



ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

The parent voice on public education

Mr Andrew Barr
Chief Minister & Treasurer
ACT Budget Consultation
Treasury Directorate
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

27 May 2022

Dear Andrew,

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council), I am writing to provide a submission to the 2022-23 ACT Budget Consultation.

Council is a non-profit, non-government representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, provide support services for affiliates and make representations to government on behalf of parents of government school students.

I would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss our submission in more detail. If you have any questions about the attached submission, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Yours Sincerely,

Allison Elliott
President
ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

Budget Submission 2022 - 23



**ACT Council of
Parents & Citizens
Associations**

The parent voice on public education

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the representative body
for Parent & Citizen associations in the ACT.
Council represents parents and carers in ACT public schools.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters where we live, work and learn, and pay my respects to elders past, present, and future.

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations | ABN: 53 870 517 949
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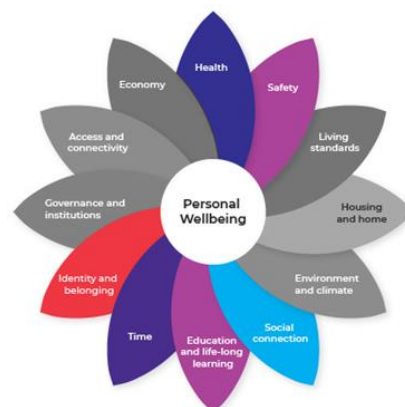
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Executive Summary

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is pleased to provide the following submission for consideration in the ACT government's 2022-23 budget. Council recommends the ACT Government supports budgetary initiatives to provide all public education students with an excellent experience of education.

Our submission includes 28 recommendations required for effective implementation of the Government's Future of Education Strategy and considers several domains from ACT's Wellbeing Framework, including:

- Education and life-long learning,
- Identity and belonging,
- Health,
- Safety,
- Social connection, and
- Time



Parent and family engagement

Recommendations:

1. Invest in family engagement officers in schools to facilitate collaboration between parents, P&C associations, and teachers for the benefit of students, families, and schools.
2. Council recommends a trial of a mobile parent hub, containing resources for parents and families, and engagement incentives such as free coffee or breakfast.
3. Extend grant opportunities available to school communities through their P&C Associations, including Parent Engagement Activity review and guidelines and small activity grants, with goals of maintaining or rebuilding community engagement and relational trust/community capacity in a covid-recovering Canberra.
4. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government continue to support school communities connect, by considering the impact of policies and decisions on P&Cs.

Quality learning environment

Recommendations:

5. Council reiterates the call for a new public school to be built in the Inner North.
6. Council suggests the ACT Government signal the importance of specialist school facilities by excluding spaces such as libraries from public school capacity calculations.
7. Council also calls on the ACT Government to expedite a permanent solution, such as a new college, to address the growth projections for Dickson and Gungahlin Colleges.
8. Council recommends the ACT Government build new primary schools in central Belconnen and Woden to match increases in urban density.
9. Council recommends the ACT Government develop a cross-directorate approach to regional and town planning to ensure that schools can begin planning for increases to school capacity, and to allow land for new schools to be set aside.
10. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government fund qualified infrastructure professionals to support schools with the management of school infrastructure and maintenance.
11. Council calls on the ACT Government to fund all our recommendations to the ACT school infrastructure inquiry.

12. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government ensure a consistent process is developed and implemented to ensure Education Directorate funded infrastructure projects are equitably distributed across ACT public schools.
13. Council recommends the ACT Government establish an equitable school modernisation fund to create inspiring places which students are proud to belong to, where schools which have not previously benefited can be prioritised.
14. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government significantly increase long-term funding for the management and removal of hazardous materials in ACT public schools.
15. Council recommends the ACT Government develop a strategy to protect schools from vandalism, including CCTV and fencing (where CCTV and fencing is supported by the school community).

Students at the centre

Recommendations:

16. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government increase real-time and accessible wellbeing and allied health supports available through public schools, to support student learning.
17. Council strongly encourages the ACT Government implement a plan to attract and retain public and private wellbeing and allied health services in the Canberra community.
18. Council calls on the ACT Government to embed a comprehensive evidenced-based relationships and sex education framework in public schools that:
 - meets the needs of all students, including those with special education needs and disabilities,
 - engages parents and carers early,
 - explicitly teaches protective behaviours including body autonomy and consent consistently from preschool,
 - is delivered by educators with specialist training,
 - is accurate and age appropriate, be positively role-modelled in everyday school life,
 - is embedded in expectations for school communities,
 - is supported by all school staff,
 - is integrated into school life rather than only taught in specific school years,
 - is evaluated against accountability mechanisms.
19. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government ensure that all education professionals in public schools (school leaders, teachers and learning support assistants) have access to quality inclusive education professional development.
20. Council strongly recommends the ACT Government ensure that school infrastructure supports all students to engage in learning, particularly those with complex, challenging behaviours, by providing ramps, lifts, sensory spaces, and quiet and calm spaces.
21. Council suggests the ACT Government ensure the approach to individualised learning in public schools is implemented, to ensure that all students reach their full potential. Especially students with learning difficulties, gifted and talented students and those with disabilities and complex needs.
22. Council calls on the ACT Government to fund the development of a wholistic inclusive education framework to guide best practice inclusive education across public schools.
23. Council calls on the ACT Government to reduce the additional advocacy and administrative burden on parents and carers of students with disabilities or complex needs.
24. Council calls on the ACT Government to extend the commitment to offer remote and online learning at every public school for students who need it or are unable to attend.

Quality teaching

Recommendations:

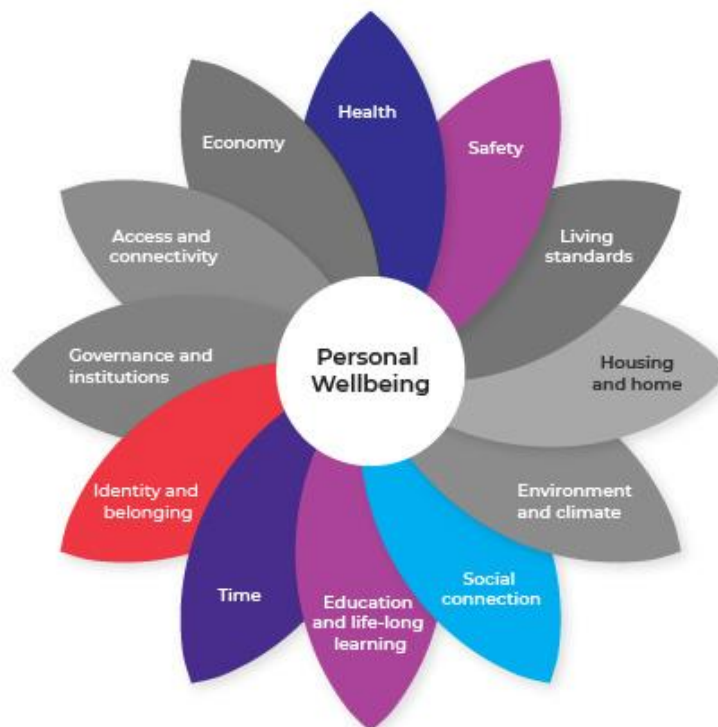
25. Council reiterates [our recommendations made to the Assembly Inquiry into Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools](#), and renew calls for professional development, professional development systems, and other supports for teachers to be strengthened.
26. Council calls on the ACT Government to fund a qualified teacher librarian in every school. Placement of librarians in schools with lower socio-economic areas should be prioritised.
27. Council calls for the full and unconditional implementation of all recommendations by the [ACT Government Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools](#). Including a trustworthy and resolution-focused complaints handling process at the directorate and school levels, with a self-reporting portal for students and families to report incidents.
28. Council recommends the ACT Government continue to support a range of strategies to reduce bullying and violence in schools including, implementing the Smiling Minds mindfulness program, MIEACT's No Labels program and Menslink.

Excellence in education

The partnership between a school and their P&C Association is pivotal in supporting the wellbeing of families and communities in Canberra. Council recommends the ACT Government supports and increases budgetary initiatives to provide all students at public schools with an excellent education experience, as well as nurturing the relationship schools have with their P&C Association.

Council notes that schools and their P&C Associations all over Canberra contribute directly to multiple domains in the Wellbeing Framework, as well as introduce students to most domains. Schools are some of the first places that Canberrans develop wellbeing in the domains of:

- Education and life-long learning,
- Identity and belonging,
- Health,
- Safety,
- Social connection, and
- Time



The 2021-22 Budget Review notes significant investment has been made in public education and school construction and redevelopment to support children and young people's learning. The review recognises the importance that education has in life-long wellbeing. Council contends that as an extension to this, P&Cs are critical in establishing community connections and values that influence life-long wellbeing.

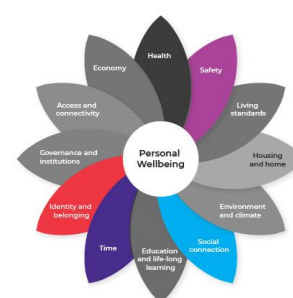
Parent and family engagement

Communities scaffold around schools to support students to assist them reach their potential. Council is appreciative of the parental engagement grants which have resulted in several exciting and novel ways to improve relationships between schools and parents. However, Council considers that broader Government approaches and policies must acknowledge the central and special place schools have in the Canberra community.

P&C Associations are small, volunteer organisations which form a crucial component of school communities, by facilitating connections through events and activities, providing essential school services (such as canteens and out of hours school care) and raising funds. Council contends that a lack of volunteers and increasing regulatory obligations may result in P&Cs being unable to continue to make positive contributions to school communities.

Wellbeing domains and indicators

Strong communities are vital for the wellbeing of school staff, students, and families. Every indicator in several wellbeing domains is directly enhanced by the effort of P&C associations. Recognition of and investment in school communities will send a strong signal of the importance of wellbeing in Canberra.



Social connection indicators include *levels of loneliness, levels of volunteering, participation in community events and activities, and sense of social connection, all of which our members have identified as things they seek to improve through connection with their P&C.* **Identity and belonging** indicators of belonging and *inclusion* are core principals of the work of P&Cs. The **time** domain represents one of the biggest challenges our members face when trying to improve wellbeing indicators across all other domains. Finally, **safety** indicators of *feeling safe and community resilience to emergencies* are improved by the work of P&Cs across Canberra.

Parental Engagement

Parents turn to their school communities to build networks and friendships. Having a valued role within one's community directly impacts the sense of social connection indicator.

Facilitating and encouraging meaningful parental engagement is an ongoing requirement that needs to be prioritised by the Education Directorate and schools and funded in the ACT Budget. Although P&Cs usually support parent and family relationships through their events and activities, some P&Cs are struggling due to several barriers. These challenges include balancing work and life commitments, lack of volunteers, as well as meeting specific cultural and linguistic diversity of their community. Schools are well positioned to support parent and family engagement. However, the national workforce shortage of teachers currently being experienced in the ACT highlights the need to relieve teacher workloads. The ACT Government could trial of family engagement officers in several schools to build and maintain relationships between schools, families, and parents. Council considers that family engagement officers would provide targeted opportunities to build and maintain school, family and parent relationships whilst meeting the cultural and linguistic diversity needs of each school.

Recommendation 1

Invest in family engagement officers in schools to facilitate collaboration between parents, P&C associations, and teachers for the benefit of students, families, and schools.

Another strategy revolves around the development and use of parent and family hubs. Again, some school communities already have excellent resources, but they are in the minority. An innovative idea to deliver the benefits of a parent hub to a range of schools is to develop a mobile parent hub that can be deployed in a targeted approach to combat identified disengagement. Ideally, after a trial, the Education Directorate would be given the resources to have a mobile parent hub available to each region or school network.

Taking this mobile approach to a more traditional parent hub idea has several benefits. The parent hub can be deployed reactively to school needs, for example to schools with upcoming events, forums, issues, or opportunities. It could also be deployed proactively to schools demonstrating early signs of disengagement. Being a limited-time resource while it is deployed, parents may be more inspired to make use of it while it is there.

Recommendation 2

Council recommends a trial of a mobile parent hub, containing resources for parents and families, and engagement incentives such as free coffee or breakfast.

Recent grant opportunities including Parental Engagement grants and Children's Week grants proved to be a big success, funding grassroots projects and ideas that otherwise would not have been possible. P&Cs can achieve excellent value for money where it can have the greatest impact. These grant opportunities were very valuable, particularly in maintaining and re-building community opportunities as Canberra recovers from covid.

Recommendation 3

Extend grant opportunities available to school communities through their P&C Associations, including Parent Engagement Activity review and guidelines and small activity grants, with goals of maintaining or rebuilding community engagement and relational trust/community capacity in a covid-recovering Canberra.

Policy impacts

Over 51,000 ACT residents are students at ACT public schools. As such, policy decisions in many different areas impact the lives of school students and their families. Council considers that broad Government approaches and policies must acknowledge the central and special place schools have in the Canberra community.

Recommendation 4

Council strongly recommends the ACT Government continue to support school communities connect, by considering the impact of policies and decisions on P&Cs.

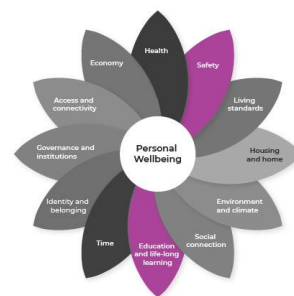
Quality learning environments

A quality educational experience needs a foundation of safe, accessible, and comfortable public-school infrastructure. Public schools work hard to offer students welcoming, inspiring places where students can shine. However, Council considers, significant resources are needed to ensure public school infrastructure can support quality educational experiences into the future.

Wellbeing domains and indicators

All the wellbeing indicators in the **Education and life-long learning** domain are a factor when budgeting for public-school infrastructure: *early childhood education, equity of educational outcomes, learning for life, learning growth, and student belonging*. As the framework acknowledges, the wellbeing of children in their school years is vital to their life outcomes, and our public-school infrastructure should reflect that.

Further, the wellbeing domain of **Safety** includes several indicators that are impacted by schools and P&C associations, such as *feeling safe*, and *road safety*. Schools are also workplaces, and as such the *workplace safety* indicator is impacted by our public-school infrastructure.



Capacity planning and new schools

As Canberra's population rises and urban density increases, more schools are needed. Council recognises the significant commitment the ACT Government has made to building new public schools. Council considers the building of new schools has been too conservative and, that more schools are needed instead of school expansions which place unreasonable pressures on existing public schools and related infrastructure.

Of note, brownfields development/urban infill places additional burden on existing schools and infrastructure. Schools in the inner north, for example, are feeling the pressure from increased enrolments. Students at the schools suffer from inadequate infrastructure from specialist spaces to toilet facilities, as every possible space is repurposed for core learning. Creative enrolment zoning gives only temporary relief, and pushes the burden out to suburban schools, and to families having to commute.

Recommendation 5

Council reiterates the call for a new public school to be built in the Inner North.

Specialist facilities and outdoor areas

Council recognises that schools work hard to accommodate growing student numbers, but often this results in the permanent loss of important specialist facilities, such as libraries, music, and art rooms, decreases available outdoor spaces due to demountable classrooms, places additional pressures on whole of school facilities such as toilets and canteens; and prevents whole of school activities and events like school assemblies. Parents and carers may be amenable to short-term compromises such as the rostering of access to playgrounds however, sustained growth in school capacity must not compromise on the quality of the educational experience.

Recommendation 6

Council suggests the ACT Government signal the importance of specialist school facilities by excluding spaces such as libraries from public school capacity calculations.

Long-term plans to manage sustained growth

Additionally, the temporary measure of amending the Dickson College Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) to include students from Gungahlin is insufficient to meet the sustained projected growth. Council contends a permanent longer-term solution is required to meet growth projections for Gungahlin and Dickson Colleges.

Recommendation 7

Council also calls on the ACT Government to expedite a permanent solution, such as a new college, to address the growth projections for Dickson and Gungahlin Colleges.

Council is also concerned about the impact of significant increases to Belconnen, Weston Creek, Molonglo, Woden, and Tuggeranong school populations, particularly due to planned brownfield development. Council considers longer-term cross-directorate planning is needed to ensure schools have adequate infrastructure and facilities to cope with increases in population from brownfield development. Council suggests that the impacts on schools from brownfield developments need to be considered and outlined in regional and town planning.

Recommendation 8

Council recommends the ACT Government build new primary schools in central Belconnen and Woden to match increases in urban density.

Council notes the current ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project, which aims to introduce District strategies and a new Planning Act. The supporting documentation for this consultation briefly mentions schools, though the bill itself is very thin in this regard. Council contends that schools and related infrastructure must be given a bigger role in district planning, particularly in and around town centres where density is rapidly increasing.

Recommendation 9

Council recommends the ACT Government develop a cross-directorate approach to regional and town planning to ensure that schools can begin planning for increases to school capacity, and to allow land for new schools to be set aside.

Infrastructure projects and maintenance and hazardous materials in schools

Many of our schools are showing their age and upgrades are needed. Our schools must be accessible, safe and sound, and provide all the facilities that students need to learn in a variety of domains. [Council's submission](#) to the recent ACT Legislative Assembly standing committee inquiry into school infrastructure, maintenance and hazardous materials highlights a number of significant concerns raised by P&Cs about their school infrastructure.

Recommendation 10

Council strongly recommends the ACT Government fund qualified infrastructure professionals to support schools with the management of school infrastructure and maintenance.

Recommendation 11

Council calls on the ACT Government to fund all our recommendations to the ACT school infrastructure inquiry.

P&Cs, parents and carers want to know that there is a fair and equitable system for the allocation of major infrastructure projects across all ACT public schools. Council is particularly concerned that specialist facilities in some high schools have been left in original condition and need modernisation.

Recommendation 12

Council strongly recommends the ACT Government ensure a consistent process is developed and implemented to ensure Education Directorate funded infrastructure projects are equitably distributed across ACT public schools.

Recommendation 13

Council recommends the ACT Government establish an equitable school modernisation fund to create inspiring places which students are proud to belong to, where schools which have not previously benefited can be prioritised.

Council notes recent work done by the ACT Government regarding management of hazardous materials and communication with school communities, though contends that funding is still inadequate for such a critical safety issue.

Recommendation 14

Council strongly recommends the ACT Government significantly increase long-term funding for the management and removal of hazardous materials in ACT public schools.

School security – CCTV and other measures

School communities want their schools to be safe places, valued and supported by the whole community. Unfortunately, some public schools in the ACT are subject to repeated vandalism, which costs the school financially and destroys the morale of the school community. Some school communities have had 12-13 major incidents of vandalism within a short period of time, despite having been fenced. These communities are asking for assistance from the ACT Government to ensure that their public school is recognised as a valuable space and protected accordingly.

Feedback from school communities indicates that parents and carers are frustrated that public school grounds and facilities appear less important than private school grounds. Private schools can take security measures without undertaking extensive public consultation, where public consultations can stop public schools from protecting their assets irrespective of the associated risks. Council believes that public school grounds and facilities are valuable to the community and worthy of protection.

Council notes that most public schools now are fenced, though some are still in the process of advocating to protect their assets.

Recommendation 15

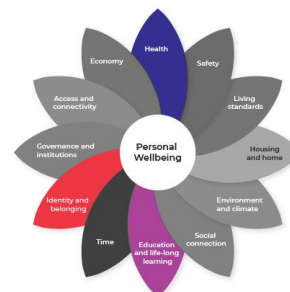
Council recommends the ACT Government develop a strategy to protect schools from vandalism, including CCTV and fencing (where CCTV and fencing is supported by the school community).

Students at the centre

Students need the right supports at the right time to engage in learning and achieve their full potential. Council contends that supporting students will lead to excellence in education and is essential for life-long wellbeing.

Wellbeing domains and indicators

As well as the **education and life-long learning** wellbeing domain, a student-centred mindset heavily benefits the **health** domain. Schools and P&C associations help to teach children about *healthy lifestyles* and *mental health*, while also being one of the first places students might receive support in these areas. The *access to health services* indicator measures access for adults, though young people often rely on schools as their first point of call for some services, particularly around mental health.



The *best start to life* indicator measures the proportion of children who are developmentally on track as they commence school, however it is then up to schools to bridge any gaps and ensure children do indeed have the best possible start to life.

The **identity and belonging** domain is the very definition of a student-centred mindset. Indicators such as *sense of belonging and inclusion*, *support for multiculturalism*, and *valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures* are heavily impacted by a young person's experience at their school.

Accessible wellbeing and allied health support in schools and the community

Despite significant commitments and investment by the ACT Government in wellbeing supports for students in public schools, students and their families are needing more support. Council is concerned a shortage of wellbeing and allied health supports publicly and privately available in the Canberra community will increase demand on the wellbeing and allied health supports available in schools.

Since 2020, families are reporting an increased shortage of wellbeing and allied health supports within the broader Canberra community. Families have reported a high turnover in qualified staff, in addition to exceptionally long waiting lists of 12 months across a range of public and private services, including speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists. Many families have waited prolonged periods for diagnostic assessments, followed by further long wait lists for therapeutic supports.

Council contends that provision of early and real time access to supports for students is desperately needed for parents, carers, and schools. Council recognises that waiting for services often results in increasing challenging behaviours at home and at school, and often requires additional school resources.

Recommendation 16

Council strongly recommends the ACT Government increase real-time and accessible wellbeing and allied health supports available through public schools, to support student learning.

Council believes the inability to access these wellbeing and allied health supports is likely to increase demand for supports in public schools. Additionally, Council expects that an inability to

access wellbeing and allied health supports for diagnostic assessment or therapy is likely to impact student behaviour, resulting in increased incidents, as well as escalation of incidents in public schools. Alternatively, early identification and access to wellbeing and allied health supports will prevent a substantial portion of challenging behaviours in schools.

Recommendation 17

Council strongly encourages the ACT Government implement a plan to attract and retain public and private wellbeing and allied health services in the Canberra community.

Relationships and sex education

Currently, the Australian Curriculum requires relationships and sex education be delivered in specific school years. In the ACT, public schools may fulfil this requirement in several ways, including procuring specialist services to provide incursions or by teachers developing their own content. However, research clearly demonstrates a more comprehensive consistent approach to relationships and sex education is needed.¹ Implementing a comprehensive evidenced-based relationships and sex education framework in schools promotes wellbeing, self-management, healthy relationships, reduces sexualised violence and protects against negative sexual experiences.²

Recommendation 18

Council calls on the ACT Government to fund and embed a comprehensive evidenced-based relationships and sex education framework in public schools that:

- meets the needs of all students, including those with special education needs and disabilities,
- engages parents and carers early,
- explicitly teaches protective behaviours including body autonomy and consent consistently from preschool,
- is delivered by educators with specialist training,
- is accurate and age appropriate, be positively role-modelled in everyday school life,
- is embedded in expectations for school communities,
- is supported by all school staff,
- is integrated into school life rather than only taught in specific school years,
- is evaluated against accountability mechanisms.

Inclusive education for every student

Students of all capabilities and backgrounds must be provided with adequate support so they can achieve their best. Council considers, a targeted approach is needed to ensure all public schools support every student's learning needs, including those with learning difficulties and the gifted and talented students.

Council notes the effort that schools, teachers, and school leaders put in to creating inclusive learning environments, though feedback from our members indicates that results can be inconsistent. Council believes investing adequately in ACT educators will serve to improve practices and consistency of implementation across all ACT public schools.

¹ Marson, K. (2018) *Ignorance is not innocence: Safeguarding Sexual Wellbeing Through Relationships and Sex Education*. <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/katrina-marson-act-2018/>

² Ibid.

Recommendation 19

Council strongly recommends on the ACT Government to ensure that all educational professionals in public schools (school leaders, teachers and learning support assistants) have access to quality inclusive education professional development.

While schools are often eventually inclusive places, specific requirements for individuals are not always met promptly. Infrastructure improvements to address inclusivity and accessibility needs to be seen as – and budgeted for – an ongoing journey. Schools need to be empowered through the Education Directorate to be proactive and quickly make reasonable adjustments for new students.

In some instances, students are in schools that are not accessible to them, causing physical harm or mental anguish. As a proud human-rights focussed jurisdiction, we should be budgeting to not only meet, but exceed these ideals.

Recommendation 20

Council strongly recommends the ACT Government ensure that school infrastructure supports all students to engage in learning, particularly those with complex, challenging behaviours, by providing ramps, lifts, sensory spaces, and quiet and calm spaces.

Students with disabilities or complex needs

Whilst some ACT schools work hard to provide best practice inclusive educational experiences for all students, several parents and carers are extremely frustrated by a general lack of inclusive education practice across public schools. In these instances, parents and carers report that they or their students do not feel welcome, a sense of belonging within their public-school community or valued.

Reports to Council indicate that students with disabilities in some schools are not supported to engage in whole of school activities and events. In other cases, parents and carers are required to repeatedly advocate for reasonable adjustments to be made to support learning. Other experiences include staff questioning medical diagnoses, delay in making or declining to make reasonable adjustments (via Individual Learning Plans and Behaviour Plans). In other cases, schools have regularly failed to implement reasonable adjustments or failed to implement reasonable adjustments with fidelity. Unfortunately, a lack of reasonable adjustments often results in escalated student behaviour resulting in violent incidents, and suspension of the student.

Recommendation 21

Council suggests the ACT Government ensure the approach to individualised learning in public schools is implemented, to ensure that all students reach their full potential. Especially students with learning difficulties, gifted and talented students and those with disabilities and complex needs.

Parents and carers of students with disabilities or complex needs want public schools to lead best practices when it comes to inclusive education. Whilst individual schools may offer a different approach to inclusive education, parents expect the foundations of inclusive education practice to be consistent across the system. To achieve this, Council considers inclusive education needs to be underpinned by a wholistic framework, which clearly identifies expectations and outcomes. Parents and carers want to know what inclusive education might look like. Council expects students with

disability or complex needs to be welcomed and supported to engage in learning, irrespective of the school they attend.

Recommendation 22

Council calls on the ACT Government to fund the development of a wholistic inclusive education framework to guide best practice inclusive education across public schools.

Furthermore, parents and carers of students with disabilities and complex needs are often required to complete additional administrative tasks and advocacy to ensure their students have access to appropriate supports. In many cases, parents and carers are exhausted by the amount of time spent advocating for student needs to be met. One example is the requirement to complete two enrolment application forms to access a learning support unit: one for their local school and then one for a learning support placement. Council understands that these parents and carers are often already under significant pressures due to their students' additional needs. A reduction in the administrative and advocacy burden for these parents and carers would be greatly appreciated.

Recommendation 23

Council calls on the ACT Government to reduce the additional advocacy and administrative burden on parents and carers of students with disabilities or complex needs.

Our schools need physical infrastructure, which is safe and sound and, supports access for students to engage in their learning, from ramps and lifts to sensory spaces, as well as quiet and calm spaces. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that some students, such as those with social disabilities, health conditions or immune-compromised, greatly benefit from continued access to remote and online learning. Offering remote and online learning within existing school communities reduces social pressures whilst allowing students to remain connected with their teachers and peers. Supporting students to maintain social connections is an important aspect of inclusive school communities.

Recommendation 24

Council calls on the ACT Government to extend the commitment to offer remote and online learning at every public school for students who need it or are unable to attend.

Quality teaching

Teachers need the right supports and development to deliver excellence in teaching. Council recognises and appreciates the excellent work of teachers and school leaders and contends that further investment in our educators leads to better outcomes and wellbeing for students, families, schools, and teachers.

Recommendation 25

Council reiterates [our recommendations made to the Assembly Inquiry into Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools](#), and renew calls for professional development, professional development systems, and other supports for teachers to be strengthened.

Qualified teacher librarians

Council acknowledges the ACT Government's commitment to provide scholarships to increase the number of teacher librarians in ACT schools. Council strongly believes every school must have a permanent, fully resourced library which is staffed by qualified teacher librarians.

Council considers that many students will need additional assistance to recover from lost learning due to COVID-19 shutdowns, and to grow student literacy. Professionally staffed libraries are the perfect place to support student literacy, learning and help students make sense of modern information sources. Only 2 in 5 public schools has a properly staffed library, with some schools having lost their permanent library space due to enrolment growth.

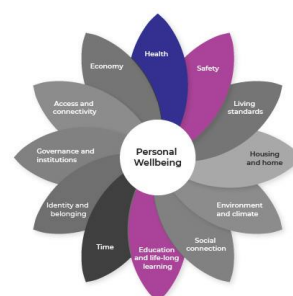
While aiming for qualified teacher librarians in every school, an equitable approach might be to prioritise schools in lower socioeconomic areas.

Recommendation 26

Council calls on the ACT Government to fund a qualified teacher librarian in every school. Placement of librarians in schools with lower socio-economic areas should be prioritised.

Wellbeing domains and indicators

As well as reactive strategies to respond to violence and bullying, strong proactive measure are needed to reduce the number and severity of incidents in the first place. Mental health support is essential. Indicators in the **health** domain, specifically *mental health*, only seem to cover adults, though a strong foundation for young people will lead to better outcomes and should be considered.



The *workplace safety* indicator in the **safety** domain measures the fact that school staff can go to work and feel safe. Workplace safety for school staff has a direct link to how safe students feel, and indeed are. Student's self-reported feeling of safety at school is also considered by the *student belonging* indicator in the **education and life-long learning** domain.

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 to better respond when it happens.

Council recognises recent progress on complaints handling processes and communication and notes this is an ongoing effort. We continue to urge the ACT government to fund the development of a self-reporting portal as well as many other recommendations identified in other government inquiries.

Recommendation 27

Council calls for the full and unconditional implementation of all recommendation by the [ACT Government Inquiry into the management and minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools](#). Including a trustworthy and resolution-focused complaints handling process at the directorate and school levels, with a self-reporting portal for students and families to report incidents.

Recommendation 28

Council recommends the ACT Government continue to support a range of strategies to reduce bullying and violence in schools including, implementing the Smiling Minds mindfulness program, MIEACT's No Labels program and Menslink.