



ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

The parent voice on public education

**Mr Andrew Barr
Chief Minister & Treasurer
ACT Budget Consultation**

14 April 2023

Dear Andrew,

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council), I am writing to provide a submission to the 2023-24 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,

Alison Elliott
President
ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

Budget Submission 2023 - 24



**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.

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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 2023-24 budget. Our submission includes 27 recommendations under three broad categories:

- Parent engagement and support for P&Cs;
- Inclusive education; and
- School infrastructure and maintenance.

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.



Parent engagement and support for P&Cs

Recommendation 1

Council recommends that the ACT Government develop a policy or guiding framework on parent engagement which contains clearly defined expectations for teachers and schools and explicitly encourages schools to collaborate with and support P&Cs.

Recommendation 2

The ACT Government should extend grant opportunities available to school communities through their P&C Associations, including Parent Engagement Grants, with goals of building community capacity and engagement.

Recommendation 3

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, with a particular focus on harder to reach families and families with students at risk of or experiencing school refusal.

Recommendation 4

The ACT Government fund Access Canberra to provide a supportive service to incorporated associations to help them meet their regulatory requirements, this includes the development of short factsheets, timeline graphics, reminder notices when documents are due or overdue and appropriately trained staff to help resolve difficult issues.

Recommendation 5

The ACT Government should reinstate funding through ACT Health to the ACT Nutrition Support Service to provide canteen menu assessments and support for ACT public school canteens.

Inclusive Education**Recommendation 6**

The ACT Government should invest in accessibility upgrades across ACT public schools as a matter of priority with the goal of having all public schools accessible by 2030.

Recommendation 7

The ACT Government should provide funding to retrofit all ACT public schools to ensure that school infrastructure supports all students to access and engage in learning, by providing ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, sensory spaces, quiet and calm spaces, assistive technology and modifications across schools to make the whole school site sensory friendly.

Recommendation 8

The ACT Government should invest at least \$10 million to develop and implement a continuous professional learning program of inclusive education for all school staff. This professional learning is an investment in our educators to ensure they have the skills and tools they need to create inclusive school cultures and education.

Recommendation 9

Council recommends that schools be resourced to ensure that Individual Learning Plans are in place for the beginning of the school year so that schools are ready on day one of term one to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Recommendation 10

The ACT Government should fund a position in all schools (pro rata depending on size of school) to oversee disability supports, facilitate the implementation of ILPs, monitor and review the implementation of reasonable adjustments, provide support to teachers and act as a contact point for parents.

Recommendation 11

The ACT Government should explore ways to capture student attendance data to identify students at risk of school refusal to ensure that strategies can be implemented to support students and reduce the likelihood of the issues escalating.

Recommendation 12

The ACT Government should adopt principles to support attendance, with a focus on student wellbeing. Noting that for students experiencing school refusal the first step is to turn up and that only once students are at school, with the right supports, and achievable goals, will learning occur.

Recommendation 13

The ACT Government should fund professional development for school staff to support a shift in culture from a focus on compliance around attendance to a focus on supporting student wellbeing and addressing individual student need, to help address the issue of school refusal.

Recommendation 14

The ACT Government should provide a further investment in flexible school options such as online learning, the Big Picture program, The Cottage and Muliyan to ensure that students that are unable to attend mainstream schooling can participate in school and continue their education.

Recommendation 15

The ACT Government should provide funding to improve access to allied health professionals (such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists) noting the flow on effects this has in schools, families, and communities.

Recommendation 16

The ACT Government should provide funding for support services for parents and carers to help support them in their roles as carers.

School infrastructure and maintenance**Recommendation 17**

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

Recommendation 18

Council calls on the ACT Government to consider innovative solutions to addressing capacity issues in high density areas and explore a vertical school in central Canberra.

Recommendation 19

Council recommends the ACT Government build a new college in Molonglo as a matter of priority.

Recommendation 20

The ACT Government should embed in policy that school communities must be consulted when major expansions or infrastructure works are being planned.

Recommendation 21

Council recommends that libraries and specialist spaces are excluded from capacity calculations, so they are not taken over to be used for additional class space.

Recommendation 22

The ACT Government should continue to explore and provide funding for short to medium-term solutions to address capacity pressures at Gungahlin College including:

- expediting planning permission for the promised transportable classrooms to be located at the front of the college, with installation to occur as soon as possible. This will provide 4 additional classrooms.
- relocating Gungahlin CIT to a more suitable space in Gungahlin and refurbishing the space for college use, creating 3 additional classrooms and a staff room.
- completing refurbishments within the cafe area of Gungahlin Library to create additional classrooms and dedicated library space for the college. Noting if the current café becomes classroom space there is still a desire by the school community for a café to remain close by to provide an affordable and convenient option for students.

Recommendation 23

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.

Recommendation 24

Council recommends that the ACT Government provide funding to ensure that ACT public school bathrooms are well maintained, clean and accessible.

Recommendation 25

Council recommends that the ACT Government provide funding for outdoor classrooms and kitchen gardens, recognising the educational and health benefits of such facilities.

Recommendation 26

Council recommends that schools with capacity pressures be prioritised for traffic management plans. Additionally, permanent school expansions should include additional corresponding car parking and traffic management measures.

Recommendation 27

Council recommends that a review of the school crossing supervisor program be undertaken with a view to coming up with criteria to help determine which schools should qualify for a school crossing supervisor. This will ensure that they continue to operate where they are most needed.

Parent engagement and support for P&Cs

Council recommends the ACT Government supports budgetary initiatives to promote and support the role that parents play in their children's education and in building the social capital of school communities. We want to see parents being explicitly welcomed back into schools and partnerships between parents and schools valued and actively fostered. In particular, we want to see the role of Parent and Citizen Associations (P&Cs) valued and supported by schools and government, recognising the valuable contribution P&Cs make to school communities.

P&Cs create opportunities for parents and carers, students and staff to interact, building a feeling of respect and a stronger, safer, school community. Schools also benefit from the support of their P&Cs in providing school services (such as canteens, uniform shops and Outside School Hours Care), events, communicating with parents and fundraising for resources.

Parent engagement

Outcomes for children are the best when families, schools, communities and governments work together. Parents are important partners in schooling by virtue of their role as the central provider and carer, and the role they play in their children's learning and development.

Parent participation contributes significantly to better outcomes for all students. It enables the school system and individual schools to respond more effectively to community values, aspirations and needs. It enhances the strength and vibrancy of the public education system and builds a stronger school community.

Parent engagement can occur in many ways and for many parents the P&C is an important way for them to be involved with their children's school. When supported and working well P&Cs provide a significant positive contribution to school communities and play a role in building wellbeing amongst everyone in the school community, from parents to students to teachers and school executive and support staff. Council would like to see the value of P&Cs included in a policy or guiding framework on parent engagement. This document should explicitly encourage schools to collaborate with and support P&Cs, noting the valuable contribution they make to the school community.

Recent "Parental Engagement Grants" have given P&C associations the freedom to explore creative ways to engage with their school communities. Being volunteer organisations who are often constrained to tight budgets, small and targeted financial support for P&Cs can pay large wellbeing dividends in the community.

Recommendation 1

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Recommendation 2

The ACT Government should extend grant opportunities available to school communities through their P&C Associations, including Parent Engagement Grants, with goals of building community capacity and engagement.

Partnerships between parents and schools

Family Engagement Officers

Council encourages the ACT Government to appoint Family Engagement Officers to all ACT public schools. Family Engagement Officers would perform an integral role in connecting schools and their staff with families and students and the broader communities. They would provide families with an alternative point of contact within a school and provide conversations which are less intimidating. This can help with communication between schools and families and may help in reducing parent frustration and de-escalating situations before they get out of hand.

Council believes that the appointment of Family Engagement Officers would also help to reduce teacher workload. They would be non-teaching positions that would help build social capital across the school community and link in with harder to reach families. They would also work closely with school P&Cs to promote targeted events and activities of interest to the school community, fostering social capital and partnerships between school and home.

Council envisages that Family Engagement Officers would also provide an important resource for families and students experiencing school refusal. We have heard that having a supportive and flexible approach from the school to addressing issues related to school refusal is critical to getting the young person back to school. Family Engagement Officers would have the time to work with families on a one-on-one basis to provide this type of intensive support.

Council believes that these positions would be most effective if they were employed centrally and reported to a supervisor located in the directorate. This way they could have support of other Family Engagement Officers and have clearly defined expectations about their role, while allowing for some flexibility to suit each individual and unique school.

Recommendation 3

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, with a particular focus on harder to reach families and families with students at risk of or experiencing school refusal.

Support for Parent and Citizens Associations operations

Meeting Regulatory Requirements

Council and the P&Cs we represent are all incorporated associations and are subject to the regulatory requirements as outlined in the *Association Incorporation Act 1991*. The nature of P&Cs means that there is a regular turnover of committee members. Members come and go as their children progress through the school system. It's rare to find the same people on P&C committees for longer than 3 years. Many new committee members join the P&C as a way to be involved in their children's school but don't understand the regulatory framework they must operate under.

Council has been consulted on proposed regulatory changes including new Model Rules and a proposed deregulatory change that removes the requirement to lodge an annual audited financial report. While we view measures that will reduce the administrative burden as a positive thing, we are concerned that removing the requirement to lodge an annual audited financial report will result in many P&Cs not realising that they still need to complete them.

Council believes that Access Canberra could play an important role in supporting incorporated associations to meet their regulatory obligations by playing a proactive and supportive role. Council has provided a number of suggestions to the Better Regulation Taskforce on how Access Canberra could better assist incorporated associations including: moving to online submissions; sending reminders for the submission of the AR form and following up on overdue lodgements; providing direct support to P&Cs completing overdue returns; having a point of contact for incorporated associations to speak to about complex issues; and moving to a support-based approach to compliance (moving away from the current punitive/fees-based approach).

Recommendation 4

The ACT Government fund Access Canberra to provide a supportive service to incorporated associations to help them meet their regulatory requirements, this includes the development of short factsheets, timeline graphics, reminder notices when documents are due or overdue and appropriately trained staff to help resolve difficult issues.

Support for P&Cs running a canteen

School canteens provide a valuable service providing healthy food options for students, giving parents a day off making lunch and enabling students to learn about using money. School canteens have traditionally been run by school P&Cs. However, over recent years the number of P&C run school canteens has been declining, some of them have been replaced by other providers and some have closed altogether. The increasing regulatory requirements have had an impact on the ability of P&Cs to continue to provide this valuable service.

Until the end of 2021 the ACT Nutrition Support Service (ACTNSS) was funded through ACT Health to provide ACT public school canteens with an annual menu assessment and general support on meeting their healthy food requirements, guided by the *ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy*. The ACTNSS is a trusted, independent support and provided an essential service that P&Cs are actively looking for. With funding withdrawn from the ACTNSS, school canteens are now expected to fund their annual menu assessment themselves. School canteens are generally not money-making enterprises, rather many operate at a loss as a service to the school community and are propped up by P&C fundraising.

Council calls for funding to be reinstated to the ACTNSS to provide menu assessments and canteen support. Without a trusted and known support for helping canteens manage their menus we believe that canteen menus will slowly creep, often unknowingly, towards less healthy options. By the end of 2021 the ACT was the leading jurisdiction in the provision of healthy food and drink at school canteens. For a small investment the ACT Government can ensure that ACT public school students continue to reap the health benefits of having access to nation leading healthy school canteens.

Recommendation 5

The ACT Government should reinstate funding through ACT Health to the ACT Nutrition Support Service to provide canteen menu assessments and support for ACT public school canteens.

Inclusive Education

Council considers that considerable efforts have been made to improve the experiences of students with disabilities in ACT public schools. Council has participated in the consultation process and eagerly awaits the release of an *Inclusive Education Strategy*. Council, however, believes that greater consistency within schools and across the public education system is required to improve the educational experience for students with disabilities and their families. Council would like all schools to be accessible for all and calls on the Government to commit to funding accessibility upgrades so that all students can access their local school and participate in school life from day one. Council also notes what appears to be an increasing trend of school refusal/can't and would like to see a recognition of and commitment to addressing this issue.

Schools are accessible for everyone

Parents want schools to be inclusive and for inclusive education to be underpinned by a wholistic framework across all public schools. They want to know that their young people will be welcomed and supported to engage in learning and school events no matter what school they attend.

Council supports inclusive education, where every student is supported to access and engage with high quality learning and be an active participant in their school community. Appropriate infrastructure plays an important role in ensuring that students with disability can access school facilities and learning in the same way as other students.

Council acknowledges that accessibility is a particular issue for the ACT's older public schools. Understandably, retrofitting older schools is costly, complicated by additional factors such as the presence of hazardous materials and may include the need for re-design. Council understands that schools with students requiring modifications to allow accessibility are prioritised. However, Council has heard that currently adjustments for physical disabilities can still take a long time to be met. In the meantime, students wait and are unable to access school as their peers do. Council believes that students shouldn't have to wait for the school's physical infrastructure to be upgraded and that all schools should be accessible to people with disabilities. As such Council contends that significant funding should be provided to retrofit older schools to ensure all schools are accessible for all by 2030.

School accessibility infrastructure upgrades should also include the addition of sensory/quiet spaces and assistive technologies to ensure that all schools can provide an inclusive physical environment to support all students with disabilities. Consideration of the overall sensory environment across the entire school site also needs to be taken into account with lighting, colours of walls, soundproofing, flexibility in design and layout of classrooms all important accessibility considerations.

Council notes that making schools accessible not only benefits students with disability but benefits the broader school community including parents with prams, parents and carers with disability, staff with disability and students with temporary injuries.

Recommendation 6

The ACT Government should invest in accessibility upgrades across ACT public schools as a matter of priority with the goal of having all public schools accessible by 2030.

Recommendation 7

The ACT Government should provide funding to retrofit all ACT public schools to ensure that school infrastructure supports all students to access and engage in learning, by providing ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, sensory spaces, quiet and calm spaces, assistive technology and modifications across schools to make the whole school site sensory friendly.

Schools are truly inclusive and reasonable adjustments are made for students with disabilities

School staff and educators play a vital role in making families of students with disabilities feel welcome, valued, and included as members of the community. Positive and constructive engagement with parents and carers is needed to demonstrate that schools can confidently cater for the needs of students with disabilities. Council strongly believes a continuous professional learning program on inclusive education is needed for all school staff to develop understanding of the needs of students with disabilities.

Council has heard that while some staff are great at identifying supports for students, others seem reluctant or unable to accommodate strategies and adjustments. We also hear that a teacher might be absent, and the replacement staff doesn't have access to, or knowledge of the adjustments required in a particular class. Council considers this sets both the teacher and students with disabilities in that class up to fail. The detail of support needed should be provided and explained to the student's broader teaching and support team, and not reliant on one or two staff members. For this reason, Council recommends that all educators and school staff would benefit from professional development in this area.

Council strongly believes this professional learning program should include training from people with lived experience of disabilities, as well as experts. A professional learning program of inclusive education will lift the overall capability of all staff in working with students with disabilities and take steps towards improving the culture and understanding of schools.

Recommendation 8

The ACT Government should invest at least \$10 million to develop and implement a continuous professional learning program of inclusive education for all school staff. This professional learning is an investment in our educators to ensure they have the skills and tools they need to create inclusive school cultures and education.

Schools are ready on day one of term one to meet the needs of students with disability

The process to identify student needs at a school level is usually undertaken at the start of every year through the development of individualised plans, including Individual Learning Plans (ILP), medical or positive support plans. This is an opportunity for families to have a discussion with teachers and support staff about their students' needs. However, this process is usually undertaken after school has commenced. Parents and carers therefore commonly report that students with disabilities are not supported to succeed from day one of school, and often enter classrooms without much-needed adjustments and are expected to perform equivalently to their peers. Arguably, the lack of supports and adjustments increases the risk of incidents, decreases accessibility to learning and may result in some students being unable to attend school. All of which unfairly disadvantage students with disabilities when compared with their peers and may be considered discriminatory.

Council strongly believes that schools need to be resourced so that the development of individualised plans and identification of supports and reasonable adjustments can be made before the school year starts. This will ensure that the student has the reasonable adjustments in place to access learning, from day one of term one, just like their peers.

Furthermore, we strongly believe that funding an executive staff member in all schools to have responsibility and time to oversee disability supports would lift the capability of all schools to provide inclusive education. This position would be responsible for overseeing disability supports, providing support to teachers, overseeing the ILP process, monitoring and reviewing the implementation of reasonable adjustments and providing a contact point for parents especially when there are concerns about inclusive education. A dedicated staff member responsible for inclusive education would be able to develop expertise in inclusive education which should result in better outcomes for students with disabilities, better supported teachers and help reduce concerns from parents.

Recommendation 9

Council recommends that schools be resourced to ensure that Individual Learning Plans are in place for the beginning of the school year so that schools are ready on day one of term one to meet the needs of students with disabilities

Recommendation 10

The ACT Government should fund a position in all schools (pro rata depending on size of school) to oversee disability supports, facilitate the implementation of ILPs, monitor and review the implementation of reasonable adjustments, provide support to teachers and act as a contact point for parents.

Addressing issues around school refusal

School refusal/can't is when the idea of going to school causes such great distress for a student that they are unable to attend school. Rates of school refusal appear to have been increasing since COVID-19 lockdowns, but data is patchy at best in this space.

Council considers, students' experience of school is enhanced when parents are an effective partner in the education of their children. Teachers and schools get a better understanding of the needs of individual children, what supports they either have or lack outside of school and can adjust their practices accordingly.

Parents have told us that success in getting a student back to school depends on a good partnership with the school. Schools that listen to families and are prepared to work together to address the issues preventing the student from attending have the most success. Flexibility by the school and the ability to consider and implement solutions that may be considered "out of the box" were also seen as important. Recognising that just getting to school can be a massive achievement for a student and celebrating that, rather than always focusing on academic outcomes is important. For students experiencing school refusal the most important thing is to get to the point where they feel safe and comfortable at school and the learning will follow.

Just as there are various reasons for school refusal there is not a one size fits all solution that will work for all students. It is important that schools delve deeply into the issues for school refusal by talking to the student and family and come up with a solution tailored to the individual

circumstances. The ACT Government can also play a role at a system level by providing more funding to increase the availability of flexible school options such as an online learning academy, the Big Picture Program, The Cottage or Muliyan.

Recommendation 11

The ACT Government should explore ways to capture student attendance data to identify students at risk of school refusal to ensure that strategies can be implemented to support students and reduce the likelihood of the issues escalating.

Recommendation 12

The ACT Government should adopt principles to support attendance, with a focus on student wellbeing. Noting that for students experiencing school refusal the first step is to turn up and that only once students are at school, with the right supports, and achievable goals, will learning occur.

Recommendation 13

The ACT Government should fund professional development for school staff to support a shift in culture from a focus on compliance around attendance to a focus on supporting student wellbeing and addressing individual student need, to help address the issue of school refusal.

Recommendation 14

The ACT Government should provide a further investment in flexible school options such as online learning, the Big Picture program, The Cottage and Muliyan to ensure that students that are unable to attend mainstream schooling can participate in school and continue their education.

Improving access to specialist and allied health services

Students need access to timely assessment, diagnosis, and treatment strategies for a range of health concerns. Providing pathways to diagnosis and treatment is important due to the funding and supports that often accompanies a diagnosis.

Public access to allied health practitioners is difficult. Psychologists, speech therapists and occupational therapists are in very high demand, with wait lists extending out as far as 6, 12, or even 24 months. If a child does not yet have a formal diagnosis which is covered financially by NDIS, the cost can be prohibitive. If a specialist practitioner is required (for example an OT with specific experience with autism), then wait times can be pushed out even further. This can lead to students not getting the help when they need it. Families and teachers are then left to work out by themselves the most appropriate strategies to use to assist those students in the school environment.

Parents also need support in their roles as carers. Parents of students with disability or facing school refusal issues have an important but difficult job in supporting their child, navigating the medical and allied health system and working with schools to ensure the best outcome. Council has heard about the flow on effects this has for the family, financially, socially and emotionally. Parents are often referred to Carers ACT for support, but this service is already overwhelmed. Council calls on the ACT Government to ensure supports are available to carers of students with disability.

Recommendation 15

The ACT Government should provide funding to improve access to allied health professionals (such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists) noting the flow on effects this has in schools, families, and communities.

Recommendation 16

The ACT Government should provide funding for support services for parents and carers to help support them in their roles as carers.

School infrastructure and maintenance

Infrastructure plays an important role in schools by providing welcoming, enriching environments where all students can access learning. At a minimum, P&Cs and their parents and carers want ACT public schools to be safe, accessible and comfortable places. However, they also expect all public schools to be inspiring, welcoming places, where students can shine.

Respond to capacity pressures

Planning for new schools and increases to existing schools' capacity has been an ongoing concern for P&Cs, parents and families over recent years. Council remains concerned that the ACT Government's commitment to building new schools, and expanding others is too slow and places an unreasonable capacity pressure on existing schools. P&Cs, parents and carers continue to identify that capacity pressures at a number of schools are compromising the educational experience of students.

New schools

Increases to urban density arising from urban infill is seeing permanent increases in the demand for schooling across the ACT. The effect of permanent increases in capacity are best demonstrated by the enrolment data for schools in the Inner North, Belconnen and Woden many of which are at or above capacity. Council considers that demountable classrooms are only a temporary measure, to cater for temporary increases in student enrolments.

In the last decade, there has been a large increase in high density development within Belconnen and Woden town centres. Many of the surrounding primary schools are already at or near capacity. Council believes that by building new primary schools in these areas it will reduce pressure on already full schools as well as encouraging active travel and building social capital in communities.

Council has been concerned about school capacity in the inner north for some time. We continue to call on the ACT Government to purchase land close to the tram corridor and consider innovative solutions such as a vertical school close to and linked with existing open spaces.

Council welcomes the opening of Stage 2 of Evelyn Scott School in 2023 which now caters to preschool to year 10 students. Council however, notes that a college for the Molonglo Valley still appears to be years away. College students from the Molonglo Valley currently have to travel to Canberra College in Woden, which is fast approaching capacity. Council calls on the ACT Government to build a new college in Molonglo as a matter of priority to reflect population growth in the region and reduce capacity pressures on Canberra College.

Recommendation 17

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

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Council calls on the ACT Government to consider innovative solutions to addressing capacity issues in high density areas and explore a vertical school in central Canberra.

Recommendation 19

Council recommends the ACT Government build a new college in Molonglo as a matter of priority.

Expansion of existing schools

P&Cs believe that permanent growth in student projections should be accompanied by permanent school classrooms, with increases to corresponding school facilities. Council notes that there are some major infrastructure projects underway that will address capacity pressures at some schools, including expansions of Garran primary school, Franklin School and Amaroo Senior School. Council welcomes permanent expansions to these schools and looks forward to their completion and the facilities they will offer their students. When undertaking expansion of school sites Council would like to see a policy to ensure that school communities are consulted and involved noting that schools are broadly viewed as a community asset.

Recommendation 20

Embed in policy that school communities must be consulted when major expansions or infrastructure are being planned.

Library and specialist spaces

Currently, school Principals can choose to use the library (or other specialist spaces) as a permanent teaching space. Council member feedback shows that some public schools use the school library as a permanent classroom due to high capacity. Accordingly, student access to the library is reduced or varied. In some cases, libraries have been relocated to shared spaces such as hallways. Furthermore, student access to the library for library classes, reading material and lunchtime activities may be restricted. Council members strongly believe that school libraries are an essential component to developing student literacy and promoting equitable education.

Recommendation 21

Council recommends that libraries and specialist spaces are excluded from capacity calculations, so they are not taken over to be used for additional class space.

Address capacity issues at Gungahlin College

Council welcomes the promise of a new college for the Gungahlin region but notes that this is only in the early scoping stages and still some time from completion. Measures to address the capacity issues at Gungahlin College are currently in the pipeline but even these are taking longer than expected, with some promised solutions not likely to be in place until at least 2024 and others looking like they may not progress at all. Noting that college students only attend for two years, there are cohorts of students that are going through the college system with suboptimal infrastructure solutions in place.

Recommendation 22

The ACT Government should continue to explore and provide funding for short to medium-term solutions to address capacity pressures at Gungahlin College including:

- expediting planning permission for the promised demountable classrooms to be located at the front of the college, with installation to occur as soon as possible. This will provide 4 additional classrooms.
- relocating Gungahlin CIT to a more suitable space in Gungahlin and refurbishing the space for college use, creating 3 additional classrooms and a staff room.
- completing refurbishments within the café area of Gungahlin Library to create additional classrooms and dedicated library space for the college. Noting if the current café becomes classroom space there is still a desire by the school community for a café to remain close by to provide an affordable and convenient option for students.

Upgrades and refurbishments

Many ACT public 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. P&Cs, parents and carers want to know that there is a fair and equitable system for the allocation of funding to refurbish ACT public schools. Council is particularly concerned that specialist facilities in some high schools have been left in original condition and need modernisation and that bathrooms are often neglected and not maintained as they should be. Council has heard from many P&Cs with concerns about the state of toilets at their children's schools and that students avoid using bathrooms whilst at school because of this.

Council would also like to see increased investment in outdoor infrastructure for schools, such as outdoor classrooms and kitchen gardens. Outdoor classrooms are valuable learning spaces that provide better ventilation which can assist in preventing the spread of illnesses. They also support the health and wellbeing of students and teachers as they connect with the natural world. Bush gardens and kitchen gardens also support curriculum areas such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait and sustainability cross-curriculum perspectives. Kitchen gardens can also support healthy eating messaging and its associated benefits.

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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.

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Council recommends that the ACT Government provide funding to ensure that ACT public school bathrooms are well maintained, clean and accessible.

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Council recommends that the ACT Government provide funding for outdoor classrooms and kitchen gardens, recognising the educational and health benefits of such facilities.

Student safety in school carparks and nearby areas

Safe travel to school remains a key concern for P&Cs across the ACT. Whilst active travel, such as riding or walking to school is a healthy and environmentally friendly choice, this is not possible for all families. The distance to school may be too far or it may simply be more practical and time efficient for parents to drop children off or pick them up on the way to or from work.

P&Cs, parents and carers consistently identify the need for better parking and traffic management across ACT schools. Council understands that school car parks are not designed to cater to the entire school population at a point in time. Council notes that insufficient car parking, combined with a lack of clear drop-off and pick-up systems appears to plague all schools. However, school expansion places significant demand on school car parking and drop-off and pick-systems, which Council considers must increase safety risks. Furthermore, some schools are facing additional traffic and parking issues with an increased volume of near-by construction and development. P&Cs have reported obstructed views from illegal on and off-street parking, and difficulty to access school or legal on-street car parking due to additional demand, which is considered to increase student safety risks.

Recommendation 26

Council recommends that schools with capacity pressures be prioritised for traffic management plans. Additionally, permanent school expansions should include additional corresponding car parking and traffic management measures.

Recommendation 27

Council recommends that a review of the school crossing supervisor program be undertaken with a view to coming up with criteria to help determine which schools should qualify for a school crossing supervisor. This will ensure that they continue to operate where they are most needed.