

A3 Highlights

The Department works in partnership with the community to provide high-quality education and training services.

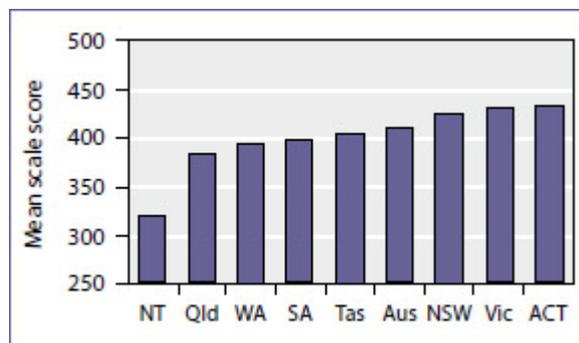
The key achievements described in this year's report highlight excellent service provision as delivered through public school education, planning and coordination of vocational education and training, early intervention programs, registration of non-government schools, and registration for home education.

Achievements

Improving educational outcomes

The Department's *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013* provides a framework for building teacher capacity and improving student outcomes. Late in 2009, the second *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Report* was released. In summary, the results showed that in all year levels and across most tests the ACT achieved the highest mean score, or was ranked at or near the top when compared with other jurisdictions.

Figure A3.1: NAPLAN year 3 Reading, 2009



Source: Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2009, *National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2009*

Some apprentices and trainees require additional learning support to enable them to successfully complete their qualification. Under the User Choice program the Department provides some additional funding for needs, such as improving literacy and numeracy skills and sign language interpreter services.

The Department was proud to present *Step into the Limelight 2009* at the Canberra Theatre on 16 and 17 September. The theme was *Colour My World* and involved over 1,000 ACT public

school students. It was an evening with a unique blend of music, drama, dance, media and visual arts.



ACT primary school children participating in 'Step into the Limelight 2009'

Improving schools for teaching and learning

A key strategic priority outlined in the Department's Strategic Plan is the continued improvement of school facilities to support teaching and learning.

The 2009-10 reporting period saw the largest ever capital works program for ACT public schools, totalling \$214.8 million, with 95 percent expenditure achieved during the reporting period.

Highlights included the completion of all 84 Building the Education Revolution National School Pride projects and 19 of the 68 Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) projects. The remaining P21 projects are on track to be finished by 31 December 2010.

Work is progressing well on the construction of the new Gungahlin College and P-10 school in Kambah, with both schools to open for the start of the 2011 school year.

A range of capital works have been completed including: the new performing arts centre at Lyneham High School; new gymnasiums at Belconnen and Stromlo high schools; major refurbishment works at Canberra High School, Alfred Deakin High School and Telopea Park School; and the refurbishment of the Erindale Leisure Centre pool and the Turner School hydrotherapy pool.

Other important works included protecting heritage trees at Ainslie School and the commencement of programs to install solar panels and water tanks at all ACT public schools.

Improving leadership and corporate development

Consistent with our strategic directions, the Department has placed a high priority on developing leadership and corporate capacities to ensure it is recognised as a responsive, innovative and high-achieving agency.

Central to the objectives of the Department is the networking of knowledge and skills. The upscaling of individual pockets of excellence is critical to improvement at the system level. From the beginning of the 2010 school year, the Department implemented an integrated and comprehensive approach to school improvement based on the principle that the core work of all school leaders is to improve student learning outcomes. Implementation of this principle assumes improvement of teacher quality, development of leadership capacity, the introduction of more consistency in curriculum provision and the increased use of data to monitor and report on school performance.

To support the new networked model of school improvement, the ACT public school system was reorganised into four regions; with a School Network Leader appointed to each region. The School Network Leaders will develop effective and purposeful partnerships within and across the four school networks. Partnerships will be flexible and innovative, informed by high quality local, national and international practices and initiatives that improve the performance of every school.

The Department is committed to developing a more systematic and targeted approach to school improvement through:

- enhanced accountability of principals and school network leaders
- increased availability and use of data to inform school improvement practices and monitor progress
- provision of support for our principals to ensure they are highly effective instructional leaders
- building the capacity of our teachers, particularly in literacy and numeracy teaching.

In January 2010, the Department reorganised its divisions and branches to best address its strategic objectives and harness the capacity of central office executives and staff. The rearrangement is reflected in new committee structures that promote intelligent accountability, networking and collaboration across the agency. The Department's structure supports change management by facilitating flexibility and encouraging innovation.

Following the review of School Based Management (conducted by the Allen Consulting Group) school principals will have increased levels of local autonomy. Initially, the reform practices will be implemented at the new P-10 school in Kambah and the new college in Gungahlin, with further rollouts to follow. As principals opt-in to the new system they will take on greater responsibility for the hiring and retaining of staff with an increased expectation of performance management. The reforms to School Based Management will deliver to schools greater flexibility from which they can adapt to the rapidly changing needs of students and communities.

Under the new system, schools will also develop closer links with neighbouring schools to share knowledge of best practice. The construction of new schools and colleges, north and south of Canberra, has prepared the way for 21st century educational leadership. Appointments at the new \$72.4 million Gungahlin College (Principal Ms Gai Beecher) and the new \$56.5 million P-10 school in Kambah (Co-principals Ms Lynn Petersen and Ms Pam Rosser) have been established based on the Department's new approaches to School Based Management.



Newly appointed principals: (l-r): Gai Beecher, Lynn Petersen and Pam Rosser

As leading-edge principals they have an opportunity to build innovation into school practices and cultures; making the most of state-of-the-art facilities and community partnerships. Upon appointment, and to encourage research-based practices, these three principals were enrolled in the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the United States to take part in the renowned *Improving Schools: The Art of Leadership* course. School leaders from across the world took part in the program and explored successful models for school improvement as well as developing skills to lead and manage change and implement curriculum innovation.

Our research collaboration with the University of Canberra has prepared a strong foundation from which the Department can better target its research program and use its significant data holdings to advance school improvement.

In addition, our research relationships with the ACT university sector continue to inform practice. In late 2009, the ACT hosted 600 of the world's leading education researchers attending the Australian Association for Research in Education's international conference. The ACT's early childhood schools are based on such research and are continuously improving the integration of services, including maternity health care, family support and childcare.

Early childhood education

The Minister officially opened the early childhood schools at Isabella Plains, Narrabundah and Southern Cross on 12 September 2009. Lyons Early Childhood School was officially opened in 2010.

Each school has healthy enrolments and the number of classes provided at each has been expanding to meet the demand in 2010. Childcare is now in operation at all the early childhood schools.

The early childhood schools operate as early learning and development centres providing integrated services for children (birth to eight years) and their families. By providing children with the best start in life, the schools are designed to strengthen families and community partnerships.

The ACT Government's investment in early childhood education over recent years means the ACT is well-placed to support the increase to 15 hours of preschool education across the ACT. As part of the commitment to Universal Access within the public preschool setting, the 15 hours of preschool education will be delivered by a four-year university qualified early childhood teacher.

Canberra's Early Childhood Schools 'Best in the World'



Australia, and in particular the ACT, are leading the world in the integration of early childhood education, says Professor Joseph Sparling of Georgetown University, Washington DC.

Professor Sparling was in town for a tour of the Southern Cross Early Childhood School and gave the facility a glowing review. It is quite exciting for us, we wanted to come see for ourselves, he said. Centres like this make life so much more meaningful for parents, to come to the one place where there is health care and parent groups, childcare and preschool, and your child can go up to second grade; it is an exciting concept. The Southern Cross Early Childhood School is one of four early childhood schools opened during this reporting period. It is the most beautiful facility we have seen, not just in Australia but period, Professor Sparling said in summary.

Special education

The *Review of Special Education Services in ACT Schools* was completed in October 2009. The Review report is now being used to develop a Disability Education Strategic Plan to be finalised and implemented in the next reporting period.

Essential Skills: Teaching Students with a Disability is a professional learning package outlining the fundamental skills required of all ACT public school teachers. It is used to train teachers in the essential evidence-based practices needed to support the educational engagement of students who have a disability.

The Canberra College Futures Program delivers a specialised education program to college students identified by the Department as having a special need. The program offers an educational package of Board of Senior Secondary Studies accredited core courses of functional literacy and numeracy. Students also undertake elective areas of personal interest. Close links with community groups, industry groups and training organisations are maintained to enable training opportunities and employment for the students.

The uniqueness and strong reputation for excellence has seen this program become the showcase of best practice in the provision of educational and vocational training for college aged students with special needs. The Canberra College Futures Program was the ACT VET in Schools Excellence Award winner for 2009.

Tertiary education

In May 2010, the Minister announced an ACT Tertiary Taskforce, with representation from ACT industry and education institutions and other stakeholders, to consult with the Canberra community on the future of skills training in the ACT. The Tertiary Taskforce, chaired by the Department's Chief Executive, aims to create a vision for ACT tertiary education, training and skills development, steer stakeholder consultations, report to the Minister for Education and Training and the ACT Government on its findings, and make recommendations for the future of ACT tertiary education.

At the same time, the Minister also released a discussion paper, *Creating a Connected ACT Tertiary Education Environment* as a focus of the Taskforce discussions and the engagement with a broader range of stakeholders and the community.

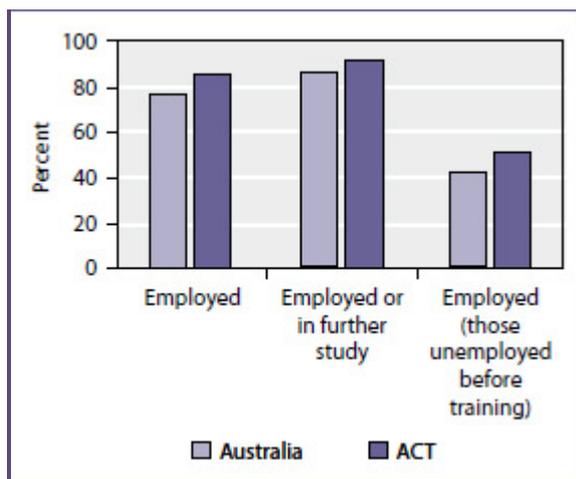
The discussion paper posed questions under three broad themes:

- industry and professional needs for innovation and growth
- high schools/college/post secondary and transitions, retention and pathways
- connections, systems, data and information sharing.

Together, the taskforce and discussion paper form part of the Department's response to the 2008 *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley Review) which recommended improving the integration of the school system with universities and other training providers to offer more flexibility to students, and ensure local businesses have access to the skilled workers they need. University partnerships featured prominently throughout the reporting period. Most recently it was announced, in June 2010, that from 1 July 2010 Kaleen High School and Lake Ginninderra would adopt new names reflecting a partnership with the University of Canberra. With their new titles, the University of Canberra High School and the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College will facilitate access to university facilities and expertise. In 2012, when operating at full scale, the partnership will broaden student options for entry into university and increase teacher access to research and personal development.

According to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research publication *Australian Vocational Education and Training: Student Outcomes 2009*, the percentage of ACT VET graduates employed or in further study is the best in the nation at 93 percent. Figure A3.2 indicates that ACT levels for students employed after training are also the highest in the nation at 87 percent, with the national average being 78 percent. For those not employed before training but employed after training, again the ACT levels are the nation's highest at 52 percent, compared with the national average of 43 percent.

Figure A3.2: Employment outcomes after training, 2009



Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2009, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Student outcomes 2009*

Challenges

Health and wellbeing

The Department continues to integrate its own objectives with the broader intent of The Canberra Plan. The plan notes the ACT is an 'affluent community in which disadvantage and social inclusion have been largely geographically dispersed'.

Student wellbeing, particularly through the display of positive behaviour, is an area that continues to challenge education providers across Australia.

As a priority, the Department has strengthened student engagement and learning outcomes by enhancing student support and intervention services. Creative and confident students are supported when learning environments are safe and inspiring.

The Department has taken strong action to establish lifelong healthy behaviours for all students to:

- value the benefits of a healthy lifestyle
- take responsibility for their own health choices
- understand their right to personal safety and their responsibility for contributing to the safety of others.

As a result of an ACT Government budget initiative, three physical education consultants were employed for three years to increase the capacity of primary school teachers to deliver Fundamental Movement Skills as part of the curriculum. The initiative has had a twofold effect by increasing the engagement of primary school students in physical activities and raising the level of professional development delivered to primary school teachers.

The Department has established collaborative links with the University of Canberra to collect qualitative data on the impact of the initiative on teachers' perceived capacity to teach Fundamental Movement Skills. The Minister's Physical Activity Challenge saw over 10,000 students from 38 schools participate in the second year of this initiative. The 10 week challenge set students the task of being physically active for at least an hour a day for a minimum of five days a week.

The Department has trained staff in the *Everyone Matters Behaviour Support Protocols*. The protocols are guidelines for classroom teachers, executive staff and student services staff on how they can best work to teach socially responsible behaviour.

Towards full adoption in 2012, all staff will be resourced and trained in restorative practices. The program offers schools an alternative contemporary approach to the management of student behaviours. Using the principles of social justice, students are encouraged to use dialogue to repair damaged relationships.

KidsMatter and MindMatters are evidenced- based programs being implemented in ACT public schools. These programs aim to improve student and staff mental health wellbeing, reduce mental health difficulties amongst students, and increase support assistance to students experiencing mental health issues. The implementation of these programs is the result of a partnership between Principals Australia, the ACT Department of Health and the Department.

The results of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) showed that less children in the ACT were 'on track' in respect to physical health and well-being relative to their Australian peers. Section A9 of this report provides further information related to AEDI.

To address health and social issues facing young people, the Department funds the Youth Health Nurse program which is managed by the ACT Department of Health. The objectives of the program are to promote positive health outcomes for young people and to provide an opportunity to access health services in school setting. In 2009, individual consultations were held with 165 students and 153 group sessions were conducted. In term 1 2010, there were 301 individual consultations and 100 group sessions.

Supporting youth attainment and transitions

The journey of a lifelong learner is enhanced when educational sectors and institutions work together to make transitions seamless and meaningful. The Department's strategic objective is to recognise the importance of each student's unique pathway towards a fulfilling and productive adult life. Schooling in this context helps students to make choices about their future training, study and employment options.

In 2009-10 the Department began implementing reforms aimed at providing enhanced educational opportunities for every school student in the ACT and ultimately enhancing employment capacity and earning potential over the course of their employment.

In 2009, the *ACT Education Act 2004* was amended to create a mandatory requirement for all children to participate in schooling until they complete year 10, and to participate in full-time in

education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, after they have completed year 10, until age 17. This has represented a significant shift in approach for many students and their families.

Implementation of the changes to participation will build on the 2008-09 ACT Budget initiative Moving Forward. This initiative placed one additional full-time equivalent teacher into each ACT public college to improve student transitions, career education, innovation in vocational learning, and participation in Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASBAs).

In 2009-10 the government committed \$1.45 million over four years for the provision of up to 100 new ASBAs to support student transitions. In 2009-10, 56 ACT public schools agreed to host all 100 school apprentices.

Australian school-based apprenticeships are the way to go

Today, one might think being a teenager is a profession in itself. Dealing with the stress of school work, maintaining your ever-changing social life and perhaps even having the responsibility of an after-school job, how can anyone find the time to take on more? Completing college is a task that ranks above the rest, and looking forward to the future can sometime be a neglected chore. But with the aid of new programs such as work experience and Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASBA), looking forward and planning for your future almost seems easy.



Hawker College student Thomas Lester working in the role of Learning Support Assistant

Work experience provides you with the opportunity to investigate your field of choice based on face value. This allows for a basic 'like' or 'dislike' decision. After deciding that you like a field of work the next point of call is to investigate it in more detail. This can be easily achieved through an ASBA.

An ASBA allows you to engage in work-related training while still at school. It allows you to go onsite and receive first-hand training while being paid. Last year I began working at Black Mountain School. My duties were essentially those of a Learning Support Assistant or a teacher's aide. Working at Black Mountain School is not something that everyone is cut out for, at times the work can be challenging and physically and emotionally draining, but at the end of the day if you can come away feeling like you have done some good and maybe changed someone's life for the better, then your work is done.

I feel lucky enough to have that self-gratification when I work with the many talented and bright students of Black Mountain School. Thanks to the ASBA program I am able to continue my study at college and receive my Year 12 Certificate whilst learning and expanding my knowledge in my field of choice. Working with the many students and teachers at Black Mountain is a privilege and one that I am grateful for. They have all been very welcoming and are always helpful and supportive. For anyone thinking about starting an ASBA, I strongly recommend that you do. It is a great opportunity and can help you decide which way to go in the future. If you're passionate about what you do, and you do what you love, you'll never have to work a day in your life. Undertaking an ASBA can help you discover and explore those passions.

Thomas Lester, ASBA Student