



Café-style canteen facelift

Calwell High School's canteen dining space is getting a café-style make over and 'how to' guides are set to make the transformation easier to copy at other schools as well.

Calwell's new furniture was on display at the National Youth Week Festival in April.

The new canteen furniture, created from recycled materials, is the product of the school's involvement in the *It's Your Move* program, a partnership between ACT Health and the ACT Education Directorate. *It's Your Move* gets students to identify health problems at the school and propose solutions. Of the nine Canberra high schools participating, three have chosen to improve their dining environment.

Many high schools and colleges in Canberra have no dedicated dining space, which makes it hard for students to sit and eat a healthy meal in a sociable setting. It also makes it hard for canteens in colleges, where students can leave school grounds, to compete with external food outlets.

The new furniture includes stools, benches, seats and tables made from palettes, recycled doors and milk crates. The entire fit-out was completed for under \$10,000, less than half of what a commercial fit-out might be.

It is certainly bright and engaging and will be a welcome addition to the school's canteen. As a teacher at the school noted, "if there are nice things, the kids are more likely to use the canteen,

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Fun canteen furniture on show in Civic for Youth Week.

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From the President



John Haydon

An election is upon us but let's not talk the intricacies of school funding. Instead let's look at a concept that both Labor and Liberal will use to attract your vote: school 'autonomy'.

Schools have always been to some degree autonomous and always will be. No school has the same staff or students as another and different things take place at every school, so schools will always do some things differently. It is a question of how many things they do differently and how much freedom to innovate a school should have. Not only are the big parties strongly in favour of greater school autonomy, so are the upper echelons of the ACT Education Directorate.

Those in favour of school autonomy believe each school, or in practice largely the principal, is best left to work out for itself the best ways of catering to its students' needs.

I take a contrarian view. Are student needs really that different? The ACT, unlike other parts of Australia, has virtually no rural or regional areas, has a relatively uniform socio-economic status and most schools have an ethnically diverse student population. Despite this the ACT is probably as far down the school autonomy road as any state or territory in Australia.

We have some truly wonderful principals in our schools, dynamic, innovative and energetic communicators that could easily earn many times their salaries in the corporate world. Proponents of school autonomy seem to assume however that all principals are in this mould, and this is clearly not realistic. Even if they were, having to manage autonomously all aspects from scratch of a complex organisation like a school is a recipe for principal burn-out.

Schools have to teach the Australian Curriculum. This makes sense given that students move from one school to another, and that developing a curriculum is a complex task. No one is suggesting that schools have a free hand on the

curriculum they teach. Schools also operate in a broad policy framework, dealing with student absences, emergency procedures, out-of-school excursions, and so on. So they can never be really autonomous.

School autonomy probably bites hardest when we get to the issues of staff and money. The wonderful inspiring principals will naturally attract the best teachers, but what happens to schools where the principal is less than stellar? Does this widen the gap in educational outcomes for students? Do we want an education system with a few great schools and many below par?

It makes sense for schools to have some discretion as to what they spend money on but there are some outrageous examples. One lauded Victorian principal sent his teachers on school-budget funded study trips to Harvard. In any case, given that the total size of a school budget must be largely determined centrally, the degree of autonomy is in practice limited.

Does it make sense to have each school reinvent the myriad procedures a school needs? It is good to see school autonomy wound back a little recently in the form of a standardised student report for the ACT. Prior to this, schools invented their own reporting template, often changing with every new principal. This is not only inefficient but also confusing to parents when students change schools.

On the other hand, the lack of a uniform territory-wide 'bring your own device' policy is, to my mind, carrying school autonomy too far. It is a complex matter that should be resolved centrally.

Should we see school autonomy as a stalking horse for the death of the public school system? Is one reason for its enthusiastic embrace that it absolves politicians and bureaucratic leaders from responsibility if something goes badly wrong? It was the principal's or school's fault!

I've asked lots of questions and welcome your feedback to contact@actparents.org.au. •

Canteen facelift

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and to respect school property”.

Partnering with someone with expertise in design and production was critical – in this case a local company called Boy and Girl Co which makes furniture from recycled materials.

Calwell High technology students were also involved in the design and furniture making. Innovations they specified included the addition of board games to the tabletops, and boxes for storing game pieces attached to recycled doors which act as dividers and screens.

“The kids’ input and ownership is so important. They told us what they needed from the furniture and the space,” explained Boy and Girl Co’s Founder, Carlo Krikow.

“We had only a few benches before, but they were fixed to the floor”, explained one student. “With these, you can drag them over to make room for friends. It might stop people going to the shops for food because it looks a nice place to be, but then the canteen food has to be good too.”



Student-centered design includes table-top games.

A ‘how to’ guide is being made to help other schools replicate the project. It will include instructions for making each piece of furniture, great contacts to assist with materials and construction, and will cater to different budgets.

The guide will soon be available on the *It’s Your Move* website: health.act.gov.au/itsyourmove. •

Me & my school: engaging migrant families

The ACT Principals Association, Companion House and Council have teamed up to host a forum to help schools create a sense of belonging for migrant and refugee parents and students.

The ‘Me and My School’ forum is a chance for principals to hear directly from migrant parents as well as share experience and best practice with other school leaders. It will run as a panel session with the audience encouraged to ask questions and share experiences.

“We hope to foster a greater understanding of the difficulties parents face when approaching schools if they are not confident with their English, their cultural experience of schools is very different from here in Canberra, or they have suffered on their journey to Australia,” explains Council Vice President, Viv Pearce.

The panel will include parents and cultural experts as well as educators who have successfully engaged migrant students and families.

The forum is on Thursday, June 9 from 2 to 4pm at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, 51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling. Afternoon tea is provided. Everyone is welcome, simply RSVP to Glenn on 6251 4550.

P&Cs are asked to alert migrant and refugee parents in their community about the event. •

What can we learn from Finland?

Recently a group of ACT principals participated in the International Confederation of Principals Conference in Helsinki, Finland. The theme was *Leading Educational Design*. Here are some reflections one participant brought back.

A phenomenon recently experienced in Australia is one of increasing numbers of parents withdrawing their child from sitting the National Assessment Plan for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), questioning the purpose of such an educational undertaking. Some students who do take the opportunity, teachers are finding, are choosing not to do their best.

Meanwhile, in Finland, students there are topping international lists of countries performing best in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and have done so for successive years. Finland is also a country that scores highly on the Health Index of Young People (by comparison, Australia is 14th), least corrupt country (Australia is slipping), happiest country (Australia is 10th), and most competitive (Finland is fourth and Australia 22nd according to the *World Economic Forum, 2015*).

Why is it that the value of learning is seen so differently in these two countries? Why do significant numbers of Australians not value learning nor feel proud of their learning and consequent achievement? Why is it that many school leaders here regularly deal with adversarial parents who rush to find fault with what schools are doing with their child, parents who complain that schools have the audacity to give homework. The value of education simply for the sake of education in Australia is an often contested one.

At the base of this dissonance, the answer to why Finnish education is performing so highly can be found. The value of life-long learning for every Finn; a personal modesty coupled to a national humility; second and third language learning; and honesty and trust among and between people are core to this progressive social welfare state. Trust between young people, families, schools and communities rates so highly that

collaboration is streets ahead of bickering and test avoidance.

The social status of teaching in Finland is so high that, although salaries in Australia compare marginally more favourably to salaries of Finnish teachers, teaching is seen as a prestigious career, garners community respect and esteem in a way that has not really ever been the case in Australia's anti-authoritarian cultural disposition.

Caring for and investing in the young is a national priority in Finland. There are no education fees (students purchase their textbooks in high schools, but food is funded by their local municipalities). Even students from outside Finland do not pay fees, because Finland is an egalitarian country when it comes to providing education. Finnish education has basically two destinations — university or polytechnics — both skilling people towards particular professional occupations and trades.

School autonomy in Finland, enabled by a high quality curriculum (revised every 10 years) is linked to the region's economic equality and extensive welfare safety nets. A high community ethos of striving for success in an increasingly knowledge-based economy powers learning in Finland.

A lack of motivation that can hinder learning engagement can come from poverty, but can also come from abundance. Children are not challenged in a society where all the problems appear solved (though Australia can hardly be described as having solved all its problems). Students are challenged by high expectations from demanding parents collaborating with demanding teachers.

Motivation, say the Finns, can be seen differently. As a business model, motivation is about

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Tops tips for P&Cs

We've managed to distil our key advice for P&C office bearers to just five points!

Be clear about your goals

Is your P&C a social, educational, advisory or fundraising body? Is it a means for involving parents in the school or a service provider for the school community? What roles are most important to you and to parents at the school? You may find surveying parents useful. Here at Council, we encourage P&Cs to facilitate parent involvement in the school, support the school and community, and provide a forum for parents to discuss and debate school and education issues.

Know your constitution

Yes, we know that sounds boring, but the answers to most P&C questions are found within its folds, from how often to meet and how much notice to give, to the association's stated aims (or 'objects' as they are known in the constitution). If your constitution is out of date and no longer reflects your P&C's practices, we can help you amend it.

Seek help

Don't do it all yourself! Break tasks into smaller jobs and call for volunteers. Start early and be specific about the jobs. Repeat if necessary, and don't be afraid to cancel if there's not enough help. Remember that Council is also here to help. See our extensive resources for P&Cs at www.actparents.org.au or contact our office with

your questions. (Our contact details are on page 11.)

Make it as enjoyable as possible

If being involved in your P&C is more fun than expected, people are more likely to come back, so run your meetings well, stick to time, and include introductions or even an ice-breaker activity at the beginning. At big events, assign someone to just look after volunteers and provide them with drinks, sunscreen, bathroom breaks and so on. Make sure volunteers are well utilized, have clear tasks and finish at the end of their shift. It is a good idea to pair volunteers with friends and always thank everyone profusely.

Work with the principal

Parents and the school will both benefit most if you work closely with the principal. Co-ordinate school and P&C calendars so events and fundraisers don't hit families all at once; align your goals with those of the school; ask the principal and board for funding priorities; offer parent help (such as catering) for school events; and provide the parent perspective as feedback to help the school reach out to parents. Always share your agenda with the principal ahead of the P&C meeting, and an informal chat a few days before each meeting will ensure everyone knows what to expect. ●

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competition, and winning at all costs. In this model, when one wins another loses. Such a model in the Finnish world is an aberration. Instead, the model is of intrinsic motivation, where the learner derives satisfaction from learning for the sake of learning, rather than for the benefit of gaining material advantage. This is shown by research to produce happier adults, and, not surprisingly, more successful learners

and researchers, and participation in educational assessments that drive the hunger for comparative data and measure educational performance. ●

Dr Michael Kindler is Principal at Mount Stromlo High School. Views expressed here are his own, and do not represent those of the ACT Education Directorate.

Realising expert panel's advice

Council's Policy Officer, Maclaren Wall, takes a look at what Council is doing in response to last year's expert report into students with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

With much fanfare, the ACT Government released the final report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour in November last year. The Education Minister at the time, Joy Burch, accepted all of the panel's recommendations. So what does this mean for your school?

The bulk of the recommendations relate to specific policy frameworks, focusing on gathering data, reporting and procedures. While these changes will no doubt contribute to meaningful change, there are several recommendations that are of particular interest to many parents.

Following best practice acknowledged by the Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools Association as well as a recent coroner's report, the expert panel recommended a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students in ACT schools. Currently each psychologist caters for many more than 500 students. In recent years resources have been directed towards school chaplains and youth workers. However, Council believes that these individuals cannot replace professionally trained psychologists and counsellors. Expert counsellors and psychologists perform crucial functions in schools by assessing the cognitive capacities and needs of students and working with teachers and other school staff to develop, monitor and implement evidence-based strategies in the classroom to assist with learning. In addition they provide ongoing counselling and support for students and provide a linkage to other programs and resources within the system and the community at large.

For a number of years Council has been lobbying for an overhaul of the Student Centred Appraisal of Need (SCAN) funding model. The expert panel has recommended an urgent review of SCAN, with particular attention to the appropriateness of the eligibility criteria, current funding and its overall impact on students, carers and parents. A 2009 review into SCAN drew several negative conclusions. In their report the expert panel

suggested that little has changed since that time. As in previous years Council will continue to lobby for significant reform of the SCAN process. It is unacceptable that little has changed since the 2009 review. Parents and students deserve to have a positive process with broad funding criteria grounded in student outcomes, rather than the deficit-based system currently in place.

The expert panel has recognised the need for teachers (both old and new) to be adequately trained in educating a wide spectrum of students with various needs. To this end, the directorate will liaise with the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University to review and improve the theoretical and practical relevance of teaching units addressing students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. The Directorate induction program for all permanent and temporary teachers will now include components on the teaching of students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. The Teaching Quality Institute will also develop a suite of professional learning options, including models on the safe use of restraint, trauma, autism spectrum disorder, mental health and other learning difficulty areas.

While these recommendations are a good start, it is clear that wide-spread cultural change is essential in order to create meaningful reform in ACT government schools. Council has always been of the view that a positive culture in each and every school is a major requirement when tackling the unique needs of students.

In the lead up to both the federal and territory election Council will lobby all major parties, requesting that they implement these recommendations unconditionally. Beyond this, Council will always work hard to hold the Directorate and government to account and will assist in any way possible to create change that benefits parents, carers and students in the ACT. These recommendations are only the tip of the iceberg. Now they need to be implemented. ●

Attention treasurers!

P&C treasurers should note several important upcoming bills and payments.

- **Insurance** premiums are now payable. Invoices are sent directly to P&Cs from Civic Insurance Brokers.
- **Workers compensation** payments are also due soon. Invoices will come separately to P&Cs who have paid employees.

- **Council affiliation fees.** Your annual membership fees with Council are now due. Invoices were mailed a few weeks ago to P&C treasurers. Fees remain at the same low rate.

What do you get from your Council membership? Advice, resources, training, publications, representation and more. The benefits are fully expounded in the FAQ on our website. •

Parents as ‘career partners’

Rebecca Bray from the ACT Education Directorate outlines the career planning tools created for public school students and how to assist your child.

As a parent you have a key role to play in supporting your child with their career journey and the ACT Education Directorate encourages you to improve your knowledge of career development so you can better assist your children. But, in a rapidly changing world of work in the 21st century, what is a career?

A career is more than just a job, or a job for life. A career encompasses the lifetime of experiences including periods of education, training, paid employment, unpaid employment, volunteer work, unemployment, and life roles. Our young people need to develop the skills, knowledge and capabilities to navigate through these various experiences, and be agile and flexible to pursue their preferred pathway.

The ACT Education Directorate have developed an online resource called Pathways (see pathways.act.edu.au) for students from years five and six through to the end of college in year 12. The secure website has been developed to help improve students’ knowledge and understanding of career pathways. It helps them identify their strengths and interests, set goals, practise

decision making, and research multiple pathways for their future. Students can register online to create their plan if they haven’t already done so at school.

We encourage you to support your child with their career journey and invite them to complete and share their Pathways Plan with you. Your interest in what your child is interested in can have a powerful impact on your child’s career development and how they manage their lifelong learning. Presenting a positive attitude, identifying activities your child likes and is drawn to and seeing their career development as a journey are some of the ways in which you can support your child to prepare for their future and be adaptable to change.

If you would like more information about Pathways or would like your school to be involved in delivering Pathways, please contact the Transitions and Careers team at the Directorate on 6205 7044 or at careers@act.gov.au. •

Rebecca is Manager of the Careers & Transitions Program at the ACT Education Directorate.



Kids, computers and RSI

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and computer use can result in a significant reduction in musculoskeletal pain.

Dr Leon Straker from Curtin University has long been concerned about computer-related musculoskeletal injuries in children. In a recent paper entitled "Young Children and Screen Time: It Is Time to Consider Healthy Bodies As Well As Healthy Minds", he says: "we urge all authorities developing guidelines for wise use of information technology by children to adequately consider the long-term physical health aspects of this interaction."

He suggests that guidelines should include "practical advice to parents and others responsible for care of children on how to minimise potential negative physical health outcomes. For example, the advice could include statements on ensuring that children are adequately encouraged to actively play and not sit for prolonged periods in flexed posture engaged with a screen."

Reducing your child's risk of RSI

There are relatively simple things you can do to reduce the risk of harm from your child's computer use.

Limit computer time

It's really important to limit the amount of time spent at the computer, ideally taking an active break every 30-60 minutes. It is also important to encourage micropauses – taking 30 second breaks every three to 15 minutes – as this has been found to be even more effective than taking long breaks every hour or so.

Mix it up

It is also helpful to switch between different types of tasks (e.g. data entry, reading, intensive tasks) as they apply different types of stress to the body. Increased neck pain is found in children who primarily use the mouse when using the computer and mouse use has also been associated with musculoskeletal pain in adults. Keyboards allow more body movement but often involve more awkward wrist positions so a mixture of the two is recommended. Using

motion sensor technologies which require more active movements should also be strongly encouraged (e.g. using a Wii rather than other gaming devices).

Focus on posture

Good posture is vital when it comes to preventing musculoskeletal pain in both children and adults. One of the best ways to improve posture is good workspace design. If the child's workstation is set up awkwardly and includes things like furniture that doesn't provide proper back support, as is the case in many schools, then it is difficult to avoid discomfort and pain while using the computer.

The chair is a good place to start if you're looking to improve your child's workstation, as many chairs provided in schools are just unsuitable for computer work. The distance from the chair to the ground should be the same as the distance from the underside of the thigh at the knees to the soles of the feet. Adjustable height chairs can be very helpful in achieving this, especially if different people use the same workstation.

Backrests are also recommended as they are thought to reduce spinal loading and leaning against a backrest can also help with retaining the lumbar curve. That said, no backrest is better than a bad one as children without backrests tend to adopt better posture.

When it comes to the monitor, it's important to have it at the right height: the top of the monitor should be at eye-level or up to 45° below that. If your child is using a desk that other people use, it is extremely unlikely that these requirements will be met, so for safe computer use, your child should have their own desk suited to their size. And the set-up will need to change as your child grows!

Forearm support

How your desk is set up is also important as this can reduce strain on your arms, shoulders and wrists. Having forearm support is vital and your child's keyboard and mouse should be pushed back so that they can comfortably rest their

forearms while they type. The mouse should also be adjusted for the child's size. Smaller mice with a lower clicking force both help performance and reduce stress on the wrist. To avoid compromising spinal posture, try to have the desk slightly below elbow height.

Choose the right device for school

Provide your child with a relatively light notebook if you can and when transporting it, use a backpack with two comfortable straps to minimize discomfort. And when it comes to notebooks or laptops, it's better to have an external mouse and keyboard.

Two things to teach your kids

It's vital to teach children to respond to discomfort. Many children will ignore symptoms because of limited self-awareness and will not address issues in the same way that an adult would. So it is important to teach your child to

notice whether they are in pain or discomfort and make them aware that this is not just a part of computing that should be ignored.

Secondly, teach your children touch-typing, which has been associated with lower stress on the wrists.

As computers become a greater part of our lives, both at work and home, it's essential to learn how to use them safely. As parents, we need to encourage our schools to provide a safe computing environment – and also make sure we provide one ourselves! •

For more information on child-safe computing, see the RSI and Overuse Injury Association website: www.rsi.org.au.

The Association is Australia's only support group for people with RSI and is a non-profit charity funded by the ACT Health Directorate.



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At our P&C...

Kirsty McGovern-Hooley, outgoing Treasurer at Farrer Primary School, shares a fun and successful fundraiser – their Father's Day Movie Night.

For the last two years, the Farrer Primary School P&C have run a very profitable movie night, specially for Father's Day. Just as importantly, the nights have been lots of fun and a great way to get more Dads involved and coming to school events.

We make sure we get the relevant licence to screen the film (from the movie distributors, like Roadshow) and then charge for entry as well as selling food on the night. We have been lucky to have Craig Jamison, one of the school's parents, running the events because he is also a caterer, so the food has been hand made and of high quality!

We set up in the school hall and project onto the big screen and encourage families to come. It is fun to watch the kids showing up with their teddies and pyjamas. We end up with a mosh-pit of bean bags in front of the screen!

Our first Father's Day movie night was fabulously successful. We screened The Lego Movie and had nearly a third of all school families come along, mostly kids with their Dads. When you consider research which shows that children do better at school when their Dads are involved (even if their mother is already involved), getting Dads to school events with their kids is a great first step!

I can certainly recommend taking advantage of big popular movie titles, like The Lego Movie, films that people are happy to see more than once.

P&Cs also need to think about the rating of the film. The Lego Movie is rated PG, which the Education Directorate requires parental permission to be screened in schools, so we insisted that parents accompany their children and provided information to parents about what the rating meant. The following year we screened Paper Planes, which is rated G, which made things easier, but G films can be harder to get senior students enthused about. Again, we got



FRIDAY 5 SEPTEMBER
FATHER'S DAY
MOVIE NIGHT!

Celebrate Father's Day with a movie night.
Help the P and C to raise funds for Farrer Primary School. All proceeds go to supporting our kids at school. "The Lego Movie", a story about nobody who saves everybody.
On the big screen in the Farrer School Hall.



Farrer School Community Association

Family Ticket
(1 adult and 2 children)
Price \$20
(pre-purchase)
\$25 on the night
(\$5 additional person)

When: 6.00pm
Where: Big Screen in the Farrer Hall

Bring your own bean bag for front section seating!

Special Father's Day Raffle.
Win a \$1000 Camera valued at over \$2000! Tickets available from the school or on the night

Popcorn / Sausage Rolls / Snacks / Drinks available for purchase

MOVIE RATING
The Lego Movie is rated

PG Parental guidance recommended

View trailers & information on content at
thelegomovie.com

lots of people coming along, about a quarter of the school's families.

We sold tickets in advance as well as on the night at \$25 for a father and kids.

We have tried selling either a meal (handmade sausage rolls and feta and spinach triangles) or snacks – popcorn, packaged snacks and mini hotdogs. Both were popular, but the meal was more profitable. We also provided Halal food which sold well. When we sold meals, we made around \$1500 for the night, which was great for a school of only 180 families.

We have found Roadshow really good to deal with. When you buy the film licence from them (the cost varies depending on the movie, from \$220 to \$350 or more) they also provide promotional material, like the official film posters, which helps to get everyone excited about the upcoming screening. Obviously, we do all we can to promote the event to our parents

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Excellent teachers

Do you know an inspirational teacher?

Nominations are now open for the 2016 National Excellence in Teaching Awards.

The awards are a wonderful way to recognise the fantastic work done everyday by our teachers and being nominated reflects well on the whole school community.

The awards were established in 1994 to honour exemplary teaching in Australia and New Zealand and to provide the opportunity to formally thank outstanding teachers. Since then, more than 30,000 teachers have been nominated and over \$700,000 worth of prizes and grants have been awarded!

This year, teachers who reach the national level will be rewarded with a professional development grant of \$5,000 and the opportunity to attend a Space Camp in the USA.

To nominate a great teacher or get more information contact the Australian Scholarship Group on 1800 624 487 or go to www.asg.com.au/nominate. Nominations close on 31 July. ●

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well in advance. We start selling tickets several weeks out, and offer a discount to pre-purchase. Almost 80-90% of tickets are presold which means we can manage catering quantities more effectively. The event is advertised on posters around the school, in the newsletter, and on the school app.

So if you are looking to combine a great community event with getting more Dads involved and raising funds, I can certainly recommend an event of this kind. ●

Editor's note: for more information about running movie nights, see Council's Information Sheet 28 on Licensing requirements for fundraising, available on our website.

About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the peak body for Parent & Citizen (P&C) Associations in the ACT.

We represent over 60,000 parents and carers in 86 ACT public schools.

About our magazine

ParentACTion is a free journal published four times a year. It is available online, plus hardcopies are provided to all ACT public school P&Cs and school boards, the ACT Legislative Assembly, senior ACT Education Directorate staff, public education organisations, the media and interstate parent associations.

Contributions, advertising and feedback are always being sought. Contributions can be emailed directly to the Editor, Janelle Kennard, at jkennard@actparents.org.au.

Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.

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9.30am - 2.30pm Monday to Friday.
Closed public holidays and school holidays.

Dates to remember

May 24 Council General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

June 2 Effective P&C Workshop
6.30pm - 9.10pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

**June 9 Public forum - Me and my school:
engaging migrant families**
2.00pm - 4pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

June 28 Council Hot Topics/General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Gungahlin College
23 Gozzard St, Gungahlin

July 4-15 Council office closed for term break

Aug 23 Policy Conference and General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

Kids, computers and RSI

With children using computers ever more at home and at school, Ann Thomson, Director of the RSI and Overuse Injury Association of the ACT, has some important information for parents and tips for avoiding injury.

Would you be surprised to learn that even young children are reporting musculoskeletal pain related to computer use? According to an international team of experts, one in five Australian children reported soreness at least monthly and the soreness reported was not trivial in nature. One in four had to limit their activities, one in ten took medication and one in twenty sought professional health advice.

Unfortunately, computer use can involve poor posture, long hours of sitting and repetitive activity. None of these is good for health. As computers become a bigger part of education and children's lives generally from primary school right up to high school, these factors can lead to muscular pain at a very early age.

One American study of 212 primary and secondary students found that many of them were experiencing physical discomfort which they attributed to computer use. For example, 30% of the children reported computer-related wrist pain and another 15%, back pain.

There are a number of key factors behind the increase in overuse injuries in children. One is



Image: 'Typity-typity' by Amancay Maahs www.flickr.com/photos/amanky

There are simple things you can do to reduce the risk of computer use harming your child.

simply that computers are often not set up properly for kids' young bodies. Another is a lack of evidence-based guidelines and education around safe computer use.

A quality education program in safer computer use can be really effective in preventing injury. For example, a recent study in Johannesburg found that educating a group of adolescent students about correct ergonomics and computer use resulted in a significant decrease in muscle pain. After a six-month period of working with the students on correct computer use, the prevalence of musculoskeletal pain reduced from 43% to 18%. Ultimately the study found that simply educating students about correct posture

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