.

Recent Trends

Consistent with other Australian jurisdictions² the ACT is seeing a growth in enrolments of students with disability at greater rates than growth in total enrolments and population growth. Due to the increase and changing needs of students in ACT public schools the Education Directorate is continuing to develop and implement flexible and responsive approaches with the intention of providing inclusive education for all students.

In 2021 there were 339 students at specialist schools across the ACT, with 254 or 74.9 per cent most classified at the highest level of need. The number of students enrolled at specialist schools, with lower levels of needs has decreased, which is assumed to primarily relate to parental choice. As a result, there has been an overall decrease in students with disability attending specialist schools, however student numbers at the highest levels of need have remained constant, possibly reflecting an ongoing parental choice for this type of setting.

Reform Agenda

ACT public schools deliver a range of inclusive education, supports and services which vary from school to school. These approaches reflect the local school context; the disability education programs available; the adjustments required for individual students; the school's capability to provide those adjustments; and the culture set by the school's leadership team. The Education Directorate is working towards a future state where all ACT public schools are fully inclusive, and all parents have confidence that their child's individual needs are met at their local priority enrolment area school. To achieve a fully inclusive education for all ACT public school students, the Education

² [Disability Strategy – A Living Document, NSW Department of Education](#)

Directorate is committed to continuing to strengthen the system to ensure all students are able to access high quality education and care at their local school.

As the Education Directorate works to strengthen ACT public schools' inclusive education, it has become apparent that there isn't a universally accepted definition of the term. What inclusion means, and what inclusive education looks like, is open to interpretation. Through consultation the Education Directorate is aware that the term inclusion has negative connotations for some people and that this is not unique to the ACT context. Future reform in this area will seek to address this to ensure future policy development and strategic planning is underpinned by a shared understanding of what inclusion means.

Expert Panel

2015 Expert Panel Report	2016 Schools for All	2017 Disability Review	2018 Future of Education	2018 Occupational Violence Review
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In April 2015, the ACT Education Directorate engaged an Expert Panel (the Panel) to review the policies and practices that were in place to support and teach students with complex needs and challenging behaviour in all ACT Government, Independent and Catholic schools. The review included an evaluation of legislative and policy frameworks, guidelines, practices and protocols that supported all ACT schools, including research and evidence-based best practice in other jurisdictions.

The Panel defined complex needs and challenging behaviour as:

Any pervasive behaviour, or set of behaviours, regardless of cause (or even without any apparent or identified cause) which disrupts the capacity of the person, or other persons, to learn within the school environment, and which requires targeted or personalised interventions.³

In November 2015, the panel released the 'Schools for All Children and Young People – Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour' (the Report). The Report acknowledged the broad overlap between students defined as having 'complex needs and challenging behaviours' and students with disability – however the two groups are not identical. The Panel considered a student population much broader than those identified by the ACT Student Disability Criteria. The additional factors that were considered included exposure to trauma, family violence, socio-economic disadvantage and other difficult circumstances which may contribute to students presenting with complex needs and challenging behaviour. In other cases, the causes of challenging behaviour displayed by some students may remain unclear. During the review, the Panel consulted with a broad range of stakeholders including students, parents, teachers, school leaders, school organisations, support organisations, education and care experts and other community members. It heard from over 1,700 individuals and organisations.

Recommendations

The Panel's report contained 50 recommendations that sought to introduce 'system change' strategies that included the necessity for 'systems thinking', planning for all students (Universal Design), proactive and preventive intervention, and remodelling services by building on existing effective practice.

The Panel advised that as a priority, teachers in specialist settings should be given an appropriate level of qualifications and professional learning. It also made recommendations related to the development and publication of policy and procedures regarding the placement of students in LSUs

³ [Schools for All Children and Young People – Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour](#)

and LSCs, and consultation with schools regarding placements. Further recommendations related to the need for professional supervision to support staff working with students with complex needs and challenging behaviour; and for specialist schools to continue to develop inclusive practices and to share expertise with mainstream schools with more formal arrangements for supporting that work.

In regard to the use of restrictive practice within ACT schools, the Panel recommended that the ACT Government implement a whole of government approach to the use of restrictive practice and independent oversight of restrictive practice in all ACT schools, and other relevant settings.

The Report made recommendations about the delivery of supplementary financial resources to schools, which support students with disability. The Panel recommended a review of the Student Centred Appraisal of Need (SCAN) process to address issues such as the inflexible eligibility criteria, adequacy of funding, and the negative impact of the assessment process on parents and students.

The Panel found that a small number of students appeared to be caught in a cycle of suspensions, transfers between schools and reduced school hours, where their behavioural support needs weren't being adequately addressed. The Panel commented that the use of suspension is generally not a long term solution for students with complex needs and challenging behaviours and may increase the risk of disengagement.

The Panel found that some students attended school with reduced hours – which is an approach that is intended to be used in limited circumstances where an exemption is actively sought by a parent. However, some parents described seeking an exemption for their child because of the school's inability to support the child's behavioural needs on a fulltime basis.

The Panel recommended that an evaluation of post school outcomes of students with complex needs and challenging behaviour be undertaken, particularly the outcomes of graduates of secondary and specialist schools.

Schools for All

2015 Expert Panel Report	2016 Schools for All	2017 Disability Review	2018 Future of Education	2018 Occupational Violence Review
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In response to the Panel's report and recommendations, the ACT Government, Catholic and Independent school sectors delivered a three year 'Schools for All' program of reform, that responded to and implemented the Panel's recommendations. The Schools for All program provided reports in 2016⁴ and 2017⁵ and a final 'Showcase' report in 2019.⁶

In 2016, the then ACT Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development held stakeholder roundtables to hear directly from parents with children and young people with disability, community members, disability advocacy groups and community services and health care providers on the implementation of the Schools for All program. Participants contributed to setting the direction of the program and provided feedback on what mattered the most to them. Participants highlighted the following key areas for development:

- the need for schools to translate parent and student voice into action;
- the co-design of safe, sensory and calming spaces in schools;
- engagement between school and parents;
- belonging and the need for students and parents to feel welcome in their school community;
- schools to provide a safe, positive, and meaningful learning experience;

⁴ [Schools for All Program: Responding to the Needs of Children and Young People in Canberra Schools 2016 Report](#)

⁵ [Schools for All Program: Responding to the Needs of Children and Young People in Canberra Schools 2017 Report](#)

⁶ [Schools for All Program Showcase](#)

- expectations of positive behaviours in school; and
- partnerships between schools and the community to support children and families who need help outside school.

Professional Learning

Helping staff to build knowledge and capabilities throughout their careers was a key goal of the Schools for All program. The Education Directorate remains committed to ensuring all staff are equipped with the skills, knowledge and capabilities needed to support student learning, including students with complex needs and challenging behaviours and/or disability.

In 2016, online training modules related to the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) 2005 under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), saw an increase from 11 per cent to 91 per cent completion from staff in ACT public schools. This training for educators, including support staff, ensured staff were aware of the rights of students with disability and their obligation to assist students to have access to the same opportunities and choices in their education. This training is compulsory for all staff and the Directorate is continuing to work towards 100% of staff completing the training.

Programs that have been implemented in ACT schools to promote inclusion include the *Everyone Everyday* teaching program. This program provides units of work that develop social awareness and social management skills to foster inclusive attitudes and behaviours in the classroom. *Everyone Everyday* is intended for students from Kindergarten to Year 8 and is supported by professional learning.

The professional learning, 'Transforming Thinking for Inclusion (Students with Disability)', is completed online and is a pre-requisite of delivering the teaching program. It provides insight into current thinking about the inclusion of students with disability and equips educators with the tools they need to model inclusive teaching attitudes and behaviours, and explicitly teach inclusion concepts to their students. An additional two hour face-to-face session is offered to further support effective implementation of the teaching program. The teaching program has been updated substantially and will be launched on International Day for People with Disability, 3 December 2021.

Positive Behaviour for Learning

In 2015, the Education Directorate introduced the *Positive Behaviour for Learning* (PBL) initiative for school staff. PBL is an evidence-based, whole school framework which improves student engagement in learning, builds stronger student-teacher relationships and increases time spent on academic instruction. Collectively these measures foster positive student behaviours and improves student learning and wellbeing outcomes. PBL starts with creating a positive learning environment for all students, then focuses on applying interventions to improve social-emotional skills for small groups of students; and finally, tailored individual intensive supports for students who have experienced academic and behavioural difficulties over an extended period of time.

The Education Directorate has embraced the PBL framework, with 78 per cent of all ACT public schools implementing PBL. All ACT public schools will adopt the PBL framework and an implementation schedule is underway and is expected to be complete during 2022. Currently the Australian National University are working with the Education Directorate to conduct research into particular aspects of PBL which will help to inform an evaluation of the overall program and its effectiveness in ACT public schools.

The Education Directorate has developed innovative additions to the PBL model by integrating Neuroscience in Education and Trauma-Informed Schools practices into its PBL training.

Student Engagement Teams

School-based staff in ACT public schools are supported by the Student Engagement Teams. The Student Engagement Teams are multi-disciplinary teams comprised of allied health professionals that provide advice and consult with schools on their needs to support students including those with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

Allied Health Professionals include:

- Senior Psychologists;
- Occupational Therapists;
- Social Workers;
- Speech Language Pathologists; and
- Physiotherapists.

These allied health staff provide professional learning and build school capacity. They also partner with schools, community organisations and families in a case management approach to provide tailored support for individual students.

Wellbeing

In response to the Expert Panel Report, ACT public schools committed to developing their wellbeing programs, including *KidsMatter* and *MindMatters* Australian mental health and wellbeing frameworks. In June 2017, the Australian Government announced that Beyond Blue was successful in receiving the four year Mental Health in Education grant for the National Initiative *Be You*. *Be You* builds on the success and learnings from *Response Ability*, *KidsMatter Early Childhood*, *KidsMatter Primary*, *MindMatters* and *HeadSpace School Support* and integrates them into one single, national initiative delivered throughout the education system. Since the official launch of *Be You*, in November 2018, the Education Directorate has supported the uptake in ACT schools with 88 per cent of all ACT schools registered for *Be You* as of September 2021.

In 2016 the Education Directorate launched an initiative aimed at putting student voice into practice through a student-teacher-school partnership. In July 2016, over 130 students from 60 ACT Catholic, Independent and public schools came together at the *Ask Us... Student Voice in the ACT* forum. Following the forum, a resource booklet was developed in partnership with the Youth Coalition. In 2018 over 100 students who attended the Minister's Student Congress on 'Leadership' received a copy of the *Ask Us... Student Voice* resource booklet to take back to their schools. The resource kit was distributed to all ACT public schools and is freely available on the Education Directorate's website. In 2020, hard copies of the resource kit were also provided to the Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

An Inclusion and Wellbeing Staff Intranet page was launched in March 2017 to provide a 'one-stop shop' for all information and resources for staff to support students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. The external Inclusion and Wellbeing webpage was launched in October 2017 and provides tailored content for students, their families and the broader education community. The webpage includes information under three key categories: students and families; school and community; and resources and community support.

In October 2020 the Education Directorate published the Service Portal, an internal portal designed to enhance service accessibility for school-based staff to Directorate service offerings. The platform is being built on over time and hosts a range of up to date approved teacher resources, guides and lesson plans, latest research and publications, relevant policy frameworks, tools and templates, professional learning and school-based exemplars available to support staff across a range of learning and teaching topics. Within each of the topic areas are the details of Directorate contacts who can help school staff answer any questions that they may have.

The Education Directorate is committed to supporting the wellbeing of students and recognises student wellbeing is a critical factor that enables access to learning. Every school has a School

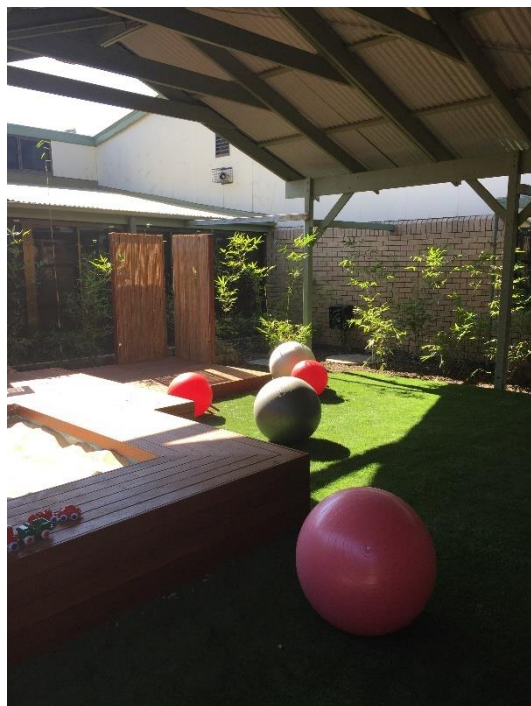
Wellbeing Team who is responsible for providing pastoral and emotional support for students. These teams consist of school leaders and teachers and may also include roles such as a school psychologist, nurse, youth support worker, social worker and pastoral care coordinator. Some schools also have community coordinators, wellbeing support workers and Indigenous Education Officers. Schools have flexibility in how these teams operate to ensure they meet the unique needs of the students and school community. These teams develop and deliver a range of programs and activities that support the social and emotional wellbeing of students and school communities. These programs and activities can include, among other things, developing individual learning and wellbeing plans for students, providing targeted support for students, nurturing student engagement as well as coordinating activities such as breakfast clubs and parent/carer workshops.

Infrastructure

In accordance with the Expert Panel's recommendation to provide safe and appropriate sensory spaces, the Education Directorate invested \$6.452 million in infrastructure improvements, between 2016 and 2019. This investment has supported 53 ACT public schools to have safe, calming sensory spaces. These spaces are designed to support students to relax, reduce anxiety and regulate their sensory needs, when they feel overwhelmed or need a safe place to go throughout the day.

Improvements included:

- the development of environmentally sustainable sensory gardens;
- outdoor courtyards and playgrounds;
- classroom modifications to support sensory play and accommodate appropriate withdrawal spaces; and
- spaces for small group learning, which have been carefully designed in collaboration with schools and allied health experts, to ensure they are safe and appropriate.



In addition, the Public School Infrastructure Upgrade Program, which commenced in 2017, has a budget provision for the creation of, and improvements to, specialist spaces and improved access for existing schools. These works are centred on the needs of individual students via recommendations from the Education Directorate's occupational therapists. This fund spent \$12.7 million from July 2017 until October 2021 on infrastructure improvements.

Infrastructure improvements are underpinned by the principles of universal design which are outlined in the Education Directorate's *Functional Design Brief for New Schools*. The Functional Design Brief ensures new schools are designed to meet inclusion requirements and comprises initiatives such as flexible classroom spaces with adjacent small group learning areas – allowing small groups to work seamlessly with mainstream classes to maximise the inclusion of

students with disability – and quiet rooms, where students can meet with a teacher or self-regulate. These design aspects are also incorporated into external school designs, such as inclusive playgrounds. The Functional Design Brief was used in the design of Margaret Hendry School and Evelyn Scott School and is being used in the design of new schools at Throsby and Strathnairn, new suburbs in the ACT. The Functional Design Brief was also used to inform the modernisation of Belconnen High School and will be applied to all schools that receive major upgrades. Small scale refurbishments are undertaken using the universal design principles for the space being upgraded.

Evaluation

A robust evaluation framework was developed to ensure the integrity of the implementation of the Schools for All program and recommendations. This framework is being used to monitor the program's impact and an evaluation is underway with a focus on both process and outcomes. The Education Directorate also collects information on employment and study outcomes for school leavers and graduates from both ACT public and non-government schools, including students with disability. The School Leaver Survey data is collected to improve strategies at schools to ensure that students progress to meaningful outcomes after leaving school.

Disability Review

2015 Expert Panel Report	2016 Schools for All	2017 Disability Review	2018 Future of Education	2018 Occupational Violence Review
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In response to the ACT Government's commitment to the National Education Reform Agreement, the Education Directorate engaged Victoria University's Centre for International Research on Education Systems to undertake a review of the Students with Disability funding, as part of the Student Resource Allocation program. The Disability Review 2017 included an extensive consultation process with the ACT community and comprehensive analysis of current data on students with disability. The process involved consultations with a wide variety of stakeholders representing themselves and 47 organisations and groups, comprising of:

- parents of students with disability, parent representative bodies, advocacy groups, professional organisations and service providers;
- public school leaders, school staff, school psychologists/senior psychologists, directors of school improvement and other staff; consultations with primary, high school and college students at nine schools;
- surveys of parents of students with disability, school leaders, school staff and other community members; and
- submissions from individuals and organisations.

During the stakeholder consultations it was acknowledged that it is vital that there are highly capable and committed school leaders, teachers, Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and other school staff to ensure that students with disability are included and supported to reach their full potential.

Many stakeholders, both external and internal, identified the range of settings available to students with disability as a strength of the public school system. Settings include specialist schools, mainstream schools with LSCs and units (LSUs and LSU-As) as well as other mainstream school settings from which parents could seek a suitable place for their child. The flexibility provided to schools in response to the diversity of students with disability was identified by many as a strength of public schools.

However, the majority of stakeholders, both external and internal, including the staff in both specialist and mainstream schools, shared the view that where possible students should be included in mainstream schools, preferably their local school. Stakeholders voiced that specialist schools are for those who could not be accommodated with reasonable adjustments. There was also a view that although many mainstream schools were happy to enrol students with disability, others were not, and found ways to avoid accepting them.

The Education Directorate is continuing to work with schools to ensure that all staff have the necessary skills to meet the needs of all students and to support school leaders to create an inclusive culture that welcomes all students. The Education Directorate acknowledges that parents need to have confidence that all schools are willing and able to meet their child's individual needs.

Future of Education

2015 Expert Panel Report	2016 Schools for All	2017 Disability Review	2018 Future of Education	2018 Occupational Violence Review
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Following the Expert Panel report and the Schools for All program, which focused on reform to support students with disability, complex needs and challenging behaviour, the Directorate embarked on a broader review of the ACT education system to ensure that it would provide the best possible outcomes for all students.

In February 2017, the ACT Government committed to engaging the community to develop a ten year strategy for the future of education in the ACT. A broad range of people engaged in the consultation process, which placed great emphasis on hearing the voice of students and ensuring the education system was discussed within its broader context that includes health, community services, early childhood and other human services.⁷

Over a sixteen-month period nearly 5,000 people contributed to the conversation, many of them more than once. This resulted in the Future of Education Strategy⁸ (Future of Education) which intends to guide the education system in the ACT throughout 2018-2028. The Strategy is underpinned by comprehensive research⁹ and establishes a strategic policy direction that informs a range of future initiatives and project work rather than simply listing disjointed remedies.

Four foundations emerged from the broad consultation process. The foundations draw together and coordinate a range of actions. They focus improvements to education on what matters most.

The foundations of Future of Education are to:

- place students at the centre of their learning;
- empower teachers, school leaders and other professionals to meet the learning needs of all students;
- build strong communities for learning; and
- strengthen systems to focus on equity with quality.

Equity, Student Agency, Access and Inclusion

The Future of Education is underpinned by four key principles; equity, student agency, access and inclusion. The Education Directorate recognises that in order to achieve equity, there must be acknowledgement of students' different backgrounds and starting points in their learning. Some students may require more assistance in order to achieve their best. This commitment to equity is supported by the ACT Government as a signatory of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which promotes equity and excellence in schooling.

The principle of inclusion focuses on supporting education professionals to meet the diverse needs of every student in ACT classrooms and ensuring students with disability and their families are included in a way which suits them. The Future of Education also includes continued growth in teachers' skills and confidence, as well as strengthened partnerships between schools and across agencies.

Inclusion is also a key goal of the Education Directorate's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan¹⁰ and the Directorate's first strategic objective is to promote equity in learning outcomes across ACT public schools. The 2021-22 ACT Budget placed access, equity and inclusion at its forefront and continued

⁷ [The Future of Education Consultation Report](#)

⁸ [The Future of Education - an ACT Education Strategy for the Next Ten Years](#)

⁹ [The Future of Education Research Report](#)

¹⁰ [Strategic Plan 2018-21](#)

the Education Directorate's drive to make education more inclusive by delivering additional funding to boost supports available for students with diverse needs.

To ensure access to quality learning opportunities the Future of Education outlines a series of actions that will provide additional support for all students and remove barriers to enable students with disability or disadvantaged students to access learning programs. These actions include enhancing student wellbeing and psychological supports, building a diverse workforce, ensuring young children have the best start to their education journey, building culturally aware environments that welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and strengthening digital platforms to allow educational access across settings.

First Phase Implementation

The Future of Education first phase implementation has concluded¹¹. A number of initiatives have been introduced or expanded as part of this implementation:

- 1. Infrastructure:** A series of feasibility studies provided clarity around the need for additional school sites and explored opportunities to expand and modernise existing learning environments across the ACT as the population grows. This first phase of comprehensive infrastructure planning also takes into account the design of schools as 'Community Schools', recognising schools as hubs of the community and an integral part of a broader human services system which takes a holistic view of students and families and their needs in the local area. Future school sites have been identified and funding for new school construction, expansion or modernisation has been provisioned at the following sites:
 - Denman Prospect (Evelyn Scott School) new P-6 school;
 - Denman Prospect new 7-10 school;
 - Throsby new P-6 school;
 - East Gungahlin new 7-10 school;
 - Belconnen High modernisation;
 - Campbell Primary modernisation;
 - Neville Bonner School expansion;
 - Gold Creek Junior and Senior campus expansion;
 - Amaroo School expansion;
 - Gungahlin College expansion;
 - Expansions at other schools via relocatable classrooms.
- 2. PBL:** In addition to the expansion of the PBL framework, scoping work for a complex student needs team with access to external experts began.
- 3. Continuum of Education:** As a commitment to ensuring students remain engaged with their education, the Education Directorate provides alternative settings and/or other flexible learning options for students at risk of disengaging from secondary school. The Continuum of Education support model has three tiers.
 - Tier 1 Universal responds to individual student needs through implementing adolescent centred practice, effective transitions and social and emotional wellbeing support for every student, quality teaching, parent engagement and community involvement.
 - Tier 2 Selected involves identifying supports for some students who are at risk of disengaging, including wellbeing supports, flexible learning programs and pedagogies.
 - Tier 3 Targeted provides intensive targeted support for students who have disengaged from their learning and require high levels of holistic support to re-engage them in their learning that cannot be provided in a mainstream classroom. It includes in-school and out-of-school options.

¹¹ [The Future of Education First Phase Implementation](#)

The Flexible Education Team within Student Engagement encompasses the flexible learning options currently available to students. These Programs include, Murrumbidgee Education and Training Centre, Hospital School, The Cottage, Muliyan Off Campus Flexible Learning Program and Distance Education.

4. **Student Resource Allocation:** Student Resource Allocation (SRA)¹² was developed to implement a student needs-based school funding model for ACT public schools. This reform is ongoing and aims to ensure all students with disability will benefit from adjustments required to successfully participate in learning, funded consistently across every school and informed by the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on students with disability.
5. **Professional Development:** LSAs who work in ACT public schools can access the Learning Support Scholarship Assistance Program to upskill and gain a Certificate IV in Education Support through the Canberra Institute of Technology. The certificate is customised to meet the needs of ACT schools and supports our students, particularly in complex needs and challenging behaviours.

Second Phase Implementation

The Future of Education second phase implementation plan has been finalised and it is due to be launched in early 2022.

Cultural Integrity

Continuing to strengthen cultural integrity was identified as a priority in the Future of Education first phase implementation. While not specifically related to disability, it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with disabilities feel supported within a culturally safe school environment. The Future of Education has a strong focus on the expectations of schools to work with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and students to identify their cultural integrity priorities.

Case Studies

Black Mountain School



Black Mountain School is a specialist school for students with disability from years 7 to 12. Staff at the school work with students and their families to develop Personal Futures Action Plans that outline personalised learning, and pathways through the school and into post-school options. Black Mountain implements PBL and the school values are Learning, Growing, Achieving.

Staff work to meet each students' individual learning needs and reduce barriers to learning. Functional Behaviour Assessments; targeted communication intervention; social/emotional skill development; and input from the school's occupational therapist and speech pathologist support this work.

Staff at Black Mountain work in partnership with mainstream schools to provide opportunities for Black Mountain students to access mainstream programs. There are also opportunities for students from mainstream high schools to join their peers at Black Mountain as community partners and community mentors.

¹² [Student Resource Allocation in ACT Public Schools](#)

Black Mountain School operates Six Degrees café, garden and gallery which is open to the public. The café provides employment for young people with disability and offers work experience to students from mainstream schools. Six Degrees provides a link to the broader community and opens employment and work experience opportunities in the community for students who work at the café.

Early in 2021, in partnership with Woolworths and Fujitsu, the school opened BMS Fresh Food, a mini retail development facility. In the same framework as Six Degrees, BMS Fresh Food provides students the opportunity to develop skills in the retail field. Students learn the skills need to work in a supermarket environment including: register operation, money handling, stock control and communication. This enterprise has already yielded work opportunities for three BMS students with our partners' store, Dickson Woolworths.

Monash Primary School

Monash Primary School's leadership team have worked strategically over the past two years to implement their vision for inclusion at the school. Monash receives resourcing for a small group program for students with who meet the disability eligibility criteria. All of these students are based in mainstream classrooms with their peers and receive targeted learning with a specialist teacher in small group learning spaces within the school, at regular periods in the day.

In 2018, the leadership team worked alongside parents and carers of students in the LSUs at Monash to begin transitioning the students from a separate learning area into their year level mainstream classes. Once the parents and carers were onboard, it was initially anticipated that the students would return to the small group program building for individual learning, but the teachers soon found that the students did not want to leave the mainstream environment. As a result, the school staff have strategically established flexible learning spaces throughout the school that meet the needs of the students. This has included relocating teacher offices and underutilised spaces, as well as redesigned buildings by removing and moving walls as needed to make the environment work better for the students.



Some students with significant support needs and/or challenging behaviours are able to access their own withdrawal spaces, which is part of a planned strategy for the student, the class and staff. For some students with very high support needs, Monash have employed two teachers who alternate between teaching the whole class and providing targeted learning support to individual students. The staff at Monash provide flexible targeted support that can be increased, decreased or withdrawn over time as the students' needs change.

Monash employs executive staff with expertise in disability education to lead and guide the school and to ensure that the students are sufficiently supported. The school have found that changing culture has been challenging at times, and they are continuing to work with parents, and staff to support them to accept and embrace this model of inclusion. Through an *Everyone Everyday* parent information session the school provided information and support to the community to assist with developing an understanding of supports for children with disability through inclusive education. A

group of teachers conducted a research project with the University of Canberra to develop their own professional knowledge around inclusive education. Monash Primary School also implements PBL which is an evidence-based whole school process to improve the social/emotional and behaviour learning outcomes for all students.

Feedback from the parents and carers of the students who attend the small group program has been overwhelmingly positive. They report significant improvements in their child's social and emotional wellbeing, an increased ability for them to form and maintain friendships and a higher sense of belonging at the school and with their peers. Some parents of neurotypical students who have raised concerns about the inclusion model are being supported to understand the difference between disability and challenging behaviours and the school continues to work to ensure that all necessary safeguards are in place.

Gungahlin College

Gungahlin College has 1,200 students enrolled in Year 10, 11 and 12 programs. The College offers an Inclusion Support Program, which provides additional resourcing to help facilitate reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of students. Students in the Inclusion Support Program can complete Tertiary, Accredited and Modified units of study to contribute to their Senior Secondary Certificate. Modified units are highly individualised subjects in which curriculum and assessment are designed around development and personal learning goals that are appropriate for the student with disability.

Gungahlin College provides a Student Support Hub which includes the Inclusion and Diverse Programs, Wellbeing Directors, Careers and Transitions, school psychologists and a Student Services Manager who work together in a collaborative approach to support school staff and students.

Students who are in the Inclusion Support Program are supported by the Inclusion Support Team who are responsible for developing Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) with students, managing the SCAN process, and advocacy for students. Staff from the Inclusion Support Team work with teachers and staff to modify the curriculum, and to assist teaching staff so they understand the needs of all students. The Inclusion Support Team's role is ensuring that teachers build their own capabilities and gain the necessary skills to teach all students.

Gungahlin also offers other diverse programs. One such program is an alternate program for students who have significant difficulties engaging with the full curriculum in mainstream school settings. Students who access support through the C Program include students who have experienced trauma, students with mental illness and students with disability. Many of the students who access the C Program also attend mainstream classes and the Inclusion Support Team work to build staff capability to meet the needs of these students.

The staff at Gungahlin College have participated in small group professional learning provided by the Education Directorate's Occupational Violence and Complex Case Management team and staff have engaged with Berry Street to develop a trauma informed approach in their teaching.

Gungahlin College has provided specific resourcing for careers staff to explore post school options for students with disability as a college priority to improve successful transitions out of the college for all students. The College also developed the Gungahlin College Health and Wellbeing website to improve students' mental health during Covid-19 and the period of remote learning.

The University of Canberra High School Kaleen

The University of Canberra High School Kaleen (UCHSK), provides education for students from year 7-10, from a richly diverse range of backgrounds. UCHSK takes great satisfaction in knowing the students well and developing core and enrichment programs that meet the individual needs of all students. The staff at UCHSK believe that all students can learn and can achieve success in all aspects



connect learn achieve

of their learning when they are provided with quality teaching practices, and the time and support they need in order to do well.

UCHSK receives funding for several small group programs, these students attend mainstream and small group classes and each program is personalised based on the student's individual needs. The small group learning is aligned with the mainstream curriculum as much as possible. The small group programs focus on essential learning outcomes. These are differentiated to ensure that each student's learning program is personalised and delivered at their point of need. UCHSK inclusive education staff use assessment scales to measure the student's progress to ensure that they are learning and progressing.

The school offers MacqLit sessions that are facilitated by trained Learning Support Assistants. MacqLit is a program that offers explicit and systematic reading intervention for small groups of older low-progress readers. This program is offered to mainstream students to prevent the need for more intensive support in the future. UCHSK staff consider inclusion to be about "giving all students the right supports".



UCHSK values sharing information, to ensure good transitions into and out of the school. Staff recognise that understating the needs of individual students before they arrive, can significantly impact student achievement. UCHSK have a comprehensive transition program with the feeder primary schools and the local college, and staff work very hard to make these transitions successful.

UCHSK has worked hard to move away from identifying the small group program area as being different from any other part of the school. It was formerly known as a 'learning support unit' but is now identified as classroom 10 and 11. Mainstream classes are held in these classrooms and all students are welcome. Students who struggle to participate in mainstream classes are able to use the space to re-engage with education and to transition back into classes.

Duffy Primary School

Duffy has two small group programs for students with an autism diagnosis who meet the disability eligibility criteria. There are also students who meet the disability eligibility criteria who attend the mainstream programs and other students who are not eligible for additional funding but require adjustments. Duffy is committed to the provision of inclusive and personalised educational responses to all students. Whenever possible the students in the small group programs attend mainstream lessons, the school staff use a common language and a shared curriculum to ensure consistency across settings.

The Principal and staff at Duffy have worked hard to foster an inclusive school community that welcomes all students, and their families. Duffy's school values are 'Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Inclusive'.

The students who attend the small group programs have their own classrooms and area within the school. The Principal has been working with the students and staff to ensure the small group programs are able to access the larger school site, and the other students are able to access the small group program area, as a means to encourage inclusion. The students in the small group programs are able to invite their friends to play during recess and lunch.

Duffy Primary School works hard to ensure that all spaces are learning spaces and are welcoming. Through infrastructure funding provided for creating sensory spaces, Duffy worked with the students in the small group programs to codesign their classrooms and sensory spaces. The school has

improved its physical environment, including a new 'pump track' that is used to encourage students to participate in movement breaks. The school is very committed to the Positive Behaviour for Learning philosophy and has also engaged with Berry Street, an independent family service organisation, to provide professional learning for staff on a trauma informed approach to their work.

The Disability Education Contact Officer at Duffy is committed to working with families and values open communication and working in partnership with parents/carers. Families are considered to be partners in learning and classroom teachers encourage relationships with parents/carers, through communications books, emails and regular meetings, although communication is tailored to suit each individual family. The staff are encouraged to acknowledge and celebrate all achievements and successes (big and small), with the students, and their families, as students learn and progress through the school. The school works to include external therapists and to ensure that all ILP goals are personalised and reflect students' needs, with input from parents/carers.

The school employs a youth worker and utilises the school newsletter to promote inclusion with the wider school community and families. Duffy prides itself on ensuring that all students are included in every year level activity, including all excursions and camps. Consequently, three Learning Support Assistants were nominated for ACT Public Education Support Person of the Year by a parent, the school was nominated for the Alderson Community Award (Down Syndrome Association's inclusivity award) and received a nomination for a Chief Minister Inclusion Award.



Policies and Procedures

Disability Education

Students who meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria¹³ can apply to access a range of programs. School teams, including psychologists, work with parents to understand and support the student's educational needs and interventions necessary to support learning and engagement. The school psychologist will help parents consider the range of programs and supports the student is eligible for, although all students are entitled to attend their local school.

All ACT public schools are required to:

- consult with parents to understand their child's educational needs and the adjustments required to support the student;
- apply reasonable adjustments to enable students with disability to take part in education on the same basis as other students; and
- assist students and families to feel safe and supported in the education environment.

¹³ [ACT Student Disability Criteria](#)

Adjustments may be made in areas of the curriculum, environment and/or teaching methods, and will vary according to the individual student.

When a student is eligible for Disability Education support, their needs are assessed in a SCAN¹⁴ meeting. A SCAN meeting is held once the student has commenced in the disability program. The meeting determines the extent of the student's needs at school, in a variety of areas including communication, mobility, personal care and safety, social development and curriculum. Parents are an important part of the meetings, which are guided by a trained moderator.

The Education Directorate provides guidance¹⁵ on the provision of equitable and inclusive education for students with disability, which ensures compliance with the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1991* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. The Education Directorate is committed to ensuring staff understand their obligations under the policy and relevant legislation and that they have the appropriate skills and training to work with students with disability.

Teams monitor the educational progress of students with disability and coordinate the support mechanisms required to meet the students educational, pastoral care, safety and health needs. These teams also coordinate the planning and review processes. All students accessing support under the ACT Student Disability Criteria or who are supported by additional resources or services must have a current ILP and an annual Disability Education Program Review meeting.

The ILP identifies the student's individual needs, goals and priorities for learning. ILPs are designed by teachers in collaboration with parents, relevant professionals and the student where appropriate, to inform the planning, delivery and evaluation of the student's personalised learning program. The annual Disability Education Program Review meeting formally reviews progress against the goals and priorities identified in the ILP and the appropriateness of the current placement.

Feedback during consultations for the Disability Review suggested that the current SCAN process is deficit-based and should be replaced by a more positive, strengths-based assessment of need and/or an assessment based on the adjustments required for participation and achievement of the student's goals. School leaders and staff also suggested that the SCAN process be more sympathetically and skilfully conducted, including the phase of parent preparation undertaken prior to SCAN. Some school leaders suggested that an assessment of need at the school level could replace individual assessments, possibly utilising NCCD data, with individual assessments conducted for a small number of high need students.

The Education Directorate acknowledges that the SCAN process may not be the ideal mechanism for assessing the support needs of students; work is underway to finalise the SRA funding model in order to address these issues.

During the Disability Review parents, school staff and other stakeholders provided feedback that ILP practices vary between schools. To remedy this, the Directorate is formulating standard planning documents. Consultation with school Disability Education Contact Officers (DECOs) informed document changes for students with additional support needs, including the ILP, Eating and Drinking plan (for students who require mealtime management support), and Manual Handling Plans. These plans are in the process of being finalised and will be available to the DECOs to support consistent planning practices.

Safe and Supportive Schools Policy

The Education Directorate's *Safe and Supportive Schools Policy*¹⁶ provides guidance to ACT public schools on creating safe, respectful and supportive learning communities. The policy provides guidance to ensure schools have appropriate processes in place to address bullying, harassment, and

¹⁴ [Student Centred Appraisal of Need](#)

¹⁵ [Students with a Disability Meeting their Educational Needs Policy](#)

¹⁶ [Safe and Supportive Schools Policy](#)

violence as well as building capacity to respond to complex needs and behaviours of concern. To support schools to achieve these goals, the policy and procedures provide guidance on positive behaviour support plans and the use of protective action as an emergency response to prevent harm. A range of fact sheets, action plans and flowcharts have been developed to assist schools in implementing the policy. The policy requires every school to have a minimum of one male and one female teacher dedicated to the role of Safe and Supportive Schools Contact Officer (SASSCO). SASSCOs are responsible for supporting and responding to students who may be experiencing bullying, discrimination and harassment. SASSCOs participate in relevant training and are a valuable resource for school staff.

The *Safe and Supportive Schools Policy* and procedures provide guidance to school principals to ensure they establish regular meetings to monitor the wellbeing of students. These meetings are to identify and coordinate the support mechanisms required to meet the educational, pastoral care, safety, health and wellbeing needs of students as well as coordinating planning and review processes for individual students. These meetings provide an avenue for teachers to discuss and develop strategies for students' learning and wellbeing needs, as well as identifying issues that may be affecting groups of students in the school.

Safe and Supportive Schools Procedures also provide guidance for ACT public schools to develop Positive Behaviour Support Plans for students with complex behaviours of concern, including behaviour which may result in injury to themselves or others. These procedures include guidance to minimise the use of restrictive practice in accordance with *The Senior Practitioner Act 2018*.

A Positive Behaviour Support Plan outlines proactive strategies to assist the student to develop new behaviours and skills and to modify their environment to reduce the behaviour of concern. Plans detail information such as triggers of the behaviour, signals the behaviour is about to occur and what may be reinforcing the behaviour. The strategies in the plan assist school staff to support the student to de-escalate and safely respond to behaviours of concern. Wherever possible Positive Behaviour Support Plans are developed in collaboration with the student, the student's parents/ carers and involved caregivers and service providers, this may include professionals external to the Education Directorate.

Behaviour support planning is based on data collected through observations for the student. For students with patterns of complex behaviour, data is obtained through a Functional Behaviour Analysis supported by a psychologist, to determine the function and purpose of the behaviour. Other staff involved in supporting a Functional Behaviour Analysis and the development of a Positive Behaviour Support Plan may include school staff with appropriate skills, expertise and experience; the school psychologist; and other Education Directorate allied health professionals.

The Directorate uses a Restrictive Practice Protocol as an attachment to the Positive Behaviour Support Plan, which is used where there is a risk of harm to a student or others in their environment. Before a restrictive practice is recommended non-physical interventions, such as relocating students to an alternative location away from potential harm are considered. Sometimes as a last resort, protective action may involve a restrictive practice. Any action that restricts a student's choice and movement must be commensurate with the duty of care to the student and be reasonable, proportionate and necessary to the level of risk presented to all involved.

Staff involved in the implementation of a Restrictive Practice have access to training to safely implement the practice and to understand the legislation which governs schools. Restrictive Practice Protocols are reviewed at least once a term (with the accompanying Positive Behaviour Support Plan) and include strategies to reduce or eliminate the use of the restrictive practice, through the use of other positive behaviour support strategies. For further information refer to the [Senior Practitioner Act 2018](#).

Schools Education Advisory Committee review of Safe and Supportive Schools

In 2019 the then ACT Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development established the Schools Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). SEAC were asked to provide advice about how to strengthen safe and supportive school culture in every ACT public school, with a focus on opportunities to reinforce practices related to the PBL framework and targeted interventions. SEAC provided its final report¹⁷ to the Minister in August 2019. The Government response¹⁸ to the report was published in October 2019.

The report includes a series of observations on the current approach to achieving safe and supportive schools and opportunities for improvement. The report acknowledges the ACT Government's demonstrated commitment and significant investment, particularly in recent years, to support, manage and respond to students with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

SEAC found that the *Safe and Supportive Schools Policy* plays a key role in ensuring the safety of both students and staff, and that it reflects the principles of high-quality education outlined in the *Education Act 2004*. The report also highlights that there has been a positive shift in culture in ACT public schools driven by PBL, although effective PBL based change will take a number of years to implement.

The report noted the Education Directorate's goal of implementing a consistent approach across schools and to create a repertoire of skills in all staff to maximise school participation and learning. This universal approach is complemented by a more targeted approach through a team of allied health professionals from the Student Engagement team.

SEAC acknowledged the importance of schools working with parents and communities to support positive school experiences. The report suggested that the Directorate may wish to explore opportunities to increase authentic engagement and collaboration with students and families, by developing quality and regular communication and developing feedback processes to "close the loop" on issues that are brought to schools' attention.

Other observations were related to:

- The importance of improved data collection and analysis to assist leaders to make informed and timely decisions.
- An emphasis on developing teachers' capabilities in relation to trauma-informed teaching within the PBL framework to enhance learning outcomes for students.
- Expanding on the existing use of a digital environment to develop strategies to build resilience and self-esteem in students to assist them in dealing with bullying and violence.

The SEAC report commented that the Future of Education is centred on an acknowledgement of inclusion within ACT schools. The report recognises the strength of the ACT Government's work in these areas and concludes that "many of the necessary levers [to provide safe, supportive and inclusive schools] are already in place" in our education system, "but that there are also opportunities to enhance, modify or expedite some levers".

In reflecting on the Committee's observations, the ACT Government reiterated its commitment to ensuring the safety of students and staff in ACT public schools and acknowledged that truly inclusive educational environments deliver better academic, social, and wellbeing outcomes for all students and are a key part of making our schools safer for all.

¹⁷ [Schools Education Advisory Committee – Safe and Supportive Schools report](#)

¹⁸ [Government Response to the School Education Advisory Committee Report on Safe and Supportive Schools](#)

Suspension, exclusion and exemption certificates

ACT public schools use a range of prevention and early support approaches when students are demonstrating behaviour which may prevent them from positively engaging with school. Developing students' social emotional skills is an important part of promoting student wellbeing. It is a requirement of the *Safe and Supportive Schools Policy* that ACT public schools include Social Emotional Learning (SEL) approaches in their curriculum. SEL is the process through which students acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions. SEL helps students understand and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive respectful relationships, set and achieve positive goals and make responsible decisions.

All schools have a School Wellbeing Team that works together to support students. As part of this team, all schools have access to a school psychologist to provide a particular lens in assessment and planning of support for students. As part of the School Wellbeing Team, some high schools and some primary schools have youth support workers and teachers whose primary focus is student wellbeing/pastoral care which includes the provision of personalised supports to improve students' wellbeing and engagement with learning. The Student Engagement teams work with schools to build their capacity to make adjustments for students with disability, complex behaviour, or wellbeing support needs to improve engagement with learning.

Wherever possible, principals are encouraged to consider and trial reasonable alternatives to suspension, including in-school options, before plans for out of school suspension, transfer or exclusion are progressed and approved. The Directorate's policy guides schools to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the student's needs and put appropriate supports into place where there are patterns of concerning behaviour. This includes developing and implementing a Positive Behaviour Support Plan. Where possible these approaches are implemented before a student is suspended, or a transfer or exclusion is considered. The Student Engagement teams also provide targeted support designed to support students who have been suspended. The Student Engagement team members work with the student as well as their family and school to address underlying issues that contributed to the suspension.

Schools are required to notify the Complex Case Management team when a suspension relates to an incident involving a safety risk, as determined by a safety risk assessment. The Education Directorate records data relating to student suspensions, including students with disability. Due to a change in the data collection the Directorate is not able to directly compare information prior to 2018 with current data. However, the Directorate is aware that the suspension rates for students with disability is disproportionate compared to their peers and data continues to be monitored. Schools are encouraged to access supports provided to schools through Disability Educator Coordinators (DECOS) school psychologists, allied health professionals, social or youth workers and the Student Engagement teams to provide universal and targeted intervention to reduce suspension rates and in particular recurrent suspension. Recurrent suspension is addressed in the policy and procedures with a focus on prevention and early support for behaviours that lead to disengagement from school.

The Directorate recognises that there are circumstances where it may not be appropriate to require a child to be enrolled with an education provider or be registered for Home Education, or to meet the full-time attendance requirements of the Act. To cater for exceptional circumstances, the Director-General has the authority to issue an Exemption Certificate, exempting the child and parent from the enrolment and/or attendance obligations of the Act. The ACT Education Directorate provides stringent direction on the use of Exemption Certificates and the reasons why reduced or partial attendance may be approved. Requests for Exemption Certificates are initiated by the parent/carer (not the school). Exemption Certificates are not granted for a period longer than six months except in the case of a young person entering into a national training contract as an apprentice or trainee, and an ILP must accompany an application for partial exemption.

Occupational Violence Review

2015 Expert Panel Report	2016 Schools for All	2017 Disability Review	2018 Future of Education	2018 Occupational Violence Review
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The ACT Education Directorate holds the health, safety, and wellbeing of its workforce and of its students at the core of its education and school improvement agenda. To develop, implement and maintain a safe and supportive learning and teaching environment requires a comprehensive and robust Safety Management System Framework (SMSF) supported by clear governance mechanisms, systems of training, assessment, reporting, appropriate responses, and prevention. The Education Directorate has been on a journey in developing and strengthening its SMSF and is committed to supporting all staff and students and putting their safety at the forefront of operations.

The Directorate's approach to managing occupational violence is underpinned by the *Addressing Occupational Violence Strategy 2019-2022* and the *Managing Occupational Violence Policy* which provides guidance on the appropriate response to occupational violence which must be evidence-based, positive, preventive, and consistent with the commitment of the ACT Government that:

...issues posed by students with complex needs and challenging behaviour should not be problematised, but instead seen as an opportunity, invitation and challenge to further exemplify the inclusive vision of the ACT and its schools.¹⁹

The Directorate's actions to address violence in schools for our staff and students has been multi-faceted – addressing people capability, information, technology, and process:

People:	building the capacity of school and directorate staff to support students with complex needs and challenging behaviour, and fostering positive cultural change and a focus on respect, integrity, innovation, and collaboration
Information:	providing timely and transparent access to information for schools and families
Technology:	having the systems to enable the work and to allow the evaluation of the effectiveness of that work; and
Process:	providing school staff with access to clear policies, procedures and resources that support development of safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments and guide schools in responding to incidents of bullying and violence

Key parts of this multi-faceted response include the following supports:

- The Student Engagement team who provide training and support to help schools manage challenging and complex student behaviours;
- The Complex Case Management team who were established to support schools in strengthening risk assessments and the implementation of risk management controls;
- The Health Safety and Wellbeing Support team who provide assistance and advice in responding to employee related incidents, safety issues and responding to complex occupational violence incidents; and
- The Employee Assistance Program who provide employees with six free sessions for short term, confidential and professional coaching.

The Complex Case Management team adopt a behaviourally and therapeutically informed approach and work collaboratively with the Student Engagement teams, school psychologists, flexible education, and schools in their approach to occupational violence. The Complex Case Management team draw on allied health expertise to assess and address incidents of occupational violence with

¹⁹ [Managing Occupational Violence Policy](#)

the intention of creating a safer environment for all students and staff. The Complex Case Management team monitors reports of occupational violence through RiskMan, this information enables timely and data driven responses that ensures that the Complex Case Management team are providing intervention where the team's resources are most needed and where it will be most effective.

The Complex Case Management team also uses data to identify schools who may be under-reporting occupational violence. This allows the team to provide targeted professional learning and work with schools to support staff and student safety. The Complex Case Management team is continuing to support schools to build their capacity and to embed a data driven approach to risk assessments and risk management. Data collected by the Complex Case Management team indicates that since 2018 reports of occupational violence has increased in primary and specialist schools (noting there has been a marked reduction in reports due to remote learning between March and May 2020 and August and November 2021).

In March 2019, the Education Directorate hosted a national forum to address the issue of occupational violence in schools. The purpose of the forum was to share work safety learnings across jurisdictions and collectively identify best practice strategies to support safe and inclusive school communities for staff and students. The forum confirmed that the ACT Education Directorate's response to occupational violence is comprehensive and aligns with national best practice. Insights from the forum will further enhance jurisdictional responses to occupational violence. The Education Directorate is using these insights to strengthen the commitment to safe and supportive schools.

A final key activity undertaken as part of the Directorate's Occupational Violence response has been a collaboration between the Directorate and the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations (P&C) to design and deliver a series of community workshops focussed on ensuring the safety of staff, students and families while meeting the diverse range of student academic and wellbeing needs. The focus of this work has been to build strong and safe communities for learning. The workshops were held through 2018 and 2019 and brought together stakeholders from across the ACT including those within the public school system (teachers, parents, carers, principals, psychologists, counsellors, students, directorate staff); the community sector; and the ACT P&C. Through the workshops a shared vision has been developed of what strong and safe communities for learning can do:

- create an inclusive school culture;
- build a culture of readiness in schools so they can respond to violence;
- support students and families experiencing violence;
- build trust between the schools, families and the community; and
- provide strong support, collaboration and a great environment for learning.

Four main themes have emerged: response, communication, culture and collaboration and five priority areas: wellbeing, family focus, service response, system navigation and shared language.

Senior Practitioner Act 2018

The *Senior Practitioner Act 2018* (the Act) provides a formal framework for the reduction and elimination of restrictive practices by service providers in the ACT. The ACT is one of the first Australian jurisdictions where schools are regulated by legislation with respect to the use of restrictive practice. The Education Directorate has provided professional learning to support staff to understand their obligations under the Act, and there are resources, including factsheets and e-learning available to staff through the Service Portal.

The Student Engagement team supports schools to develop Positive Behaviour Support Plans for students presenting with behaviours of concern. The Complex Case Management Restrictive Practices team also provide input related to the restrictive practice in the Positive Behaviour Support Plans. From term 4, 2019 the Education Directorate commenced work to develop Positive Behaviour

Support Plans for approval by the Education Panel and registration with the Senior Practitioner, as required by the Act.

The supports provided to schools to assist with the minimisation and removal of restrictive practices include:

- environmental assessment;
- identification of low level universal supports that minimise or eliminate the behaviour of concern or associated risk;
- direct support for individual staff, school teams (including executive) to determine need and to review or develop processes, protocols and responses to complex behaviours (particularly related to safety);
- targeted Tier 2 and 3 supports, including professional learning specific to the context of the behaviour and involvement of allied health professionals and supports;
- review and modification of existing Positive Behaviour Support Plans; and
- development of new Positive Behaviour Support Plans, based on understanding the function of behaviour.

Representatives from the Education Directorate meet with the ACT Senior Practitioner on a fortnightly basis to discuss issues as they arise. The Education Directorate is continuing to support schools to build capacity, to ensure compliance with the Act, and to work towards the reduction and elimination of restrictive practices in ACT schools.

Representatives from the Education Directorate meet with the ACT Senior Practitioner on a fortnightly basis to discuss issues as they arise. The Education Directorate is continuing to support schools to build capacity, to ensure compliance with the Act, and to work towards the reduction and elimination of restrictive practices in ACT schools.

Family engagement

The Education Directorate values parental engagement and recognises the important role that parents and teachers play in developing children's positive attitudes towards learning, building their motivation and confidence as learners, and fostering their enjoyment of learning. The Directorate provides guidance to school-based staff about the importance of engaging with families of students with disability.²⁰ This guidance is underpinned by the *Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT* project,²¹ which defines learning as a partnership in which parents are valued and respected as children's first and most influential teachers.

The project brings together research undertaken by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth in partnership with the Education Directorate, Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools. The project was also widely informed by engagement with parents, families and the ACT community about what matters to them in their child's learning.

Parents can engage with the Directorate through the Families and Students, Complaints and Feedback Unit. Feedback and complaints that relate to students with disability are often varied. Some relate to systemic issues, such as resourcing and funding, others pertain to the individual circumstances of a particular student or family.

Concerns raised with the Families and Students, Complaints and Feedback Unit include:

- Resourcing and issues relating to SCAN. Some parents raise that SCAN processes do not adequately capture their child's support needs and/or does not consider the whole child. Some parents raise that the process is not fair or equitable, or that some students are not receiving enough support.

²⁰ [Progressing Parental Engagement – School Fact Sheet](#)

²¹ [Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT](#)

- Systemic issues, for example students being unable to access additional supports or small group programs. Currently students require a diagnosis and the need for significant and extensive adjustments to meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria.
- Concerns that families have not been involved in the development of their child's ILP, or that their child is engaged with therapists who have not been able to provide input into the ILP. Some complaints relate to concerns that school-based staff do not have the skill level required to meet children's needs.
- Availability of small group programs at the family's local school. Some concerns also raised were that families with more than one child eligible for small group programs have to attend different schools due to the programs capacity and not being able to meet individual needs.

The Families and Students, Complaints and Feedback Unit works with families to resolve issues by developing relationships with parents to understand their concerns, and to broker realistic resolutions which meet the needs of the student. This individualised approach helps to achieve the best outcome possible for all involved parties. If unresolved, the unit can escalate issues within the Directorate and they inform parents of their rights if they are not satisfied with the outcome, including taking their concerns to the ACT Ombudsman and ACT Human Rights Commission.

The Education Directorate also engages with family and advocacy representatives in a more systemic way through the Disability Education Reference Group. This group is a community consultative forum convened by the Director-General and chaired by the Executive Branch Manager of Strategic Policy, members consist of several disability stakeholders including: the ACT P&C; Carers ACT; the ACT Office for Disability; Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority; the Australian Association of Special Education; the ACT Down Syndrome Association; Imagine More; and the Australian Education Union. The reference group provides an opportunity for stakeholders to have an important role in formulating advice on the education of students with disability in ACT public schools.

The Education Directorate's grant round to support parental engagement and build P&C Associations is currently closed, and applications for Round 5 are being considered. The grants are part of the ACT Government's commitment to enhancing strong family-school partnerships. Grants up to \$20,000 are available. Parent Engagement Grants are aimed at strengthening P&C governance, and their capability to effectively operate, administer and govern. Grants are available to support formation of an active P&C Association in schools without them. In the Round 4 grants, Narrabundah Early Childhood School P&C, UC SCC Lake Ginninderra P&C, Charles Condor Primary School and Giralang Primary School P&C received \$20,000 each; Narrabundah College P&C received \$10,978 and Harrison School P&C received \$5,440.

Access and Inclusion (Disability) Employment Action Plan

The Education Directorate's *Access and Inclusion (Disability) Employment Action Plan 2019-2023*²² (Action Plan) was developed through a co-design process, led by staff with disability and disability champions from across the Directorate. Through the Action Plan, school-based staff and directorate staff are asked to actively support and engage with initiatives, from professional learning, to becoming an employer of choice for People with Disability through innovation and employment opportunities.

As at June 2021, the Education Directorate employed 194 staff members who identify as living with disability, which represents 2.4 per cent of total headcount. The Directorate supports the ACT Public Service inclusion employment initiatives for People with Disability, including traineeships and inclusion through the ACT Public Service Graduate Program.

²² [Access and Inclusion \(Disability\) Employment Action Plan 2019-2023](#)

Appendix A: Glossary

Term	Definition
ILP	<i>Individual Learning Plans</i> identify students' individual needs, pathway, goals and priorities for learning. All students who access support under the ACT Student Disability Criteria or who are supported with additional resources or services must have a current ILP.
LSA	<i>Learning Support Assistants</i> are school-based staff who provide personal, physical and educational support to students including students with additional needs and/or intellectual and/or physical disability.
LSC	<i>Learning Support Centres</i> are small group programs for students with a significant learning delay, a mild intellectual disability or who meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria for Autism. They are located in various primary schools, high schools and colleges.
LSU	<i>Learning Support Units</i> are small group programs for students who meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria for intellectual disability or Autism. They are located in various primary schools, high schools and colleges.
LSU-A	<i>Learning Support Units Autism</i> are small group programs for students who meet the ACT Student Disability criteria for Autism. They are located in various primary schools and high schools.
Parent	<i>Parent</i> refers to all individuals who have responsibility for parenting children and young people. It includes biological parents, step-parents, extended family members such as grandparents, people who have adopted, and the wide range of registered and informal care providers who undertake this important role.
PBL	<i>Positive Behaviour for Learning</i> is an evidence-based whole school framework which improves student engagement in learning, builds stronger student-teacher relationships and increases time spent on academic instruction.
SCAN	<i>Student Centred Appraisal of Need</i> is a process to assess the level of need for students who meet the eligibility criteria for Disability Education support.
SRA	<i>Student Resource Allocation</i> is a student needs-based school funding model.