

Chapter 15

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Structure and context of schooling

Government sector

The ACT Department of Education and Community Services has direct responsibility for government preschools, primary schools (K–6), high schools (years 7–10), secondary colleges (years 11 and 12), and a range of special settings.

The pattern of enrolments in government schools was as indicated in Table 15.1.

Education policy and programs support the ACT government's vision of 'a clever, caring capital'. The three component outcomes for the whole of government are 'a healthy, safe, diverse and contributing community', 'accessible, cost-effective services' and 'a dynamic, sustainable economy'.

Two of the important measures of success for these outcomes are education levels and participation rates. These are achieved against the background of a well-educated population and a school retention rate which is high in comparison with national rates.

Part of the context of schooling is a service-based ACT economy, new and evolving government social and economic priorities since the advent of ACT self-government and an ACT education system which celebrated its twenty-fifth year in 1999.

The Family Support Plan aims to link schools with families and communities. The plan was developed to communicate a number of goals, actions and activities that underpin the department's commitment to supporting families in schools and linking closely with service providers. Building upon family strengths and supporting parents to enhance the well-being of children and the communities in which they live are inherent elements of this commitment.

Table 15.1 Enrolments in government schools, ACT, 1999

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| <i>Preschool sector</i> | |
| Preschools | 81 |
| Students | 3,900 |
| <i>School sector</i> | |
| Schools | 97 |
| <i>Students</i> | |
| Primary | 21,606 |
| Secondary | 17,198 |
| Total | 38,804 |
| Female | 19,047 |
| Male | 19,757 |
| Teachers ¹ | 2,664.7 |
| Average school size | 400 |
| <i>Apparent retention rates</i> | |
| Years 7–12 | 110.0% |
| Years 10–12 | 107.1% |
| <i>Student groups</i> | |
| Born overseas | 6,945 |
| Indigenous | 684 |
| International | 206 |
| NSW resident | 1,365 |
| LOTE enrolments ² | 23,322 |
| ESL enrolments ³ | 1,964 |

Notes:

1 In school, full-time equivalent

2 Languages other than English

3 English as a second language

Source ACT Department of Education and Community Services

It is intended that the Family Support Plan will serve as a catalyst for action. Government and non-government service providers, government schools and non-government schools, local community groups, small business and corporations are encouraged to support the

goals of the plan in delivering family support to our community over the next three years. In this way the plan will contribute to a whole-of-government and community understanding of building and sustaining a healthy, robust community.

The plan acknowledges the increasing recognition by society for shared responsibility: that a need exists for a whole-of-community response to promoting the safety, welfare and well-being of all children and their families. A whole-of-community response results in benefits to the community and society as a whole: the occurrence of social negatives affecting communities, family functioning and children are minimised, for example homelessness, aggressive behaviour, child abuse and neglect, poor school performance.

Although schools cannot provide all the services that children and families need, they can offer a critical point of access to outside services and often provide an ideal location for many kinds of assistance.

The plan outlines some actions and activities in which schools are already engaged or are planning to introduce over its lifetime.

The Education and Community Services Business Plan for Government School Education sets out initiatives to be completed by June 2000. They include:

- introduction of the High Schools for the New Millennium program
- reporting of literacy and numeracy achievement against national benchmarks
- enhancement of drug education in schools
- introduction of a needs-based assessment model for students with disabilities
- consolidation of years 11 and 12 standards-based assessment
- development of a parent participation policy
- trialling of year 10 information technology competencies
- embedding of Registered Training Organisation (RTO) processes in the College Review program
- increase in international sales of services and intellectual property
- establishment of schools as community centres/home-school links

- refinement of School Development processes.

Catholic sector

Within the ACT sector of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Catholic Education Office is responsible for systemic education in 22 primary schools (K–6), and five secondary schools (years 7–12).

1999 student enrolments were:

| | |
|-----------------|--------|
| Primary schools | 8,546 |
| Secondary | 7,667 |
| TOTAL | 16,213 |

The student population was made up of 8,348 males and 7,865 females.

The following groups were part of the student population:

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Indigenous | 112 |
| International | 12 |
| LOTE enrolments | 8,025 |
| Students with disabilities | 107 |
| ESL enrolments | 839 |

There were 635 teachers full-time equivalent.

The Catholic Education Office provides educational, financial and administrative services designed to enhance the quality of education available to students within the archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. With an emphasis on consultation and human relations, the Office continues to develop leadership, provide resources and foster professional and spiritual development for Catholic systemic school communities within the archdiocese and for the Catholic Education Office staff so that schools and the Office fulfil their educational and pastoral roles within the spirit and philosophy of Catholicism.

Priority objectives

Government sector

Improving literacy and numeracy

Strengthening teaching, learning and assessment strategies

The development of a literacy and numeracy assessment program for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 was completed. A total of 6,000 primary school students and 5,200 high school students were assessed in July and August 1999.

The Literacy Strategy has been implemented in all primary and high schools – all schools submitted their Literacy Plans in 1999. An additional \$400,000 was allocated to improve literacy and numeracy programs in the early years.

Literacy and numeracy were the focus of high school and primary school system days and achieved 100 per cent participation in all schools. Further reporting and professional development initiatives are targeted for implementation or completion in 2000.

Achieving productive partnerships with parents and carers

Parents are involved in professional development activities and conferences with teachers. The video *Never Miss a Chance*, which will help parents/carers support their children's literacy and language development, is being distributed through parent, family and community organisations.

The Supportive Practices to Enhance Literacy Learning project provided training for teachers in developing partnerships with parents/carers and will be completed in 2000. Components of this project included home-school communication, homework and integrating home and school literacy and numeracy practices.

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) program was developed in the USA and has been implemented internationally. A pilot was launched in the ACT in 1999. FAST targets the underlying causes of school failure, child abuse, substance abuse and delinquency in a preventative approach that requires the collaboration of schools, parents, family support and alcohol and drug agencies. The impact of the program is rigorously measured and the program has proved extremely effective.

The development of a Parent Participation Policy is under way. The policy affirms parent/carer participation as a fundamental component of the ACT government school system and provides a framework for the development of effective partnerships with parents.

Surveys indicate that 86 per cent of primary school parents and 48 per cent of high school parents were provided with the opportunity to be involved in educational activities at school.

Connecting students and society

Engaging students in learning

A comprehensive range of initiatives were implemented, including advances in vocational education, promotions such as Enterprise Education Week, strategies to enhance

self-esteem and resilience, and interventions on behalf of Indigenous students and students with disabilities. All schools have contact officers to assist with countering sexual harassment and racism.

Surveys indicate that student perceptions of a safe, harassment-free learning environment are significantly more positive among primary school students than among high school students. Further training of teachers in anti-sexual harassment and anti-racism strategies was offered in 1999.

School Development surveys in 2000 will include a question aimed at measuring the percentage of students who believe that their self-worth and self-confidence is being developed.

Developing effective citizens

Discovering Democracy grants were used to implement projects in 19 schools and resulted in a number of individual school programs with a citizenship theme and community involvement. The Active Australia Leaders program was widely implemented and focused on encouraging students, outside the elite athlete category, to become leaders in their sport.

As mentioned earlier, there was a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in vocational education and training programs over the last three years, as well as a corresponding increase in the numbers of students seeking vocational placements.

Affirming the High School Years

Affirming the High School Years is a key priority in the ACT Government Schools Plan. The action taken to achieve this priority will acknowledge and draw upon the professionalism and commitment of high school teachers.

The aim in addressing issues facing high schools is to achieve outcomes in three broad areas:

- shaping cultures
- structural change
- learning and assessment.

An Affirming the High School Years Action Timeline has been developed to guide implementation of school and system initiatives to achieve the desired outcomes.

ACT government high school principals and deputy principals met to look at ways of explaining, developing and affirming the central place of high schools in Canberra. The workshop reflected on the importance of high schools

in the development of young people in Canberra and of their changing needs.

Five year 10 students from Territory high schools received recognition in the 1999 INTERACT Awards for Outstanding Achievement in the High School Years. The awards were given for excellence in academic, sporting, personal and school community achievement.

The National Schools Network project in high schools involved a large number of specially trained teachers in a structured program to explore new and best practices in pedagogy and school organisation.

The draft year 10 IT competencies were completed and were piloted in five high schools in Term 4, 1999. There will be a full trial of year 10 IT competencies in all high schools in 2000. The percentage of year 10 students with IT competencies will be reported in 2001.

The review of the ACT Year 10 Certificate to ensure it meets the needs of a changing social and economic climate has reached the consultation paper stage. The second stage of consultation begins in 2000.

Three high schools are trialling key competency reporting and the results of these trials will provide valuable information for the design of a new year 10 certificate.

Developing a culture of enterprise

Encouraging enterprising students

During Enterprise Education Week schools showcased school enterprise education initiatives in Canberra shopping centres through activities and displays, parent and student workshops and a principals' national teleconference on enterprise education.

Sustainable curriculum change in selected high schools was supported to place a stronger emphasis on enterprise education in areas such as studies of society and environment and the Sport Education in Physical Education Program (SEPEP). Central office staff encouraged and assisted in a variety of school-based programs such as creative problem-solving and lateral-thinking exercises, and simulated business projects.

Well-attended professional development evenings promoted the SEPEP curriculum model, which emphasises student leadership, management, decision-making and teamwork competencies. As well as participating in sporting activities students also provided the administrative and management support for the programs.

There was ongoing collaboration with Australian Business Week (ABW) and Young Achievement Australia. One result was an increase in the number of schools using the ABW program to simulate business environments for students.

ACT students successfully participated in the annual Plan Your Own Enterprise competition for years 10, 11, 12 students in Australia and New Zealand. The ACT also provided the national winner. Business Educators of Australasia and the Institute of Chartered Accountants conducted the competition.

Agreements were reached with the ACT Department of Urban Services and the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers to enable out-of-classroom community service components of the mainstream curriculum to expand.

The Outdoor Adventure Activities policy was redrafted to eliminate anomalies and clarify requirements for its effective operation.

In partnership with the ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Adopt-a-School project was implemented and a report produced that detailed partnership activities and evaluated outcomes. The evaluation demonstrated the overall success of the project as a trial and made recommendations for future strategic directions. The concept is seen as having the potential to engage schools and local businesses in community development, curriculum enhancement and community service partnerships. Additional schools and businesses are now using the model.

Surveys indicated that the percentage of students satisfied with their involvement in school decision making was much higher among primary school students than among high school students.

Promoting quality teaching

The department implemented System Professional Development Days; supported cluster-based professional development exercises; delivered central courses on performance management, ethics, leadership and team excellence; and trained staff as trainers in cross-cultural awareness.

Evaluation sheets indicate high levels of teacher satisfaction with the System Professional Development Days.

A fresh media strategy for the 1999 Departmental Awards resulted in increased recognition of professional excellence in teaching.

Building learning communities

The Full Service Schools unit became operational. In 1999, the Unit provided 'at risk' or returning students access to alternative education and training opportunities as well as professional development opportunities for staff working with these students. The unit's activities were designed to strengthen partnerships with community agencies. A full service school evaluation is due in 2000.

Consultations and drafting began for a system Framework for Partnerships. The framework will encompass protocols and policies as they apply to the relationship between schools and their wider communities. It is due for completion in 2000.

Over 1,100 parents were involved in Needs Based Assessment Panels for students with disabilities. A needs based assessment instrument is being developed.

There was substantial liaison activity in establishing understandings with diverse community groups, business, other government agencies and professional organisations, including Indigenous community representatives and the Health Promoting Schools Network.

Successful pilot projects were implemented with:

- the Australian Federal Police, to examine the effectiveness of direct involvement of police officers in school programs
- the University of Canberra, in partnerships that will enable undergraduates to use school and departmental programs as subjects of their research.

The Board of Senior Secondary Studies rewrote some 20 courses to meet the requirements of Training Packages that define industry workplace competencies. This will have the effect of bringing both teachers and students into contact with the workplace and enable students to obtain national vocational qualifications.

Multiple innovative teaching and learning models were in operation, for example Music Pedagogy, Webquests, Boys' Education, English Modules and a Sports Fitness Vocational Training pilot.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling survey on the extent and nature of school/community partnerships is currently being analysed to identify and strengthen links with the community and business.

Using information technology (IT) creatively

Integrating IT into learning and teaching

There was intensive professional development in IT support and IT-related curriculum initiatives. The IT coaching program, providing small-group professional development, was implemented. A majority of teachers reported using computers in delivering learning programs and in completing administrative tasks.

Best practice in the use of IT was showcased by a total of 62 schools in the 1998 and 1999 IT Weeks. Best practice and professional development will continue to be emphasised in the IT field during the year 2000.

Education Network Australia (EdNA) facilitated the donation of 991 computers to schools in 1999. The survey of IT infrastructure in schools was completed. Early indications are that the overall student-to-computer ratio improved from 11.43 students per computer in 1997 to 7.65 students per computer in 1999. Primary schools have a student-to-computer ratio of 6.67 students per computer.

Improving administrative efficiency

Administrative efficiency improved through:

- the completion of the Computers for Teachers Program, involving the rollout of 2,800 PCs to provide one Pentium PC for each equivalent full-time teacher
- completion of the installation of the year 12 software for certification and assessment
- completion of the new School Administration System installation and the training for use of the integrated system
- employment by the department of two technicians specifically to support schools
- provision for schools to access free Microsoft software licences
- delivery of free Web publishing courses to central office staff.

Catholic sector

Education services included:

- preparation for implementing new religious education guidelines
- planning for Jubilee Gathering Days in 2000

- professional development for implementing information technology in the K–12 curriculum
- literacy benchmarking in years 3 and 5
- school-based cross-curriculum processes and key learning area development
- development of new guidelines for Languages Other than English in schools
- learner-centred assessment, cooperative learning and multi-age classes
- managing student behaviours
- inclusion
- RTO status of schools for vocational education and training
- Indigenous education teacher training and development of the Mobile Indigenous Cultural Centre
- National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools – Studies of Asia curriculum support
- serving students with special needs in schools.

Human resource initiatives for the year covered:

- development of a communications strategy that encompassed promotions, media, advertising, public relations and correspondence
- fostering partnerships between parents and teachers
- improving employment relations
- support and development procedures
- Masters in Educational Leadership programs
- development of staff appraisals, performance reviews, principals' appointments and support.

Independent sector

The further development of skills and knowledge associated with literacy and numeracy was among the objectives of most surveyed schools. Other objectives included identifying gifted and talented students, ensuring computers were accessible to all students and staff, preparing students for the workforce, catering more effectively for children with special needs, ensuring students were able to realise their full potential, and assisting teachers to further enhance their knowledge and skills through professional development.

Significant developments

Government sector

Affirming the High School Years

The Affirming the High School Years initiative was a major force for change in improving the learning outcomes for students in years 7–10. In 1999, a wide range of projects was developed and implemented at the individual school level as joint initiatives between schools and the department.

Examples of joint initiatives were:

- reporting information technology competencies
- revamping the year 10 certificate
- reporting key competencies
- years 7 and 9 Literacy/ Numeracy Assessment program
- year 10 awards for outstanding achievement in the high school years
- developing a vision statement for high schools
- improving transition between high schools/primary schools and secondary colleges
- supporting the ongoing work of the NSN Research circles
- vocational pathways
- developing flexibility and diversity in high school structures, such as the Middle School program.

Other initiatives targeted staffing issues, managing students with extreme behaviour, developing a high school charter and improving communication and information about the achievements of high schools and their students.

Information technology competencies

The ACT government has set a goal for 95 per cent of year 10 students to demonstrate IT competency by the year 2001. A pilot project involving five high schools assessed students against competencies involving:

- access to information processes and tools
- communication and collaboration processes and tools
- organisational processes and tools
- authoring processes and tools
- presentation and visual display processes and tools.

The information obtained from these trials provided the basis for the design of a trial involving all high schools in 2000.

All high school staff completed a survey to determine their professional development needs in IT. A professional development program was designed to ensure that staff have the competencies needed to teach and assess IT skills.

Year 10 certificate

A paper was published and initial consultation completed on the future of the ACT year 10 certificate. The results of the consultation will be used to develop a proposal for change. Further consultation will be undertaken in 2000 and implementation in 2001.

Key competencies

Three ACT high schools participated in a trial of the key competencies as the basis of reporting to students. Reports from these schools will be used as part of the review of the ACT year 10 certificate.

Literacy and numeracy

All students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were assessed in the literacy skills of reading and writing as well as the numeracy strands of number, space and data sense. Students in years 3 and 5 were also assessed on listening, speaking and viewing. All strands used a thematic approach in a curriculum based unit of work. The three numeracy strands were drawn from the National Profiles with data sense incorporating chance and data, and measurement. All strands were externally marked.

Years 7 and 9 were assessed for the first time in 1999.

Year 10 awards

The inaugural ceremony to recognise the outstanding achievements of five year 10 students in each ACT government high school was held in December 1999. The awards were sponsored by the Interact Technology Group and acknowledged excellence in a range of different schooling activities.

Early childhood assessment

An assessment screen was developed for use in kindergarten. This screen provides a basis for teachers to identify students who need additional support to achieve success in literacy and numeracy. Kindergarten teachers will trial the use of this instrument in 2000.

International education

In 1999, there were almost 100 students from the People's Republic of China in ACT government schools, compared with only five at the beginning of 1998. As a result, the teaching and learning of Mandarin in schools has been enhanced to cater for increased student interest. The International Education Unit, in partnership with the schools, is involved in a number of short- and long-term initiatives aimed at increasing the number of international fee-paying students in the system.

Indigenous education

The Indigenous Education Unit was renamed and relocated to make it more accessible to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The core focus of the unit is now curriculum and educational outcomes.

Autism programs in government schooling

A range of options were provided for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, including support in mainstream settings and special units and programs in special schools. A Working Party reconvened in May 1999 as a consultative forum to enable ongoing discussions with parents. The new forum is titled The ASD Advisory and Consultative Committee.

Drug education

The development of the Drug Education Framework for ACT Government Schools in 1999 was a major initiative that involved extensive community consultation. It is part of the National School Drug Education Strategy and receives Commonwealth funding. The framework will be implemented through professional development programs that will support schools in drug education.

Professional development and teacher education

Government sector

Numeracy

All primary school teachers attended a half-day of professional development on teaching numeracy. All primary schools then reviewed their approach to teaching numeracy.

Literacy

Several teachers from each high school were trained in a program of writing text types in key learning areas. These teachers then facilitated a day in their school for all high school teachers to participate in this program, Language Understanding Across the Curriculum, First Steps or Conceptual Mediation.

Leadership

In preparation for the implementation of the new departmental Performance Management Framework 60 senior school staff attended one day of training in performance management techniques; 97 senior school staff attended a half-day of ethics training; 52 senior school staff attended a series of four two-hour courses on legal issues; and 200 school leaders attended a one-day workshop on leadership and management skills.

Information technology

Two hundred classroom teachers attended a one-day professional development session in which they examined adult learning in the information technology age. One hundred classroom teachers were trained in WebQuests. One hundred and ten schools were funded for IT coaches to assess IT professional development needs and devise strategies to meet those needs. IT coaches have provided 70 small-group professional development sessions, mostly on integration of IT in the curriculum.

Commonwealth-funded capital projects

Government sector

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$3.904 million towards capital projects in the government sector under the general element of the Capital Grants Programme.

In government schools there were six major projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially in 1999. Major projects involved provision of transportable accommodation and upgrading science and technology areas in secondary schools.

In 1998–99, the ACT government provided \$9.704 million for capital works projects in government schools. The ACT government also provided \$2.29 million in interest subsidies for capital projects in the non-government sector in 1998/99.

Non-government sector

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$2 million towards capital projects in the ACT non-government sector under the General element of the Commonwealth Capital Grants Programme.

Of the capital projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1999, the most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided were:

- for primary schools, the upgrading of administration and library facilities, the provision of computer equipment and the construction of general learning areas
- for secondary schools, the upgrading of industrial arts facilities and the construction of general learning areas.