

Chapter 13

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Overview

The ACT offers high-quality education through a range of government, Catholic and independent schools. In 1998, there were 60,765 students enrolled in ACT schools: 32,351 primary students, 19,232 high school students and 9,182 secondary college students, of whom 45 were ungraded.

Enrolments in government schools accounted for 64.3 per cent of the total. The remaining 35.7 per cent were enrolled in non-government schools. Of the non-government enrolments, 75 per cent were in Catholic schools, 17 per cent in Anglican schools and 7.6 per cent in other schools.

Major developments

Government sector

A notable achievement for government schooling was the launch of the ACT Government Schools Plan 1998–2000: Partnerships for Excellence. The plan was developed as a result of extensive consultation with the community. It is a guide for all involved in government school education and supports the vision of Canberra as the clever, caring capital of Australia. The plan will assist schools face the challenges leading into the new century. It will ensure that government schools remain at the forefront of education delivery and maintain a culture of excellence.

The plan focusses on students becoming assured, knowledgeable learners and effective local and global citizens. Learning throughout life is emphasised. Student performance and commitment to learning, staff expertise, parent and carer participation, community partnerships, diversity and choice, accountability and openness are highlighted.

The goals of the plan are to:

- improve literacy and numeracy by strengthening teaching, developing effective strategies and achieving productive partnerships with parents and carers
- connect students and society by engaging students in learning, developing effective citizens and affirming the importance of the high school years
- develop a culture of enterprise by encouraging enterprising students, promoting quality teaching and building learning communities
- use information technology (IT) creatively by integrating IT into learning and teaching and improving administrative efficiency.

The title of the plan, 'Partnerships for Excellence', reflects the support provided by long-established community partnerships. School boards play a pivotal role in the success of government schools, as do parents, community organisations, business and industry. The plan recognises that partnerships in education are critical to improving student learning.

Catholic sector

The Catholic Education Office, in collaboration with Archdiocesan primary and secondary school principals, developed a list of system targets for 1998. Those targets, in order of priority, were:

- information technology
- early intervention in literacy
- curriculum development
- leadership development
- spiritual development of staff
- review of ACT primary schools
- middle years of schooling
- principal–parish–parent relationships.

Curriculum development continued to have a high priority in Catholic schools, with major emphases on religious education in secondary schools, civics and citizenship, cooperative learning, literacy and numeracy, Asia Across the Curriculum, special education and health and drug education.

Independent sector

Recurring themes in the objectives of ACT independent schools included the following:

- a focus on literacy attainment
- a focus on numeracy attainment
- curriculum development across a wide spectrum of subjects
- review of school policies and, in particular, approaches to behaviour management.

Improving literacy and numeracy

Literacy

The ACT Literacy Strategy for government schools was launched in June 1998. It covers preschool to year 10. Importantly, the strategy recognises the role of parents and carers as educators.

The strategy is a coordinated approach to improving literacy for all students in government schools. It is based on the assumptions that:

- all children can learn and succeed but will progress at different rates
- early identification and intervention for students at risk is the most effective way of improving literacy outcomes
- continued intervention and support will be required for some students with learning difficulties
- schools have a responsibility to create the conditions that will enable students to succeed.

An eight-point plan underpins the strategy. The plan involves:

- schools developing literacy plans that detail their approach to literacy improvement – these will be available to parents in conjunction with other public curriculum documents



Reading Room at Gold Creek School, ACT

- a coordinator or team providing support for teachers and coordinating literacy programs in each school
- a literacy team being established to provide assistance to schools
- a group of designated primary and high schools sharing their expertise with other teachers
- parent literacy awareness and support programs being provided by schools, clusters of schools and the literacy team
- an early childhood literacy plan being developed for children in childcare, preschool and kindergarten in collaboration with the Canberra Preschool Society
- a community-based early literacy intervention and awareness program being implemented to increase community awareness of the importance of language skills in the early childhood years
- a parent information booklet being developed about the importance of language development and strategies to support children as they move through the various stages of schooling.

Implementation of the strategy will be monitored at school and system levels. The strategy was informed by the results of the first systemwide primary school assessment program

in the ACT. Systemwide literacy assessment in years 3 and 5 covered all strands of literacy, including reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing. In 1999, the program will include assessment in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Student learning outcomes will be reported against national curriculum profile levels. Achievement data at each level will inform curriculum and teaching programs and provide comparable data for the national benchmarking program.

In 1998, the overall good performance levels of government school students in literacy were maintained in both years 3 and 5. Over 80 per cent of year 3 students performed between National English Profile Levels 2 and 3 in each strand of literacy. Over 76 per cent of year 5 students performed between Levels 3 and 4 in each strand of literacy. Reading remained the weakest strand for year 3 students, with 5.3 per cent of students still at Level 1. In writing, year 3 students performed more strongly, with 98 per cent having mastered skills at Level 2 and above. Year 5 students found speaking and writing the most difficult, with 17.2 per cent and 11.8 per cent respectively at Level 2. In reading, 98 per cent of year 5 students were at or above Level 2.

The literacy needs of students were supported in a variety of ways in government schools. Learning assistance was provided to students experiencing literacy difficulties. An important component of the Learning Assistance Program was Reading Recovery. The program provided students with intensive, individual assistance for 12 to 20 weeks.

Intensive English assistance was provided to newly arrived, Indigenous and kindergarten students. The Language for Understanding Across the Curriculum program also provided assistance to these students.

In the Catholic sector, literacy improvement became a priority with the broadbanding of Commonwealth funds. The focus was on years 3 and 5. The First Steps program was chosen as the delivery mode, with Tutor training given a high priority. Training was also provided for a focus teacher in each school.

The 1998 Archdiocesan Literacy and Numeracy Plan was developed and implemented in Catholic schools. It involved extensive development of school-based roles, including those of the Literacy Focus teacher and First Steps Tutor. A parent information guide on Archdiocesan literacy initiatives was published, promoting a 'parents as partners' approach. A focus on ESL student learning needs was maintained.

Literacy professional development opportunities were provided to teachers in Catholic schools, including First Steps Tutor courses, participation by school-based staff in the

interdiocesan literacy conference, Literacy in Action – A Catholic Perspective, and participation in cross-sectoral projects with the Department of Education and Community Services.

In 1998, the Archdiocesan Benchmarking Exercise was developed to report on literacy attainment in ACT Catholic primary schools. Students were drawn from a sample of nine schools, representing 17 per cent of the years 3 and 5 cohorts. The exercise will be further developed to include all students in year 3 and year 5 in 1999. This will include reporting by specific sub-categories, such as students with disabilities, Indigenous students and students from language backgrounds other than English.

Both the independent primary schools surveyed measured the literacy achievement of years 3 and 5 students. Tools included the normed Progressive Assessment Test and Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers testing (ACER). In testing sub-groups of students, one school in the sample had students with English as a second language or those with learning difficulties who scored above average.

Initiatives taken to implement assessment and reporting included staff training in First Steps and Spalding Phonetics, curriculum reviews, programs for parents and special classroom projects.

Both schools surveyed planned future initiatives in implementing literacy goals. They focussed on teacher training in First Steps and Spalding Phonetics, evaluating new curriculum, extending current activities and translating national profiles into the curriculum.

Numeracy

A range of programs were implemented to improve numeracy in government schools. Numeracy focus groups comprising key people from schools and tertiary institutions were convened to develop strategies to improve numeracy. Teachers established a numeracy network to develop numeracy training courses. Parents were partners in activities to improve numeracy, participating in school-based curriculum development and mathematics activity days.

The ACT numeracy assessment program was introduced into government schools in 1998. Using the ACER numeracy assessment package called 'Maths at the Zoo', the first full cohort assessment of year 5 students took place. The package was developed with input from teachers, parents, principals, the Department of Education and Community Services and other stakeholders. Assessment will cover students in years 3,

5, 7 and 9 from 1999. ACT teachers were directly involved in the development and trialling of the package.

On the first year 5 numeracy assessment, National Mathematics Profile Level 3 or above was achieved by 95 per cent of students in space, 91 per cent in number and 89 per cent in data sense.

In Catholic schools a number of initiatives were taken as part of the Archdiocesan Numeracy Plan and in preparation for the International Year of Mathematics in 2000. These included introducing school staff and parents to 'best practice' pedagogy, disseminating information to schools from national and State conferences on mathematics through in-service sessions and introducing staff in schools to key curriculum initiatives such as the 'working mathematically' strand.

Both independent schools surveyed assessed the numeracy achievements of year 3 and year 5 students. One school recorded no significant differences for ESL students, but students with learning difficulties scored below average.

Both schools initiated actions to implement the numeracy national goal and sub-goal agreed to by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in March 1997. These included:

- curriculum evaluation
- entry in all major competitions
- new programs to extend able students
- continued development of literacy and numeracy programs in line with national profiles.

The schools' planned future initiatives include policy reviews, introducing calculators, introducing activity cards to encourage independence in work methods and training in the Kumon mathematics system.

Supporting students with particular needs

Government schools catered for a diversity of students and made concerted efforts to meet equity needs. Education was provided for students with disabilities at four special schools. In mainstream settings students with disabilities were catered for in 25 primary schools, nine high schools and two colleges. A survey conducted in 1998 showed that 99 per cent of parents were satisfied with the services provided.

Reforms were implemented in government schools following a major review of services to students with disabilities. These included:

- introduction of a more extensive and flexible range of services in mainstream schools and preschools, including new services for autistic students
- development of an individual, needs-based assessment and resource allocation model
- consolidation and strengthening of integration support services for students and schools, where it was in the educational interests of the student
- revision of policies to incorporate obligations under anti-discrimination and disability services legislation
- recognition of the right of parents/carers to participate in decisions about their children's education, through open and explicit assessment and review processes
- strengthening of cooperation between government agencies.

Over 600 Indigenous students were supported in government schools. Additional assistance was provided to schools with socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In 1998, 14 schools with over 25 per cent of their enrolments identified as disadvantaged received funding of \$145,000 from the Schools Equity Fund. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage was used to determine disadvantage. The funds were used to improve learning outcomes of relatively disadvantaged students, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.



Indigenous preschool, ACT

Introductory English centres provided support to 458 newly arrived students from language backgrounds other than English. Assistance was also provided to 1,667 students in mainstream

schools. A total of 94 Indigenous students received ESL support, including those who spoke Aboriginal English.

The special needs of government school students in the middle years of schooling were addressed through a variety of initiatives. The ACT Middle Schools Network played an important role in facilitating parents' and teachers' understanding of middle schooling and provided support to teachers.

Government school students experiencing difficulty had the opportunity to withdraw from the mainstream school environment. Alternative units catered for student of all ages. They included an early intervention program for students aged 5–7 years, a primary program for students aged 7–12 years and an adolescent program for students aged 12–15 years. Programs focussed on literacy and numeracy skills development and aimed to reintegrate students into mainstream settings or to facilitate transition to work where appropriate. Alternative education was also provided for students at two government colleges.

The Adolescent Day Unit provided a day program of intensive specialist support for 15 young people from 12 to 15 years. The program improved students' self-esteem and social skills, helped them manage their behaviour and assisted them to integrate into school or an alternative activity. The Youth Connection Youth Work Service assisted young people to identify and address the issues that place them at risk of failing to complete their education. Based in a youth centre environment, the program assisted young people who were not currently involved in the formal education system or were unemployed. A teacher provided educational support in the centre on a drop-in basis, three days per week.

In 1998, two pilot High School Support Centres were established to provide short-term intervention programs for government school students experiencing difficulty in mainstream settings. The centres provided supportive, flexible education programs tailored to the needs of individual students in a non-school environment. Each centre included a teacher and a youth worker. Programs supported both academic and non-academic needs, assisting students to develop personal and social skills such as anger management, conflict resolution, effective communication and goal setting. An evaluation of the pilot project found strong support for the centres by all respondents.

In the Catholic sector the amalgamation of two secondary schools provided the opportunity to pursue a middle-school model on one campus, involving years 7 and 8. All secondary schools instituted elements of the model to facilitate more

effective social integration of primary students. Reports indicated numerous changes in attitude of students and a high level of staff commitment to the process.

The independent schools surveyed identified socioeconomically disadvantaged students, either through interviews with parents or through self-identification by parents in relation to fees or other costs. All schools in the sample had students they described as 'socioeconomically disadvantaged' and offered services to attract such students, including scholarships, bursaries, or very low fees.

Once enrolled, independent schools offered socioeconomically disadvantaged students specific services such as bursaries, fee relief, grants, scholarships, and subsidies for excursions and camps.

Both independent schools surveyed addressed gender equity issues. They took specific action in 1998 to ensure that the concept of gender construction would be acknowledged, examined and understood at all levels of schooling. The issue was a subject of staff discussion and was addressed at various stages in curricula. One school in the sample acted to ensure that curriculum reform acknowledged and addressed gender equity principles by planning a curriculum review. To deal with gender-based violence and harassment, the schools surveyed took action such as developing/ implementing behaviour management policies or codes of conduct that were written collaboratively with students.

Recognising that expanding post-school pathways for students is an important issue, the schools in the sample introduced non-gender-based advice about careers and tertiary education options; teachers as role models, and visits from people working in professions to dramatise role models for students. The schools ensured that gender equity principles would be integral to school and management by introducing affirmative action programs and a Value Difference program.

Funding received from both the Commonwealth and ACT governments was used to support students with disabilities in independent schools. Support included additional teacher assistance as well as purchase of equipment specific to the students' disabilities. A network of special education teachers shared knowledge and strategies and identified appropriate professional development courses.

One school in the sample had students at risk of leaving school early. It provided extensive counselling and support and, in addition, gave students transferred from other schools a fresh start.

To assist students in need of ESL assistance, the independent schools in the sample introduced initiatives such as small tuition groups and additional lessons.

Reporting on school performance

Reporting on school performance is a key aspect of ACT government school education. In 1998, four high schools and 15 primary schools participated in the quality assurance process known as School Development. Every year, around 20 per cent of schools participate in this process.

In the review phase of School Development, school communities identified achievements and areas for improvement. School communities received training on strategic planning, data analysis, evaluation and report writing.

Questionnaires were distributed to parents, students and staff. Responses provided information to the system and the school about community perceptions. Schools also reviewed curriculum. The questionnaires and curriculum review were used by schools to produce a four-year development plan. Each plan addressed issues identified in the review process and established objectives and measures for improvement. The plan was included in a final report to the school community.

School Development promotes school improvement, future planning and accountability. The process involves the whole school community in review and planning for the future. The primary outcomes are improved learning and enhanced education opportunities for students.

In 1998, 89.5 per cent of parents involved in School Development expressed strong satisfaction with the education provided, as did 84.5 per cent of students, 90.5 per cent of teachers and 96.5 per cent of administrative staff.

A review was begun in 1998 in the Catholic sector as part of the school renewal and registration process. The review assessed the extent to which delivery of educational services met course requirements, including the standard of capital equipment and buildings. The review also assessed the capacity of the system to meet future needs in accordance with demographic change.

Using information technology creatively

To complement the government commitment to making Canberra a leader in information technology, a \$20 million package was introduced to provide computers in government schools. The package delivered approximately 2,000 computers for students and teachers during 1998. It is an integrated initiative that recognises the central role teachers play in education and provides schools with:

- \$5 million in grants
- the Computers for Teachers program
- access to quality low-cost computers to schools
- free software for educational purposes.

Under the Computers for Teachers program, 95 per cent of all permanent government schools teachers will have a computer dedicated to their own use by 1999.

In addition to providing equipment and funding, creative strategies were put in place to provide customised IT coaching directly to classroom teachers in government schools. Around 1,700 staff have already received formal IT training. Over the next three years experienced IT teachers will coach their peers.



Ginninderra District High School media class, ACT

A multifaceted approach was used to keep government schools at the forefront of the information age. This approach involved providing schools with a wide area network, an administration system, technical support, professional development and grants for innovative projects.

The Internet has become a major resource for student learning. Ninety-two per cent of government schools were connected to the Internet through the Canberra Schools on the Net service. This service was developed by Telstra in partnership with Schoolsnet and the Department of Education and Community Services.

A priority of the government schools plan is improving administrative efficiency. All government schools now have an administrative system that enables them to record all student information on one database. The new system is an integrated package that provides data on students, enrolments and finance, and other statistical information.

Strategic partnerships with the computer industry are being developed that will benefit government schools over the next few years.

In the Catholic sector, an on-line computer network was established as part of the development of an overall system communication strategy. All schools were equipped with an administration computer and associated software. The system provided email and Internet access at all sites.

Enhancing vocational education and training

Vocational education and training (VET) continued its rapid growth in government and non-government schools. There was a high level of cooperation between sectors and between schools and industry bodies, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Joint Industry Training Council.

Government and non-government schools cooperated in a feasibility study of training packages for the Canberra region and the capacity of industry to provide vocational placement opportunities.

A pilot project was carried out in 1998 involving students in school-based New Apprenticeships. Students entered an agreement with the Building and Construction Group Training Company to undertake industry training concurrent with the

year 12 Certificate. Eight students from non-government schools and eight from government schools entered this program at the end of 1998. The students will receive their Certificate II during 1999 after they have completed the year 12 Certificate.

In 1998, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) agreed to provide funding to establish a number of skill centres in government and non-government senior secondary schools in 1999. Grants of \$40,000 each were provided to three government colleges for the establishment of Practice Firms. A Catholic college received a grant of \$180,000 for the development of a business skills centre. Regional skill centres in multimedia were established at two government senior colleges in 1998. Skill centres set up with ANTA funding are available for use by all schools and by the general community.

Expanding VET courses in government and non-government senior secondary schools was a major priority, with an emphasis on linking key stakeholders. The number of Board of Senior Secondary Studies accredited vocational courses available in 1998 increased to 17.

Schools delivered a range of programs that met national standards, responded to industry needs and articulated with apprenticeships, traineeships, employment and further training. Students participated in a wide variety of VET activities. For example, businesses assisted groups of year 11 students to establish and operate their own companies through the Business Skills Program under the auspices of Young Achievers Australia.

In 1998, government and non-government schools continued to work closely with training providers, industry and schools through the ACT School-Industry Taskforce. This group helped set directions for VET in schools and investigated a sustainable structure for vocational placements.

In the government sector five high schools and two senior secondary colleges participated in a pilot program to explore ways of linking high schools and colleges through vocational education. Other initiatives included a feasibility study into using personnel from industry to assist with VET delivery and a project to investigate the provision of credit for competencies achieved through part-time work.

Professional development opportunities were provided to VET teachers in government and non-government schools, including return-to-industry programs and training towards workplace assessor qualifications. In 1998, workplace assessor qualifications were provided to 34 teachers in Catholic schools and nine in independent schools. A total of 125 teachers in

government schools gained these qualifications, more than half of them in 1998. In non-government schools in 1998 experts from industry were trained as mentors and workplace assessors to provide a resource to teachers and students.

Connecting students and society

Government school programs incorporated units on social and democratic participation, cultural tolerance and participation in the world of work. Students were made aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They were encouraged to develop values that assist them to contribute effectively to a diverse, global society.

Government and non-government schools participated in the trialling of the Curriculum Corporation *Discovering Democracy* materials. The final kits were distributed to all schools in 1998. Professional development activities on *Discovering Democracy* themes were provided for teachers, including two workshops at the ACT Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) Professional Association summer school. A pilot course for primary and secondary teachers was also developed and run by the Australian National University political science department. A program of grants is planned for government and non-government schools to develop innovative implementation models, including across-curriculum approaches.

Students in government schools received first-hand experience of democratic processes through student representative councils and class parliaments. These forums encouraged students to undertake leadership roles and negotiate classroom, playground and school rules. Student leadership was also encouraged through involvement in the ACT Government Schools Student Network. The network gave student representatives the opportunity to discuss issues with senior executives at monthly meetings. Other forums in which students were involved included district network meetings and the School Board Forum. There is a student representative on all government school boards.

Action was taken to involve students in government and non-government schools in a broad range of experiences within the community in order to improve their sense of

self-worth and confidence. Schools sought to develop students who are enterprising, adaptable, competent and confident, and who have a positive approach to change.

The involvement of businesses in schools was seen as essential in promoting enterprise. In government and non-government schools programs such as work experience were available to ensure that school leavers could contribute to the business life of the local region. Local business provided advice and financial support to teachers on enterprise activities.

Several schools were awarded AusIndustry grants for enterprise projects. In the Designers and Builders in Schools Project, high school students worked with an architect and a builder to design, build and appraise a permanent structure in keeping with the school's architectural style.

Schools encouraged students to care for the environment and be aware of greenhouse issues. Many schools were involved in environment preservation activities such as Landcare and Clean Up Australia. Other enterprising projects included the production of solar-powered cars and the Lakewatch and Aquafest initiatives, which involved students and the community in lake ecology and other aquatic activities.

Both independent schools surveyed engaged in citizenship education in 1998. Teaching of citizenship was incorporated with other studies. In primary schools these included SOSE, literature, social studies, Christian living, history and geography. Initiatives and activities included:

- multicultural education – developing links with overseas schools; culture, language and arts programs focussed on other countries and cultures such as Spain, Italy and Asia
- anti-racism activities such as classroom discussion, links with overseas students, literature studies, reconciliation and Sorry Day activities
- integration of anti-discrimination activities in units such as SOSE
- whole-school meetings to discuss and formulate codes of conduct in regard to anti-discrimination
- involvement in a range of charities and community activities, including fundraising, providing guest speakers, sponsoring children and supporting organisations or events such as AusAid and Walk for the Cure (juvenile diabetes)
- parliamentary education via student representative council meetings, excursions to Parliament House and the ACT Legislative Assembly, role-playing and the election of prefects.

The independent schools surveyed reported positive outcomes as a result of these programs and activities, including:

- increased awareness of Australia as a multicultural society
- greater understanding of the nature of citizenship
- greater responsibility for actions and behaviour both in school and in the larger community
- greater awareness of the role of local government
- appreciation of the needs of charities.

In the two independent schools future plans included revising curriculum, new programs, staff training, policy development and focussing on a theme such as ‘federal government’ or ‘Aboriginal studies’.

Promoting the health and well-being of students

All schools promoted the health and well-being of their students. Health promotion programs were included in the key learning area (KLA) of health, physical education and sport and, where appropriate, in other KLAs such as science, SOSE and technology.

Schools worked with Family Planning ACT, the ACT Cancer Society and the Heart Foundation to ensure that students were provided with a range of health education opportunities.

Drug education continued to be a focus. A Drug Education Working Party was formed to provide advice on good practice in government school drug education programs and to develop a draft framework for drug education in government schools. Its membership included community groups.

In the Catholic sector, a curriculum officer participated in the ACT Healthpact Steering Committee for Health Promoting Schools. One senior secondary college received funding to support a project officer to develop and implement a ‘best practice’ model for drug education. Training was provided to Life Education ACT staff to assist in their delivery of drug education programs in Catholic schools. Support was provided to a number of schools for drug education and curriculum-related matters. Resources were expanded at the Catholic Education Office Resource Library to assist teachers in the presentation of drug education units.

The Active Australia project was piloted in 1998 with the initial involvement of 25 government and non-government schools. The project examined how physical activity is promoted and supported within the school environment. The physical activity of over 3,000 students was monitored in and

out of school. Results of the project contributed directly to the development of an Active Australia model, which will be used in schools across the country. A number of schools were given approved provider status by Active Australia. These schools were recognised for their commitment to making physical activity a quality experience.

Most government high schools provided a Pre Driver Awareness program for year 10 students. The program was designed to prepare students for their learner licence. Schools were able to access government and community support for the program. The Department of Education and Community Services collaborated with the Australian College of Road Safety (ACT Chapter) to promote and support a Safe Young Driver Awards Scheme in government senior secondary colleges. Five colleges participated in the first year of the scheme.

In 1998, the policy statement *Child Abuse and Neglect: Guidelines for Response to Concerns* was provided to professionals working in government schools. It provided guidelines on how to respond to suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. A newsletter, entitled *Keeping Children Safe: A Shared Responsibility*, was distributed to all schools, child-care facilities, medical surgeries, family support agencies and ACT government shopfronts. The Protective Behaviours program taught children to deal with situations involving physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The Safe Schools Policy Framework emphasised positive student management and provided strategies for minimising violence and harassment.

Catholic schools participated in a number of child protection initiatives, including professional development on the Child Protection Policy, the strategy networks for the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and implementation of national employment policy screening procedures.

Delivering quality teaching and management

Quality teaching, school administration and management were promoted in government schools through ongoing professional development. Professional development for teachers centred on improving classroom practice and teaching. Programs provided were school-focussed and encouraged research into improving student learning. They were practical and adaptable

to specific staff needs. Teachers enhanced their professional learning by attending courses on topics such as developing curricula, cooperative learning, team building, conflict resolution, leadership and cross-cultural training and awareness.

All government school teachers participated in a minimum of five days of staff development in holiday periods as part of the 1996–98 Enterprise Agreement. At the system level, particular emphasis was given to professional development in literacy and curriculum renewal. In primary schools, teachers were trained in the First Steps literacy program. In secondary schools, teachers explored curriculum renewal through a program called Quality Curriculum: the Challenge for High Schools. Teachers in senior secondary colleges explored moderation and assessment procedures and VET.

A high priority was given to school-based professional development in government schools. Issues explored included assessment and reporting, change management, cooperative learning, curriculum development, information literacy, multiple intelligences and student management.

All government school teachers developed, negotiated and organised Individual Development Plans according to professional needs. The plans enabled staff to manage their own professional learning. Beginning teachers received support from a teacher induction program and mentors in schools.

Government school administrative staff made an important contribution to student learning through their support of management, teaching staff and students and their relationships with parent and community groups. Principals, deputy principals and executive teachers attended a variety of professional development courses to improve their leadership and management skills.

Catholic school leaders and Catholic Education Office personnel accessed a range of system, State and national leadership programs to meet the ongoing need to update and upgrade skills. Programs focussed on religious education, drug education, education of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, middle schooling, boys' education and special education.

With their special character, charter and mission, Catholic schools placed a continued emphasis on the spiritual needs and development of all staff. Opportunities were afforded all personnel in schools to participate in systemwide initiatives involving staff spiritual in-service training, individual programs such as New Visions and attendance at programs involving national and international guest presenters.

In the independent schools surveyed initiatives in numeracy attainment included staff attending workshops, conferences, an Association of Independent Schools mathematics seminar and multiple courses. Staff attended specific workshops and conferences in assessment for literacy education, early intervention for literacy education, professional development for support staff, citizenship education, workshops on dance and music, courses based on digital technology for the arts, and training in First Steps and Spalding Phonetics for literacy diagnostic testing.

Enhancing partnerships with parents and the community

During the year, partnerships with parents were enhanced. An emphasis was placed on working collaboratively with parents to achieve quality outcomes for students. Keeping parents informed of their children's progress at school was a priority.

Parents continued to play a vital role in the governance of government schools through school boards and parents' and citizens' associations. School boards are responsible for policy, planning and budgeting. Each board includes three parent representatives. Training was provided by the Department of Education and Community Services for members of school boards. Representatives of school boards and the School Board Forum met on a regional basis with senior officers of the department to raise issues and provide advice. The ACT Council of Parents' and Citizens' Associations and the School Board Forum were key players in the development of the Literacy Strategy and Partnerships for Excellence – ACT Government Schools Plan 1998–2000.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling helped to keep the government informed of community views. In 1998, the council examined the processes associated with the Schools Equity Fund, which provides assistance for disadvantaged students. In its report to the Minister, the council recommended a definition of disadvantage based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage. The council also recommended a threshold for school eligibility for the fund. Schools with at least 25 per cent of their students resident in collection districts defined as disadvantaged were included.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Non-government Schooling in the ACT provided advice to the Minister on

issues for the non-government school community. Issues discussed by the committee in 1998 included proposals for the introduction of greater self regulation into the re-registration process for non-government schools, literacy and numeracy assessment, funding matters and proposals for the review of ACT education legislation.

In the Catholic sector, a Parent/Participation Officer was appointed to liaise with interest groups to improve communication and to promote the pastoral and spiritual needs of the community, faith development, parental involvement and authentic Catholic education.

Review of ACT school legislation

In September 1998, the Minister for Education announced a review of ACT school education legislation. The review will

provide advice to the government on the relevance of the existing legislation to current thinking and on the elements of legislation needed for quality schooling into the 21st century. Key stakeholders were invited to participate in a review committee and a full public inquiry was scheduled for 1999.

The scope of the review includes examination of the objectives, maintenance of standards and management of school education in the ACT, the relationship between the government and non-government sectors and the impact of Commonwealth and ACT Government agreements, particularly competition policy and regulatory reform policy.

The review process should result in a legislative framework that meets the current and future schooling needs of the ACT community.