



ACT Council of
Parents & Citizens
Associations

The parent voice on public education

NOTES FROM THE ACT COUNCIL OF P&C ASSOCIATIONS

HOT TOPICS/GENERAL MEETING OF 28 MARCH 2017

Attended by 30 delegates from 23 schools

Presentation on Challenges facing ACT education and parent participation – Natalie Howson, Director General of the Education Directorate (Edu)

Natalie outlined her experience of our schools since taking on the DG position in July last year. She visited all 87 schools and colleges in her first 3 months and saw firsthand the problems each school faced but also the great professionalism of our teachers and the positive aspects of our system, including the great character and success of our students. Points she noted were:

- School communities – the partnership of the principal, teachers & parents, students and local community to make a successful school community, with each playing their role and supporting the others for the best educational outcomes.
- Parental engagement – the development in schools of an environment that welcomed parents/carers into the school and even class rooms.
- NAPLAN/Myschool – using the information provided by these to understand the growth in performance of students and schools, not just league table comparisons.
- Education Plan for the Future – The Minister wanted to develop a plan for the future and this would involve the Directorate (EDu) working with P&Cs and parents in consultation and focus groups.
- Quality Teachers – maintaining and expanding the high quality of our teachers was one of our critical objectives to ensure the best outcomes for our students.
- P&Cs role – the P&C associations play an important role in facilitating parental engagement in schools and developing the school community. They are not just there to raise funds for the school.
- Parent input via the P&C Council – the P&C Council played a vital role in collecting and presenting the P&C school association parent/carers input to the Directorate policy and activities.

During a long question time, Natalie gave the following answers:

- She is aware of the shortage of classrooms in some schools and the conversion of some libraries into class rooms. ACT is experiencing 4.2% growth in public school enrolments, placing a strain on resources in some priority enrolment areas. Schools generally have limited capacity to expand but not all schools are at capacity. The Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) system needs a review.
- 22 million is being provided by the government for heating & cooling in schools.
- The impact on schools in the new light rail corridor is being considered in cross directorate working groups.
- The government's education discussions will include a "partnership table" to which the P&C Council will be invited, there will also be talks with P&Cs and principals and focus groups. A facilitated working group was suggested.
- Transition from early childhood schooling to the next level would also be considered.
- 15 hours of funded preschooling was expected to continue.
- EDu is working on an Occupational Violence policy and looking at learning options for violent students, including increased student engagement teachers.
- EDu would look at improving their communications to parents through schools.

- Refugee children have the opportunity of a 3 month language course to transition into schooling.

P&C Council meeting with the EDu senior executive team on 16 March 17 – see attached

EDu sees privacy policy requirements as an issue in dealing with parents of violence victims in schools. They are interested in how our planned Parent Support Group for Violence in Schools will operate.

'EDu does not appear to fully consider the flow on effects of placing preschool enrolments outside their priority enrolment area.

EDu offered to talk to a future meeting about preschool enrolments.

Items for the Minister's meeting on 3 April 17 – There is a need for a policy addressing how much time students spend on IT devices such as “tablets” and a best practice guide. Also, what plans are there for the renewal of devices which needs to be undertaken every three years eg for devices provided by the schools?

P&C Council Canteen Sub Committee meeting to be called – a subcommittee meeting will be arranged to discuss ongoing concerns about canteen viability and menu issues.

P&C issues -

Early Childhood & Primary Schools: Some schools still have fencing issues, traffic and parking issues, concerns about volunteers doing traffic crossing supervision, no guidance for computer coding clubs in schools, parent engagement for teachers, class connect program, Google communications difficulties in its use, language choices in schools, support for a school capacity focus group, interest in the Harrison engineering study and implementation for traffic management.

High Schools & Colleges: small size of their P&Cs are a continuing concern and committee members were encouraged to attend the Effective P&C workshop which may help them with ideas to recruit more parents, problems when there is a completely new P&C committee taking over without adequate handover from previous committee members.

Reports on meetings

John Haydon outlined discussions at the meeting with the Chief Minister's budget advisors and noted that we had declared all our items as priorities (report attached. A report of the BSSS VET committee was also available at the meeting (attached).

Other matters

The P&C Council's Facebook page and Twitter is accessible to all via links on our webpage.

Nominations for any of the Council's subcommittees & working groups can still be made.

Two representative positions are still vacant – Preschool Consultative Committee and the College Appeals Review Committee (since filled).

REPORT: Meeting with the Education Directorate (EDU)

Meeting with:	Meg Brighton (Deputy Director-General), Cristina de Jongh (Secretariat)
Meeting	220 Northbourne Ave Braddon, 16 March 2017 10.00 am – 11.00 am
P&C	Kirsty McGovern-Hooley, Cecilia Shlegel, John Haydon
Key Issues Discussed	<p><u>Unsociable (violent) conduct by serial offenders</u></p> <p>This issue continues to be raised by parents in various schools. School responses to reported cases of dangerous/violent conduct by repeat offenders are often seen as inadequate in protecting other students and the referral of incidents to the Directorate for investigation appears to not satisfy parents' concerns and sometimes adds to those concerns. There is a perception that the "system" cares more about protecting the rights of the offender than protecting the rights and safety of other students. We provided the terms of reference of a parent support group being set up by Council. Meg explained the limitations on the Directorate imposed by privacy requirements and asked exactly how we saw Council's proposed support group working. We advised that it will develop organically dependent on parent members and the particulars of the incidents that have occurred.</p> <p><u>Preschool classes and late enrolments</u></p> <p>A preschool that had slightly less than the required number for an additional class at the enrolment cut off date, was denied that additional class only to find that not long after they had sufficient late enrolment applications which would have filled the additional class. The loss of this additional preschool class has implications for the number of children flowing into the primary school in the following years. What can be done to accommodate additional preschool classes in such situations where a school has a record of late enrolment applications?</p> <p>The ensuing discussion indicated that the Directorate sees providing a pre-school place somewhere as its primary role rather than considering the flow on implications for enrolments. This could be seen as an example of the Directorate meeting its legal requirements but not developing the education system of excellence Council promotes.</p> <p>Meg will ask Jacinta Evans and Leanne Dobson to talk to us about pre-school enrolments.</p> <p><u>Common reporting requirements for all schools receiving Government funding</u></p> <p>There are no justifiable reasons why all schools (public and private/independent) that receive government funding, should not have the same public reporting requirements. This is particularly important for the disclosure of matters such as security and safety incidences in schools. The non-reporting of such incidents by private/independent schools has created a false impression that government schools are far less secure or safe than those schools. Council intends to pursue the commitment given at our public education election forum in 2012 by then Minister Chris Burke that he would introduce a common reporting requirement for all schools funded by the ACT government. This is an important issue of transparency and accountability.</p> <p>Meg wondered whether we would be better pursuing with the Minister the mandatory reporting of incidents as a condition of private school registration, because it is unlikely the private schools would voluntarily enter into an agreement to standardise reporting.</p> <p>Council will take up with the Minister that she is currently in the dark as to the effectiveness in the private schools of the change management program 'Schools for All'.</p> <p>{Note: After the meeting John had a discussion with APFACTS, the private school parent body. They are not keen to pursue the issue but understand accountability and transparency and would not oppose the introduction of common reporting standards.}</p> <p><u>Other business</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Directorate will provide some information on the age profile of male teachers and the ratio of admin to teaching staff in other jurisdictions. • Heating and cooling in schools. • An expert on RSI addressed Council's general meeting recently and made the point that children are more vulnerable to RSI than adults. The teaching of touch typing and provision of height adjustable chairs at a minimum was discussed without resolution.
Follow up actions:	None

REPORT: Meeting with Chief Ministers Advisors on Councils Budget Submission

Meeting with:	Emma Webster (Senior Engagement Advisor. Government Communications Unit, Office of the Chief Minister) Dr Jennifer Rayner (Director of Budget & Economic Policy) - Apology.
Meeting	ACT Legislative Assembly, 10 March 2017 11.00 am - 12 noon
P&C	John Haydon, Veronica Elliott
Key Issues Discussed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Office of the Chief Minister requested the meeting to discuss Councils budget submission for the prospective financial year. In addition invited Council to outline priorities for the next 4 years. 2. Council advised that each of the priorities in our budget submission were significant and none of these issues could be considered more important than each other. 3. School traffic was the largest area of concern for parents. With parents looking forward to the implementation of the trial of 20 supervised crossings and the development of individual traffic management plans for each school. Noting that this would require some co-operation from the Education, and Transport Canberra and City Services Directorates. 4. Psychologists in schools are in great demand, often with waiting lists resulting in students unable to access support for mental health and wellbeing. Often the delay in accessing assistance resulted in on-going behavioral issues within classrooms, increasing the barriers to learning for these students and negatively impacting peer's capacity to learn. The commitment of 20 school psychologists is expected to provide some relief to waiting periods and support student learning. 5. A discussion of specialised teachers (including languages and teacher librarians) highlighted the difficulties some schools have with maintaining these staff. The discussion noted that student outcomes could be vastly different in these areas despite all attending ACT public schools. Council believes this may be due to the focus on numeracy and literacy (NAPLAN focus), and in addition to the degree of autonomy schools are allowed. In the case of specialised teachers, this appears to stem from schools managing their own accounts, and choosing cheaper staffing options. In other ways school autonomy allows for schools to focus on the interests of the Principal, which changes with staff turnover, further increasing the discrepancies between schools. An example of this would be the varied degree of support language teachers receive depending on the ACT public school, thereby increasing discrepancies effecting student outcomes. 6. Gifted and talented programs was yet another example of the varied success of school autonomy, with some schools running engaging and challenging programs to extend students. Whilst other schools ran gifted and talented programs that appeared to operate to meet requirements. 7. Under the banner of school autonomy, schools are often faced with investigating, developing and implementing individual policies and procedures. The Directorate has established some form of consistency in adopting across the board policies, however, how these policies have been implemented often varies largely from school to school. By comparison to other jurisdictions such as NSW the ACT population is quite homogenous, and may therefore not require the current degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, Council values the role of school autonomy in allowing Principals flexibility to address specific issues that arise within their school community. Although this should not come at the expense of a consistent educational foundation across all ACT public schools. 8. Maintenance and Refurbishment of older schools is critical to improve the learning environment, with high quality environment improving outcomes for students. Whilst, previously funds have been committed to upgrades, funds have a tendency to disappear within the Directorate budget and can be difficult to track. 9. Council encourages planning and funding for new schools using the neighbourhood model of school, to meet the expected increase in population growth. 10. Currently, schools requiring the use of interpreters are required to pay out of school budget for their services. This actively prevents schools from accessing these services despite the need for an interpreter. The consequence limits involvement of parents and carers' requiring an interpreter, which reflects on student outcomes. Council requests that a central funding pool be provided to support school Principals on a needs basis, promoting and encouraging inclusion in the ACT school system. 11. Council highlighted the need for Government to promote and encourage parents and carers' to volunteer at their school. Volunteering through a P&C encourages participation and engagement within the school community. Parental participation and engagement has demonstrated increases in student outcomes.

	<p>12. Council outlined the difficulties some P&Cs face in managing financial and legal matters associated with running businesses to support schools. Council requested funding of experienced school staff to provide administrative services on behalf of the P&C will allow P&Cs to make a more meaningful contribution to schools.</p> <p>13. The Senior Engagement Officer requested that Council raise our budget submission with the Minister for Education.</p>
Follow up Executive	Provide a copy of our budget submission (and discuss) to the Minister for Education at the meeting on 3 April 2017 at 4pm.
Follow up Office	
Next meeting	
