



# ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

*The parent voice on public education*

## Better schools beyond 2020

### Council's priorities for public schooling in the ACT

**Council has a vision for ACT public schools where each and every school is an inspiring place to learn, surrounded by a supported and connected community. All schools need great libraries and modern infrastructure. They must provide a safe environment, responsive to and supporting students and families.**

#### Modern Infrastructure

*Many of our schools are showing their age and upgrades are needed.*

*As Canberra's population rises and urban density increases, more schools are needed.*

Our schools absolutely must be accessible, safe and sound, and provide all the facilities that students need to learn in a variety of domains. The provision of purpose-built facilities for teaching specialised subjects must be on going. In addition, we need to aspire to create exciting, comfortable and inspirational environments in all schools that students can be proud of.

Planned new schools outlined in the recent ACT Infrastructure plan must go ahead. But the plan is too conservative and more schools are needed instead of school expansions that can be problematic.

Council calls for:

- central funding for security infrastructure where schools request it – especially fences and CCTV
- additional capital works funding focusing on modernisation and creating inspiring spaces which students are proud to belong to
- additional capital works funding focusing on upgrades of specialist facilities (eg drama suites, science labs, tech workshops) in high schools where most needed
- inclusion of more environment/sustainability in school curriculums/facilities
- additional capital works funding focusing on disability access
- air conditioning in every school, with true HEPA filtration (to assist with air quality)
- a change in system-wide policies to permanently exclude purpose-built specialist spaces from a school's capacity calculations
- the identification and safe removal of asbestos and lead paint from all schools
- more schools, with new primary schools for central Woden, inner north, and central Belconnen plus an additional college in Gungahlin/north Canberra.

#### Great libraries, professionally staffed

*Every school must have a permanent, fully resourced library which is properly staffed by qualified teacher librarians.*

To help students recover from lost learning due to COVID-19 shutdowns, and to grow student literacy and help them make sense of modern information sources, professionally staffed libraries

are critical. Only 2 in 5 public schools has a properly staffed library, and some school library spaces are not protected from loss during enrolment growth.

Council calls for:

- funding specifically ear-marked for qualified, appropriate library staffing in every ACT school, namely a qualified teacher librarian and a library assistant
- a change in system-wide policies to permanently exclude all school libraries from school capacity calculations.

## Nurtured students

*All students need the right supports to reach their full potential.*

Student wellbeing is essential to learning and schools are the perfect place to provide focused support for students' mental health and wellbeing, but more assistance is needed, especially in the light of extra the pressure and uncertainty of a pandemic. Students of all capabilities and backgrounds must be provided with adequate support so that they achieve their best.

Council calls for:

- a targeted approach to support students' individual learning needs including gifted and talented students and those with learning difficulties
- continuing development and use of remote and online learning for students who need it or are unable to attend school.
- a central pool of funding for provision of interpreters in schools
- one full-time (or combined full time equivalent) for a school psychologist, social worker, counsellor or youth worker in every ACT school.
- school liaison officers to assist in communication and engagement strategies and enhance school confidence at targeted schools, especially those with lower SES communities or high numbers of migrant families.
- a trial of in-school trauma centres, one in each of the 5 school networks.
- additional community (non school-based) mental health services for young people and families and expansion of/ secured on going funding for key programs/service providers, eg.Cool Kids, Stress better, MIEACT, HeadSpace, Menslink.

## Safe and responsive schools

*Communities must have confidence that schools, students and staff are safe from violence and respond well when incidents occur.*

Violence is an unfortunate feature of our community so schools are impacted. This means we need good strategies to reduce the incidence of violence and better respond when it happens, including complaints handling.

Council calls for:

- the full and unconditional implementation of all recommendations provided by the [ACT Government inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools](#). Particularly, a trustworthy and resolution-focused complaints handling process, with escalation and external review capabilities **and** self-reporting portal for families and students for incidents of bullying, violence and occupational violence.
- Implementation of Smiling Minds mindfulness program in all ACT public primary schools
- Funding and expansion of MIEACT's No Labels program.
- Better, systematised linkages to external organisations such as Menslink.

## Strong communities

*The central place of schools in the community, and the role of P&Cs within this must be recognised and strengthened.*

Schools are the hubs around which connected communities and social capital are woven. Government approaches and policies must acknowledge the central and special place schools have and strengthen this. P&C Associations form a crucial component of the school community, providing relationships and networks, essential school services (such as OHSC and canteens) and raising funds. Help is needed to ensure these organisations do not crumble due to a lack of volunteers and support.

Council calls for:

- all development applications, changes to land use or infrastructure for sites adjacent to schools must provide evidence of consultation and coordination with school communities, understanding of their needs and objections, and appropriate adjustments. Such changes may be to parking, roads, public transport, nearby government services etc.
- commitment to a strategy to boost volunteer numbers in schools, including a new volunteer recruitment and management position in the P&C Council office and Family Engagement Officers in schools with low parent engagement
- implementation of a targeted parental engagement strategy for early learning from preschool to year 2