

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Evaluation of Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program

Report prepared for the Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate

Western Sydney University Centre for Educational Research

Anne Power, Christine Woodrow and Joanne Orlando

October 2016

Authors

Associate Professor Anne Power

Associate Professor Christine Woodrow

Dr Joanne Orlando

Research Assistants

Dr Frances Williamson

Elizabeth Sears

ISBN: 978-1-74108-392-7

This document is also available
(http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/centre_for_educational_research).

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Copyright Regulations 1969

WARNING

This work is copyright.

This work may be reproduced for private study, research or educational purposes and as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 of the Commonwealth of Australia. Commercial copying, sale, hiring or lending is prohibited. Apart from the permitted uses as stated above no part of this work may be reproduced by any process without the written permission of the Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate. Any permitted reproduction must include a copy of this copyright notice and must acknowledge the sponsors.

Table of Contents

Tables and Figures	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Summary of Future Focus Areas	6
1. Introduction	7
Scope.....	7
Methodology.....	8
Early Childhood Schools Framework	9
ACT Auditor-General’s Report on Early Childhood Schooling	11
National Quality Framework.....	12
2. Early Childhood Schools.....	14
Infrastructure	16
Performance	17
Integrated service delivery	17
Access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students	22
High quality programs and practice.....	28
Achievement of student outcomes	32
Family support and participation.....	34
Accountability	38
Governance.....	39
3. Koori Preschool Program	45
Infrastructure	48
Performance	48
Integrated service delivery	48
High quality programs and practice.....	51
Access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students	52
Achievement of student outcomes	54
Family support and participation.....	55
Accountability	56
4. Cost-benefit analysis.....	58

5. Conclusion.....	62
References	63

Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Core elements of the Early Childhood Schools Framework	10
Figure 2: Quality areas of the National Quality Standard.....	13
Table 1: Enrolment in Early Childhood Schools	15
Table 2: Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains.....	23
Table 3: My School data 2015.....	24
Table 4: Education level of parents	25
Table 5: NAPLAN Reading results compared with highest education level of parent	32
Table 6: NAPLAN numeracy results compared with highest education level of parent	33
Table 7: PIPS data for Early Childhood Schools compared with Control schools	33
Table 8: Governance diagram	40
Table 9: Koori preschool enrolments.....	46
Table 10: Each Koori Preschool and connected services	49
Table 12: My School data on costs per student.....	59
Table 13: Koori Preschools funding information	60

Executive Summary

In mid 2015, the ACT Education Directorate (the Directorate) engaged a consortium of researchers from the Centre for Educational Research at Western Sydney University (WSU) to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of Early Childhood Schools, O'Connor Cooperative School and the Koori Preschool Program (Evaluation). This followed the 2012 ACT Auditor General's Performance Audit into Early Childhood Schooling (the Auditor-General's Report), and the Directorate's subsequent implementation of the recommendations of the Auditor General's Report throughout 2013-14.

The Directorate's *Early Childhood Schools: A framework for their development as learning and development centres for children (birth to eight) and their families* (the ECS Framework) (ACT DET, 2008), particularly its core elements of integrated service delivery, high quality programs and practice and family support and participation, provide the overarching focus of the Evaluation with the addition of sustainability of governance models, leadership structures and resourcing.

Schools are recognised, nationally and internationally, as effective centres for integrated services for children and families. The ECS Framework presents a vision that:

'Early childhood schools will become regional hubs for the provision of services for children from birth to eight years, and their families. The focus will be on quality learning for all children to give them the best possible start in life' (ACT DET, 2008, p.6)

Schools are ideal sites for establishing a 'community hub' utilising a wrap-around approach, which 'focuses on needs across a variety of domains that may include home and school environment, community supports, safety, social and emotional wellbeing, health needs and educational needs' (Shaddock, Packer and Roy, 2015, p.172).

Overall, this Evaluation found that the Early Childhood Schools and Koori Preschool Program are, to some extent, meeting the intent of the Early Childhood Schools Framework. A number of areas for future focus have been identified to strengthen practice in the areas of integrated service delivery, access for vulnerable and disadvantaged families, student outcomes, governance and accountability.

This Evaluation has involved wide ranging stakeholder consultations and the analysis of data and documents from a variety of sources. The researchers are grateful to the many people who agreed to be consulted. Their willingness to contribute their expertise and insights has been greatly appreciated. The researchers also thank those who so readily provided data and documentation, along with supporting information.

Summary of Future Focus Areas

This Evaluation has identified a number of areas for future focus to continue to strengthen the provision of quality early childhood education in Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program.

Early Childhood Schools

1. Explore the potential to use the *Human Services Blueprint* as a framework for strengthening collaboration between Early Childhood Schools and related agencies to improve outcomes for families.
2. Review the enrolment policy as it applies to Early Childhood Schools to ensure access to enrolment for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged families. In particular, the process for inter-agency referrals should be included as a component of the enrolment policy.
3. Develop a consistent approach to transitions, and associated resources, that promote effective communication and support children and families to feel secure and connected.
4. Strengthen leadership and collaboration between long day care, preschool and primary school to deliver continuity of high quality curriculum and pedagogy from birth to year 2 in Early Childhood Schools.
5. Develop agreed key performance indicators to support the ongoing implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of service delivery by Early Childhood Schools.
6. Review and strengthen the governance arrangements of Early Childhood Schools, with a focus on School Board membership and cross-agency collaboration, to ensure their decision-making structures are aligned with the intent of the integrated service delivery model.

Koori Preschool Program

7. Review relevant procedures, and establish formal referral processes across government agencies, to improve the access and participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Koori Preschool Program.
8. Develop and document clear objectives and key performance indicators for the Koori Preschool Program to inform the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the program.

1. Introduction

Scope

In mid 2015, the ACT Education Directorate (the Directorate) engaged a consortium of researchers from the Centre for Educational Research at Western Sydney University to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of Early Childhood Schools, O'Connor Cooperative School and the Koori Preschool Program. This followed the 2012 Auditor General's Performance Audit into Early Childhood Schooling (the Auditor-General's Report), and the Directorate's subsequent implementation of the recommendations throughout 2013-14.

The Directorate tasked the researchers with:

- evaluating and reporting on current policies for Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program and whether desired outcomes are being achieved;
- preparing a cost benefit analysis of both Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program;
- assessing staffing structures to ensure equality and alignment with system requirements and structures;
- assessing student outcomes against the outcomes achieved in mainstream schools; and
- providing case study examples of effective practice in integrated service delivery, high quality programs and practice, family support and participation, and effective governance models and leadership structures.

This Evaluation was to focus on the recommendations of the Auditor-General's Report, and reference the following key areas:

- integrated service delivery;
- high quality programs and practice;
- family support and participation;
- access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students;
- achievement of student outcomes; and
- sustainability of governance models, leadership structures and resourcing.

The researchers were also requested to identify any impact the establishment of the ACT Government's Child and Family Centres has had on the realisation of an integrated service delivery model, and whether Child and Family Centres are now contributing to the wrap-around service delivery originally envisaged as part of the Early Childhood Schools intent.

Methodology

This Evaluation was informed by:

- review of current policy, legislation and governance structures in Early Childhood Schools, O'Connor Cooperative School and the Koori Preschool Program;
- analysis of the effectiveness and sustainability of the current governance model and leadership structure in Early Childhood Schools to ensure system-wide alignment and equality;
- analysis of quantitative data, including National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS);
- literature review of best practice and like-service provision in other Australian jurisdictions, particularly those that have implemented integrated service delivery models including models of care (years 0-5) and education;
- analysis of financial information including a cost-benefit analysis of minimum leadership structures of both Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program; and
- consultation with the following essential stakeholder groups and individuals:
 - Early Childhood School and O'Connor Cooperative School principals, staff and parents;
 - Koori Preschool Program principals, staff and parents;
 - Education and care service managers and staff;
 - Australian Education Union;
 - Child and Family Centre staff;
 - School Board Chairs and members;
 - Affiliated service providers;
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body;
 - Indigenous Education Consultative Committee; and
 - Directorate officials.

Documents consulted in this Evaluation include:

- Auditor General's Performance Audit into Early Childhood Schooling (2012);
- School Board Reports (2010-2014);
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Matters Strategic Plan 2010-2013;
- National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating Reports (2012-2015) for preschool units and co-located long day care services;
- External Validation Reports (2013, for all Early Childhood Schools except Franklin which opened in 2013);

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2014-15: Report to the Legislative Assembly of ACT;
- ACT Education Directorate Strategic Action Plan 2014-2017; and
- ACT Education Directorate Action Plan 2015

To inform this Evaluation, a range of school planning documents were provided to demonstrate learning from preschool, kindergarten to year two, and co-located long day care services. This Evaluation also accessed National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating reports for long day care and public preschool components of each Early Childhood School.

Additionally, parent focus groups (n=15, representing all schools and programs considered in the Evaluation) were held at times convenient for parents to attend. The interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and themes drawn from the data, using NVivo software (a qualitative data analysis computer software package) and content analysis. Member checking (checking the veracity of transcripts of interviews) was carried out with interviewees with regard to case studies of Early Childhood Schools.

Early Childhood Schools Framework

Early Childhood Schools: A Framework for their development as learning and development centres for children (birth to 8) and their families (the ECS Framework) describes the intention for Early Childhood Schools to develop as early learning and development centres, with the potential to provide integrated services for children from birth to 8 years and their families. Under the ECS Framework, this could be achieved through the on-site provision of long day care and access to community programs and health services that support children's learning, health and wellbeing.

The ECS Framework provides flexibility for Early Childhood Schools to develop early learning and development services that respond to the needs of their communities, with each community identifying the services that best meet their needs. It provides a model for Early Childhood Schools to place children's learning and development at the centre, and includes core elements, critical success factors and overarching outcomes.

Figure 1 demonstrates the three interlinking elements of the ECS Framework:

- High quality learning – early childhood schools will offer continuity in curriculum and relationships over children's early years.
- Integrated service delivery – families have access to a comprehensive array of programs that support children's early learning and build family and community capacity.

- Family support and participation – by forming genuine partnerships with families, early childhood schools can both build and draw upon parents’ skills and expertise, provide mutual support and learn from each other.

The relationship between each element is dynamic. They provide a basis for developing action plans for the successful operation of each Early Childhood School, and for monitoring and evaluating their outcomes.

Figure 1: Core elements of the Early Childhood Schools Framework



The ECS Framework sets out the following goals for Early Childhood Schools to support overarching outcomes of providing excellent schooling, strengthening families and building communities:

To provide educational programs and services that:

- promote children’s health and wellbeing;
- meet the needs of their communities;
- help build strong families and communities;
- involve families and communities in genuine partnerships;
- use inter-agency approaches to link services for children and families;
- provide a valuable research base that will help improve early childhood education across the ACT public school system; and

- ‘provide for and promote the care, protection and wellbeing of young children in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment and that takes into account the responsibilities of parents and others for them’ (*Children and Young People Act 1999*) (ACT DET, 2008, p.7).

The focus on high quality learning in Early Childhood Schools is based on a philosophy that learning begins at birth. This philosophy is further informed by *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Early Years Learning Framework) (DEEWR, 2009); Australia’s first national framework for early childhood educators. It guides educators in developing quality programs for children. It describes the early childhood principles, practice and outcomes required to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years of age, including their transition to school (ACECQA, 2013).

Some eight years after the development of the ECS Framework, this Evaluation found that the key elements of high quality learning, integrated service delivery, and family support and participation continue to guide delivery of programs for children from birth to year two, and their families, in ACT Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program.

ACT Auditor-General’s Report on Early Childhood Schooling

In 2012, the ACT Auditor General released its Performance Audit into Early Childhood Schooling. The Auditor-General’s Report was the first public evaluation of the Early Childhood Schools’ model, and looked at the administrative effectiveness of the delivery of Early Childhood Schools, Koori Preschool Program, Early Intervention Program, and Preschool Early Entry Programs. It did not cover the mainstream preschool units attached to ACT public primary schools.

The Auditor-General’s Report provided 11 recommendations to be addressed by the Directorate under the central themes of early childhood schooling governance and context, planning for the community’s need, managing service delivery, and meeting the community’s needs.

The Auditor-General’s Report states that the Early Childhood Schools ‘were premised on the importance of improving early years’ learning and development for children, particularly children at risk’ (ACT Auditor-General’s Office, 2012, p.3).

In highlighting the location of Early Childhood Schools in areas with relatively higher levels of disadvantage, the report identified the potential for these schools to have greater impact in these communities, specifically in regards to families who may be considered socially or economically disadvantaged:

‘...the early childhood schooling programs and services considered as part of this audit do provide additional support and development opportunities for many children [including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with language background other than English, and children with disabilities]. However, there is potential for the reach [of Early Childhood Schools] to be extended to other children in need’ (ACT Auditor-General’s Office, 2012, p.6).

The Auditor-General’s Report also noted that children from socially or economically disadvantaged families were not separately recognised and identified for planning purposes by the Directorate. As such, the report underscored the risk that those who were socially or economically disadvantaged may not receive the additional support they require. In response to this finding, the Directorate agreed to undertake increased analysis of how the provision of targeted programs across the system best meets the needs of targeted groups.

The Auditor-General’s Report found that Koori Preschools are being accessed by a small proportion of eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, due to a range of reasons, including parents/carers’ preferences. The report noted that there was an opportunity to improve the targeting of the program by improving the promotion and marketing of the program to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in the programs; and developing better linkages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations.

The Auditor-General’s Report stated that parents and carers of children attending Koori Preschool provided positive feedback on the benefits of the programs for their children and the broader community. However, generating enrolments in the programs was an issue and there was evidence to indicate that a disproportionately low number of eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in the Koori Preschools. The report also stated that a concerted effort needed to be made to engage with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to encourage interest and enrolments in the programs.

On 1 April 2014, the Directorate’s Audit Committee accepted the implementation of all of the Auditor-General’s recommendations, pending the completion of an Evaluation of Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program (this Evaluation).

National Quality Framework

In December 2009, all Australian governments, through the Council of Australian Governments, agreed to a partnership to establish a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (the National Quality Framework).

This agreement recognised the importance of the early years in ensuring the wellbeing of children throughout their lives, based on evidence that the early years of children’s lives are

very important for their present and future health, development and wellbeing (ACECQA, 2013, p.7).

The National Quality Framework (NQF) applies to the long day care, outside school hours care and public preschool components of Early Childhood Schools.

The National Quality Standard is a key aspect of the National Quality Framework, and includes seven key quality areas:

Figure 2: Quality areas of the National Quality Standard

QA1	Educational program and practice
QA2	Children’s health and safety
QA3	Physical environment
QA4	Staffing arrangements
QA5	Relationships with children
QA6	Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
QA7	Leadership and service management

The National Quality Standard provides high level outcome statements that set a quality benchmark for all education and care services, regardless of the setting. Each education and care service is assessed against the National Quality Standard, with overall ratings and ratings by quality area published at www.acecqa.gov.au. The ratings that may be awarded by the Regulatory Authority are:

- Significant Improvement Required
- Working Towards National Quality Standard
- Meeting National Quality Standard
- Exceeding National Quality Standard.

The national body, the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), may also award an Excellent rating upon application.

2. Early Childhood Schools

In 2006, the ACT Government announced it would open four Early Childhood Schools in 2009. The announcement was made as part of the ACT Government's vision *Towards 2020: Renewing our schools* for new school structures across the ACT, to achieve high quality education for students into the future. In 2013, an additional, purpose-built Early Childhood School was opened. The locations of the Early Childhood Schools are:

- Southern Cross (Belconnen region)
- Lyons (Woden/Weston region)
- Isabella Plains (Tuggeranong region)
- Narrabundah (South Canberra region)
- Franklin (Gungahlin region).

In line with the ECS Framework, each Early Childhood School was tasked with providing early learning and development services responsive to the needs of its community.

As well as employing educational and administrative staff, each of the five Early Childhood Schools has a designated community coordinator who is responsible for liaison with health and community agencies, including Child and Family Centres, to identify and respond to families in need of additional support.

The preschool to year two (P-2) component at each Early Childhood School is operated by the Directorate. The long day care service at each Early Childhood School is operated by an external provider: Anglicare (Southern Cross and Franklin), Woden Community Services (Lyons), and Communities@Work (Narrabundah and Isabella Plains).

Enrolment at each Early Childhood School (P-2) over the period ending in 2015 is shown in Table 1. This Table demonstrates a general pattern of moderately increasing enrolments. Table 1 also shows the number of part-time and full-time enrolments at each co-located long day care service for 2016, highlighting that the school population is greater than the sum of P-2 enrolments.

Table 1: Enrolment in Early Childhood Schools

Franklin Early Childhood School

(opened in 2013)

Year	P	K	Year 1	Year 2	Total
2013	65	15	3	2	85
2014	89	54	21	6	170
2015	120	57	40	16	233
2016	143	67	48	32	290

2016 Long Day Care enrolments: 144

Isabella Plains Early Childhood School

Year	P	K	Year 1	Year 2	Total
2012	83	41	33	15	172
2013	79	36	31	30	176
2014	78	49	26	26	179
2015	83	47	29	23	182
2016	76	49	35	21	181

2016 Long Day Care enrolments: 176

Lyons Early Childhood School

Year	P	K	Year 1	Year 2	Total
2012	63	28	30	9	130
2013	57	50	24	16	147
2014	65	39	45	21	170
2015	66	49	33	31	179
2016	57	42	34	28	161

2016 Long Day Care enrolments: 111

Narrabundah Early Childhood School

Year	P	K	Year 1	Year 2	Total
2012	62	23	23	13	121
2013	58	23	20	22	123
2014	64	27	13	14	118
2015	68	23	23	12	126
2016	72	20	23	16	131

2016 Long Day Care enrolments: 84

Southern Cross Early Childhood School

Year	P	K	Year 1	Year 2	Total
2012	77	52	33	16	178
2013	83	41	47	25	196
2014	76	57	32	36	201
2015	91	50	47	26	214
2016	87	52	36	35	210

2016 Long Day Care enrolments: 141

This Evaluation also considers O'Connor Cooperative School, which evolved from a parent cooperative in the mid-1970s to become part of ACT public education in 1978. It was referenced in the ECS Framework (ACT DET, 2008, p.2) as a successful model of preschool to year two education.

O'Connor Cooperative School

Year	P	K	Year 1	Year 2	Total
2012	25	20	18	18	81
2013	21	20	18	18	77
2014	21	20	19	16	76
2015	18	19	18	15	70
2016	21	20	17	19	77

Infrastructure

In 2008, as part of the ACT Government's vision *Towards 2020: Renewing our schools*, the indoor and outdoor environments at four existing ACT public schools were redeveloped to create the Early Childhood Schools of Southern Cross, Lyons, Isabella Plains, and Narrabundah. The refurbishment was made at an approximate cost of \$4 million, and was integral to the ACT Government's school modernisation program. Franklin Early Childhood School was purpose-built in 2013.

The redevelopment was in line with the core elements of the ECS Framework, recognising the sites as community hubs providing wrap-around services for children and families. Canada's Toronto First Duty model (Corter, 2012) provided direction on the redevelopment of the infrastructure for the Early Childhood Schools in relation to meeting the needs of refugee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, low socio-economic and socially isolated families.

Through observation of school sites and interviews with Directorate officials, this Evaluation found that the building design of the Early Childhood Schools aligns with the vision of the ECS Framework. The development of open plan spaces at each site supports and facilitates

early childhood pedagogy and practice such as play-based curriculum, inquiry learning and collaborative teaching. The learning environments are respectful of young children. For example at Franklin Early Childhood School there are two rows of windows, one at child height and one at adult height. Spaces are also provided in Early Childhood Schools for families to meet and interact while on the campus site.

Performance

Integrated service delivery

The Council of Australian Governments' (2009) *Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* describes the elements of an effective early childhood development system. One of these elements, 'responsive early childhood development services', refers to services for children and their families that are linked to provide a holistic response to each child and family situation. Press, Sumsion and Wong (2010) define integrated services:

Integrated services provide access to multiple services to children and families in a cohesive and holistic way. They recognise the impact of family and community contexts on children's development and learning and focus on improving outcomes for children, families and communities. Through respectful, collaborative relationships, they actively seek to maximise the impact of different disciplinary expertise in a shared intent to respond to family and community contexts (p.53).

While co-location of services is beneficial, it is not essential; integration of services can also be achieved through establishing a 'virtual' services hub where access to services is seamless and coordinated.

Nationally and internationally, schools are recognised as effective sites for integrated service delivery. According to the ECS Framework, building these integrated systems around a school 'helps meet the needs of all children and all families in a supportive, non-judgemental and community-driven way' (ACT DET, 2008, p.6). The intention was for Early Childhood Schools to become regional hubs that facilitate access to a comprehensive array of programs that support children's early learning and build family and community capacity.

Research into effective early childhood integrated service delivery programs internationally informed the development of the ECS Framework. United Kingdom's Sure Start Program (2007) established community hubs that combine early childhood educational programs with outreach and home visiting services, parenting support, healthcare services, and support for children with additional needs. Canada's Toronto First Duty (Cortier, 2012) co-located education and care services and family support services within a school site, with

service delivery managed through a partnership between government, not-for-profit organisations and community groups. A number of significant studies in Australia, including Wong and Press (2012) and Wong, Press, Sumsion and Hard (2012) have informed the development of innovative programs involving health, family support and education in collaborative partnerships for service delivery and enhanced outcomes for children. While integrated services provide universal benefits, they have the potential to be particularly advantageous in providing early intervention for vulnerable children and families to combat early life disadvantage. Doveton College (<http://dovetoncollege.vic.edu.au/>) is an outstanding example of the success of this approach in delivering enhanced outcomes for children in vulnerable communities.

Integrated service delivery, as considered by this Evaluation, includes examination of the links between Early Childhood Schools and the range of programs and services provided on and off-site, including through the ACT Government's Child and Family Centres.

The ECS Framework recognises that children's learning, health and wellbeing are interconnected, and that young children's experiences are inseparable from those of their families. Early Childhood Schools therefore provide access to services that support children's health and wellbeing, as well as an educational program from birth to year two. Each Early Childhood School is unique, offering programs that meet the needs of each community. Some programs offered by Early Childhood Schools on-site include:

- Franklin: Mandarin for Fun, Russian Language Playgroup, Conversation for Everyday Life, Support Asian Women Group;
- Isabella Plains: Circle of Security, Family Playgroup, Move and Groove, Backyard Rangers;
- Lyons: Paint and Play, Dads Build and Play Playgroup;
- Narrabundah: Child Health Clinic, Maternal and Child Health Service, Stories and More, Move and Groove, Community Breakfast;
- Southern Cross: Stay and Play, Move and Groove, Read With Me, Have A Go Friday, Community Breakfast, Circle of Security.

These programs are initiated by the school executive for the wellbeing of children and their families. The school's community coordinator connects with a range of child and family health and wellbeing service providers. These programs also contribute to the core element of family support and participation, which is discussed later in this Evaluation.

Off-site health services and other family wellbeing services, such as parenting courses and early intervention programs, are provided through the nearby Child and Family Centres. Child and Family Centres were established to deliver government and community services in a 'one-stop shop' model. This model was strongly influenced by the experience of government and non-government services working together following the 2003 Canberra

bushfires. The Gungahlin Child and Family Centre opened in 2005, followed by Tuggeranong in 2007 and West Belconnen in 2011. The partnership between Early Childhood Schools and Child and Family Centres aligns with the intent of the ECS Framework which notes that ‘in some cases all services might be provided on the site of the early childhood school; in other cases services might more appropriately be provided through a collaborative approach with existing providers and/or through outreach services’ (ACT DET, 2008, p.11). This Evaluation found that partnerships between Early Childhood Schools and Child and Family Centres provide opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged families to access wrap-around services, although these opportunities could be improved through greater inter-agency collaboration. The family support services provided are discussed later in this Evaluation.

All Early Childhood Schools (except O’Connor Cooperative School) include a co-located long day care service for children from birth to preschool age, operated by an external provider. The co-location of long day care services has contributed to strong themes of continuity for children, families and teachers. Corter et al (in Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010) suggest that facilitating greater continuity can mean fewer transitions for each child, and consistent expectations and support. This model has assisted Early Childhood Schools in establishing long-term relationships with children and their families, and providing services all year round.

Holistic services – Narrabundah Early Childhood School

The holistic nature of learning and development is recognised at Narrabundah Early Childhood School, where long day care (Communities@Work), a family support worker (Woden Community Services) and a Maternal and Child Health (MACH) nurse (ACT Health) are co-located on the school site. These agencies collaborate to meet the needs of families in a one-stop-shop model. For example, the community coordinator, MACH nurse and long day care manager liaise to support mothers with post-natal depression to access health, childcare and parenting support services. In another example, early childhood teachers attend the new parents’ group to promote early literacy development.

In some Early Childhood School settings, the principal and long day care service manager meet weekly to discuss support for families with children who attend both education and care services and school.

While this collaboration is commendable, this Evaluation found that it is not evident in all Early Childhood Schools and does not routinely extend to collaborative planning around curriculum and pedagogy or participation in governance, which will be discussed later in this Evaluation. School staff and education and care service staff often work in isolation. According to Shaddock, Packer and Roy (2015), collaborative planning and innovative service delivery are central to the wrap-around service model.

The External Validation Reports for four Early Childhood Schools (noting Franklin Early Childhood Schools is due for External Validation in 2016) reveal the different ways that the schools have endeavoured to manage the complexity of working together, in the context of ensuring quality and effective continuity for children and families. For example, the External Validation Report for Narrabundah (2013) recognised the challenge of the unique arrangement of co-located services and specifically mentioned the establishing of professional learning communities across each of the services. It acknowledged the work of the school leadership team in addressing the challenges, and cites evidence of the development of a shared philosophy, and strong cross-service relationships.

Each of the public preschool components of the Early Childhood Schools achieved a rating of Exceeding National Quality Standard for Quality Area 6, which includes Standard 6.3: *The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing*. However, the ratings for the long day care components were more variable, with only two achieving Exceeding National Quality Standard in Quality Area 6, and one rated as Working Towards National Quality Standard in Quality Area 6. Given that the ECS Framework identifies collaboration as a critical success factor for Early Childhood Schools, these results indicate that improvements to implementation are warranted to better align with the intent of the ECS Framework.

Interviews conducted during this Evaluation confirm strong relationships between Early Childhood School principals and community coordinators, with a shared understanding of the responsibilities of each role. However, this Evaluation found that Early Childhood Schools appear to rely heavily on the community coordinator for the successful functioning of the Early Childhood Schools as hubs for accessing other services. There is risk in the sustainability of relying on one person to facilitate the coordination of wrap-around services. Integration should be a shared philosophy underpinning all aspects of service delivery, where all staff are responsible for working in ways that support collaboration, holistic approaches and seamless transitions between services. The Centre for Community Child Health (2009) suggests that integrated early childhood services require joint professional development that supports staff to work effectively in integrated settings and to develop shared understandings and practices.

Focus group discussions revealed that the community hub model of Early Childhood Schools is highly valued by parents and carers. The majority of parents viewed Early Childhood Schools as strongly inclusive and connected environments. Parents nominated the co-location of preschool, long day care and outside school hours care on the school site as positively contributing to their child's school transition, as the children had an opportunity to become familiar with the school space, teachers and students before commencing formal schooling. Parents particularly noted the benefit of interactions between children of all ages in the school community.

The integrated governance of the Toronto model, which is characterised by facilitated joint program planning, administration, financial management and program evaluation, is a point of difference with the ACT Early Childhood Schools’ model. Stakeholder consultation and research conducted during this Evaluation shows that in the ACT model there are three or more agencies with distinct governance structures, presenting challenges for whole of service planning and delivery. Some External Validation Reports also identified difficulties in communication between these agencies. Governance is a pivotal element of effective integrated services, and this is examined more closely later in this Evaluation.

The challenge for leadership is to maximise the strengths of each group and build a cohesive staff team (Wenger, 2000). This Evaluation highlights effective collaboration between all stakeholders as a key aspect of the success of integrated service delivery.

The ACT Government’s *Human Services Blueprint* (ACT Government, 2014) is a strengths-based framework for collaboration between government agencies and community organisations in the human services sector. Launched in 2014, the Blueprint enables community, health, education and justice systems to work in alliance to join up support to people and families. A central tenet is that people ‘tell their story once’.

Key features of the Blueprint include shared policies and ways of working; pooled funding arrangements to support multi-agency collaboration; and the establishment of joint governance structures.

In addition to creating a better service experience through services that are person-centred and better matched to people’s needs, the Blueprint improves economic and social participation for disadvantaged Canberrans through building skills and capacity and connecting government and community services where people require a joined-up response.

This Evaluation suggests that consideration should be given to the potential to more fully utilise the Blueprint to guide the ways in which Early Childhood Schools and related agencies work together to improve outcomes for families.

Future Focus Area 1:

Explore the potential to use the *Human Services Blueprint* as a framework for strengthening collaboration between Early Childhood Schools and related agencies to improve outcomes for families.

Access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students

In considering the role of Early Childhood Schools to provide access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students, this Evaluation notes that these terms most commonly refer to socio-economic status. Vulnerability can also encompass:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
- children who are culturally and linguistically diverse, including recently arrived refugees;
- children who suffer trauma; and
- children in contact with care and protection and out of home care systems.

Early Childhood Schools, including O'Connor Cooperative School, do not have a designated Priority Enrolment Area (PEA). The Directorate's website indicates that principals make offers of enrolment according to the following criteria:

1. Wellbeing considerations (evidence from a registered psychologist or medical specialist required).
2. Child lives in the ACT and has a sibling attending the school (P-2).
3. Child lives in the ACT and attends the long day care program at the school.
4. Child lives in the suburb where the school is located.
5. Child lives elsewhere in the ACT.
6. Child lives outside the ACT.

Early Childhood School websites do not reference any additional enrolment requirements or criteria other than completing an online enrolment form. The current enrolment policy therefore does not include any criteria to specifically address the prioritisation of enrolment of vulnerable and disadvantaged children, nor the processes for inter-agency referrals to Early Childhood Schools.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time schooling (kindergarten in the ACT). The AEDC highlights what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to support children and their families by providing evidence to support health, education and community policy and planning. The AEDC collects data related to five key developmental domains which have been shown to predict later health, wellbeing and academic success. The AEDC can be used as one measure of vulnerability.

Table 2: Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains

Suburb where child resides	2009	2012	2015
National average	11.8%	10.8%	11.1%
ACT average	10.9%	9.8%	10.3%
Franklin	22.2%	15.8%	7.0%
Scullin (Southern Cross)	13.5%	7.9%	2.6%
O'Connor	12.1%	10.4%	5.6%
Lyons	9.4%	22.2%	22.5%
Narrabundah	8.8%	11.6%	10.1%
Isabella Plains	12.3%	9.1%	13.1%

AECD Data 2015

The most recent AEDC data (Department of Education and Training, 2015) shows that the suburbs of Lyons and Isabella Plains have above the national average levels of children identified as vulnerable on two or more domains. The other Early Childhood Schools are located in suburbs with lower levels of vulnerability than both the national and ACT average. This data affirms the need for clarification of the enrolment policy to identify and prioritise vulnerable children. It should be noted that not designating a PEA for Early Childhood Schools is also supported by this data.

Another measure of vulnerability, the Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA), provides an indication of the socio-economic backgrounds of students attending a particular school. It is calculated taking into account parent education and occupation, the school's geographical location, and the proportion of Indigenous students attending the school. ICSEA is set at an average of 1000. A small number of schools in the ACT have an ICSEA below 1000, with the highest proportion of these schools located in the Tuggeranong region. Narrabundah Early Childhood School is the only ACT Early Childhood School with an ICSEA below 1000, noting this rating was calculated in 2012.

Other indicators of vulnerability may include Indigeneity or children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The My School website provides data on the percentage of the school's population that identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or has a language background other than English (LBOTE). Table 3 shows the ICSEA, proportion of Indigenous students and proportion of students from a language background other than English for Early Childhood Schools. The two closest primary schools from each region are included as a comparison.

Table 3: My School data 2015

Region	School	ICSEA *	Indigenous	LBOTE
Gungahlin	Franklin ECS	1129	0%	64%
	<i>Neville Bonner School</i>	1072	5%	54%
	<i>Palmerston Primary School</i>	1085	2%	50%
Belconnen	Southern Cross ECS	1118	4%	21%
	<i>Florey Primary</i>	1054	3%	39%
	<i>Latham Primary School</i>	1035	2%	13%
North Canberra	O'Connor Cooperative	1168	2%	15%
	<i>Turner School</i>	1175	2%	31%
	<i>Lyneham Primary School</i>	1144	2%	33%
Woden	Lyons ECS	1100	0%	28%
	<i>Hughes Primary</i>	1140	2%	46%
	<i>Curtin Primary School</i>	1152	2%	20%
South Canberra	Narrabundah ECS	1018	22%	33%
	<i>Red Hill Primary School</i>	1150	2%	34%
	<i>Forrest Primary School</i>	1130	6%	36%
Tuggeranong	Isabella Plains ECS	1042	6%	13%
	<i>Bonython Primary School</i>	1023	8%	19%
	<i>Monash Primary School</i>	1033	4%	21%

*For Early Childhood Schools, the most recent available ICSEA (unpublished) is from 2014.

When the Early Childhood Schools were established, they were located in areas characterised by greater levels of disadvantage (ACT Auditor-General's Office, 2012). The data in Tables 2 and 3 indicates that, while Early Childhood Schools are catering for vulnerable families, they are not necessarily catering for higher levels of vulnerability than their neighbouring public schools (using ICSEA, Indigeneity and LBOTE as measures of vulnerability).

Each Early Childhood School differs somewhat in its demographic profile – some have higher proportions of students from a LBOTE, while others have a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, with the exception of Narrabundah Early Childhood School, the Early Childhood Schools have a higher ICSEA (i.e. higher socio-economic status) than their neighbouring public schools.

A further measure of vulnerability is parents' education level, as this can provide an indication of the family's socio-economic circumstances. Table 4 below shows the highest

education level of parents of children enrolled in ACT Early Childhood Schools, in comparison to enrolments across all schools. On analysis, there appears to be no significant difference in parental educational achievement, with the exception of 'not stated' which is higher at the Early Childhood Schools. This data may suggest that the demographic of enrolments at the schools are not significantly different from the demographic of enrolments at non-Early Childhood Schools in the ACT.

Table 4: Education level of parents

Highest education level of parent	% enrolments at ECS	Percentage enrolments at all schools
Year 11 or less	3.2	3.7
Year 12	7.1	7.3
Certificate I - IV	11.8	15.5
Diploma	8.2	11.9
Degree or higher	53.6	52.6
Not Stated	16.1	9.1

Other measures of vulnerability and early life disadvantage, such as children suffering trauma or involved in the care and protection system, are not captured by the available data.

The Auditor-General's Report (2012) highlighted that long day care fees, payable to the external provider, present a potential barrier to socially or economically disadvantaged children and their families. The report also identified that 'there is a risk that the schools become 'schools of choice' for ACT families, who recognise the benefits of the model and the suite of services that are delivered' (ACT Auditor-General's Office, 2012, p.7).

Daily fees charged at co-located long day care services appear to be generally comparable with fees charged at similar services in the ACT. While the Evaluation notes that eligible families are able to access Australian Government child care rebates in assisting with payment for the long day care service, it is unclear whether cost remains a barrier to vulnerable and disadvantaged families and whether these families are prioritised in the enrolment process.

All long day care services approved for the purposes of Child Care Benefit are required to follow the Australian Government *Priority of Access Guidelines* when allocating places. These Guidelines prioritise vulnerable and disadvantaged families including:

- Children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Children in families which include a disabled person
- Children in families which include an individual whose adjusted taxable income does not exceed the lower income threshold specified by the Australian Government, or who is on income support

- Children in families from a non-English speaking background
- Children in socially isolated families
- Children of single parents.

However, these families may experience other barriers to enrolment and also may be unaware of what services and financial subsidies are available. This Evaluation did not identify the proportion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children enrolled in long day care services located at Early Childhood Schools.

Early Childhood Schools, partly due to the attraction of a wrap-around service, do have a high demand for long day care and preschool places. However, enrolment patterns show a significant decrease in demand for kindergarten to year two places (except O'Connor Cooperative School), which suggests that children attending preschool at an Early Childhood School are subsequently enrolled in a PEA public school or non-government school for kindergarten onwards. As children enrolled in co-located long day care services are prioritised for enrolment into an Early Childhood School, the allocation of places at the long day care services may impact on opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged families to access an Early Childhood School setting (preschool – year two). There is potential to review the Directorate's service agreements with co-located long day care services to strengthen access for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

When data is examined on all students that have completed year two at an ACT Early Childhood School between 2011 and 2015, it appears that the proportion of disadvantaged or vulnerable children catered for by the schools does not significantly differ from that in the broader ACT community.

This highlights the importance of ensuring vulnerable and disadvantaged families are identified early and that access to Early Childhood Schools is promoted and supported. It should be acknowledged that some vulnerable and disadvantaged families may prefer to attend their local PEA school - for example they may have transport constraints, or may be reluctant to seek enrolment on the bases of being identified as vulnerable and disadvantaged.

However, it is important that families who are identified as having some measure of vulnerability are targeted for potential enrolment, and supported to access Early Childhood Schools if they choose.

Katz, Spooner and Valentine (2006) also note that 'the balance between targeting appropriately (so that services are not utilised only by those families who don't have multiple and complex problems) and avoiding labels (so that those families who do have multiple and complex problems aren't further stigmatised) seems to be crucial to effective practice' (p.5).

This is reinforced by research which shows that attending school with a mix of students from diverse social and economic backgrounds is beneficial to students identified as low socio-economic status (Livingston, Kearns & Bailey, 2013). This is because socio-economic integration effectively ‘taps into the academic benefits of having high achieving peers, an engaged community of parents and high quality teachers’ (Potter, 2013, p.39). The ECS Framework does support enrolling a mix of students from diverse backgrounds into Early Childhood Schools, stating that ‘they will be open to families from across the ACT and provide a choice in addition to the current... school models’ (ACT DET, 2008, p.2). The challenge is to achieve the right balance of promoting access for vulnerable and disadvantaged families while also maintaining enrolments for non-disadvantaged families to ensure the schools are not stigmatised and children obtain the benefits of integrating with a mix of students from diverse backgrounds. Further research could be undertaken to identify the ratio of vulnerable versus non-vulnerable families at which benefits are achieved for all students in the school community.

Some inter-agency collaboration to promote enrolment in Early Childhood Schools is apparent across Early Childhood School settings. In particular, children from vulnerable or disadvantaged families may come into contact with other ACT Government agencies, including the Community Services Directorate and Health Directorate (ACT Health). This Evaluation found that some referrals to Early Childhood Schools from other agencies have taken place, however the process is inconsistent and largely based on relationships, rather than formal protocols. The opportunity to use the *Human Services Blueprint* as a framework to strengthen inter-agency collaboration, including inter-agency referrals, has been discussed earlier in this Evaluation.

This Evaluation notes that the Directorate has committed to developing formal arrangements with the ACT Community Services Directorate and ACT Health for the identification and referral of children from socially and/or economically disadvantaged families. In 2014, the Canberra Hospital’s Child Development Forum provided an opportunity to identify issues and solutions regarding the identification, referral options and processes for children who are from socially and/or economically disadvantaged families in the ACT. As such, progress towards formal referral processes has begun, however they are yet to be finalised, documented or agreed across government agencies. This Evaluation supports the finalisation of the formal arrangements between the Directorate, ACT Community Services Directorate and ACT Health for the identification and referral of children from vulnerable and disadvantaged families to Early Childhood Schools.

Future Focus Area 2:

Review the enrolment policy as it applies to Early Childhood Schools to ensure access to enrolment for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged families. In particular, the process for inter-agency referrals should be included as a component of the enrolment policy.

High quality programs and practice

High quality teaching and learning is core business for all schools. High quality practice in early childhood pedagogy draws on contemporary research across the neurobiological, behavioural and social sciences, and emphasises play-based approaches and responsive and reciprocal relationships.

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Early Years Learning Framework) (DEEWR, 2009), is the core framework for pedagogy in the long day care and public preschool components of the Early Childhood Schools. The kindergarten to year two curriculum is drawn from the Australian Curriculum.

The ECS Framework identifies a number of features of high quality programs and practice, as highlighted by contemporary research in early childhood education. The Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) describes the principles and practices fundamental to quality early childhood pedagogy and curriculum decision-making. These elements are evident in Early Childhood Schools' programs and practices in the following ways:

- School design and resources that support open-ended play, developing children's curiosity and mastery of new skills.
- Inquiry-based learning that promotes high expectations of children as learners, allowing them to investigate, collaborate, solve problems and discover.
- Innovative programs that focus on social, emotional and mental wellbeing and promote children's resilience and sense of identity.
- Strong, mutually respectful partnerships with families and community that support a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- Outdoor learning environments that support physical, imaginative and open-ended play, and encourage care of the natural environment.

Loose Parts Play Program – Lyons Early Childhood School

High quality programs and practice at Lyons Early Childhood School is demonstrated by the innovative Loose Parts Play Program. The program, which encourages children to construct and create with recycled materials in the outdoor learning environment, celebrates children as capable and active learners who demonstrate their learning in many ways.

With strong links to the Early Years Learning Framework, the program is designed to develop dispositions for learning including collaboration, creativity, communication, commitment, curiosity, citizenship, confidence, critical thinking and connectivity. Teachers play an active role in scaffolding children's learning and as co-researchers developing knowledge with children. Children's participation encourages learning about sustainability as well as opportunities to develop risk assessment and management strategies.

Lyons Early Childhood School is sharing the success of their Loose Parts Play Program with parents and the community through presentations and developing online learning modules for teachers in ACT schools.

Bush School – Narrabundah Early Childhood School

Narrabundah Early Childhood School is dedicated to improving outcomes for children through providing programs that instil curiosity and wonder, excitement about learning and pride in achievements. 'Bush School' embraces the great outdoors as a school without walls providing rich opportunities for children to connect with nature and learn about their world through real life experience. Once a week during terms three and four children spend a whole day at Red Hill Nature Reserve, the National Arboretum or Botanical Gardens walking in the bush, climbing trees, turning rocks, balancing on logs and investigating nature. In learning to respect boundaries and to recognise and manage risk, children develop resilience, responsibility and independence. As a result of Bush School, teachers have identified an increase in student learning outcomes linked to literacy, numeracy, science, art and technology, as well as social and emotional wellbeing.

Bounce Back – Isabella Plains Early Childhood School

Social and emotional learning is essential to every child's ability to manage feelings and to interact successfully with others. Isabella Plains Early Childhood School's Bounce Back wellbeing and resilience program uses children's literature as a meaningful way to explicitly teach social and emotional skills. Weekly whole class Big Book sessions provide children with opportunities to develop self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. Children engage in high level thinking as they explore issues of reason, ethics, safety, social norms, respect for self and others, consequences, decision-making and contributing to the wellbeing of one's self, school and community.

Investigations – O’Connor Cooperative School

Each day begins with an hour of ‘investigations’ for children at O’Connor Cooperative School. The teacher-framed, child-led learning draws on the Kathy Walker Approach and the principles of Reggio Emilia. A focus group system, comprising one child as reporter and two focus children, allows educators to monitor and assess children’s learning, build on children’s interests and strengths, as well as support children who may need additional guidance. The focus group reports on their learning to the whole class at the end of the ‘investigations’ hour, building confidence and oral language skills, and providing an opportunity for students and teachers to reflect on, and share, their learning.

Teachers believe that Early Childhood Schools are particularly effective in supporting the development of dispositions for learning in children, including resilience and confidence. This view was supported in focus groups, where parents spoke positively of leadership opportunities for children. Consultations also confirmed that parents value play and inquiry-based learning in the Early Childhood School setting.

The Early Years Learning Framework also identifies continuity of learning and transitions as an important element of quality practice in early childhood settings. In Early Childhood Schools, children and families may experience a number of transitions including:

- home to the Early Childhood School setting;
- long day care to preschool/kindergarten;
- preschool to kindergarten; and
- Early Childhood School to another school setting from year 3.

Children and families may also experience daily transitions such as between the formal school environment and outside school care or community programs.

The Early Years Learning Framework describes the importance of partnerships and communication in effective transitions:

Children, families and early childhood educators all contribute to successful transitions between settings. In partnership with families, early childhood educators ensure that children have an active role in preparing for transitions... As children make transitions to new settings (including school) educators from early childhood settings and schools commit to sharing information about each child’s knowledge and skills... Educators work collaboratively with each child’s new educator and other professionals to ensure a successful transition.

(DEEWR, 2009, p.16)

Similarly, the ECS Framework identifies transitions as a critical success factor for Early Childhood Schools to develop as effective learning and development centres. It highlights

that, 'parents also need to be assured that there are identified pathways beyond the early years, for the next phase of their children's learning and development' (ACT DET, 2008, p.14).

This Evaluation found that there is no consistent approach to transitions at and from Early Childhood Schools, however Early Childhood Schools do have their own processes for transitioning children to the next stage of schooling.

Transitions – Narrabundah Early Childhood School

Narrabundah ECS staff created a database of all year two students, and identified which school each child would move to the following year. For students living in a shared zone, the principals of each school were asked to identify their capacity to receive year 3 enrolments. Information sessions were then arranged, and transition procedures (including timelines) were documented to support families and staff. Feedback from families has been very positive. Transitions within the school are also planned to ensure they are as seamless as possible. Buddy programs enable children of different ages to develop relationships and become familiar with different learning spaces and educators within the school.

Several other states and territories have developed resources to support successful transitions, in particular transitions from long day care/preschool to formal schooling. This includes a Transition Statement, which provides a framework for parents, teachers and children to share information about a child's learning, strengths and interests. This Evaluation suggests that current transition practices at Early Childhood Schools could be maintained and strengthened through the development of a consistent approach and resources.

Future Focus Area 3:

Develop a consistent approach to transitions, and associated resources, that promote effective communication and support children and families to feel secure and connected.

Overall, evidence from assessments under the National Quality Framework suggests that quality programs and practice are implemented in the preschool component of Early Childhood Schools. Five of the six public preschools examined in this Evaluation achieved a rating of Exceeding National Quality Standard in Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice. However, quality programs are not consistently evident across all age cohorts, with only two of the five co-located long day care services meeting the National Quality Standard in Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice. In some settings, there is a disconnect between the quality and continuity of programming in the long day care service and in the P-2 area of the schools, with little evidence of planning across ages and stages to achieve a continuum of learning.

A continued focus on whole of school teaching and learning initiatives at the Early Childhood Schools, including the long day care component, will strengthen the quality and consistency of programs and practice for all children from birth to year 2.

Future Focus Area 4:

Strengthen leadership and collaboration between long day care, preschool and primary school to deliver continuity of high quality curriculum and pedagogy from birth to year 2 in Early Childhood Schools.

Achievement of student outcomes

Student outcomes, both academic and social, have been examined in this Evaluation. The evidence gathered through NAPLAN data, PIPS data, External Validation Reports, and focus group discussions as part of this Evaluation show that student achievement in Early Childhood Schools is generally comparable with non-Early Childhood Schools. It should be noted that the small student populations of Early Childhood Schools presents challenges to deriving statistically valid data and accounts for minor discrepancies in the data.

Attention should be given to the issue of whether vulnerable and disadvantaged children benefit from the Early Childhood Schools environment.

Table 5 below shows the reading performance of all children who have completed year two in an Early Childhood School since their inception, and have then undertaken NAPLAN testing as a year three student. The table uses highest education level of parents as a proxy for disadvantage.

Table 5: NAPLAN Reading results compared with highest education level of parent

Highest education level of parent	NAPLAN ECS Reading – Mean Score	NAPLAN NON-ECS Reading – Mean Score
Year 11 or less	362.5	391.5
Year 12	414.8	414.7
Certificate I - IV	408.8	407.2
Diploma	404.6	421.3
Degree or higher	469.2	467.7
Not Stated	474.2	439.9

Noting the small sample size, the data indicates that children of parents with a year 11 qualification or less are performing at a lower level in NAPLAN reading compared to the equivalent cohort in non-Early Childhood Schools. A similar, but smaller gap exists for children of parents with a diploma level qualification.

Additionally, Table 6 below shows a gap also exists in mean numeracy scores.

Table 6: NAPLAN numeracy results compared with highest education level of parent

Highest education level of parent	NAPLAN ECS Numeracy – Mean Score	NAPLAN NON-ECS Numeracy – Mean Score
Year 11 or less	334.9	370.3
Year 12	400.1	391.2
Certificate I - IV	375.9	383.3
Diploma	401.5	394.9
Degree or higher	439.1	432.9
Not Stated	407.5	414.2

NAPLAN data supplemented by PIPS data as shown in Table 7 below indicates marginally less success in scaled scores than control and remainder schools.

Table 7: PIPS data for Early Childhood Schools compared with Control schools

Group	Year	No Students	Start Raw score	End Raw score	Raw score gain	Start scaled score	End Scaled score	Scaled score change
Early Childhood Schools	2010-14	785	38.9	52.9	14.0	50.1	49.0	-1.1
Control Schools	2010-14	1115	39.0	53.8	14.8	50.0	49.7	-0.4
Remainder public schools	2010-14	13060	39.1	54.6	15.5	50.2	50.7	0.5

Data drawn from the External Validation Reports (2013), provides evidence to support the value-added growth for children (end raw score), achieving within school targets as well as in PIPS end of year assessments in literacy. For example, Southern Cross Early Childhood School has identified marked gains in PIPS results (2010-2012). This is attributed to a change in pedagogy, which promotes explicit teaching in literacy.

In analysing and drawing conclusions from the quantitative data, additional factors should be taken into account, including the potential effect of the small cohort size on deriving statistically valid data. Additionally, the decrease in some class sizes in Early Childhood Schools due to retention issues, and the timing of NAPLAN a few months after children have transitioned into a non-Early Childhood School, should also be noted.

Whilst the quantitative data suggests Early Childhood Schools may not yet be realising their full potential to develop a learning environment that supports higher academic gains in comparison to non-Early Childhood Schools for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, the influencing factors found the results to be inconclusive. Further investigation could be undertaken to derive statistically valid data to inform evaluation and ongoing planning.

Qualitative data can also offer insights into the performance of students attending Early Childhood Schools. For example, this Evaluation observed examples of children demonstrating qualities of independence, resilience and leadership. Parents, teachers and principals in all Early Childhood Schools confirmed demonstrations of leadership by the children at the end of their education in year 2, with staff speaking at length about children's resilience and independent learning.

Research highlights the importance of data in supporting improved outcomes. Goss et al note that 'teachers should observe and assess how students respond to teaching, track their progress and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly' (Goss, Hunter, Romanes & Parsonage, 2015, p.11). This Evaluation found data gathering and analysis to be comprehensive in some Early Childhood Schools, and emergent in others. However, a review of School Strategic Plans shows it to be a key focus area for Early Childhood Schools. For example, in 2015 Narrabundah Early Childhood School commenced action on a key improvement strategy to 'develop a culture of analysis and discussion of data', including consideration of overall school performance and the performance of students from identified priority groups; improvement/regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, using data from standardised tests and measures of growth across school years.

The importance of ongoing data analysis and evaluation is essential to ensuring that Early Childhood Schools meet their intended objectives, particularly to ensure improved outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged students. As such it is recommended that this remain a key priority within all Early Childhood Schools.

Family support and participation

The ECS Framework describes the importance of supporting the whole family where 'children are not thriving' (ACT DET, 2008, p.11), which encompasses vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Examples of support services referenced in the ECS Framework include parent support and education, targeted services for children and families with specific needs, and health care. The Evaluation found that across the five Early Childhood Schools families have access to a comprehensive array of programs that support children's early learning and development and build family and community capacity.

As noted earlier in this Evaluation, family support and participation is primarily facilitated by a person in a designated role known as the Community Coordinator. Some of the activities of the Community Coordinator include:

- Initiate and deliver programs and community events for children and families
- Connect families with specialist support services

- Deliver parent information sessions on subjects such as parenting, attachment, and anxiety
- Be available to discuss school concerns, family matters and parenting issues
- Provide individual support to families including drop-in; assistance with filling in forms.

Interviews with community coordinators, conducted for this Evaluation, highlight the importance of effective partnerships in facilitating family support and participation. These include partnerships with parents, government and non-government agencies, health and community services. The focus on family support and participation in Early Childhood Schools requires effective communication with families, as well as the provision of targeted programs that meet community needs. This Evaluation found many examples of communication with families of Early Childhood Schools, including:

- initial interviews;
- preschool information booklets (includes contact information, what to bring, session days and times of the preschool program, out of hours care information);
- newsletters (includes updates on school events, meetings, fundraising, learning programs);
- learning summaries; and
- blogs (includes information about children’s learning and school events).

The ECS Framework highlights that ‘it will be important for early learning and development centres to reach out to those families who are not using services, but who need them. If all children and families are to be assisted, there will be a need for active outreach’ (ACT DET, 2008, p.11). This Evaluation found that community coordinators have assisted parents to seek referrals to ACT Health, community dietician, parenting programs, Legal Aid, Community Pantries, Return to Work Grants, and Conflict Resolution Service. While all available programs and services are promoted through the above communication channels, it appears that outreach at Early Childhood Schools is primarily the responsibility of the school’s community coordinator. There is risk that the current use of the role as the primary point of contact for families and referrals may result in less direct action from other staff. To mitigate these risks, Early Childhood Schools could prioritise the functions of the community coordinator within the school environment to ensure service integration and referrals are viewed as a shared responsibility.

The ECS Framework also articulates a vision to support ‘active participation of families... giving them a strong voice in decision-making and empowering them to contribute to their children’s learning and development’ (ACT DET, p.11). Community engagement is also an important aspect to facilitating family support at each Early Childhood School. Katz, Spooner and Valentine (2006) suggest that trusting relationships and strengths-based approaches

support effective engagement with families with multiple problems. Family participation can also reduce social isolation and facilitate greater parental engagement in children’s learning. This Evaluation found many opportunities for family participation, including for example:

- Grandparent mornings – a whole school gathering for grandparents and special friends to view learning and the learning spaces;
- End of year showcase;
- Paint and Play playgroup;
- Move and Groove (music based literacy program);
- Kitchen Garden;
- Reading with children;
- Attending excursions;
- Sharing culture such as Indigenous Art Workshop; and
- Sharing skills such as woodwork.

Early Childhood Schools offer programs at varying times on different days, to promote participation of all families including those with working parents and grandparents.

Get Engaged Mutual Support (GEMS) – Isabella Plains Early Childhood School

Get Engaged Mutual Support (GEMS) is the parents’ association at Isabella Plains Early Childhood School. GEMS welcomes parents and carers of all children attending the school including the long day care service. It supports children and families by hosting events, contributing a voice to key issues in the school, and school improvement activities. Meetings are held 1-2 times each term and are also attended by the principal, deputy principal, long day care manager and the community coordinator. This provides a genuine forum for collaboration between school leadership and the parent community on matters such as school priorities.

Music Engagement Program – O’Connor Co-operative School

Every Friday afternoon children, staff, and parents meet in the school’s multipurpose room for community singing. This is just one feature of the highly valued Music Engagement Program (MEP) delivered at O’Connor Cooperative School.

O’Connor Cooperative School’s work with Associate Professor Dr Susan West of the Australian National University to implement MEP illustrates the school’s rich history of drawing on the expertise of families and the local community to enhance the development and delivery of learning programs.

Based on a social philosophy of shared, active music making known as the Music Outreach Principle, MEP promotes skill development and an ongoing musical pathway

through joyful engagement. Students participate in a range of school, community and system based events including outreach singing at Black Mountain School and Morshead Home for Veterans and Aged Persons, and 'MEP Big Gig' and 'Music: Count Us In'.

External Validation Reports cite examples of family support and participation at Early Childhood Schools. For example, External Validation Reports noted high attendance at school gatherings (Southern Cross, 2013), a school wide communication strategy (Lyons 2013), and a strong sense of belonging to the school community (Narrabundah, 2013).

Support for Defence families – Franklin Early Childhood School

Situated in the growth area of Gungahlin, Franklin Early Childhood School enrolls many children whose parents are in the Australian Defence Force. When family members are posted overseas it can result in a time of stress for the whole family. The school makes a particular effort to welcome live-in nannies and extended family into the school community, and to connect these families with each other through programs such as playgroups. The Seasons for Growth program also assists children to understand and cope with the change that is a regular feature of their lives as they move between countries, states and schools.

Read to Me Cafe – Southern Cross Early Childhood School

Read to Me Cafe is open from 8 a.m. every morning during terms two and three in the Southern Cross Early Childhood School library. The cafe is available to all families across the school. Research shows that children and families reading together has many benefits including increased literacy and strengthening of the parent–child bond. As families read with their children, the school's community coordinator cooks and serves pikelets.

Family-led learning – Narrabundah Early Childhood School

In 2014, Narrabundah Early Childhood School set out to strengthen one of its community programs by embedding research about early literacy development. The targeted program provided vulnerable families with evidence-based strategies and resources to support their child's early literacy development. Changes to the program enabled a consistent group of families to engage with the program for a semester. Families reported that they had increased their knowledge about ways to support their child's literacy development.

The External Validation Reports also reference parent satisfaction data, which consistently demonstrate that parents whose children attend Early Childhood Schools are highly satisfied with their school. Parent satisfaction surveys show continuity of experience is highly valued by parents, with specific reference to the depth of preparation provided to children

transitioning to year 3, and high expectations of all students. This Evaluation found that the majority of parents regard the Early Childhood School environment as welcoming, inclusive and supportive.

Accountability

The Auditor General's report articulates the need for clear planning, management, delivery and evaluation within Early Childhood Schools to ensure the services are achieving their objectives and that the community is receiving value for money. The Auditor General's report noted that 'key performance indicators are a useful component of an overall program performance management and assurance framework. Effective performance indicators facilitate ongoing monitoring and assessment of program performance' (2012, p.55).

Early Childhood School preschools and co-located long day care services have an assurance framework through the National Quality Standard and related assessment and rating process. Each service is assessed and rated by the ACT regulator, with those ratings required to be displayed in the relevant service and are also published online. This provides one mechanism of accountability for these education and care services. However, to date the data drawn from these assessments and ratings has only been used at the service level to implement quality improvement, and has not been used by the Directorate to contribute to system-level evaluations of whether Early Childhood Schools are meeting their intended objectives.

The schooling component of Early Childhood Schools has an assurance framework through the *People, Practice and Performance: School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools; A Framework for Performance and Accountability* (School Performance and Accountability Framework) (ACT EDU, 2016). The School Performance and Accountability Framework aims to provide schools with the mechanisms to identify how well they are performing against the nine domains identified within the *National School Improvement Tool*, which include:

- School-community partnerships
- A culture that promotes learning
- An expert teaching team
- Targeted use of school resources
- Systemic curriculum delivery
- Differentiated teaching and learning
- Effective pedagogical practices
- An explicit improvement agenda
- Analysis and discussion of data

The Tool is used by schools to strengthen cultures through self-evaluation and external school reviews, and provides schools with clear evidence of how schools are meeting individual student needs.

Through the use of the Tool, schools are able to give priority to particular domains, in order to focus and target their improvement efforts (ACT EDU, 2016, p.14). This tool should therefore go some way to supporting Early Childhood Schools to target, measure and evaluate their efforts including supporting improved outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. However, it should be acknowledged that Early Childhood Schools operate in a unique context, as they have additional objectives from mainstream schools, and comprise a number of agencies that are outside the Directorate's authority but who need to work together in order to achieve the objectives sought by the ECS Framework. Therefore a unique service delivery and accountability framework may be needed.

The Auditor-General's Report recommended that the Directorate should conduct regular evaluations of its early childhood schooling programs. This is the first such evaluation. To inform regular, ongoing evaluation by the Directorate of the ACT Early Childhood Schools, key performance indicators should be agreed in order to measure and monitor the effectiveness of the program. Appropriate data sources, such as PIPS, NAPLAN, AEDC and NQF Assessment and Rating outcomes, should be used to measure service delivery against the agreed performance indicators.

Future Focus Area 5:

Develop agreed key performance indicators to support the ongoing implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of service delivery by Early Childhood Schools.

Governance

The ECS Framework identifies five factors, in the ACT context, critical for Early Childhood Schools to develop as successful and effective integrated early learning and development centres:

- leadership and commitment;
- decision-making structures;
- collaboration;
- transitions; and
- research and evaluation.

These factors dovetail with research by Press, Sumsion and Wong (2010) which highlights that effective governance of an integrated service includes:

- responsiveness to community;

- clarity of roles and functions;
- commitment to common vision and values;
- robustness and sustainability to ensure continuity of service provision;
- engagement with parents; and
- wider community involvement structured to promote working and delivery partnership.

This Evaluation found that the Early Childhood Schools operate in a multifaceted organisational environment with associated implications for the characteristics and effectiveness of governance. In each Early Childhood School, a School Executive comprising the principal, deputy principal, executive teacher, business manager, community coordinator and long day care service manager meet weekly or fortnightly to address operational, educational, management, child and family issues. The School Board supports the School Executive to develop priorities and strategic direction, and to implement these priorities.

Table 8 plots the observed governance structures against the key elements of the Framework with a view to illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of current governance arrangements.

Table 8: Governance diagram

Governance Agency or Responsible Agent	Key Actions and Responsibilities	Accountabilities and Articulations	Framework Elements
Principal	Educational Programs P-2 across the school site; Learning, safety and wellbeing of children in the context of their families.	Overall responsibility for children’s learning and wellbeing (P-2) to EDU; Operational Accountabilities Financial Reporting to School Board	High Quality Learning P-2; Family Support and Participation P-2; Integrated Service P-2
School Board	Strategic Priorities and Directions for School Works with Principal Chair signs off on School Board Report.	Principal; accountability to EDU Strategic Priorities- aligned to EDU priorities	Family Support; Reporting on High Quality Learning
School Executive	Implementation and monitoring children’s learning P-2 across the school; Works with principal to foster staff development and improved learning	Principal	High Quality Learning

	outcomes		
Community Coordinator	Liases with community agencies and provides services for families	Principal	Child and Family Support; Integrated Service Delivery
ECEC Manager	Planning for children's learning and wellbeing 0-4; Meets regularly with principal to discuss students/families in need	Member of School Executive but accountability to Education & Care Provider/Managing Organisation	National Quality Framework; EYLF; Family Support; Integrated Service Delivery 0-4 years
ECEC Managing Organisations	Meet contractual terms with EDU	EDU for contractual hire of site; Accountabilities: Board of ECEC Managing Organisations National Quality Framework	Family Support; Integrated Service Delivery 0-4 years
Child and Family Centres	Identify and refer vulnerable children and families; Services to families	ACT Government	Family Support; Integrated Service Delivery
ETD	Quality of ECS provision meeting the Framework	ACT Government	Quality Learning; Family Support; Integrated Service Delivery

Whilst some aspects of governance - such as the principal having responsibility for governance of the school site - are common to all Early Childhood Schools, variations between Early Childhood Schools include different on-site education and care providers, and on-site or off-site arrangements with health and community services. The result is diversity of governance, operational and accountability structures.

This Evaluation found complexity in governance arises from the separation of responsibility for communication and decision making between the School Executive and the long day care service provider. The School Executive makes decisions about Preschool to year two. The long day care service provider makes decisions about long day care and out of school hours care. During consultation, principals presented situations where, despite having overall responsibility for the school site, they had no authority over the co-located long day care service. They did not participate in, or yield any influence, over decision-making undertaken by the long day care service provider. This Evaluation notes that communication and decision making between the School Executive and long day care service provider was ambiguous, haphazard and/or idiosyncratic.

This may reflect the historical divide between long day care and preschool. Press, Sumsion and Wong (2010) advocate 'that the education and care component of an integrated service works from a sound pedagogical basis in which the divisions between these spheres are broken down' (p.10). It may also highlight the 'stereotypical perceptions widely held and remain unchallenged within an organisation, some professions will be more powerfully positioned within that organisation than others' (Press, Sumsion and Wong, 2010, p.17).

This Evaluation found that the disconnect between the schooling and long day care service components hinders the full integration of service delivery as envisaged by the ECS Framework. This Evaluation notes the reciprocal responsibility for School Executive and long day care services to participate in governance structures, and to contribute to planning for continuity in curriculum, staff development, and child and family wellbeing.

Implementing structures to support consistent communication between the School Executive and the long day care service provider will increase accountability and facilitate shared responsibility for decisions.

Professional collaboration Birth to Year 2 – Isabella Plains Early Childhood School

The leadership team has built a professional learning community across the whole school, incorporating educators from long day care, preschool and K-2. The aim is to enhance teaching and to foster collaboration and community amongst all the staff. Staff are encouraged to meet in spaces especially created to enhance shared planning and collaboration. The leadership team support learning projects across the whole school from birth to year 2; for example, a recent focus on oral language was shared across the long day care and school, with a member of the school executive leading a project on nursery rhymes for the birth – five year old cohort.

The intent of the ECS Framework that 'leadership and commitment at all levels will be reflected in governance structures and decision-making' (ACT DET, 2008, p.13) has been realised to a limited extent, however there is potential for this to be strengthened to reflect the integrated service delivery model.

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007, in Press et al, 2010) identified that effective leaders focus on:

- identifying and articulating a shared vision;
- ensuring shared understandings and building common purposes;
- effective communication;
- encouraging reflection;
- commitment to ongoing, professional development (including critical reflection);
- monitoring and assessing practice through collaborative dialogue and action research;

- building a learning community and team culture; and
- encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships.

Research shows the development and alignment of shared vision is a key aspect of effective governance of integrated services. This Evaluation found that Early Childhood Schools with a shared school culture and philosophy were successful in promoting a whole school vision.

Governance – Narrabundah Early Childhood School

Embedding structures that support meaningful cross-service relationships and delivering consistent integrated marketing messages are two of the ways the leadership at Narrabundah Early Childhood School (NECS) has created a successful collaborative working environment in a complex governance structure comprised of three separate agencies. Beginning with a strong shared vision, NECS leadership has unified the services and created a coherent whole school identity. The strong links between services allows families easy access to the programs that support children’s learning, builds community capacity and provides a solid foundation for continued school improvement.

This Evaluation found that Early Childhood Schools continue to refine cross-stage planning to address continuity of learning and student retention. Early Childhood Schools identify school and home communication and targeted transition programs as critical to addressing parent concerns that their children will either not be able to enrol in the school of their choice at year 3, or that their child may be disadvantaged by coming into a school in year 3 where peer relationships are already established.

Governance of an integrated service is inherently challenging. Success requires active participation of organisations committed to working in partnership that view collaboration as ‘a natural extension of their repertoire for tackling items on their own agenda as well, as well as those of other partners’ (Glasby & Peck, 2006, in Press et al, 2010, p.12).

The *Education Act 2004* requires each ACT public school to have a School Board as a way of sharing authority and responsibility with the local school community. The *Education (School Boards of School-Related Institutions) Early Childhood Schools Determination 2012* provides for the composition of boards at Early Childhood Schools, as follows:

- (a) the principal of the school;
- (b) one member (the *appointed member*) appointed by the Director-General as the appointed member;
- (c) two members (the *staff members*) elected by the staff of the school and appointed by the Director-General;

- (d) three members (the *parents and citizens members*) elected by the parents and citizens association of the school and appointed by the Director-General; and
- (e) up to two members (the *board appointed members*) (if any) appointed by the board.

This does not appear to fully align with the intent of the ECS Framework, which states that

The chief executives of [EDU, CSD] and ACT Health will have key roles and responsibilities in the... direction of early childhood schools as early learning and development centres (birth to 8). It is envisaged that a cross-agency advisory group will support planning and operations and monitor progress and outcomes, reporting to Chief Executives. At the local level, it is envisaged that an Early Learning and Development Centre Board would be established for each centre...The Board's membership would include representatives of staff, families and government and community agencies.

(ACT DET, 2008, p.13)

This Evaluation found that the decision-making structures articulated by the ECS Framework have not been fully realised. The *Education Act 2004* provides the opportunity for related community agencies, such as the co-located long day care service, to be appointed to the School Board as a 'board appointed member'. However, this Evaluation found that this provision is rarely utilised and there is inconsistent representation of long day care services on the School Boards of Early Childhood Schools. Consideration should be given to how the intent of the ECS Framework could be more fully realised in governance structures, particularly School Board configuration and the cross-agency aspect of governance.

Future Focus Area 6:

Review and strengthen the governance arrangements of Early Childhood Schools, with a focus on School Board membership and cross-agency collaboration, to ensure their decision-making structures are aligned with the intent of the integrated service delivery model.

3. Koori Preschool Program

The Koori Preschool Program, begun in 1993 by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT, provides an early childhood schooling program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged three to five years. Children under the age of three may attend the Koori Preschool Program when accompanied by a parent or adult carer.

Since 2011 the management of the Koori Preschool Program has resided with the principal of the school at which the preschool is located, under the administration of the Directorate.

The Koori Preschool Program operates from five ACT public school sites:

- Ngunnawal Primary School
- Kingsford Smith School
- Narrabundah Early Childhood School
- Richardson Primary School
- Wanniasa School.

Ngunnawal, Richardson, Wanniasa and Kingsford Smith Koori Preschools deliver nine hours of preschool education over two days per week during school terms. Narrabundah Koori Preschool delivers 12 hours of preschool education over two days per week during school terms.

In addition to enrolment at a Koori Preschool, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can enrol at their local preschool. The Directorate's Early Entry for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children procedure also allows children to enrol in a mainstream preschool program up to six months earlier than their age cohort (in addition to enrolment in the Koori Preschool Program), supporting access to up to 24 hours of free preschool education per week in the 18 month period prior to children commencing formal schooling. However, there is no complete data set on the number of children utilising the early entry provision as this is managed at a school level.

Table 9 shows the number of children enrolled in each Koori Preschool from 2012 to 2016.

Table 9: Koori preschool enrolments

Kingsford Smith Koori Preschool

Year	February	August
2012	9	N/A
2013	7	7
2014	12	11
2015	14	17
2016	11	N/A

Narrabundah Koori Preschool

Year	February	August
2012	9	N/A
2013	9	15
2014	17	19
2015	23	22
2016	16	N/A

Ngunnawal Koori Preschool

Year	February	August
2012	10	N/A
2013	3	4
2014	12	11
2015	4	12
2016	13	N/A

Richardson Koori Preschool

Year	February	August
2012	17	N/A
2013	15	18
2014	14	19
2015	19	20
2016	20	N/A

Wanniassa Koori Preschool

Year	February	August
2012	20	N/A
2013	10	11
2014	17	19
2015	19	10
2016	18	N/A

Total enrolment across the Koori Preschool Program

Year	February	August
2012	65	N/A
2013	44	55
2014	72	79
2015	79	81
2016	78	N/A

(Source: ACT EDU, 2015)

In February 2016, 78 children from two to five years old were enrolled in the Koori Preschool Program, with 44 children concurrently enrolled in a mainstream preschool program. The data indicates fluctuating enrolments between the February and August Census each year at most Koori Preschools, with an overall increase in enrolment across the Program by August of each year. Narrabundah, in particular, has significantly increased enrolment since 2012.

The Auditor General's Report (2012) noted the importance of increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the Koori Preschool Program. This Evaluation found that each Koori Preschool was staffed by an early childhood degree qualified teacher and a Certificate III qualified assistant. The teaching assistant position is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified position, and this Evaluation notes that the Directorate has worked actively to recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the teaching assistant position at each of the five Koori Preschools.

Children attending the Koori Preschool Program engage in a play-based program aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework. There is a strong focus on literacy, numeracy, transition to school, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture. Collaborative partnerships between families and educators guide children's understandings in a culturally safe and inclusive learning environment. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2014-15 Report to the Legislative Assembly* (ACT ETD, 2015) highlights the strength of the Koori Preschool Program in supporting language, numeracy and cultural understanding. In addition, the program aims to increase access to educational services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

The Koori Preschool Program has contributed to the ACT's priorities under the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2010-2014 (MCEECDYA, 2010) by:

- supporting children's literacy and numeracy development;
- implementing Early Entry for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and
- all staff members' participation in Teacher Quality Institute-accredited professional learning.

Infrastructure

Each Koori Preschool operates within the existing host school infrastructure. In some schools, such as Kingsford Smith and Ngunnawal, the Koori Preschool operates from a designated classroom. In other schools, such as Richardson and Narrabundah, the Koori Preschool program shares a classroom with the mainstream preschool on alternative days of the week.

To support students diagnosed with varying degrees of chronic middle ear infection and hearing loss, Soundfield hearing systems have been installed in classrooms at the five Koori Preschool Program sites. The installation of these systems supports student participation in class activities.

Performance

Integrated service delivery

Co-location with schools and proximity to health and community services enhances the integration of services delivered in conjunction with the Koori Preschool Program. Partnerships between Koori Preschools, ACT Child Development Service (formerly Therapy ACT) and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Services support access for children and families to community and health services including speech therapy, occupational therapy and hearing testing. Table 10 shows the services connected with each Koori Preschool.

Table 10: Each Koori Preschool and connected services

Name	Services
Kingsford Smith	Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service West Belconnen Child and Family Centre
Narrabundah	On site Maternal and Child Health (MACH) nurses Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service (attend on site)
Ngunnawal	Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service Gungahlin Child and Family Centre
Richardson	Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre
Wanniassa	Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre

Hearing checks

Ear disease and associated hearing loss are highly prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (AIHW, 2014). Hearing loss can lead to significant delays in speech and educational development. The partnership between Koori Preschools and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service – a primary health care service operated by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community – facilitates regular hearing checks for children enrolled in the Koori Preschool Program. An audiologist and Aboriginal Ear Health Worker visit each Koori Preschool at the beginning of the year to check children’s hearing. Any concerns are followed up with an appointment with parents and carers at the preschool. This partnership works to identify ear disease and resulting hearing loss early, to prevent delays in children’s learning and development.

Actions to improve the integration of service delivery include the revision of the service delivery model in 2014 by the Directorate, in conjunction with Therapy ACT (now the ACT Child Development Service). The revision of service delivery was intended to ensure effective partnerships between the Directorate and Therapy ACT to support the speech, language and early literacy development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The inter-agency partnership was documented and roles of each partner described.

In December 2015, under the Australian Government’s *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Children and Schooling* program, two Early Years Engagement Officers were employed to work with families of children who attend the five Koori Preschools in the ACT.

The Early Years Engagement Officers are located at the ACT Child and Family Centres. One officer is funded under the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, and the other officer is funded by the ACT Community Services Directorate. One position is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified position.

The role of the Early Years Engagement Officers includes:

- Support improved participation in early childhood services by Indigenous children and their parents, to support enhanced school readiness;
- Enhance parental engagement to support improved attendance at early childhood education services;
- Support effective transitions to formal schooling; and
- Support family engagement with the process of developing personalised learning plans that target individual literacy and numeracy needs.

The officers visit each Koori Preschool weekly and provide a liaison point between the preschool and other community services.

Growing Healthy Families

The ACT Community Services Directorate's Growing Healthy Families program supports integrated service delivery at Koori Preschools. Growing Healthy Families uses a community development approach to engage, support and link Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families to services within their local communities and to Child and Family Centres. Using an early intervention and strengths-based approach, the integrated model of service delivery focuses on health, education, parenting and family support and is delivered in partnership with a range of community organisations.

The Early Years Engagement Officers are part of the Growing Healthy Families program and support families to access Child and Family Centres and partner programs and services. This includes case management, group programs, community activities and events, advocacy, school based programs, Maternal and Child Health Nursing, counselling, group and community development activities.

This Evaluation noted that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in September 2015, to transfer funds, provided centrally to the Directorate by the Australian Government for the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Children and Schooling* program, to the ACT Community Services Directorate.

The collaboration between the Directorate and the ACT Community Services Directorate, formalised by the MOU, draws on the expertise and capacity of each Directorate to provide network support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to enhance parental

engagement and to promote children's readiness for, and transition to, school through strengthening links between Child and Family Centres and Koori Preschools (known as the *ACT Koori Preschool Network Initiative*).

This Evaluation found the partnership to be a positive step towards inter-agency collaboration; however, as discussed later in this Evaluation, collaboration could be further improved to increase access to and participation in the Koori Preschool Program.

High quality programs and practice

The Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) guides the design and delivery of curriculum in the Koori Preschool Program. In embedding the Early Years Learning Framework, staff foster respectful and reciprocal relationships with children and families and promote children's learning, identity and wellbeing in play-based and culturally inclusive learning environments.

This Evaluation observed many examples of high quality, responsive learning programs. These observations were confirmed through a review of documentary evidence including school planning documents.

The learning programs at each Koori Preschool engage children in a range of experiences in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Children participate in excursions around Canberra, and staff arrange educational and cultural visits to the preschool. Together these elements, each presented with an Indigenous perspective, provide a rich and comprehensive program to develop children's literacy and numeracy and support children's transition to school.

This Evaluation observed children exploring letters and numbers using natural materials such as sticks, leaves, stones, twigs and sand, pursuing an interest in lizards through construction, following routines and contributing to shared eating times through preparing fruit and vegetables.

In developing a strong sense of personal and cultural identity, children participate in experiences that acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal culture and heritage. For example using and discussing the Aboriginal Map of Australia; singing in Ngunnawal language; sharing Dreamtime stories from across Australia; Aboriginal art making and working with a Wiradjuri artist; tending a bush tucker garden; exploring traditional uses of gum tree sap; and learning about Aboriginal animal totems.

Excursions to places such as the Botanic Gardens and an outing to hear an Aboriginal storyteller extend children's knowledge in key learning areas, value and enrich cultural understanding and strengthen family engagement in children's education.

The learning environment at each Koori Preschool is resourced with culturally relevant resource materials such as alphabet posters illustrated with Aboriginal paintings, a display of sand drawings and counting cards depicting local fish, birds and plants.

This Evaluation notes that since 2013 the Directorate has provided twice yearly, whole day professional learning for staff in Koori Preschools. The Teacher Quality Institute Accredited professional learning supports educators to implement preschool programs aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework. To date, the professional learning has focused on embedding high quality early childhood pedagogy and practice, developing cultural competence, incorporating digital technology for documenting and assessing children's learning and communicating with families, and choosing and using culturally appropriate resources.

Bush Garden – Kingsford Smith Koori Preschool

The educators at Kingsford Smith Koori Preschool have linked with local Ngunnawal elders to teach children about their 'dyin', or spiritual emblem, and the connection between their 'dyin' and their responsibility for looking after the land. Using the preschool's bush garden children learn about their ancestry, stewardship, flora and fauna and sacred sites.

Access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students

The Auditor-General's report notes that the Koori Preschool Program was '...explicitly designed to provide additional support and assistance to children from particular groups within the ACT community who may be at an educational disadvantage' (2012, p.3).

This Evaluation notes the comprehensive service the Koori Preschool Program provides for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. The preschool programs are characterised by respectful relationships with families that support enrolment, attendance, engagement and achievement. Strong partnerships with allied service providers connect families, preschools and communities. During interviews and focus groups conducted for this Evaluation, families stated they were pleased their children were learning to be proud of their culture as well as learning skills that will prepare them for formal schooling.

On available measures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience developmental and educational vulnerability to a greater extent than non-Indigenous children. For example:

- 2015 AEDC data (Department of Education and Training, 2015) identified 42.1% of Indigenous children as developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains upon school entry, compared with 20.8% of non-Indigenous children.

- NAPLAN results show that Aboriginal students consistently achieve below the national minimum standard in both literacy and numeracy. For example, in 2015 11% of ACT Indigenous year 3 students did not meet the national minimum standard in reading, compared with 2.6% of non-Indigenous ACT students (ACARA, 2016). Similar patterns exist for persuasive writing, language conventions and numeracy. This disparity tends to increase throughout schooling.
- PISA results 2000-2012 reveal persistent educational disadvantage with consistently low achievement levels among Aboriginal secondary students in mathematics, literacy and science (Bortoli & Thomson, 2010).

Research that shows developmental vulnerability at school entry can carry through to lower academic achievement throughout schooling is countered by studies into the role of early educational intervention. A recent study found that if Aboriginal students reach comparable levels of academic achievement by the time they are 15, there is no significant difference in subsequent educational outcomes such as completing year 12 and participating in university or vocational training (Mahuteau et al., 2015).

Addressing the association between school attendance and disparity in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Hancock et al., 2013) is a priority for the Koori Preschool Program. For example, supporting children's enrolment and attendance at Koori Preschool is a key responsibility for the recently appointed Early Years Engagement Officers.

Data from the February 2016 Canberra School Census (ACT EDU, 2016) indicates there is scope for improved targeting and promotion of the Koori Preschool Program to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The 43 four and five year olds enrolled in the Koori Preschool Program (ACT EDU unpublished data, 2016) represent approximately 28% of the 155 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year old children in the ACT (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

It should be noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT are not missing out on preschool education; the February 2016 Canberra School Census identified 191 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in preschool in the ACT. This confirms that the Koori Preschool Program is not accessed by all eligible families, although there has been a small increase in enrolments since 2012. The range of reasons cited for not accessing the Program include, parent preference, preschool location, preschool hours, transport constraints, attendance at other education and care service and whether children are identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in both data sets.

This Evaluation found that a small but unspecified number of referrals have been made to the Koori Preschool Program. Recommendations sometimes occur by word of mouth, with families recommending the Program to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

and network community contacts. Whilst this informal way of working is reflective of the community context, more formal processes will increase the targeting of eligible families and the ensuing benefits of the program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Formal processes will be supported by the strengthening of connections between Koori Preschools and related agencies serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, as exemplified by the existing relationship between Wanniasa Koori Preschool and the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre. Further, the appointment of Early Years Engagement Officers from 2016, whose role includes facilitating enrolments, is likely to increase the uptake of the Koori Preschool Program as recommended in the Auditor General's Report.

Future Focus Area 7:

Review relevant procedures, and establish formal referral processes across government agencies, to improve the access and participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Koori Preschool Program.

Achievement of student outcomes

The Auditor General's Report (2012) noted 'there is evidence to indicate that ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are, on average, achieving lower early childhood schooling outcomes than their peers' (p.79).

The Auditor-General's report also noted that key performance indicators had not been developed for early childhood programs, including the Koori Preschool Program, and the Evaluation found this is still the case in relation to student outcomes.

Student academic outcomes in later years can be measured through standardised testing including PIPS and NAPLAN. However, there are no data linkages to support a robust analysis between attending a Koori Preschool and subsequent academic achievement. There are also no agreed measures of student outcomes achieved across the Koori Preschool Program, although individual schools are able to set their own priorities and targets through their Strategic Plan.

While Koori Preschools are not mandated to implement the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), this Evaluation found that Koori Preschool educators are guided by the EYLF in their curriculum planning and delivery. The EYLF's Learning Outcomes, therefore, may provide guidance in assessing and documenting student outcomes in the Koori Preschool Program. Individual Learning Plans are also used to monitor individual students' learning in the Koori Preschool Program and to support their transition to formal schooling.

This Evaluation suggests the development of a more robust data measure could support ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the Koori Preschool Program, while acknowledging there may be challenges in deriving statistically valid data from the small

cohort size. Some further investigation of longitudinal data linkages with PIPS and NAPLAN could also be considered.

Family support and participation

The Koori Preschool Program's focus on 'families at the centre' enables family engagement in children's learning and enhances positive learning and development outcomes for children.

This Evaluation found strong evidence of the ways in which Koori Preschools foster communication and relationships with parents and families; build a sense of community; and encourage family support and participation. For example, Koori Preschool staff host morning teas to encourage parents to spend time at preschool, meet other parents and build relationships with, and between, parents, carers and staff. Both staff and parents talked about how the formal and informal interaction at preschool facilitates the sharing of information about learning as well as about issues they are facing.

For example, during consultations, parents at Wanniasa Koori Preschool stated that they have the opportunity to be involved in the preschool in a range of ways, including initiating and participating in social, learning and cultural events and collaborating with educators on the learning needs of their child. Similarly, at Ngunnawal Koori Preschool, parents stated that incorporating Aboriginal knowledge and skills in the curriculum provides them with ideas and resources and strengthens cultural identity at school and at home.

Koori Preschools provide a space for Child and Family Centre staff to meet parents and assist them to locate relevant support services.

The success of these strategies in enhancing family participation and support is substantiated by School Board Reports, which detail an increase in family participation in Koori Preschools. The Kingsford Smith School Board Report (2010) makes explicit reference to the External Validation Report's recommendation to increase the presence of the school in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community cultural events. The Kingsford Smith School Board Report (2014) outlines the contribution of Koori Preschool excursions and family activities in promoting home-school partnerships.

This Evaluation found that the Growing Healthy Families program has the potential to contribute to increasing the uptake of the Koori Preschool Program, as recommended in the Auditor-General's Report. In the 2015 ACT Budget, the ACT Government provided \$1.3 million over two years to expand the Growing Healthy Families program. The Early Years Engagement Officers employed under the Growing Health Families Program support preschool enrolment and attendance by providing and connecting families to outreach services, linking families to community support programs, and conducting home visits.

Healthy Lunch Boxes - Narrabundah Koori Preschool

Learning about healthy eating and healthy lunch box options is supported at Narrabundah Koori Preschool with children and parents cooking together in class. The targeted cooking sessions are facilitated by the Early Years Engagement Officer. Future directions include visits by a nutritionist and dinner time cooking sessions for parents and carers.

Focus group discussions conducted by this Evaluation confirm that parents of children currently attending Koori Preschools greatly appreciate the program, particularly the way in which they are welcomed into the classroom to participate in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day, NAIDOC week celebrations and Tracks to Reconciliation events.

This Evaluation found evidence of positive initiatives ensuring that the Koori Preschool Program is culturally responsive and inclusive, for example through the use of resources with cultural significance.

Accountability

The delivery of programs in Koori Preschools is the responsibility of the individual school to which the preschool is attached. As such, the School Performance and Accountability Framework provides a mechanism for schools to set priorities and targets, and monitor achievements. However, a review of schools' current Strategic Plans shows limited or no reference to their Koori Preschool. Where performance measures are identified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in particular, they relate to achievements in primary school. Attendance rates are reported for Kindergarten onwards. External Validation Reports generally only reference Koori Preschools in describing the school context.

The Directorate also provides an annual report to the ACT Legislative Assembly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. This includes a description of the program and highlights positive achievements, such as in relation to professional development of educators. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2014-15 Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory* (ACT EDU, 2015) includes data on the number of children enrolled in the Koori Preschool Program, and the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching assistants employed in the Program.

Koori Preschools, although providing an early childhood education and care service, are currently not considered within scope of the National Quality Framework and are therefore not assessed and rated against the National Quality Standard. In the absence of an external assessment, this could provide a framework for self-assessment against national quality benchmarks in early childhood education and care.

The Auditor-General's Report provided some suggestions for potential performance indicators in the Directorate's early childhood programs, including:

- Enrolment rates;
- Children’s educational outcomes;
- Children’s developmental progress; and
- ACT Government commitment to National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care.

(ACT Auditor-General, 2012, p.27)

Earlier in this Evaluation, it was identified that there are no agreed performance indicators in relation to achievement of student outcomes across the Koori Preschool Program. In order to develop a measure of student outcomes, it is important to understand the objectives of the Koori Preschool Program and what outcomes are sought. The Auditor-General’s Report recommended that the Directorate should ensure that ‘the purpose and objectives sought from the Koori Preschool Programs are clearly identified and documented’ (2012, p.53). This should then guide the development of key performance indicators that can be measured and monitored to inform regular evaluation and quality improvement actions. In line with the Auditor-General’s recommendations, key performance indicators should be developed that align with the objectives and purposes of the Koori Preschool Program. These performance indicators are likely to extend beyond academic targets, and this will be further discussed later in this Evaluation.

Future Focus Area 8:

Develop and document clear objectives and key performance indicators for the Koori Preschool Program to inform the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the Koori Preschool Program.

4. Cost-benefit analysis

'The long term educational, social and economic benefits of an increased emphasis on children's early years will be felt not only by children and their families but also by the wider ACT community' (ACT DET, 2008, p.1).

International research demonstrates the economic and social value of providing quality early childhood education and care services (Clothier & Poppe, 2016), not least of which is the cost effectiveness of targeted intervention in education, health and social arenas so that children can build the skills necessary to contributing to society. Optimising the social development and learning of children will yield:

- improved individual well being and life chances;
- improved community well being; and
- more productive participants in the economy (Tayler, 2007 in ACT DET, 2008, p.6).

Research also indicates that children gain long term benefits when parents are supported to parent well and where family capacity and community connectedness are strengthened (Valentine et al, 2007). Whilst it is known that all children benefit from quality early learning, it is particularly advantageous to children experiencing social and/or economic disadvantage. Early Childhood Schools have an opportunity to counter the effects of vulnerability and disadvantage in an innovative and holistic way.

Early Childhood Schools, along with ACT primary and secondary schools, specialist schools and Introductory English Centres, are provided funding for the staffing allocation including non-staffing operational costs through the School Operational Allocation.

Early Childhood Schools receive separate funding allocations to support the operation of the on-site long day care service. This is calculated on the square meterage occupied by the service (ACT ETD, 2014). Additionally, lump sum payments for capital works, library and consumables are made for re-opened or newly constructed schools in the first three years of operation. Franklin Early Childhood School, opened in 2013, will receive this funding allocation to 2016.

My School website financial data shows expenditure per student in an Early Childhood School (K-2) exceeds that of a student in a mainstream school. For example, the cost per student at Narrabundah Early Childhood School (2013) was \$31,612, compared to \$10,864 (2013) at Red Hill Primary School. Similar data for the co-located long day care services is not available.

Table 12: My School data on costs per student

My School website Financial Data	School			
	2013	2012	2011	2010
O'Connor Co-operative School	21,661	20,485	19,086	18,503
Isabella Plains Early Childhood School	23,378	23,115	22,376	30,288
Lyons Early Childhood School	22,409	23,055	24,309	62,333
Narrabundah Early Childhood School	31,612	27,238	23,928	31,783
Southern Cross Early Childhood School	21,374	21,150	23,599	30,976
Franklin Early Childhood School *	57,177	n/a	n/a	n/a

*Please see funding for newly constructed schools on p. 59.

A contributing factor to the higher expenditure is the difficulty for Early Childhood Schools to achieve economies of scale in operational and administrative costs because of the small student population while the fixed costs remain the same.

A new needs-based school funding model, the Student Resource Allocation (SRA) is being introduced in ACT public schools from 2016. It aims to ensure all schools can achieve high standards of performance and reduce the impact of disadvantage on student outcomes and opportunities. The approach will also support school-level decision making.

Resources will be provided to schools based on student need. Students with a disability or English as an Additional Language or Dialect, students from low socio-economic status backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will attract additional resources for their school. Therefore, the funding provided to Early Childhood Schools will be based on the demographic profile of enrolments to ensure resources are directed to where they are most needed.

The Koori Preschool Program is funded through:

- a staffing allocation to each school site through School Operational Allocation; and
- additional funds allocated through the school budget.

Other funding for the Koori Preschool Program includes:

- Australian Government Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS); Children and Schooling Programme (2015 – 2017) funding for the *ACT Koori Preschool Network Initiative*. The *ACT Koori Preschool Network Initiative* employs an Early Years Engagement Officer to support the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the Koori Preschool Program.

Table 13 details Koori Preschool Program expenditure and cost per student from 2013 to 2015. The cost per student has been determined through February census data, however, it should be noted that enrolments often increase throughout the year, as demonstrated through August census data.

Table 13: Koori Preschools funding information

Expenditure

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Ngunnawal Koori Preschool	\$ 52,716	\$ 50,311	\$ 59,776
Kingsford Smith Koori Preschool	\$ 45,036	\$ 64,763	\$ 115,001
Narrabundah Koori Preschool	\$ 56,454	\$ 53,176	\$ 32,903
Wanniassa Koori Preschool	\$ 87,950	\$ 119,917	\$ 116,196
Richardson Koori Preschool	\$ 58,346	\$ 78,713	\$ 72,683

Cost Per Student

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Ngunnawal Koori Preschool	\$ 17,572	\$ 4,193	\$ 14,944
Kingsford Smith Koori Preschool	\$ 6,434	\$ 5,397	\$ 8,214
Narrabundah Koori Preschool	\$ 6,273	\$ 3,128	\$ 1,431
Wanniassa Koori Preschool	\$ 8,795	\$ 7,054	\$ 6,116
Richardson Koori Preschool	\$ 3,890	\$ 5,622	\$ 3,825

The efficiency of the Koori Preschool Program improves as enrolment in the Program increases. This Evaluation acknowledges that efficiency will be further improved with increased participation in the program.

Earlier in this Evaluation, it was noted that Early Childhood Schools are not necessarily catering for greater levels of vulnerability and disadvantage than other public schools, and that the desired student outcomes may not be being achieved. Given that Early Childhood Schools are generally more expensive to operate than other public primary schools, it is important that the cost-benefit ratio is improved and demonstrated through data so that the Directorate can provide assurance it is offering value for money.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sustainability perspectives which centre on the mutuality of environmental and human wellbeing (Gorringe, 2010) provide an evaluative

lens that moves beyond the concept of sustainability as defined by the duration of activities. This Evaluation observed personal, relational and social dimensions of sustainability such as neighbourhood and cultural renewal that balance economic sustainability (Winter et al., 2006; Wiseman, 2004). Specific examples include collaborative planting of community gardens, participation in school and community events and connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders.

This Evaluation notes that cost efficiencies such as rental income from the co-located long day care service at each of the Early Childhood Schools (excluding O'Connor Cooperative School) and the co-location of a health care service at one Early Childhood School are not evident. This Evaluation suggests that Early Childhood Schools explore the possibilities of increased community use of facilities to increase the value for money.

5. Conclusion

‘Providing support for children in their early years lays the foundation for their future’ (ACT DET, 2008, p.1). Shaddock, Packer and Roy (2015) recommend that students with complex needs are supported with more emphasis on relationships and student interests. The model of Early Childhood Schools as a community hub where family support and participation is valued equally to high quality learning indicates, to this Evaluation, the role Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program can play in contributing to building family and community capacity, as well as economic efficiency for current and future targeted intervention. However, it is important that these programs are targeted appropriately to ensure participation by children and families that would benefit most from the model.

This Evaluation has highlighted the importance of regular, rigorous evaluation of student outcomes and service delivery at Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program to ensure the programs are managed efficiently and are meeting their intended objectives. To support this into the future, it will be critical to ensure that the objectives, accountabilities and key performance indicators of the programs are clearly articulated and that appropriate data sources are identified or developed as required. The governance structures should also be reviewed, particularly in relation to Early Childhood Schools, to ensure they support the intended objectives of the programs.

This Evaluation has identified some successful programs and practices at individual Early Childhood Schools. The challenge for the Directorate is to build on its current models, policies, procedures and practices to provide an overarching, evidence –based framework that is up-to-date and is able to be implemented flexibly to respond to individual community contexts. This framework should provide clear guidance to Early Childhood School practitioners, including educators and allied health and social workers, to support effective collaborative practice, and should be supported by appropriate professional development. ‘The sustainability of community based early years partnerships depends upon establishing integrated governance arrangements that involve all stakeholders and provide a structure for leadership and processes for funding and accountability’ (Moore and Skinner, 2010, p.9). Moore and Skinner argue, and this Evaluation affirms, that ‘successful collaborations are challenging to achieve and sustain without ongoing support and investment’ (2010, p. 25).

Maximising sustainability of Early Childhood Schools and the Koori Preschool Program to respond effectively to the multiple and complex needs of families requires action at government, service and practitioner levels (Press, Sumsion and Wong, 2010). This Evaluation acknowledges that the Directorate and school staff are committed to improving outcomes for children and families, and this is particularly evident in the programs to facilitate family support and participation. Future focus on refining the model, policies, procedures and practices will support the learning, health and wellbeing of ACT children and families.

References

ACT Auditor General's Office (2012). Performance Audit Report: Early Childhood Schooling Report No. 3/2012. Australian Capital Territory, Canberra. Retrieved from http://www.audit.act.gov.au/auditreports/reports2012/Report%203_2012_Early%20Childhood%20Schooling.pdf

ACT Department of Education and Training (ACT DET) (2008). Early Childhood Schools: A framework for their development as learning and development centres for children (birth to eight) and their families. Australian Capital Territory, Canberra.

ACT Education Directorate (ACT EDU) (2016a). People, Practice and Performance. School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools: A Framework for Performance and Accountability. Australian Capital Territory, Canberra.

ACT Education Directorate (ACT EDU) (2016b). Canberra School Census February 2016. ACT Government, Canberra.

ACT Education and Training Directorate (ACT ETD) (2014). ACT School Management Manual: Funding allocations and mechanisms. ACT Government, Canberra.

ACT Education and Training Directorate (ACT ETD) (2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2014-15 Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory. Australian Capital Territory, Canberra.

ACT Government (2014). Human Services Blueprint. Australian Capital Territory, Canberra. Retrieved from https://www.betterservices.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/599860/Human-Services-Blueprint-Final.pdf

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2015). Australian Demographic Statistics, cat no. 3101. ABS, Canberra.

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (2013). Guide to the National Quality Standard. ACECQA

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2016). NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2015. ACARA, Sydney.

Bortoli L. & Thomson S. (2011). Contextual factors that influence the achievement of Australia's Indigenous students: results from PISA 2000–2006. OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Centre for Community Child Health (2009). Policy Brief No 17: Integrating services for young children and their families. Royal Children's Hospital, Parkville.

Clothier, S. & Poppe, J. (2016). New research: Early education as economic investment. National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) accessed at

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/new-research-early-education-as-economic-investme.aspx>

Cortner, C. Z. J. (2012). *Toronto First Duty Phase 3 Report*. Toronto: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development.

Council of Australian Government (2009). *Investing in the Early Years: A national Early Childhood development strategy*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. Retrieved from https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/national_ECD_strategy.pdf

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Department of Education and Training (2015). *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2015: A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia*. Australian Government, Canberra. Retrieved from <http://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report>

Gorringer, S. (2010). *Honouring our strengths: Moving forward*. Keynote Address presented at the *2010 Annual SPERA Conference*. Stronger Smarter Institute, Queensland University of Technology. Queensland: University of the Sunshine Coast. (September)

Goss, P., Hunter, J., Romanes, D. & Parsonage, H. (2015). *Targeted teaching: How better use of data can improve student learning*. Grattan Institute. Retrieved from <http://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/827-Targeted-Teaching.pdf>

Hancock, K., Shepherd, C., Lawrence, D. & Zubrick, S. (2013). *Student attendance and educational outcomes: Every day counts*. Report for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra. Retrieved from http://telethonkids.org.au/media/472779/final_report_2013.pdf

Katz, I., Spooner, C. & Valentine, K. (2006). *What interventions are effective in improving outcomes for children of families with multiple and complex problems?* Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Perth.

Livingston, M., Kearns, A. & Bailey, N. (2013). *Delivering mixed communities: The relationship between housing tenure mix and social mix in England's neighbourhoods*. *Housing Studies* 28 (7), 1056-1080.

Mahuteau, S., Karmel, T., Mavromaras, K. & Zhu, R. (2015). *Educational Outcomes of Young Indigenous Australians*. Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Australia. National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) (2010). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2010-2014*. Melbourne: MCEECDYA and Education Services Australia.

- Moore, T. & Skinner, A. (2010). An integrated approach to early childhood development. Background paper for the Benevolent Society, Paddington NSW. Retrieved from http://ww2.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/TM_BenSoc_Project_09.pdf
- Potter, H. (2013). Boosting achievement by pursuing diversity. *Educational Leadership* 70 (8), 38-43.
- Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia: A research project for the Professional Support Coordinators Alliance (PSCA). Retrieved from <http://www.cscentral.org.au/Resources/Publications/FinalCSUreport.pdf>
- Shaddock, A., Packer, S., and Roy, A. (2015). Schools for All Children and Young People: Report of the expert panel on students with complex needs and challenging behaviours. Retrieved from http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/complex-needs
- Valentine, K., Katz, I. & Griffiths, M. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Perth.
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organisation* 7 (2), 225-246.
- Winter, A., Wiseman, J., & Muirhead, B. (2006). University-community engagement in Australia: Practice, policy and public good. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 1, 211-230.
- Wiseman, J. (2004) Broadening and deepening democracy: Learning from recent experiments in citizen and community engagement. *Labor Essays*, 2004, 54-69.
- Wong, S. & Press, F. (2012). [*The Art of Integration: Delivering Integrated Education, Care and Support Services for Young Children and their Families*](#). Ashfield, NSW: The Infants Home.
- Wong, S., Press, F., Sumsion, J. & Hard, L. (2012). [*Collaborative Practice in Victorian Early Years Services: 10 Project Sites*](#). Melbourne: Victorian Department of Education and Early Child Development.