

ACT AUDITOR–GENERAL’S REPORT

**TEACHING QUALITY IN  
ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

REPORT NO. 6 / 2021

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Produced for the Office of the ACT Legislative Assembly by the ACT Audit Office, ACT Government.

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PA 20/08

The Speaker  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
Civic Square, London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Madam Speaker

I am pleased to forward to you a Performance Audit Report titled 'Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools' for tabling in the Legislative Assembly pursuant to Subsection 17(4) of the *Auditor-General Act 1996*.

The audit has been conducted in accordance with the requirements of the *Auditor-General Act 1996* and relevant professional standards including *ASAE 3500 – Performance Engagements*.

Yours sincerely



Michael Harris  
Auditor-General  
22 June 2021

*The ACT Audit Office acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and pays respect to the elders; past, present and future. The Office acknowledges and respects their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.*



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# SUMMARY

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The impact teaching practices have on a student's learning outcomes outweighs the effect of every other factor outside the student's socio-economic and family background.<sup>1</sup> As such, teaching quality is acknowledged as the single most important factor influencing student performance within the control of education systems. The quality of teaching practices has cumulative and residual impacts on student outcomes. Contemporary research demonstrates that students taught by highly-effective teachers learn at twice the rate of their peers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, studies showed that students who are taught by a succession of three high-performing teachers scored 49 percent higher on school assessments compared to students assigned to teachers with ineffective practices over a three-year period.<sup>3</sup> This performance audit examines the effectiveness of the ACT Education Directorate's strategies and activities to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools.

## Conclusions

### STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING QUALITY

The Education Directorate recognises the importance of improving teaching quality for the purpose of enhancing student performance. Since 2014, strategic planning and government-led initiatives have identified priorities to improve the quality of teaching practices across ACT public schools.

To improve its strategic planning framework, the Education Directorate has intentionally aligned its 2018-21 Strategic Plan, along with supporting implementation plans and initiatives for improving teaching quality, to the *Future of Education* strategy. Responsibility for key actions and expected timeframes within the strategic plan is assigned in Education Support Office divisional business plans.

There is a clear structure of performance measures and six-monthly internal reports to demonstrate progress against the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. However, baseline data has not been consistently captured and used in six-monthly progress reports to determine the impact of initiatives to improve teaching quality. These reports do not track progress against the full range of priority actions documented in divisional business plans, or provide a balance of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the impact of strategies and activities to improve the quality of teaching practices at a system level.

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<sup>1</sup> Jensen, B. (2010). *Investing in our teachers, investing in our economy*. Melbourne: Grattan Institute. Page 10.

<sup>2</sup> Wiliam, D. (2009). *Teacher Quality: why it matters, and how to get more of it*. London: University of London. Page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jordan, H., Mendro, R., & Weerasinghe, D. (1997). *Teacher effects on longitudinal student achievement*. Indianapolis IN: National Evaluation Institute.

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Education Directorate has established a comprehensive school improvement process, which provides effective support to schools to plan, deliver and evaluate activities that are intended to improve student educational outcomes, including activities to improve teaching quality. The school improvement process is evidence-based, uses international educational research, and has been designed to focus school leadership on achieving a small number of achievable and relevant priorities. This is supported by a consistently implemented approach of using multiple sources of evidence to inform the effectiveness of school teaching and learning activities. There is also an effective structure of external reviews to assess the performance of individual schools and the ACT public school system against the *National School Improvement Tool*. ACT public schools perform at a 'High' level when measured against the *National School Improvement Tool*, but there are challenges to maintain and improve this performance.

Since 2018, the Education Support Office has updated their roles and responsibilities to support schools through the school improvement process. However, the policies that support the school improvement process do not fully reflect current roles and responsibilities for the process and are not well understood across all ACT public schools. There is scope to better design the roles of Directors of School Improvement and Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers to support teaching quality across all public schools. Directors of School Improvement could be better focused to specialise in school sectors and Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers currently lack a role, responsibility and resources for school improvement. Addressing these issues may help improve the perceived benefits of these certifications and their effectiveness in improving teaching quality.

While school improvement documentation and a series of school visits are used to oversight school performance, these activities were not consistently undertaken across the ACT public schools considered as part of the audit. The Education Support Office does not formally analyse school improvement documentation to better target and improve teaching quality supports and this reduces the effectiveness of the school improvement process to improve teaching quality.

The Education Support Office has established a range of activities to oversight and support school leadership to improve teaching quality. Directors of School Improvement have an active role to support principals in improving teaching quality through school improvement, and are supported by Instructional Mentors. The Leadership Development Strategy has also been implemented with a view to school leaders leading and mentoring teachers to improve teaching practices. While these supports have assisted principals and deputy principals, school executives (School Leader C staff) spoken to as part of the audit were consistently unaware of this support. While school executives' awareness may have been affected by the interruption of the Strategy's planned activities in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this reduces the effectiveness of school leaders to lift the quality of teaching in ACT public schools.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Education Support Office has developed professional learning programs, supports and resources for ACT public school teachers and leaders to improve teaching practices. The Education Support Office organises and manages professional learning programs that are intended for use across all ACT public schools, but there is variability in teachers' and school leaders' awareness of the programs. This reduces the effectiveness of the programs to improve teaching quality. Where programs are accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and teachers make use of them, there is evidence that the programs help improve teaching practice at the school level. However, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the programs are still maturing and there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the programs are having a system-level impact on teaching quality in ACT public schools.

Professional learning communities are a mandated professional development practice in ACT public schools. They involve school leaders and teachers collaborating to address the immediate educational needs of their students. The Education Directorate has implemented the 'Spiral of Inquiry' and 'Multiple Sources of Evidence' research-based better practice approaches to guide ACT public school teachers and leaders' engagement in professional learning communities. However, schools considered as part of the audit did not consistently use these supports. There is a need for more support for all schools to implement these approaches in their professional learning communities. Annual professional learning programs required by the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* were not consistently implemented in the schools considered as part of the audit or used to focus professional learning communities on improving student educational outcomes through improved teaching quality. Consistent and reliable implementation of professional learning communities could help to establish their role as the primary accountability mechanism for improving student outcomes at the school level.

The ACT Teacher Quality Institute receives rich data on ACT public school teachers and leader professional learning activities. However, the Education Directorate has not sought advice from the ACT Teacher Quality Institute or requested data for the purpose of holistically monitoring or evaluating the impact of teacher professional learning programs on improving the quality of teaching practices. This impairs the Education Support Office's efforts to plan and deliver professional learning to improve teaching quality.

The New Educator Support Program is a recognised support under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* for developing new teachers in the first three years of their career. Provisions include a five-day central induction, reduced face-to-face teaching hours and six days of classroom release to facilitate professional learning activities. However, these supports are not implemented in a way that is accessible for all New Educators. The *New Educator Support Guidelines* and the *New Educator Support Plan* provide a framework for implementation, but there is a lack of clarity associated with common expectations for New Educators' development throughout the three years of the New Educator Support Program. Furthermore, the Education Directorate does not have sufficient data or mechanisms to evaluate the efficiency or effectiveness

of the New Educator Support Program, or whether New Educators are reliably accessing their enterprise agreement entitlements.

## TEACHING WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

The management of the teaching workforce is an important determinant in achieving teaching quality across all ACT public schools. The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* includes a structure that recognises the importance of teacher experience. The Education Directorate has assigned roles and responsibilities to classroom teachers at the top of this structure at the 'Experienced Teacher 2' level to mentor New Educators and contribute to improving student educational outcomes. Principals are also assigned responsibilities to manage the school teaching workforce to improve student outcomes. However, the Education Directorate does not centrally plan or monitor the distribution of experienced teachers to determine if New Educators and schools have equitable access to them. Principals can exclude highly experienced teachers from the annual teacher transfer round, and teachers are not transferred to schools which they have not expressed a preference to teach at through this process. These practices limit the ability of schools to access highly experienced teachers to improve teaching quality.

The teacher performance development process is not effective in supporting teaching quality. While it refers to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, it does allow teachers to demonstrate their compliance with mandatory professional learning processes under the *ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act (2010)*. The Education Directorate also cannot use the process to plan, deliver or evaluate the effectiveness of supports to improve teaching quality across all ACT public schools as it is a manual process managed at the school level. The performance development process does not effectively support teacher appraisals which was regularly reflected as a highly valued support to improve practice by teachers who contributed to the audit. Schools develop their own ways to encourage these activities which are variable in quality and effectiveness.

The performance management process under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* is not implemented effectively in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate advised that one teacher had been managed through these processes in the 2019-20 financial year. However, this is not likely to reflect the true level of underperformance in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate does not have an informed understanding of the true level of teacher underperformance.

## Key findings

### STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING QUALITY

Paragraph

In April 2016, the Education Directorate released key documents that were intended to support improved educational practices: *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design*. Executives and school leaders involved in the audit advised that the frameworks were primarily 'guiding documents' and, as such, lacked clearly identifiable objectives, outcomes and measurable indicators of success. The *Great*

2.22

*Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks were not supported by implementation plan(s), nor was there centralised support for their implementation from the Education Support Office. Nevertheless, many of the initiatives and key actions detailed in the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks have been a foundation for, and contributed to, the development of the *Future of Education* strategy and subsequent initiatives.

The Education Directorate's 2014-17 Strategic Plan, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation* identified an 'ambitious agenda' to: increase the number of high performing students; reduce the number of students who are not achieving; increase the number of children who benefit from early childhood education and care; and increase qualification levels of the ACT community. Despite the 2014-17 Strategic Plan being implemented prior to the release of the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks in May 2016, no effort was made to draw the linkages and alignment between the 2014-17 Strategic Plan and the activities identified within the two strategies. The 2014-17 Strategic Plan set out five priorities for the Education Directorate, each of which was accompanied by three or four key strategies. The key strategies that were identified to achieve the outcomes of the 2014-17 Strategic Plan were not specific or measurable. A 2017 strategic planning taskforce convened by the Education Directorate concluded that the plan was developed with little consultation, included unclear measures and failed to prioritise the actions that mattered most to improving student outcomes. The taskforce also found that the Education Directorate did not adequately monitor or report against the 2014-17 Strategic Plan priorities to ascertain their impact on student performance.

2.33

The *Future of Education; An ACT education strategy for the next ten years* was released in 2018. The strategy 'outlines the plan for education in the ACT for the next decade'. The first phase of the *Future of Education* strategy was supported by an implementation plan that identified six priorities for improving the ACT public education system and 68 commitments for the Education Directorate to implement. The planned activities detailed in the first phase implementation plan are comprised of tangible programs, supports or strategic planning tasks. Priority 3 of the first phase of the *Future of Education* has a focus on supporting teaching quality, and includes a range of supports focused on developing early career teachers, improving teaching quality through school and system-level support, and developing school leaders. Priority 2 and Priority 6 also include initiatives intended to improve teaching quality. The Education Directorate published an evaluation of Phase One of the *Future of Education* in June 2021, and reported 63 of its 68 commitments had been established or completed. The Education Directorate reported that five commitments had been delayed due to the redirection of resources to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the completion of the first phase of the *Future of Education* in 2020, the second phase implementation plan is yet to be published by the Education Directorate.

2.39

To support the implementation of the commitments in the *Future of Education*, the Education Directorate has developed a series of cascading strategic planning documents. These include the *Education Directorate 2018-21 Strategic Plan* and divisional and branch business plans. The 2018-21 Strategic Plan identifies five strategic goals, each of which is supported by priority actions and between five to

2.59

seven indicators of success. The indicators are typically specific and measurable as they focus on increasing an observable performance measure of the ACT public school system, but they are not supported by identifiable or quantifiable targets. The priority actions identified in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan are assigned to the Education Directorate's divisions and branches through annual business planning processes. There is a clear structure of allocating priority actions to divisions with timeframes identified for each activity.

Progress in implementing the 2018-21 Strategic Plan actions is reported through a biannual reporting framework of six-monthly review reports. At the time of audit reporting, three of these reports had been produced; April 2019, November 2019 and August 2020. The structure of identifying priority actions, specific indicators of success and a framework for reporting progress represents a positive improvement on the structure of reporting under the 2014-2017 strategic planning activities for the directorate. The reporting framework identifies a clear alignment between the *Future of Education* and the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. However, the six-monthly reporting process is hampered by a lack of baseline data through which progress against the indicators should be measured. The reports provide progress updates in narrative form against the priority actions along with case study examples for particular areas of success. While this gives some qualitative evidence of progress, the reports produced to date have had a predominant focus on 'success stories'. They do not consistently and explicitly explore: challenges in implementing priority actions; potential improvements to the indicators of success; and what needs to be done or modified to improve performance. The progress reports have also been inconsistent in their consideration of priority actions and indicators of success. These have not been consistently considered and addressed in each report in a way that provides a clear indication of the Education Directorate's progress and performance over time.

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## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Paragraph

The *National School Improvement Tool* was designed by the Australian Council of Educational Research in 2012; its purpose is to support Australian schools' improvement activities by documenting the practices displayed by highly performing schools in the form of benchmarks. The *National School Improvement Tool* and its associated performance domains form the basis of the Education Directorate's integrated school improvement process, which includes a series of cyclical activities: school reviews; school improvement plans; actional plans; school improvement visits; and impact reports. Guidance on the use and application of the *National School Improvement Tool* is outlined in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework (2016) and the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019).

3.22

The *People, Practice and Performance* framework was re-endorsed by the Education Directorate in 2018 as the cornerstone for school improvement activities and it has continued to positively influence the school improvement process. However, the framework was not reviewed or updated before its re-endorsement. While the core features of the school improvement process remain relevant in the framework, some of the principles and assumptions behind the framework have since been superseded by newer developments. This includes new school improvement roles of Directors of School Improvement and Instructional Mentors, as well as school

3.23

improvement priorities outlined in the *Future of Education*. The *Evidence and Data Plan* does not refer to, or otherwise acknowledge, the roles and responsibilities of Instructional Mentors or Education Support Office teams that assist schools in improving teaching quality. Similarly, the plan does not satisfactorily explain the purpose and intended outcomes of school improvement visits in the school improvement process. The exclusion of this information in the *Evidence and Data Plan* combined with the outdated information in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework presents a risk that Education Directorate policies designed to enhance school improvement in ACT public schools may lead to confusion and misunderstanding with respect to the Education Directorate's school improvement processes.

Under the *National School Improvement Tool*, the school review is the primary evaluation tool for examining the effectiveness of the planning and management of individual school resources for the purpose of improving student outcomes. Undertaken in the fifth year of a school's improvement cycle, school reviews use the *National School Improvement Tool* as the framework for assessing a school's progress towards directorate and school priorities, including an assessment of the quality of teaching practices displayed. Five of the six schools considered as part of the audit had undertaken a school review under the current integrated school improvement processes. All reviews included specific and actionable recommendations for schools to implement as part of their next five-yearly school improvement plan, and were made available on the school's website. There is evidence that the schools considered the recommendations when designing their next school improvement plan and sought to address the issues in a small number of high-level priorities for the following five years. There is also evidence that the school review recommendations were then also specifically addressed in subsequent annual action plans.

3.43

On the basis of the school reviews that are conducted each year, the Australian Council for Educational Research provides the Education Directorate with a *System School Review Report*. The *System School Review Report* summarises the strengths and areas for improvement for the ACT public schools that had undergone the school review process that year. There is evidence of the Education Directorate responding to *System Review Reports* since 2016 with actions targeted at improving teaching quality against ACT public schools across some recommendations in these reports. Since 2019, the Education Directorate's responses to *System School Review Reports* have improved in how they address the Australian Council for Education Research's recommendations for system-level improvement. Actions have been attributed to Education Support Office branches to progress and monitor throughout their implementation. However, the Education Directorate's responses to the *System School Review Reports* have not included reference to how prior year recommendations have been implemented. The Directorate's response to the 2020 report includes similar or identical actions to those identified in its response to the 2019 report; the details of any progress made or any challenges or delays to the implementation of the actions is not explicitly addressed or acknowledged in the documentation. While the reports are necessarily focused on historical performance in improving student educational outcomes and improvements across the system might take some years to be observed, there is an opportunity to better reflect and recognise progress that may be being made.

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School improvement plans seek to document the direction and priorities for a school in the form of improvement goals over a five-year period. They are developed initially after the completion of a school review and are informed by the performance information obtained from the school's assessment against the *National School Improvement Tool* as well as other school performance and demographics data. Four of the six schools considered as part of the audit had developed, and were implementing, school improvement plans (the remaining schools had school strategic plans due to the timing of previous external reviews). School improvement plans had a common structure and, as expected, had a sharper focus on a small number of improvement priorities. All plans included measures to track the achievement of school improvement priorities.

3.58

A school's action plan is the delivery mechanism for achieving the priorities identified in the school improvement plan. They should be developed annually and seek to document the resources, time and processes that are to be used to achieve improvement goals. Only two of the six schools considered as part of audit published action plans in 2019 and only three of these six schools published action plans for 2020. By not publishing annual action plans as required by the school improvement process, schools lack transparency and accountability for actions designed to progress school improvement plan priorities. For those annual action plans that were completed in the three schools, it is apparent that school leadership teams are largely identifying activities to address their school's improvement priorities in isolation of the Education Support Office supports available to ACT public schools. Supports available from the Education Support Office such as Instructional Mentors, coaching and leadership support for implementing professional learning communities, and universally available professional learning programs are not consistently identified in annual action plans to achieve school improvement plan priorities in ACT public schools. Guidance provided to all schools in completing their action plans does not prompt them to consider the appropriateness of these supports in achieving their improvement priorities.

3.59

School improvement visits are a monitoring mechanism that are intended to provide differentiated support and feedback to schools on their progress towards priorities identified in their school improvement plan. Education Directorate guidelines specify that all ACT public schools should participate in at least one visit annually. For the six schools considered as part of the audit, there was evidence of six school improvement visits conducted between 2018 and 2020 in five of the six schools.

3.69

A feature of the Education Directorate's school improvement process is incorporating the development of the school principal's performance and development plan, and the associated review processes, as part of the improvement monitoring activities for the school. This recognises the important contribution that principals make in developing and sustaining a school culture that supports teaching quality. The principal's performance and development plan, which is developed in conjunction with a school's annual improvement documentation, is another means by which Directors of School Improvement and principals consider the school's progress in achieving its improvement targets. The priorities and activities contained in the performance and development plans for the principals of the six schools considered as part of the audit aligned with their school's improvement plan and the

3.70

Education Directorate 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. Principals' adherence to the requirements of the *Principal Performance and Development Guidelines* was largely consistent in the documentation reviewed. Mid-cycle and end-cycle reviews demonstrated principals' efforts to deliver on their plan's targets through tangible, measurable and evidence-based activities.

Impact reports are developed at the end of the school year and are intended to demonstrate a school's progress against its annual action plan. They are designed to monitor and evaluate how the school has contributed to the strategic priorities of the directorate, delivered on its improvement agenda through progress towards its school improvement plan priorities and determined the impact of these actions on student outcomes. The impact reports of the six schools considered as part of the audit showed there was a focus in these reports on improving student performance through improved quality teaching practices. Each school had designed and implemented various actions to achieve this goal ranging from the establishment of staff coaching and mentoring programs, to the introduction of student feedback tools, as well as the use of evidence-based professional learning communities to perform active research projects to identify effective pedagogical practices. However, impact reports do not provide consistent feedback on system-wide supports for school improvement that can be turned into actionable information to assess impact and areas for improvement. The current process for schools to complete impact reports does not provide a clear prompt to schools to give feedback on the appropriateness and quality of system-wide supports. While the Education Support Office examines impact reports for this purpose, this process is not formalised.

3.76

The Education Support Office has implemented a range of supports that are designed to assist in the implementation of school improvement activities. These include: Directors of School Improvement, the School Planning and Review Unit and Instructional Mentors. Through their supervisory responsibility over principals, Directors of School Improvement are the link between ACT public schools and the Education Support Office. The four Directors are each responsible for a geographically-based school network and they directly supervise principals and provide support to school leaders through the different stages of the school improvement process. This model, which is intended to facilitate networking, communication and sharing of practice, provides a network of approximately 20 schools that are mostly within a small distance of each other. Principals valued the support and collaboration of peers provided by this structure. The effectiveness of the Directors of School Improvement has been improved with the establishment of the School Operations Unit to handle critical incidents at schools which historically were the responsibility of Directors of School Improvement. However, there are risks in the complexity of this role that may challenge its effectiveness. There may also be opportunities to focus each Director of School Improvement on particular educational settings, rather than on a geographically clustered set of schools to expand on the intent of meeting individual school needs to better align supports with the intent of the *Future of Education*.

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The School Planning and Review Unit has also assisted with focusing school improvement activities on measurable and achievable priorities at schools. In recent years, the School Planning and Review Unit has assisted schools in focusing on more

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specific and achievable improvement goals; this was evident in the school improvement plans considered as part of the audit. Instructional Mentors have also assisted with engaging with school leaders to strengthen the adoption of professional learning communities under the 'Spiral of Inquiry' model across the ACT public school system and developing school leader expertise in coaching and mentoring as part of the Education Directorate's initiative aimed at enhancing leadership capabilities across all levels. A key challenge in the use of the Instructional Mentors has been high turnover in the roles. Three years into the program, school leaders across ACT public schools also remain largely unaware of the role of Instructional Mentors or confused regarding the support role they provide.

In 2018 the Education Directorate committed \$5.4 million to a three-year Leadership Development Strategy; the *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Program*. A series of professional learning supports have been designed to support principals and school leaders through the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan, including professional learning for all principals (which has an aspect that focuses on new principals), developing finance, human resources and business skills, an annual leadership symposium and a biennial leadership conference. This is being supported with a principal and deputy principal coaching and mentoring program that involves experienced and retired principals providing support to upskill principals and deputy principals in leadership practice. Feedback data from attendees shows that the Leadership Development Strategy has contributed to some shifts in leadership practice that facilitate improved quality teaching practices in ACT public schools. Notably, there is a significant increase in the perceptions of the quality of support from Education Support Office through these activities.

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Through focus group discussions with school executives (School Leader C staff) it was apparent that most executives were not aware of the supports under the Leadership Development Strategy, with only two of six groups of School Leaders referencing the professional learning supports within the strategy. While the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan has an aspect that specifically focuses on new principals there is no similar approach for new school executives (School Leader C staff). While there are supports available to all school leaders, and some of the key activities under the Strategy that were planned for commencement in 2020 were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a significant cohort of over 400 staff. This cohort of school executives is expected to have a significant impact on improving student outcomes through leading classroom teachers.

3.101

National certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers was established by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership in 2012 as a method of formally recognising exemplary teachers who demonstrate quality teaching practices and leadership in schools. The *Future of Education* sought to 'work towards ensuring a highly accomplished and lead teacher is in every school' by the end of its first phase in 2020. At this time, 32.9 percent of ACT public schools had at least one school leader or teacher on staff with the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. The Education Directorate established a professional learning community to create a networking and sharing space for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers, but its implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.112

Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools do not have defined roles or responsibilities beyond that of their classroom teacher band. The *2018-2021 Education and Training Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement* states 'teachers who achieve certification at the higher career stages of the Standards will be encouraged to take up leadership roles in modelling exemplary teaching practice and in building capacity for excellent teaching within schools and across the system'. No further guidance is provided as to what these leadership roles are expected to achieve, and no resourcing is identified (including classroom release time) to achieve these expectations.

3.113

School leaders, including qualified ACT Teacher Quality Institute assessors, as well as Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers advised during focus group discussions that they are used variably in ACT public schools and their impact was limited by a lack of resources and time. There was a lack of interest from teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of this audit in obtaining the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. Teachers and school leaders perceived the cost of obtaining the certification, the workload associated with obtaining the certification and the lack of perceived benefits from having the certification as the major disincentives in pursuing the accreditation. Furthermore, the teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of the audit questioned Education Directorate's use of teachers with this certification, advising that it does not necessarily lead to promotional or enhanced career opportunities.

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## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Paragraph

Since 2018 the Education Support Office has been taking an increasing role in the development and implementation of professional learning programs and resources that are made available across all ACT public schools. The programs aim to address system-wide needs that have been identified in previous reviews or through school improvement activities. The key programs that have been established since this time are: the Cultural Integrity Program; the Academy of Future Skills; the Affiliated Schools Program; the Early Years Literacy Initiative; the Digital Solutions Program; Positive Behaviours for Learning; and Enabling Pedagogies. These programs have established some useful practices to improve teaching quality in schools. Three of the seven programs are fully accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and two are partially accredited.

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The most consistently valued programs by teachers were programs that included resources that could be used in classes and used coaches or mentors to support teachers to improve their practice. While programs such as Positive Behaviours for Learning and Cultural Integrity had a high level of teacher awareness and satisfaction, teachers were less aware of newer programs such as the Affiliated Schools Program, the Academy of Future Skills and Enabling Pedagogies. Professional learning resources are being increasingly made available through the Education Directorate's Service Portal, but there is a low level of awareness of this resource.

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The *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* requires principals to develop an annual professional learning program for their school leaders and teaching staff. The annual program is required to

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integrate professional learning community programs and school-led professional learning activities. None of the six schools who participated in the audit could provide evidence demonstrating they had consistently implemented annual professional learning programs for each year between 2014 and 2020 as required by the two most recent enterprise agreements.

A review of the schools' professional learning programs showed there was variability in the quality and comprehensiveness of the programs and their implementation. Two of the five schools' programs did not reference the school's professional learning community and three schools could not demonstrate that the activities in their program had been completed as planned. The enterprise agreement requirement of principals to develop an annual professional learning program is not integrated into the school improvement process. As a result, schools are not effectively using their mandatory annual professional learning programs under the enterprise agreement to demonstrate how professional learning is contributing to progress towards school improvement priorities.

4.45

Professional learning communities are a method of school improvement where groups of teachers meet regularly to work in a structured and collaborative process to improve student outcomes. ACT public school teachers and school leaders' participation in professional learning communities is a requirement of the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*. All six ACT public schools considered as part of the audit had implemented professional learning communities, which focused on improving student outcomes. Documents from schools showed that themes explored in professional learning communities are derived from each school's improvement priorities outlined in its school improvement plan. However, a review of planning documentation for professional learning communities and their presentations reflecting the findings or impact the process has had on student outcomes, as well as discussions with school focus groups showed there was wide variability in the quality and rigour of professional learning communities across ACT public schools.

4.57

Experienced teaching staff who participated in the audit commonly voiced a frustration that the professional learning community model is not facilitated by the Education Directorate to take place across networks of schools. This was particularly noticeable in high schools and colleges where one teacher in the whole school may be responsible for a school subject, and was not able to easily collaborate with other like teachers. Evaluation mechanisms of professional learning community impact were highly variable across all settings as no formal requirement or guidance is provided by the Education Support Office. Two schools had designed their own evaluation mechanisms to guide improvement in professional learning community processes and ensure staff feedback informed future processes. Directors of School Improvement had designed a simple assessment tool based on their observations of effective professional learning communities in ACT public schools. This tool gave sound examples of what effective professional learning communities looked like. However, schools were not aware of this tool or other resources to identify how they could improve the effectiveness of their professional learning communities.

4.58

All teachers in public schools must be registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and complete 20 hours of professional development annually. Teachers are

4.67

also required to record their professional development with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute through a dedicated online learning portal. Data associated with ACT public school teachers' professional development has been captured for over ten years since the establishment of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute, but the Education Directorate does not have access to a consolidated view of this data to:

- identify trends in teacher professional learning; or
- help inform how professional learning impacts on student outcomes.

The Education Directorate does receive data on ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited programs it runs on an activity-by-activity basis and this can help inform the development of individual programs and give feedback on the quality of each accredited professional learning activity. However, there is no consolidated view of data for all programs that allows the Education Directorate to more broadly monitor the quality of its professional learning programs across ACT public schools, or their impact on student educational outcomes.

4.68

Some schools have attempted to receive recognition for their teachers in completing school-led professional development; two of the six school leadership teams advised that they sought to have activities during the two days prior to the commencement of the school year recognised as accredited learning, but reflected this was an onerous process. Furthermore, not all professional learning programs implemented by the Education Support Office were recognised as accredited learning with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. For example, mentoring activities under the Affiliated Schools Program were not recognised as accredited professional learning. Similarly, three of eight of the professional learning programs associated with the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program are not accredited for registration purposes with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. While this does not mean that the programs are of lesser value and teachers can record their participation as teacher-identified professional learning for registration purposes, there is a missed opportunity for the Education Directorate to receive specific and targeted feedback from teachers through professional learning evaluations, which would be the case if the program was registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.

4.69

Analysis of school expenditure data for the six schools participating in this audit showed that there was substantial variation in the amount spent by schools on fee for service professional learning. The amount spent on fee for service professional learning varied between \$733 and \$1,409 per full-time equivalent teacher or school leader. A number of school principals consulted as part of the audit, as well as some industry peak bodies advised that the funds provided to schools to support fee for service professional learning was insufficient to meet the needs of teachers. Principals advised that they used more than their notional allocation to allow staff to pursue professional learning opportunities. The Education Support Office has recognised these issues and has sought to provide the new universally offered programs across all ACT public schools in order to provide scale, with the expectation that school professional learning activities could focus on professional learning communities, and meeting specific needs of individual teachers that could not be fully addressed through these programs. An evaluation of the first phase of the *Future of Education* reported teachers' perception of the Education Directorate's commitment to professional learning. It noted 79 percent of teachers reporting

4.78

strong and consistent support for professional learning in 2018, which declined slightly to 76 percent in 2020.

Graduate teachers are considered 'New Educators' for their first three years in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has demonstrated its commitment to the development of New Educators in the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* through the New Educator Support Program, which comprises a range of supports such as: a five-day centralised induction prior to the commencement of the school year; reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate support and mentoring; six New Educator Support Days to be used to facilitate professional learning and development; and the provision of coaching and mentorship from experienced teaching colleagues. These supports and high level suggestions for New Educator development activities for schools to provide are documented in the *New Educator Support Guidelines* (March 2020). A template plan is also provided for schools to agree development activities with their New Educators. Schools also have an accountability to apply these entitlements through the annual completion of a *School Annual EA Implementation Plan* checklist which is co-signed by an Australian Education Union delegate.

4.86

Despite this policy and compliance framework, there is no visibility as to whether New Educators are receiving these entitlements and whether they are being used effectively across the Education Directorate. This presents a risk that New Educators will receive inconsistent access to professional development across their first three years as an ACT public school teacher. In this respect there is no:

4.87

- analysis or confirmation of how New Educators use reduced teaching hours and New Educator Support Days to improve their teaching practice; and
- examination of the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring activities for New Educators.

A mandatory five-day centralised induction is held for all first-year New Educators prior to the commencement of the school year. According to the Education Directorate's *New Educator Guidelines*, the purpose of the induction is to ensure all New Educators are 'effectively supported, prepared and informed of their responsibilities and entitlements as they begin in their roles'. The centralised induction for New Educators is not accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and therefore cannot be counted towards the accredited training requirement under their annual registration requirements. In focus groups conducted for the purpose of this audit, there was persistent negative feedback regarding the delivery of the centralised induction from all levels of school leaders and teaching staff, including New Educators. This feedback centred on the timing of this training before New Educators start teaching, and this should instead predominantly occur after they have an opportunity to teach and understand what they need to learn to improve the quality of their teaching practice.

4.92

New Educators are expected to have reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate enhanced support and mentoring. This allowance is calculated as a reduced number of minutes per week of classroom time that reduces as the New Educator progresses through the development program. It is designed to provide schools with

4.97

a provision of time for coaching and mentoring support programs designed to meet the development needs of each New Educator. The specific organisational details are decided by individual school management to allow program flexibility to meet the needs of each New Educator over time. School leaders and New Educators who participated in focus groups for the purpose of this audit advised that the provision of additional classroom release hours for New Educators were largely used to catch up on administrative tasks rather than for coaching and mentoring purposes. New Educators and school leaders also advised that the reduction in face-to-face teaching hours was largely provided on an adhoc basis. School leaders advised that making time for New Educators to collaborate with their experienced teacher mentor within school hours is difficult and considered impractical within school settings. New Educators reflected that the additional time allowance was not allocated in a consistent or structured way that would assist them to improve the quality of their teaching practice. The allowance of reduced face-to-face teaching hours for new educators is not effectively implemented in all ACT public schools. Not all new educators can access this time, and it is not consistently used to improve teaching quality.

The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018 – 2022* provides for six additional classroom release days for each New Educator. These can be taken as two leave days for each year of the three year program. While New Educators and school leaders in all schools were aware of the provision of New Educator Support Days, focus groups involving both cohorts showed a lack of understanding of the exact allocation of days and the circumstances in which to use them. School leaders and New Educators reflected that accessing the provision in full was impractical due to staffing pressures including the difficulty in obtaining relief teaching staff.

4.101

The combination of supports provided under the New Educator Support Program are not evaluated to determine whether they are effective in developing a series of expected pedagogical competencies in New Educators. Documenting expected pedagogical competencies that New Educators should display at the program's completion, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the program could allow the Education Directorate to determine whether there are barriers for to accessing these supports.

4.102

## TEACHING WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

Paragraph

Research shows that there is a relationship between years of teaching experience and the quality of practice demonstrated by an individual teacher: the quality of a teacher's practices most steeply increases in their initial years in the classroom; and the effectiveness of their teaching practices continues to improve significantly until their seventh year of service. Sixty one percent of ACT teachers are classified as Experienced Teacher 2 teachers, with at least eight years' experience, which the research suggests is the point at which they are expected to have an ongoing positive impact on student outcomes through high quality teaching. Twenty two percent are classified as Experienced Teacher 1 (four to seven years' experience) and 17 percent are identified as New Teachers (less than three years' experience). There is variability between the deployment of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers across ACT public schools, for example 26 schools have a workforce made up of more than 70

5.23

percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff and 22 schools have a workforce of less than 50 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff. The school with the lowest proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 staff has only 26 percent at this level.

The proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers in a school may have a direct impact on student educational outcomes and the ability of New Educators to access their industrial rights. When a school's workforce is made up of 50 percent or less Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers, the additional duties designed to contribute towards improved teaching quality assigned to these teachers are at risk of not being performed or being performed to a subpar standard. The proportion of experienced teachers at a school can also have a persisting impact on student outcomes, as the effects of high-quality teaching are cumulative. If the classroom teaching workforce remains stable over three years, students at the ACT public school with the lowest proportion of experienced teachers currently have a 1.8 percent chance of being taught by a series of Experienced Teacher 2 teachers over this time. This compares with the students at the school with the highest proportion of experienced teachers, which have a 77.1 percent chance of this occurring.

5.24

Under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, teachers permanently employed by the Education Directorate are placed at a particular school for an initial five-year term. At the end of this period, teachers are expected to apply for transfer to another ACT public school through an annual process known as the 'transfer round'. The annual teacher transfer round is an important process for developing and deploying highly experienced teachers across the ACT public school system. However, there are confounding factors that interfere with the effective operation of the transfer round and its effect on teaching quality across the school system. This includes the opportunity for school principals to hold on to their experienced teachers and exclude them from the transfer round by simply extending a teacher's placement for up to five years. There has also been limited central oversight of when teachers are due for transfer. Until a recent update in December 2020 of teacher placement end date records by the People and Performance Branch the Education Directorate did not have complete and accessible data on when teachers were due to complete their five-year school placements. Placement end dates were not centrally recorded for 621 teachers and school leaders (approximately 18.4 percent of the total number of 3,382 teachers as at February 2020). Extensions to teaching placements increases the risk of highly experienced teachers being clustered in a smaller number of schools, thereby reducing the impact they could otherwise have if deployed where the ACT public school system as a whole may need them for the purposes of equity and lifting student outcomes and may also interfere with New Educators' rights to access experienced mentors to improve their teaching quality.

5.38

To maintain teaching quality in ACT public schools, the Education Directorate must recruit sufficient teachers to account for growth in student numbers and staff turnover. Presently, this rate is approximately 6.5 percent. Resignations have accounted for 67 percent of teacher separations between 2014 and 2020, and the majority of these teachers have left in the first seven years of service, which is before research suggests they become highly effective teachers. The Education Directorate has recently established a *2021-2023 Workforce Strategy* which outlines high level goals to manage the risk of being unable to secure sufficient high-quality teachers,

5.45

along with potential programs and projects identified to address this risk over the next three years. While retention measures are identified in this strategy, the Education Directorate does not monitor the reasons teachers resign from ACT public schools through exit surveys to determine if such activities are appropriately targeted.

Teacher and school leader performance and development plans are intended to be the process by which principals and teachers identify, plan, action and evaluate targeted professional learning and development to improve teaching quality. To set the performance expectations of school leaders, the Education Directorate has established an *ACT School Leadership Capability Framework* that specifies the competencies expected of: principals (School Leader A); deputy principals (School Leader B); and school executives (School Leader C). The Education Directorate has not designed a similar capability framework for classroom teachers.

5.65

A consistent approach to the performance development process was observed in the six schools considered as part of the audit. However, of the 54 performance development plans considered for the purpose of the audit, 79 per cent were incomplete in terms of content, supervisor endorsement or evidence of feedback to teaching staff. Teaching workforce data cannot be easily used to monitor whether performance and development plans are completed, or timely and complete feedback is given. While it is accepted best practice that teachers and school leaders link their performance and development plan goals with school improvement priorities, the generic approach observed in the six schools resulted in a lack of evidence of teachers reflecting on how they individually needed to improve their teaching practice in support of school improvement priorities. Focus groups within the six schools considered as part of the audit indicated that the professional development plans were not used to support teaching quality within the workforce. Teachers and school leaders alike viewed the performance and development process as a mandatory compliance exercise.

5.66

The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership recommends the use of classroom observations to provide teachers with clear feedback and direction in the form of evidence-based strategies for developing the quality of their teaching practice. Despite this, the Education Directorate does not maintain a policy or guidelines for regular teacher appraisals or classroom observations for permanent teaching staff in ACT public schools. Rather, they are a widely understood and suggested practice that each school should pursue, but it is not mandated. Only two of six schools conducted regular effective teaching appraisals and the leaders of these schools actively supported and encouraged this practice. In the absence of central tools and supports for teaching appraisals, these school leaders developed their own resources to support this activity. Opportunities to encourage and model classroom observations could have a meaningful impact on systemic teaching quality in ACT public schools.

5.72

Effective performance management of teaching staff is important to maintain the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has established policies, protocols and mechanisms to support performance management. This includes the human resources business partners who are available to school leaders to help manage underperformance in their setting.

5.85

However, only one teacher was reported as underperforming in 2019-20. This is low for a workforce of over 4,000 teachers and school leaders. This is supported by discussions with Education Support Office executives and school leaders who suggest the number of teachers and school leaders who are not demonstrating quality teaching is underreported. The Education Directorate has no informed understanding as to whether performance management of ACT public school teachers is underreported, or the supports required to help school leaders to improve teaching quality through these processes.

## Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATION 1 FUTURE OF EDUCATION

The Education Directorate should, as a matter of priority develop and publish the implementation plan for the second phase of the *Future of Education*.

### RECOMMENDATION 2 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REPORTING

The Education Directorate should improve its strategic planning reporting framework by consistently and specifically reporting on progress towards its planned actions in its six-monthly review reports. Reported progress should include quantitative and qualitative analysis for:

- a) all priority actions identified in its Strategic Plan;
- b) all indicators of success for each Strategic Plan goal; and
- c) the completion of activities committed to in annual divisional business plans.

### RECOMMENDATION 3 PEOPLE, PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The Education Directorate should review and update the *People, Practice and Performance* framework to:

- a) reflect the revised structure of the Education Support Office, including the roles of Directors of School Improvement and Instructional Mentors and their role to support and maintain accountability for school principals;
- b) reflect the requirements of the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019); and
- c) require all schools to participate in school improvement activities as well as complete and publish all required school improvement documentation on their website.

### RECOMMENDATION 4 EVALUATION OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DOCUMENTATION

As part of Recommendation 3, the Education Support Office should review and revise the *People, Practice and Performance* framework to require the formal evaluation of school improvement documentation on an annual basis. The evaluation should involve consideration of school improvement plans, action plans, school visits feedback and impact reports as a method of gaining specific, actionable and timely information about ACT public schools' progress in

improving student educational outcomes. The evaluation should then be used to assess and review Education Support Office supports for teaching quality to determine any refinements or additional assistance required to support schools achieve this outcome.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5      DIRECTORS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The Education Directorate should review the role of Directors of School Improvement and in doing so:

- a) consider whether individual directors should specialise in sector-specific oversight and support (such as roles focusing on colleges, high schools, primary schools) to better target the implementation of supports for improving teaching quality; and
- b) determine if the directors' span of control allows them to fulfil the requirements of the *People, Practice and Performance* framework.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6      SCHOOL EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

The Education Directorate should establish a development program for new school executives (School Leader C staff) that upskills these staff on the instructional leadership practices of the *Empowered Learning Professional Leadership Plan* during the initial years of their appointment.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7      HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED AND LEAD TEACHERS**

The Education Directorate should clearly identify and articulate its expectations for the role and responsibilities of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools. The role could include working with principals and Education Support Office to support school improvement activities, and better using the school network model to connect with other professionals to promote better teaching practice in their school settings.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 8      ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS**

The Education Directorate should develop a practice for the Education Support Office to oversee:

- a) the completion of each school's annual professional learning program; and
- b) the development of a school's annual professional learning program as part of the school improvement process. The program should identify the development needs of teaching staff in connection with school improvement goals, and the expected impacts on student outcomes.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 9      PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

The Education Directorate should establish universal professional learning for all school leaders and teachers on the Spiral of Inquiry Model and Multiple Sources of Evidence approach in order to support school leaders to facilitate these activities. This support should focus on increasing understanding and consistency in the quality and impact of professional learning communities for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching practices in all ACT public schools.

**RECOMMENDATION 10     ACT TEACHER QUALITY INSTITUTE LEARNING**

The Education Directorate should work with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute to:

- a) receive and analyse data to use for evaluating the quality of Education Directorate professional learning activities, and identifying trends and insights from its teachers' professional learning to help determine the impact this has on improving student outcomes; and
- b) design methods and practices to recognise key professional learning supports, including professional learning communities, as accredited learning that meets the requirements of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

**RECOMMENDATION 11     NEW EDUCATOR SUPPORT PROGRAM**

The New Education Support Program should be reviewed and redesigned. The program should:

- a) be facilitated by the Education Support Office to provide centralise oversight of all Enterprise Agreement provisions, centralised support and resourcing to New Educators in ACT public schools;
- b) document a core set of highly-effective pedagogical competencies that New Educators are expected to acquire within the first three years of their teaching careers;
- c) include a series of centralised, scaffolded professional development activities to build New Educators' capabilities over the course of the three years of the program;
- d) provide schools with clear guidelines and expectations to facilitate experienced teacher coaching and mentoring for New Educators; and
- e) establish an annual monitoring and evaluation process for the program, which incorporates feedback from New Educators, experienced teacher mentors and school leaders.

**RECOMMENDATION 12     CLASSROOM TEACHING WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT**

The Education Directorate should review and revise the mechanisms that support the distribution and monitoring of the teaching workforce across ACT public schools by:

- a) monitoring the distribution of experienced teachers across ACT public schools to ensure it aligns with Education Directorate priorities under the *Future of Education*; and
- b) developing processes to monitor and review principal decisions to extend teacher placements to ensure schools have appropriate and equitable access to experienced teachers.

**RECOMMENDATION 13     TEACHER WORKFORCE SEPARATION**

The Education Directorate should develop and analyse data associated with teaching workforce separations by implementing exit surveys and conducting analysis on the reasons teachers resign from ACT public schools.

## RECOMMENDATION 14 PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The Education Directorate should:

- a) develop policies and guidelines and support for school leaders that enable regular, development-focussed teacher appraisals aligned with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. These should be modelled and encouraged through the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan and aligned with the professional learning requirements of the *ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010* to gain additional benefit from these activities;
- b) systematise the performance development process to improve efficiency and make teacher professional development data available for central oversight and management to improve teaching quality; and
- c) develop supports for school leaders to manage underperformance for poor teaching practices. These supports should emphasise the need to quickly address performance issues, identify ways to successfully improve performance, and connect underperforming teachers with practical supports to improve their practice.

## Response from entities

In accordance with subsection 18(2) of the *Auditor-General Act 1996*, the Education Directorate was provided with:

- a draft proposed report for comment. All comments were considered and required changes were reflected in the final proposed report; and
- a final proposed report for further comment.

In accordance with subsection 18(3) of the *Auditor-General Act 1996* other entities considered to have a direct interest in the report were also provided with extracts of the draft proposed and final proposed reports for comment. All comments on the extracts of the draft proposed report were considered and required changes made in the final proposed report.

## Education Directorate response

*The Education Directorate welcomes the Auditor-General's performance audit on teaching quality and looks forward to responding to its recommendations. The audit findings support the Directorate's mandate to enable schools where students love to learn, and our work programs reflect this key objective.*

*We appreciate that the audit recognised the Directorate's work to deliver quality teaching practices in ACT Public Schools. We also remain committed to support our school teachers and leaders in their professional learning and to continually improve systems to sustain optimal learning outcomes for all our students.*



# 1 INTRODUCTION

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## Teaching quality

- 1.1 Teaching quality is demonstrated when the effectiveness of a teacher's pedagogical practices (the methods and practices they use to teach) facilitates students' learning and positively impacts student outcomes.
- 1.2 Teaching quality is recognised as a defining factor in the success of each child or young person's education. The impact quality teaching has on student performance outweighs the effect of every other factor outside of a student's socio-economic background, including educational programs and policies.<sup>4</sup>The additive and cumulative impact of teaching quality results in vastly improved student academic outcomes. While expectations and understanding of teaching quality can be subjective, research of over 10,000 Australian teachers and 90,000 students has found above-average teachers can achieve in three-quarters of a year of learning what below-average teachers achieve in a full year of learning for their students. A study from the United Kingdom estimated this impact to be even stronger for the highest performing teachers, with students taught by a teacher who exhibits the highest quality teaching found to learn in six months what their peers with a less effective teacher would take a year to learn. Of concern is that students taught by the lowest-performing teachers will take up to two years to achieve the same standard.
- 1.4 Research has demonstrated that students who are taught by a succession of three high-performing teachers scored on average 49 percent higher on school-based assessments when compared to peers assigned to less effective teachers over the same period.

### *Systematic approaches to improving teaching quality*

- 1.5 To maximise students' educational outcomes, including academic performance and engagement in learning, collective systems comprising of individual schools, such as ACT

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<sup>4</sup> Jenson, B. (2010). *Investing in Our Teachers, Investing in Our Economy*. Melbourne: Grattan Institute (p.10)

<sup>5</sup> Leigh, A. (2010). *Estimating teacher effectiveness from two-year changes in students' test scores*, Economics of Education Review 29 (2010), p.484.

<sup>6</sup> Wiliam, D. (2011). *Assessment for Learning: why, what and how*. London: Institute of Education, University of London

<sup>7</sup> Sanders, W. and Rivers, J. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee

public schools, must demonstrate a systematic approach to improving teaching quality in classrooms.

1.6 The central national policy on education reform, *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, calls for equity and excellence in Australian schooling so that all children and young people can become ‘successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens’.<sup>9</sup> To achieve these objectives, research shows that improving the quality of teaching in Australian schools is important to improving student outcomes.<sup>10</sup> The 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a study comparing student academic performance internationally, demonstrated that approximately 40 percent of Australian students were below the proficient standard for OECD countries in reading, mathematical and scientific literacies.<sup>11</sup> At the time, Australia ranked ninth in the world in comparison to 65 countries for these performance measures.<sup>12</sup> With concerns that Australian students would not be as well equipped to meet the future workforce demands of a knowledge-based economy, there was a national focus on improving student outcomes. Responding to a body of research that confirmed that the quality of teaching practice was the lead contributor to improved student outcomes outside socioeconomic background, the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*<sup>13</sup> and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*<sup>14</sup> were established by the teaching profession through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* define teaching quality through seven standards of practice:

1. Know students and how they learn;
2. Know the content and how to teach it;
3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning;
4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments;

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<sup>8</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2017). *School quality in Australia: Exploring the drivers of student outcomes and the links to practice and school quality*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training

<sup>9</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (2008). *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. [online] Available at: [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf) Accessed April 7 2020 (p.8)

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2012). *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*. Melbourne: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

<sup>11</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2011). *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2009*. Sydney: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

<sup>12</sup> OECD. (2010). *PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary*. [online] Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/46619703.pdf> Accessed 2 February 2021

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2011). *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. Melbourne: AITSL

<sup>14</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2014). *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles*. Melbourne: AITSL.

5. Access, provide feedback and report on student learning;
6. Engage in professional learning; and
7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

## Roles and responsibilities

### Education Directorate

- 1.9 The ACT Education Directorate provides education services to children and young people through 89 public schools in the ACT. As at February 2020, 50,272 students were enrolled in ACT public schools, which have a workforce of 4,074 teachers and school leaders.<sup>15</sup>
- 1.10 The directorate comprises the Education Support Office and public schools.

### *Education Support Office*

- 1.11 The Education Support Office, the administrative function of the Education Directorate, sets the strategic direction for ACT public schools and mandates the responsibilities and performance of its teachers and school leaders. The Education Support Office also provides universal, selected and targeted support to ACT schools in the form of strategic planning assistance, resourcing and professional learning in the pursuit of improved teaching quality.
- 1.12 The Education Support Office comprises four divisions that facilitate and support ACT public schools to deliver educational programs:
  - Service Design and Delivery;
  - School Improvement;
  - System Policy and Reform; and
  - Business Services.
- 1.13 The School Improvement, Service Design and Delivery and Business Services divisions have a direct role in facilitating quality teaching practices in ACT public schools. The System Policy and Reform division has an indirect role in enabling teaching quality in schools through its work overseeing, informing, monitoring and evaluating the work of the other divisions and ACT public schools.

### *ACT public schools*

- 1.14 ACT public schools are organised into four geographic networks: Belconnen, North/Gungahlin, South/Weston and Tuggeranong. Table 1-1 shows the school type and number of students enrolled in the ACT as at February 2020.

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<sup>15</sup> Census of ACT Schools February 2020. As at this census, there were 88 ACT public schools, with Evelyn Scott Primary opening to students at the start of the 2021 school year.

**Table 1-1 ACT public schools and students (February 2020)**

School type	Students enrolled
Preschool	4,560
Primary school, Kindergarten to Year 6	27,212
High School, Years 7-10	11,844
College, Years 11-12	6,656
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,272</b>

Source: ACT Audit Office, Based on Census of ACT public schools February 2020<sup>16</sup>

1.15 Education in ACT public schools is governed by the *Education Act 2004* which requires that every child has a right to receive a high-quality education.

1.16 Subsection 7(2) of the *Education Act 2004* describes a high-quality education as based on the following principles:

- (a) school education and home education provide a foundation for a democratic society;
- (b) school education and home education should—
  - (i) aim to develop every child's potential and maximise educational achievements; and
  - (ii) promote children's enthusiasm for lifelong learning and optimism for the future; and
  - (iii) encourage parents to take part in the education of their children, and recognise their right to choose a suitable educational environment; and
  - (iv) promote respect for and tolerance of others; and
  - (v) recognise the social, religious, physical, intellectual and emotional needs of all students; and
  - (vi) aim over time to improve the learning outcomes of students so that the outcomes are free from disadvantage because of economic, social, cultural or other causes; and
  - (vii) encourage all students to complete their senior secondary education; and
  - (viii) provide access to a broad education; and
  - (ix) recognise the needs of Indigenous students;
- (c) innovation, diversity and opportunity within and among schools should be encouraged;
- (d) effective quality assurance mechanisms should be applied to school education;
- (e) government funding should be directed to students through their schools or school system;
- (f) the partnership between the home, community and educational providers should be recognised;
- (g) school communities should be given information about the operation of their schools.

1.17 Section 21 of the *Education Act 2004* provides each school principal with autonomy and responsibility for the management of the school and the achievement of educational

<sup>16</sup> ACT Government Education. (2020). *Census of ACT public schools February 2020*. Available at: [https://www.education.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1562682/February-2020-Census-.pdf](https://www.education.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1562682/February-2020-Census-.pdf)  
Accessed 02 March 2021

outcomes for the students. In this respect, subsection 21(5) of the *Education Act 2004* provides that:

The principal of a government school is responsible for:

- (a) educational leadership and management of the school; and
- (b) educational outcomes for students at the school; and
- (c) providing support to the school board in the carrying out of its functions; and
- (d) contributing to the development and implementation of educational policies and strategies.

### *ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI)*

- 1.18 Compliance with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* or the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* is regulated by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. Established under the *ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010*, the Institute is an independent statutory authority that is responsible for the oversight of teacher registration, initial teacher education programs and teacher professional learning.
- 1.19 All teachers in the ACT must be professionally registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. An important part of maintaining this registration is that all teachers complete a minimum 20 hours annually of professional learning and reflect on how this development aligns with the standards and can be used to improve their teaching practice.

## Audit objective and scope

### Audit objective

- 1.20 The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the Education Directorate's strategies and activities to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools.

### Audit scope

- 1.21 The audit focused on the Education Directorate's actions to:
- identify and articulate key strategies and supports to improve the quality of teaching practices;
  - support its teachers to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools; and
  - monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and supports to improve the quality of teaching practices.

### *Identification and articulation of key strategies and supports*

- 1.22 In considering the Education Directorate's activities to identify and articulate key strategies to improve the quality of teaching practices, the audit considered whether:

- whole-of-system and, where applicable, sector specific strategies and supports are clearly documented and identified;
- the strategies and supports in place have clearly identified outcomes and objectives, including measurable indicators of success; and
- the strategies and supports have clearly identified implementation plans, including timeframes for implementation and expected outcomes for improving teaching quality.

1.23 This included consideration of key documents such as:

- *People, Practice and Performance, School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools, A Framework for Performance and Accountability* (2016);
- Education Directorate strategic plans (*Strategic Plan 2014-17, Education Capital: Leading the Nation* and *Strategic Plan 2018-21, A Leading Learning Organisation*);
- *Future of Education; An ACT Strategy for the Next Ten Years* (2018);
- *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan 2018-2021*; and
- *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*.

#### *Support for teachers*

1.24 In considering the Education Directorate's activities to support its teachers to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools, the audit considered whether whole-of-system and, where applicable, sector specific:

- strategies and supports are in place and are effective in supporting teachers' professional learning and development; and
- policies and procedures are in place and are effective for the performance management of teachers.

1.25 The audit also considered whether the Education Directorate's support for its teachers, specifically professional learning and development and performance management, effectively facilitates teachers' maintenance of their registration according to the requirements of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.

### Monitoring, review and evaluation

1.26 In considering the Education Directorate's activities to monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and supports to improve the quality of teaching practices, the audit considered whether the directorate has strategies and systems in place to:

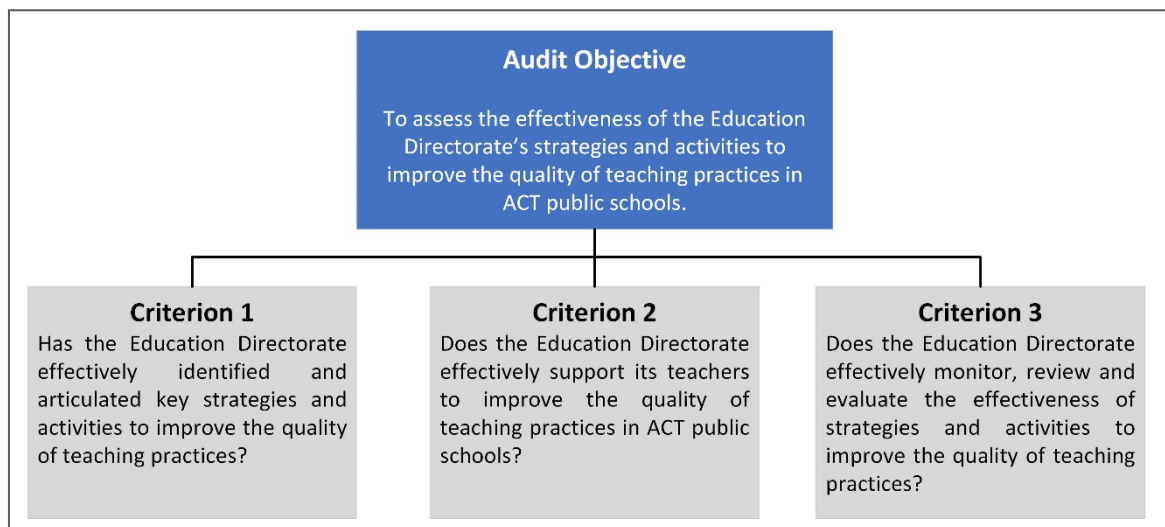
- collect and analyse data on teaching quality and performance;
- evaluate the effectiveness of key strategies and supports to improve the quality of teaching practices; and
- collect and analyse data on teachers' professional learning and development.

## Audit criteria, approach and method

### Audit criteria

1.27 To form a conclusion against the objective, there are three audit criteria, as shown in Figure 1-1.

**Figure 1-1 Audit objective and criteria**



Source: ACT Audit Office

1.28 The audit was performed in accordance with *ASAE 3500 – Performance Engagements*. The audit adopted the policy and practice statements outlined in the Audit Office's *Performance Audit Methods and Practices* (PAMPr) which is designed to comply with the requirements of the *Auditor-General Act 1996* and *ASAE 3500 – Performance Engagements*.

1.29 In the conduct of this performance audit the ACT Audit Office complied with the independence and other relevant ethical requirements related to assurance engagements.

## Audit approach and method

1.30 The audit method and approach consisted of:

- identifying and reviewing the relevant documentation associated with Education Directorate strategies and activities to improve teaching quality;
- interviews and discussions with key staff at the Education Directorate's Education Support Office;
- interviews and discussions with representatives from a selection of ACT public schools;
- interviews and discussions with peak bodies, including the ACT Teacher Quality Institute, University of Canberra, the Australian Education Union (AEU) ACT Branch, the ACT Principals' Association, and the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association;
- identifying and reviewing relevant information and documentation associated with the implementation of activities and strategies to improve teaching quality;
- identifying and reviewing relevant controls and procedures to improve teaching quality practices in ACT public schools; and
- reviewing data, documentation or reports evaluating the effectiveness of strategies and activities to improve teaching quality in ACT public schools.

### *ACT public schools*

1.31 For the purpose of the audit, fieldwork was conducted in a selection of six schools. Fieldwork within the schools consisted of:

- schools providing a suite of documentation demonstrating the quality of teaching practices or the programs and processes conducted to improve teaching quality within the setting;
- an interview with the school principal;
- a focus group of school leaders;
- a focus group of experienced teachers; and
- a focus group of New Educators or Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers.

1.32 The selected schools represented a cross-section of primary schools, high schools and colleges across the four school networks.

1.33 Table 1-2 shows the schools that were selected and their characteristics.

**Table 1-2 Schools selected for audit fieldwork**

School	Type	School network	Number of students (FTE)	Number of teaching staff (FTE)
Canberra College	College	South/Weston	1,142.6	74.8
Gungahlin College	College	North/Gungahlin	1,185.9	83.2
Campbell High	High	North/Gungahlin	702.5	60.4
Lanyon High	High	Tuggeranong	372.0	35.0
Aranda Primary	Primary	Belconnen	567.0	34.1
Taylor Primary	Primary	Tuggeranong	312.0	24.6

Source: Education Directorate, Census of ACT Schools February 2020. Student and teaching staff exclude preschool staff and enrolments.

1.34 This performance audit report considers the Education Directorate's most significant investments and efforts to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools. As such, each chapter of the report focusses on a key feature of Education Directorate's efforts to enhance teaching quality. These include:

- Chapter 2: Planning, monitoring and evaluation of system-level strategies and initiatives;
- Chapter 3: School improvement activities;
- Chapter 4: Professional learning; and
- Chapter 5: Workforce Management.



## 2 STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING QUALITY

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- 2.1 This chapter considers the Education Directorate's identification and articulation of strategies and activities to improve teaching quality practices. This includes consideration of whether the strategies and activities to improve teaching quality practices have clearly identified outcomes and objectives, including measurable indicators of success, and have been supported by clearly identified implementation plans.

### Summary

### Conclusions

The Education Directorate recognises the importance of improving teaching quality for the purpose of enhancing student performance. Since 2014, strategic planning and government-led initiatives have identified priorities to improve the quality of teaching practices across ACT public schools.

To improve its strategic planning framework, the Education Directorate has intentionally aligned its 2018-21 Strategic Plan, along with supporting implementation plans and initiatives for improving teaching quality, to the *Future of Education* strategy. Responsibility for key actions and expected timeframes within the strategic plan is assigned in Education Support Office divisional business plans.

There is a clear structure of performance measures and six-monthly internal reports to demonstrate progress against the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. However, baseline data has not been consistently captured and used in six-monthly progress reports to determine the impact of initiatives to improve teaching quality. These reports do not track progress against the full range of priority actions documented in divisional business plans, or provide a balance of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the impact of strategies and activities to improve the quality of teaching practices at a system level.

### Key findings

#### Paragraph

In April 2016, the Education Directorate released key documents that were intended to support improved educational practices: *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design*. Executives and school leaders involved in the audit advised that the frameworks were primarily 'guiding documents' and, as such, lacked clearly identifiable objectives, outcomes and measurable indicators of success. The *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks were not supported by implementation plan(s), nor was there centralised support for their implementation from the Education Support Office. Nevertheless, many of the

2.22

initiatives and key actions detailed in the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks have been a foundation for, and contributed to, the development of the *Future of Education* strategy and subsequent initiatives.

The Education Directorate's 2014-17 Strategic Plan, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation* identified an 'ambitious agenda' to: increase the number of high performing students; reduce the number of students who are not achieving; increase the number of children who benefit from early childhood education and care; and increase qualification levels of the ACT community. Despite the 2014-17 Strategic Plan being implemented prior to the release of the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks in May 2016, no effort was made to draw the linkages and alignment between the 2014-17 Strategic Plan and the activities identified within the two strategies. The 2014-17 Strategic Plan set out five priorities for the Education Directorate, each of which was accompanied by three or four key strategies. The key strategies that were identified to achieve the outcomes of the 2014-17 Strategic Plan were not specific or measurable. A 2017 strategic planning taskforce convened by the Education Directorate concluded that the plan was developed with little consultation, included unclear measures and failed to prioritise the actions that mattered most to improving student outcomes. The taskforce also found that the Education Directorate did not adequately monitor or report against the 2014-17 Strategic Plan priorities to ascertain their impact on student performance.

2.33

The *Future of Education; An ACT education strategy for the next ten years* was released in 2018. The strategy 'outlines the plan for education in the ACT for the next decade'. The first phase of the *Future of Education* strategy was supported by an implementation plan that identified six priorities for improving the ACT public education system and 68 commitments for the Education Directorate to implement. The planned activities detailed in the first phase implementation plan are comprised of tangible programs, supports or strategic planning tasks. Priority 3 of the first phase of the *Future of Education* has a focus on supporting teaching quality, and includes a range of supports focused on developing early career teachers, improving teaching quality through school and system-level support, and developing school leaders. Priority 2 and Priority 6 also include initiatives intended to improve teaching quality. The Education Directorate published an evaluation of Phase One of the *Future of Education* in June 2021, and reported 63 of its 68 commitments had been established or completed. The Education Directorate reported that five commitments had been delayed due to the redirection of resources to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the completion of the first phase of the *Future of Education* in 2020, the second phase implementation plan is yet to be published by the Education Directorate.

2.39

To support the implementation of the commitments in the *Future of Education*, the Education Directorate has developed a series of cascading strategic planning documents. These include the *Education Directorate 2018-21 Strategic Plan* and divisional and branch business plans. The 2018-21 Strategic Plan identifies five strategic goals, each of which is supported by priority actions and between five to seven indicators of success. The indicators are typically specific and measurable as they focus on increasing an observable performance measure of the ACT public school system, but they are not supported by identifiable or quantifiable targets. The

2.59

priority actions identified in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan are assigned to the Education Directorate's divisions and branches through annual business planning processes. There is a clear structure of allocating priority actions to divisions with timeframes identified for each activity.

Progress in implementing the 2018-21 Strategic Plan actions is reported through a biannual reporting framework of six-monthly review reports. At the time of audit reporting, three of these reports had been produced; April 2019, November 2019 and August 2020. The structure of identifying priority actions, specific indicators of success and a framework for reporting progress represents a positive improvement on the structure of reporting under the 2014-2017 strategic planning activities for the directorate. The reporting framework identifies a clear alignment between the *Future of Education* and the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. However, the six-monthly reporting process is hampered by a lack of baseline data through which progress against the indicators should be measured. The reports provide progress updates in narrative form against the priority actions along with case study examples for particular areas of success. While this gives some qualitative evidence of progress, the reports produced to date have had a predominant focus on 'success stories'. They do not consistently and explicitly explore: challenges in implementing priority actions; potential improvements to the indicators of success; and what needs to be done or modified to improve performance. The progress reports have also been inconsistent in their consideration of priority actions and indicators of success. These have not been consistently considered and addressed in each report in a way that provides a clear indication of the Education Directorate's progress and performance over time.

2.60

- 2.2 In considering the extent to which activities to improve teaching quality practices have been identified and articulated in strategic planning documents, the audit focused on:
- whole-of-directorate strategies and initiatives to improve teaching practices; and
  - the directorate's strategic planning activities.
- 2.3 The audit considered the directorate's activities from the start of the 2014 school year. In doing so, the audit has considered planning activities from 2014 to 2017 and planning activities from 2018 to 2021.

## Strategic planning (2014 to 2017)

### *Great Teachers by Design and Great Teaching by Design*

- 2.4 In April 2016, the Education Directorate released three documents that together were intended to form a framework for performance and accountability in ACT public schools. These documents were:
- *People, Practice and Performance: School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools- A Framework for Performance and Accountability;*
  - *Great Teachers by Design;* and

- *Great Teaching by Design*.

2.5 The *People, Practice and Performance: School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools* document (the *People, Practice and Performance* framework) is discussed further in Chapter 3 in relation to performance improvement and accountability arrangements for ACT public schools.

### Great Teachers by Design

2.6 The *Great Teachers by Design* framework sought to '[provide] school leaders with a range of evidence-based strategies and key actions to support and develop great teachers and improve educational outcomes for all students'. The framework acknowledged 'greater understanding about the central role of great teachers in improving student outcomes has generated an evidence base of the most effective strategies for building teacher capacity'.

2.7 The *Great Teachers by Design* framework identified that its intention was to inform school plans, programs and practices:

Teachers and school leaders are encouraged to use this design framework to inform school improvement plans, programs and practices. The elements of the design framework are not mutually exclusive; teachers and school leaders should look for opportunities to integrate and align the strategies and key actions outlined below to develop a coherent approach that suits their context.

2.8 The *Great Teachers by Design* framework further noted:

The evidence base within this publication supports the development of great teachers to improve student outcomes in Canberra public schools. Each section contains key actions that will drive improvement in teaching and learning in Canberra public schools. School leaders are encouraged to use the alignment with the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each section to engage with teachers about their professional practice.

2.9 The *Great Teachers by Design* framework identified a series of principles and characteristics of highly effective teachers:

- great teachers collaborate;
- great teachers use data and evidence;
- great teachers engage in professional learning;
- great teachers engage in and with research;
- great teachers use the Quality Teaching model;
- great teachers actively seek and respond to feedback; and
- great teachers engage parents.

2.10 The *Great Teachers by Design* framework described the Quality Teaching model as 'a powerful framework for enacting a research-based, clinical approach to teacher development, and a mechanism for teachers to initiate professional conversations and

provide powerful feedback, ensuring consistency in productive practices and strong collegial support for teachers at all stages of their careers'. There are three dimensions to the Quality Teaching model: *intellectual quality*, *a quality learning environment* and *significance*. The Quality Teaching model was intended to be used as a reflective tool, which was intended to initiate conversations and feedback.

2.11 The *Great Teachers by Design* framework discussed each of the seven principles in turn and, in doing so:

- identified 'key actions to support improvement in teacher effectiveness';
- identified relevant Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standards; and
- posed 'a series of discussion questions to assist school leaders and teachers to reflect on and improve practice'.

### Great Teaching by Design

2.12 The *Great Teaching by Design* framework was implemented as a companion document to the *Great Teachers by Design* framework. The *Great Teaching by Design* framework sought to '[outline] research-based strategies to enhance the quality and impact of teaching in our schools'. In doing so it:

... provide[d] an evidence base for school level decision making and implementation of classroom practices that have the most impact on positive student outcomes.

2.13 The *Great Teaching by Design* framework articulated a series of principles that were to inform activities to enhance the quality and impact of teaching in schools:

- respond to individual need;
- build effective relationships;
- use explicit teaching practices;
- embed formative assessment;
- provide students with quality feedback;
- set high expectations for student achievement; and
- engage students.

2.14 Each principle was linked to the relevant AITSL Standard and, within the document itself, a series of questions for reflection and discussion were posed. These were intended to be considered by school principals and executive teachers as part of school planning processes.

### Implementation and support

2.15 The Audit Office was advised that the design of the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks involved limited consultation with principals and union and peak body stakeholders.

- 2.16 Executives and school leaders involved in the audit advised that the frameworks were primarily ‘guiding documents’ and, as such, lacked clearly identifiable objectives, outcomes and measurable indicators of success. The *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks were not supported by implementation plan(s), nor was their implementation in the schools supported by:
- professional learning to develop expertise in the evidence-based teaching practices endorsed in the frameworks;
  - resources made available to schools to guide their use of teaching practices or development strategies; or
  - Education Support Office contacts, that could support the frameworks’ implementation in the schools.
- 2.17 Promulgation of the frameworks upon publication was limited to distributing copies of the documents to ACT public schools; there was no mechanism for subsequent feedback, discussion, consultation or ongoing review. At the time of their publication there was a strong reliance on school leaders to recognise and adopt the principles and strategies identified in the frameworks.
- 2.18 Efforts to implement the commitments across all public schools was variable as there was no accompanying centralised support for the frameworks’ implementation from the Education Support Office.
- 2.19 The six schools that participated in the audit had little evidence to demonstrate that they had implemented the initiatives within the frameworks, with the exception of two of the six schools who were still actively using the Quality Teaching model. Due to the nature of the initiatives detailed within the frameworks and the time that has lapsed since their publication in 2016 it is acknowledged, however, that it is difficult for schools to provide sufficient evidence of actions taken in response to the frameworks.
- 2.20 An ACT public school principal interviewed during the audit commented that the frameworks were:
- ... lovely glossy [paperback resources] but were not implemented nor achieved any impact.
- 2.21 Nevertheless, many of the initiatives and key actions detailed in the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks have been a foundation for, and contributed to, the development of the *Future of Education* strategy (refer to paragraph 2.34) and subsequent initiatives.
- 2.22 In April 2016, the Education Directorate released key documents that were intended to support improved educational practices: *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design*. Executives and school leaders involved in the audit advised that the frameworks were primarily ‘guiding documents’ and, as such, lacked clearly identifiable objectives, outcomes and measurable indicators of success. The *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks were not supported by implementation plan(s), nor was

there centralised support for their implementation from the Education Support Office. Nevertheless, many of the initiatives and key actions detailed in the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks have been a foundation for, and contributed to, the development of the *Future of Education* strategy and subsequent initiatives.

## Education Directorate Strategic Plan 2014-2017

2.23 At the time the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks were developed and released the Education Directorate's 2014-17 Strategic Plan, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation* identified four overarching objectives with a stated 'ambitious agenda' to:

- increase the number of high performing students;
- reduce the number of students who are not achieving;
- increase the number of children who benefit from early childhood education and care; and
- increase qualification levels of the ACT community.

2.24 In support of these overarching objectives, the 2014-17 Strategic Plan set out five priorities for the Education Directorate, with three or four key strategies identified for each priority. For the purpose of this audit, the following strategies are identified as specifically relevant (listed against the relevant priority):

- inspirational teaching and leadership
  - increase teaching expertise and effectiveness
  - build leadership capacity of current and future leaders
  - support teaching and learning
  - close the achievement gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- business innovation and improvement
  - increase accountability and transparency for school performance
  - ensure high quality data is available to monitor and drive improvement

2.25 In support of the four overarching objectives, the 2014-17 Strategic Plan also identified a total of 13 performance indicators. The *Audit Office's Performance information in ACT public schools* report (Report No. 4 of 2017) observed at the time that 'there [was] no guidance on how the indicators are to be measured nor are there quantitative targets associated with the indicators'.<sup>17</sup>

2.26 The key strategies that were identified to achieve the outcomes of the 2014-17 Strategic Plan were not specific or measurable. An example of this was the key strategy to 'increase

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<sup>17</sup> ACT Audit Office. (2017). *Performance Information in ACT Public Schools*. [online] Available at: [https://www.audit.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/1180007/Report-No-4-of-2017-Performance-information-in-ACT-public-schools.pdf](https://www.audit.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/1180007/Report-No-4-of-2017-Performance-information-in-ACT-public-schools.pdf) Accessed 30 April 2020 (p.6).

teaching expertise and effectiveness’ under the *inspirational teaching and leadership* priority. The Strategic Plan did not identify specific actions and timeframes to meet the priorities in the plan.

- 2.27 Education Directorate executives consulted as part of the audit advised that, despite the 2014-17 Strategic Plan being implemented prior to the release of the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* strategies in May 2016, no effort was made to draw the linkages and alignment between the 2014-17 Strategic Plan and the activities identified within the two strategies.
- 2.28 Activities to improve teaching quality were largely left to schools to implement through their own five-year Strategic Plans.

### *School Strategic and Action Plans*

- 2.29 The *People, Practice and Performance* framework identified a number of key planning and reporting mechanisms that were relevant to schools. Through these mechanisms schools’ performance, including their strategies for improving teaching quality, were expected to be planned for, reviewed and evaluated. At the time of the 2014-17 Strategic Plan key planning and reporting mechanisms for schools included:
- a five-year Strategic Plan to establish the strategic direction and priorities for the school; and
  - an annual Action Plan consistent with the 2014-17 Strategic Plan.
- 2.30 Through its 2016 review of school improvement activities against the *National School Improvement Tool* (refer to paragraph 3.2), the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) noted that schools included a broad range of commitments in their five-year Strategic Plans relating to areas such as:
- innovative and inspirational teaching and learning;
  - building teacher capacity and collaboration;
  - improving student learning outcomes; and
  - enhancing teaching and learning.
- 2.31 The ACER review found that ‘there were extensive whole school strategic planning and reporting documentation with measures and targets reflecting the priorities set down by the directorate’. However, the ACER review identified that there was a disconnect between the school Strategic Plans and their corresponding annual Action Plans. The annual Action Plans were expected to document the specific activities that the schools intended to pursue in the coming school year. The ACER report recommended clearer alignment between the two planning documents by developing more sharply focussed priorities expressed in terms of improvements in measurable outcomes.

### Review of the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan 2014-2017

- 2.32 In 2017 the Education Directorate established a strategic planning taskforce to review the impact of its 2014-17 Strategic Plan. The taskforce concluded that the plan was developed with little consultation, included unclear measures and failed to prioritise the actions that mattered most to improving student outcomes. Furthermore, the taskforce asserted that the Education Directorate did not adequately monitor or report against the 2014-17 Strategic Plan priorities to ascertain their impact on student performance. This assessment, along with associated recommendations, then informed the design of the 2018-2021 strategic plan.
- 2.33 The Education Directorate's 2014-17 Strategic Plan, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation* identified an 'ambitious agenda' to: increase the number of high performing students; reduce the number of students who are not achieving; increase the number of children who benefit from early childhood education and care; and increase qualification levels of the ACT community. Despite the 2014-17 Strategic Plan being implemented prior to the release of the *Great Teachers by Design* and *Great Teaching by Design* frameworks in May 2016, no effort was made to draw the linkages and alignment between the 2014-17 Strategic Plan and the activities identified within the two strategies. The 2014-17 Strategic Plan set out five priorities for the Education Directorate, each of which was accompanied by three or four key strategies. The key strategies that were identified to achieve the outcomes of the 2014-17 Strategic Plan were not specific or measurable. A 2017 strategic planning taskforce convened by the Education Directorate concluded that the plan was developed with little consultation, included unclear measures and failed to prioritise the actions that mattered most to improving student outcomes. The taskforce also found that the Education Directorate did not adequately monitor or report against the 2014-17 Strategic Plan priorities to ascertain their impact on student performance.

## Strategic planning (2018 to 2021)

### The Future of Education

- 2.34 The *Future of Education; An ACT education strategy for the next ten years* was released in 2018. The strategy 'outlines the plan for education in the ACT for the next decade'; it is focused on improving ACT public school students' participation and outcomes from their education. To provide a policy direction for implementation, the *Future of Education* strategy includes a high-level design of policy principles, an implementation roadmap, and aspiration goals.
- 2.35 The *Future of Education* is designed to be implemented in three phases over ten years. The first phase of the *Future of Education* strategy (to be completed by 2020) was supported by an implementation plan that highlighted six priorities for improving the ACT public education system. These six priorities included:
- Priority 1: Strengthening inclusive education

- Priority 2: Giving students more of a say
- Priority 3: Supporting a workforce for the future
- Priority 4: Community schools
- Priority 5: Giving young people the best start
- Priority 6: Focus the system on what matters most

2.36 Across these six priorities, the Education Directorate identified 68 commitments to be established in the first phase of the *Future of Education*. The Education Directorate reported on the completion of these commitments as part of an evaluation of the first phase of the *Future of Education*. The evaluation report, which is publicly available on Education Directorate's website,<sup>18</sup> identified that 63 of these commitments had been established or completed and five commitments had been delayed. The Education Directorate reported that the five commitments were delayed due to the redirection of resources to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.37 Priority 3 of the first phase of the *Future of Education* has a focus on supporting teaching quality, which includes a range of supports focused on developing early career teachers, improving teaching quality through school and system-level support, and developing school leaders. Priority 2 and Priority 6 also include initiatives intended to improve teaching quality. Supports under these priorities which have been considered in this audit include:

- Priority 2: Giving students more of a say;
  - the Academy of Future Skills program (refer to paragraph 4.13)
- Priority 3: Supporting a workforce for the future;
  - the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan (refer to paragraph 3.92)
  - Affiliated Schools Program (refer to paragraph 4.18)
  - the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher program (refer to paragraph 3.102)
  - a System Workforce Strategy (refer to paragraph 5.40)
- Priority 6: Focus the system on what matters most;
  - a clearing house of excellent practice (discussed from paragraph 4.59)
  - school performance and system improvement (discussed from paragraph 3.24)

2.38 As of June 2021, six months into the second phase of the *Future of Education*, a Phase Two Implementation Plan is yet to be published by the Education Directorate.

2.39 The *Future of Education; An ACT education strategy for the next ten years* was released in 2018. The strategy 'outlines the plan for education in the ACT for the next decade'. The first phase of the *Future of Education* strategy was supported by an implementation plan that identified six priorities for improving the ACT public education system and 68 commitments for the Education Directorate to implement. The planned activities detailed in the first phase implementation plan are comprised of tangible programs, supports or strategic

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.education.act.gov.au/our-priorities/future-of-education/implementation>

planning tasks. Priority 3 of the first phase of the *Future of Education* has a focus on supporting teaching quality, and includes a range of supports focused on developing early career teachers, improving teaching quality through school and system-level support, and developing school leaders. Priority 2 and Priority 6 also include initiatives intended to improve teaching quality. The Education Directorate published an evaluation of Phase One of the *Future of Education* in June 2021, and reported 63 of its 68 commitments had been established or completed. The Education Directorate reported that five commitments had been delayed due to the redirection of resources to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the completion of the first phase of the *Future of Education* in 2020, the second phase implementation plan is yet to be published by the Education Directorate.

#### RECOMMENDATION 1 FUTURE OF EDUCATION

The Education Directorate should, as a matter of priority develop and publish the implementation plan for the second phase of the *Future of Education*.

### 2018-2021 Education Directorate Strategic Plan

- 2.40 To support the implementation of the commitments in the *Future of Education*, the Education Directorate has developed a series of cascading strategic planning documents. These include the *Education Directorate 2018-21 Strategic Plan* and divisional and branch business plans. The divisional and branch business plans seek to acknowledge specific responsibility for activities identified under the *Future of Education* and the strategic plan.
- 2.41 The 2018-21 Strategic Plan identifies five strategic goals:
- Schools where students love to learn;
  - Investing in early childhood;
  - Evidence-informed decisions;
  - Learning culture; and
  - United leadership.
- 2.42 Against each strategic goal, priority actions are identified. There are many priority actions across the strategic goals that relate to teaching quality, including for example:
- implementing a whole of system approach to school improvement;
  - embedding high quality professional learning communities in all schools;
  - building the capability of all teaching staff in utilising contemporary, evidence-based pedagogical practices;
  - establishing coaching and mentoring programs available for new teachers, aspiring leaders and new principals; and

- implementing a system level leadership development strategy to build instructional leadership capability.
- 2.43 Between five to seven indicators of success are identified for each strategic goal.
- 2.44 The indicators are typically specific and measurable as they focus on increasing an observable performance measure of the ACT public school system. For example, indicators of success for the *Learning culture* strategic goal are:
- increased retention of beginning teachers and new staff;
  - increase in mentors and mentees who report high levels of confidence and satisfaction with mentoring supports;
  - increase in staff reporting strong leadership in schools;
  - increase in staff reporting that their leaders are able to build capability in others;
  - increase in staff who understand and work towards future focused skills; and
  - increase in staff reporting support for professional development.
- 2.45 While the indicators are specific and measurable, they do not include identifiable or quantifiable targets.
- 2.46 In addition to the indicators of success against each strategic goal, the 2018-21 Strategic Plan identifies three overarching strategic indicators:
- to promote greater equity in learning outcomes in and across ACT public schools;
  - to facilitate high quality teaching in ACT public schools and strengthen educational outcomes; and
  - to centre teaching and learning around students as individuals.
- 2.47 The second strategic indicator emphasises the importance of high-quality teaching practice across ACT public schools and its contribution to improving educational outcomes for students.
- 2.48 These strategic indicators are identified in the Education Directorate's budget papers and annual reports as part of Education Directorate's performance framework. Sub-measures are identified against each strategic indicator, with historical performance and targets identified for each strategic indicator.

### Division and branch business plans

- 2.49 The priority actions identified in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan are assigned to the Education Directorate's divisions and branches through annual business planning processes.
- 2.50 A review of the relevant divisional business plans shows there is a clear structure of allocating priority actions to divisions with timeframes identified for each activity. The three

divisions in the Education Directorate with primary accountability for improving teaching quality are the School Improvement, Service Design and Delivery and Business Services (with the focus for this audit being People and Performance Branch in the Business Services Division). Their 2020 plans identify a series of actions as well as risks and associated mitigations to achieve these actions.

### Reporting progress against the 2018-21 Strategic Plan

2.51 Progress in implementing the 2018-21 Strategic Plan actions is reported through a biannual reporting framework of six-monthly review reports. At the time of audit reporting, three of these reports had been produced; April 2019, November 2019 and August 2020. Each of the reports followed a consistent structure in reviewing progress and implementation of the strategic plan's priority actions. Each report included four reflective questions to review progress:

1. Are we doing what we said we would?
2. Have we maintained fidelity of our intent?
3. Are we making a difference?
4. What needs to change?

2.52 The six-monthly reports are intended to be the key internal reporting mechanism to the Education Directorate's executive leadership, and they are published on its intranet to communicate progress in implementing the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. The indicators of success are expected to be reported against to demonstrate the Directorate's progress and performance. The structure of identifying priority actions, specific indicators of success and a framework for reporting progress represents a positive improvement on the structure of reporting under the 2014-2017 strategic planning activities for the directorate. The reporting framework confirms a clear alignment between the *Future of Education* and the 2018-21 Strategic Plan.

### Lack of baseline data

2.53 The reporting framework was intended to support the Education Directorate's monitoring of its progress in achieving the indicators of success against each strategic goal. However, the 2018-21 Strategic Plan did not identify or record baseline data against which progress against the indicators was to be measured.

2.54 The second six monthly review report (November 2019) captured baseline data against many of the indicators of success in the strategic plan, some 22 months after the commencement of the strategic plan. Data sources included standardised testing data from NAPLAN and the results of school climate and all staff surveys. However, this data was not acknowledged or reported against in the following six-monthly report in August 2020, to provide an indication of progress.

### *Qualitative reporting*

- 2.55 The six-monthly reports provide progress updates in narrative form against the priority actions along with case study examples for particular areas of success. This data was obtained from workshops of key stakeholders and used reflective questions to discuss progress towards the strategic plan's priority actions (refer to paragraph 2.42). While this gives some qualitative evidence of progress, the reports produced to date have had a predominant focus on 'success stories'. They do not consistently and explicitly explore:
- challenges in implementing priority actions;
  - potential improvements to the indicators of success; and
  - what needs to be done or modified to improve performance.
- 2.56 The progress reports have also been inconsistent in their consideration of priority actions and indicators of success. These have not been consistently considered and addressed in each report in a way that provides a clear indication of the Education Directorate's progress and performance over time. Of the 14 indicators of success relevant to teaching quality in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan only two of these were reported against through qualitative statements in the three six-monthly reports produced to date.

### *Reporting clarity*

- 2.57 The lack of consistent consideration and reporting against the priority actions and indicators of success in the six-monthly reports means that it is not clear if the actions have been delayed or discontinued. While it is acknowledged that, in 2020 the national bushfire crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in some actions being postponed, the revised timeframes for implementation are not clear for all of the priority actions.

### *System-wide impacts*

- 2.58 When actions are reported against in the six-monthly reports, measures of system-level impact on the quality of teaching practices are not discernible. The reports frequently acknowledge that evidence of impact was observable on an individual student or school level, but typically state that it is too soon to determine system-level impact.
- 2.59 To support the implementation of the commitments in the *Future of Education*, the Education Directorate has developed a series of cascading strategic planning documents. These include the *Education Directorate 2018-21 Strategic Plan* and divisional and branch business plans. The 2018-21 Strategic Plan identifies five strategic goals, each of which is supported by priority actions and between five to seven indicators of success. The indicators are typically specific and measurable as they focus on increasing an observable performance measure of the ACT public school system, but they are not supported by identifiable or quantifiable targets. The priority actions identified in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan are assigned to the Education Directorate's divisions and branches through annual business planning processes. There is a clear structure of allocating priority actions to divisions with timeframes identified for each activity.

- 2.60 Progress in implementing the 2018-21 Strategic Plan actions is reported through a biannual reporting framework of six-monthly review reports. At the time of audit reporting, three of these reports had been produced; April 2019, November 2019 and August 2020. The structure of identifying priority actions, specific indicators of success and a framework for reporting progress represents a positive improvement on the structure of reporting under the 2014-2017 strategic planning activities for the directorate. The reporting framework identifies a clear alignment between the *Future of Education* and the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. However, the six-monthly reporting process is hampered by a lack of baseline data through which progress against the indicators should be measured. The reports provide progress updates in narrative form against the priority actions along with case study examples for particular areas of success. While this gives some qualitative evidence of progress, the reports produced to date have had a predominant focus on 'success stories'. They do not consistently and explicitly explore: challenges in implementing priority actions; potential improvements to the indicators of success; and what needs to be done or modified to improve performance. The progress reports have also been inconsistent in their consideration of priority actions and indicators of success. These have not been consistently considered and addressed in each report in a way that provides a clear indication of the Education Directorate's progress and performance over time.

**RECOMMENDATION 2****STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REPORTING**

The Education Directorate should improve its strategic planning reporting framework by consistently and specifically reporting on progress towards its planned actions in its six-monthly review reports. Reported progress should include quantitative and qualitative analysis for:

- a) all priority actions identified in its Strategic Plan;
- b) all indicators of success for each Strategic Plan goal; and
- c) the completion of activities committed to in annual divisional business plans.



## 3 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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- 3.1 School improvement is the function of an explicit improvement agenda in which schools plan, deliver and evaluate activities aimed at lifting student educational outcomes. This chapter considers the Education Directorate's school improvement activities, including its implementation of policies, procedures and processes to support teachers to continuously improve the quality of their teaching practice.

### Summary

### Conclusion

The Education Directorate has established a comprehensive school improvement process, which provides effective support to schools to plan, deliver and evaluate activities that are intended to improve student educational outcomes, including activities to improve teaching quality. The school improvement process is evidence-based, uses international educational research, and has been designed to focus school leadership on achieving a small number of achievable and relevant priorities. This is supported by a consistently implemented approach of using multiple sources of evidence to inform the effectiveness of school teaching and learning activities. There is also an effective structure of external reviews to assess the performance of individual schools and the ACT public school system against the *National School Improvement Tool*. ACT public schools perform at a 'High' level when measured against the *National School Improvement Tool*, but there are challenges to maintain and improve this performance.

Since 2018, the Education Support Office has updated their roles and responsibilities to support schools through the school improvement process. However, the policies that support the school improvement process do not fully reflect current roles and responsibilities for the process and are not well understood across all ACT public schools. There is scope to better design the roles of Directors of School Improvement and Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers to support teaching quality across all public schools. Directors of School Improvement could be better focused to specialise in school sectors and Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers currently lack a role, responsibility and resources for school improvement. Addressing these issues may help improve the perceived benefits of these certifications and their effectiveness in improving teaching quality.

While school improvement documentation and a series of school visits are used to oversight school performance, these activities were not consistently undertaken across the ACT public schools considered as part of the audit. The Education Support Office does not formally analyse school improvement documentation to better target and improve teaching quality supports and this reduces the effectiveness of the school improvement process to improve teaching quality.

The Education Support Office has established a range of activities to oversight and support school leadership to improve teaching quality. Directors of School Improvement have an active role to support principals in improving teaching quality through school improvement, and are supported

by Instructional Mentors. The Leadership Development Strategy has also been implemented with a view to school leaders leading and mentoring teachers to improve teaching practices. While these supports have assisted principals and deputy principals, school executives (School Leader C staff) spoken to as part of the audit were consistently unaware of this support. While school executives' awareness may have been affected by the interruption of the Strategy's planned activities in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this reduces the effectiveness of school leaders to lift the quality of teaching in ACT public schools.

## Key findings

### Paragraph

The *National School Improvement Tool* was designed by the Australian Council of Educational Research in 2012; its purpose is to support Australian schools' improvement activities by documenting the practices displayed by highly performing schools in the form of benchmarks. The *National School Improvement Tool* and its associated performance domains form the basis of the Education Directorate's integrated school improvement process, which includes a series of cyclical activities: school reviews; school improvement plans; actional plans; school improvement visits; and impact reports. Guidance on the use and application of the *National School Improvement Tool* is outlined in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework (2016) and the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019).

3.22

The *People, Practice and Performance* framework was re-endorsed by the Education Directorate in 2018 as the cornerstone for school improvement activities and it has continued to positively influence the school improvement process. However, the framework was not reviewed or updated before its re-endorsement. While the core features of the school improvement process remain relevant in the framework, some of the principles and assumptions behind the framework have since been superseded by newer developments. This includes new school improvement roles of Directors of School Improvement and Instructional Mentors, as well as school improvement priorities outlined in the *Future of Education*. The *Evidence and Data Plan* does not refer to, or otherwise acknowledge, the roles and responsibilities of Instructional Mentors or Education Support Office teams that assist schools in improving teaching quality. Similarly, the plan does not satisfactorily explain the purpose and intended outcomes of school improvement visits in the school improvement process. The exclusion of this information in the *Evidence and Data Plan* combined with the outdated information in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework presents a risk that Education Directorate policies designed to enhance school improvement in ACT public schools may lead to confusion and misunderstanding with respect to the Education Directorate's school improvement processes.

3.23

Under the *National School Improvement Tool*, the school review is the primary evaluation tool for examining the effectiveness of the planning and management of individual school resources for the purpose of improving student outcomes. Undertaken in the fifth year of a school's improvement cycle, school reviews use the *National School Improvement Tool* as the framework for assessing a school's

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progress towards directorate and school priorities, including an assessment of the quality of teaching practices displayed. Five of the six schools considered as part of the audit had undertaken a school review under the current integrated school improvement processes. All reviews included specific and actionable recommendations for schools to implement as part of their next five-yearly school improvement plan, and were made available on the school's website. There is evidence that the schools considered the recommendations when designing their next school improvement plan and sought to address the issues in a small number of high-level priorities for the following five years. There is also evidence that the school review recommendations were then also specifically addressed in subsequent annual action plans.

On the basis of the school reviews that are conducted each year, the Australian Council for Educational Research provides the Education Directorate with a *System School Review Report*. The *System School Review Report* summarises the strengths and areas for improvement for the ACT public schools that had undergone the school review process that year. There is evidence of the Education Directorate responding to *System Review Reports* since 2016 with actions targeted at improving teaching quality against ACT public schools across some recommendations in these reports. Since 2019, the Education Directorate's responses to *System School Review Reports* have improved in how they address the Australian Council for Education Research's recommendations for system-level improvement. Actions have been attributed to Education Support Office branches to progress and monitor throughout their implementation. However, the Education Directorate's responses to the *System School Review Reports* have not included reference to how prior year recommendations have been implemented. The Directorate's response to the 2020 report includes similar or identical actions to those identified in its response to the 2019 report; the details of any progress made or any challenges or delays to the implementation of the actions is not explicitly addressed or acknowledged in the documentation. While the reports are necessarily focused on historical performance in improving student educational outcomes and improvements across the system might take some years to be observed, there is an opportunity to better reflect and recognise progress that may be being made.

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School improvement plans seek to document the direction and priorities for a school in the form of improvement goals over a five-year period. They are developed initially after the completion of a school review and are informed by the performance information obtained from the school's assessment against the *National School Improvement Tool* as well as other school performance and demographics data. Four of the six schools considered as part of the audit had developed, and were implementing, school improvement plans (the remaining schools had school strategic plans due to the timing of previous external reviews). School improvement plans had a common structure and, as expected, had a sharper focus on a small number of improvement priorities. All plans included measures to track the achievement of school improvement priorities.

3.58

A school's action plan is the delivery mechanism for achieving the priorities identified in the school improvement plan. They should be developed annually and seek to document the resources, time and processes that are to be used to achieve improvement goals. Only two of the six schools considered as part of audit published

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action plans in 2019 and only three of these six schools published action plans for 2020. By not publishing annual action plans as required by the school improvement process, schools lack transparency and accountability for actions designed to progress school improvement plan priorities. For those annual action plans that were completed in the three schools, it is apparent that school leadership teams are largely identifying activities to address their school's improvement priorities in isolation of the Education Support Office supports available to ACT public schools. Supports available from the Education Support Office such as Instructional Mentors, coaching and leadership support for implementing professional learning communities, and universally available professional learning programs are not consistently identified in annual action plans to achieve school improvement plan priorities in ACT public schools. Guidance provided to all schools in completing their action plans does not prompt them to consider the appropriateness of these supports in achieving their improvement priorities.

School improvement visits are a monitoring mechanism that are intended to provide differentiated support and feedback to schools on their progress towards priorities identified in their school improvement plan. Education Directorate guidelines specify that all ACT public schools should participate in at least one visit annually. For the six schools considered as part of the audit, there was evidence of six school improvement visits conducted between 2018 and 2020 in five of the six schools.

3.69

A feature of the Education Directorate's school improvement process is incorporating the development of the school principal's performance and development plan, and the associated review processes, as part of the improvement monitoring activities for the school. This recognises the important contribution that principals make in developing and sustaining a school culture that supports teaching quality. The principal's performance and development plan, which is developed in conjunction with a school's annual improvement documentation, is another means by which Directors of School Improvement and principals consider the school's progress in achieving its improvement targets. The priorities and activities contained in the performance and development plans for the principals of the six schools considered as part of the audit aligned with their school's improvement plan and the Education Directorate 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. Principals' adherence to the requirements of the *Principal Performance and Development Guidelines* was largely consistent in the documentation reviewed. Mid-cycle and end-cycle reviews demonstrated principals' efforts to deliver on their plan's targets through tangible, measurable and evidence-based activities.

3.70

Impact reports are developed at the end of the school year and are intended to demonstrate a school's progress against its annual action plan. They are designed to monitor and evaluate how the school has contributed to the strategic priorities of the directorate, delivered on its improvement agenda through progress towards its school improvement plan priorities and determined the impact of these actions on student outcomes. The impact reports of the six schools considered as part of the audit showed there was a focus in these reports on improving student performance through improved quality teaching practices. Each school had designed and implemented various actions to achieve this goal ranging from the establishment of staff coaching and mentoring programs, to the introduction of student feedback tools, as well as the use of evidence-based professional learning communities to

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perform active research projects to identify effective pedagogical practices. However, impact reports do not provide consistent feedback on system-wide supports for school improvement that can be turned into actionable information to assess impact and areas for improvement. The current process for schools to complete impact reports does not provide a clear prompt to schools to give feedback on the appropriateness and quality of system-wide supports. While the Education Support Office examines impact reports for this purpose, this process is not formalised.

The Education Support Office has implemented a range of supports that are designed to assist in the implementation of school improvement activities. These include: Directors of School Improvement, the School Planning and Review Unit and Instructional Mentors. Through their supervisory responsibility over principals, Directors of School Improvement are the link between ACT public schools and the Education Support Office. The four Directors are each responsible for a geographically-based school network and they directly supervise principals and provide support to school leaders through the different stages of the school improvement process. This model, which is intended to facilitate networking, communication and sharing of practice, provides a network of approximately 20 schools that are mostly within a small distance of each other. Principals valued the support and collaboration of peers provided by this structure. The effectiveness of the Directors of School Improvement has been improved with the establishment of the School Operations Unit to handle critical incidents at schools which historically were the responsibility of Directors of School Improvement. However, there are risks in the complexity of this role that may challenge its effectiveness. There may also be opportunities to focus each Director of School Improvement on particular educational settings, rather than on a geographically clustered set of schools to expand on the intent of meeting individual school needs to better align supports with the intent of the *Future of Education*.

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The School Planning and Review Unit has also assisted with focusing school improvement activities on measurable and achievable priorities at schools. In recent years, the School Planning and Review Unit has assisted schools in focusing on more specific and achievable improvement goals; this was evident in the school improvement plans considered as part of the audit. Instructional Mentors have also assisted with engaging with school leaders to strengthen the adoption of professional learning communities under the 'Spiral of Inquiry' model across the ACT public school system and developing school leader expertise in coaching and mentoring as part of the Education Directorate's initiative aimed at enhancing leadership capabilities across all levels. A key challenge in the use of the Instructional Mentors has been high turnover in the roles. Three years into the program, school leaders across ACT public schools also remain largely unaware of the role of Instructional Mentors or confused regarding the support role they provide.

3.90

In 2018 the Education Directorate committed \$5.4 million to a three-year Leadership Development Strategy; the *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Program*. A series of professional learning supports have been designed to support principals and school leaders through the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan, including professional learning for all principals (which has an aspect that focuses on new principals), developing finance, human resources and business skills, an annual

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leadership symposium and a biennial leadership conference. This is being supported with a principal and deputy principal coaching and mentoring program that involves experienced and retired principals providing support to upskill principals and deputy principals in leadership practice. Feedback data from attendees shows that the Leadership Development Strategy has contributed to some shifts in leadership practice that facilitate improved quality teaching practices in ACT public schools. Notably, there is a significant increase in the perceptions of the quality of support from Education Support Office through these activities.

Through focus group discussions with school executives (School Leader C staff) it was apparent that most executives were not aware of the supports under the Leadership Development Strategy, with only two of six groups of School Leaders referencing the professional learning supports within the strategy. While the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan has an aspect that specifically focuses on new principals there is no similar approach for new school executives (School Leader C staff). While there are supports available to all school leaders, and some of the key activities under the Strategy that were planned for commencement in 2020 were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a significant cohort of over 400 staff. This cohort of school executives is expected to have a significant impact on improving student outcomes through leading classroom teachers.

3.101

National certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers was established by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership in 2012 as a method of formally recognising exemplary teachers who demonstrate quality teaching practices and leadership in schools. The *Future of Education* sought to 'work towards ensuring a highly accomplished and lead teacher is in every school' by the end of its first phase in 2020. At this time, 32.9 percent of ACT public schools had at least one school leader or teacher on staff with the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. The Education Directorate established a professional learning community to create a networking and sharing space for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers, but its implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools do not have defined roles or responsibilities beyond that of their classroom teacher band. The *2018-2021 Education and Training Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement* states 'teachers who achieve certification at the higher career stages of the Standards will be encouraged to take up leadership roles in modelling exemplary teaching practice and in building capacity for excellent teaching within schools and across the system'. No further guidance is provided as to what these leadership roles are expected to achieve, and no resourcing is identified (including classroom release time) to achieve these expectations.

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School leaders, including qualified ACT Teacher Quality Institute assessors, as well as Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers advised during focus group discussions that they are used variably in ACT public schools and their impact was limited by a lack of resources and time. There was a lack of interest from teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of this audit in obtaining the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. Teachers and school leaders perceived the cost of obtaining the certification, the workload associated with obtaining the certification and the lack of perceived benefits from having the certification as the major disincentives in

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pursuing the accreditation. Furthermore, the teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of the audit questioned Education Directorate's use of teachers with this certification, advising that it does not necessarily lead to promotional or enhanced career opportunities.

## The National School Improvement Tool

- 3.2 The *National School Improvement Tool* (NSIT) was designed by the Australian Council of Educational Research in 2012.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of the *National School Improvement Tool* is to support Australian schools' improvement activities by documenting the practices displayed by highly performing schools in the form of benchmarks. The tool is used to help schools identify areas for improvement and provides a better practice model to target initiatives.<sup>20</sup> The *National School Improvement Tool* has been used as the key evaluation instrument for ACT public schools since 2013.
- 3.3 The *National School Improvement Tool* consists of nine domains which are drawn from the practices demonstrated by highly effective schools. The nine domains and a brief explanation of each is shown in Table 3-1.

**Table 3-1 National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) domains**

NSIT Domain	Summary
1. An explicit improvement agenda	School leaders identify and communicate to the school community evidence-based targets for improved student outcomes.
2. Analysis and discussion of data	Student outcomes data is systematically collected and analysed to monitor and evidence student performance.
3. A culture that promotes learning	Staff, students and families contribute to positive relationships and a culture supportive of improving student learning and wellbeing.
4. Targeted use of school resources	School policies, programs and resources are used to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of every student.
5. An expert teaching team	A highly-capable teaching team are accountable for student achievement and lead a culture of continual professional learning.
6. Systematic curriculum delivery	Curriculum is planned, documented, and delivered consistently. Teaching is evidence-based and uses assessment and reporting practices that are aligned with the Australian Curriculum.
7. Differentiated teaching and learning	Classroom teachers identify and address the individual learning needs of students.
8. Effective pedagogical practices	School leadership supports teachers to use highly effective, research-based teaching practices in all classrooms.

<sup>19</sup> NSIT was originally endorsed by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) in 2012. In 2014, the SCSEEC became the Education Council.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). (2012). *National School Improvement Tool*. Melbourne: ACER, Page 1

NSIT Domain	Summary
9. School-community partnerships	The school actively uses community partnerships to enhance student learning.

Source: Australian Council for Educational Research's National School Improvement Tool (2016)

- 3.4 Performance levels are described for each domain: Outstanding, High, Medium and Low. Descriptors are provided for each of the performance levels, and these provide guidance on the features and practices of school improvement activities at each level.
- 3.5 Describing the domains and the associated performance levels allows schools and education systems to use evidence and judgement to assess performance and inform the design of school improvement activities.

## Education Directorate's integrated school improvement process

- 3.6 Schools and education systems that demonstrate high-quality teaching practices could expect to perform well across many of the domains of the *National School Improvement Tool*, and this is expected to lead to improved student educational outcomes.
- 3.7 Following an initial pilot of the *National School Improvement Tool* in ACT public schools in 2013, the Education Directorate identified the tool as the key component of an integrated school improvement process. The Education Directorate's integrated school improvement process includes a series of cyclical activities:
- School reviews: Each school goes through a review process every five years. They are used to evaluate a school's planning and management of resources to improve student outcomes.
  - School improvement plans: These are produced as an outcome of the school review. They seek to align and support the Education Directorate's strategic plan by setting a school's performance improvement targets over the next five-year period.
  - Action plans: These are prepared on an annual basis to guide a school's processes and resources to achieve the priorities set out in the school improvement plan.
  - School improvement visits: These are focused visits from a Director of School Improvement (refer to paragraph 3.60) and could include a member of the Education Support Office's school improvement team and another school principal. School Improvement visits are conducted at least once throughout the school year in each setting to give differentiated support and feedback to a school in implementing its school improvement plan.
  - Impact reports: These are annual reports on the school's progress towards its school improvement plan targets and the strategic priorities in the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan.

### *Key roles in Education Directorate school improvement process*

- 3.8 A number of school-based and Directorate staff have a role to plan, deliver, monitor and evaluate a school's activities to improve student outcomes through the integrated school improvement process:
- School principals: oversee school operations and lead their school with a strategic direction that meets individual school community needs and aligns system priorities.
  - Directors of School Improvement: supervise and mentor school principals to plan, deliver and evaluate school improvement activities. They are supported by instructional mentors who work with schools on specific school improvement activities.
  - School teaching staff: classroom teachers and school leaders who maintain face-to-face teaching responsibilities to plan, deliver, and assess student performance against the standards of the *Australian Curriculum*, and provide pastoral care support to students and their families.
  - Education Support Office: designs, delivers, monitors, and evaluates system-level strategies and supports to enhance student performance and wellbeing.

### **School improvement policies**

- 3.9 The integrated school improvement process and the roles and responsibilities for the stakeholders involved is documented in two key Education Directorate documents:
- *People, Practice and Performance: School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools- A Framework for Performance and Accountability (2016)* (the *People, Practice and Performance* framework); and
  - *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement (2019)* (the *Evidence and Data Plan*).

### *People, Practice and Performance: School Improvement in Canberra Public Schools- A Framework for Performance and Accountability (2016)*

- 3.10 Released in March 2016, the *People, Practice and Performance* framework articulated the performance improvement and accountability arrangements for ACT public schools. The framework established a planning and review process for school improvement. The framework allocates roles and responsibilities and endorses the *National School Improvement Tool* as the core feature of ACT public schools' improvement processes. It also establishes processes for otherwise disconnected existing internal and external accountability activities for school improvement purposes. These include staff performance and development agreements, student reports, annual school board reports and an annual assurance statement.
- 3.11 At the time of its release, the *People, Practice and Performance* framework identified a line of accountability from principals to school network leaders (now Directors of School Improvement) and ultimately to the Director-General.

- 3.12 The intent of the framework was to establish processes to:
- monitor school performance;
  - identify targeted interventions and;
  - ensure quality assurance of all ACT public schools.
- 3.13 While representative bodies were consulted in designing the framework, it is apparent there was a lack of support for principals in its implementation.
- 3.14 The *People, Practice and Performance* framework was provided to schools who were expected to autonomously implement the framework in their setting, with little direct leadership and support from the Education Support Office at the time. This resulted in schools variably using the processes outlined in the framework to improve student outcomes. Primarily, this issue was most evident in the discrepancies between school strategic plans in which some schools identified up to 15 strategic priorities to achieve within a five-year period, while other schools identified two or three broad goals.
- 3.15 The *People, Practice and Performance* framework was re-endorsed by the Education Directorate in 2018 as the cornerstone for school improvement activities, with the development and implementation of the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019). However, the framework was not reviewed or updated before its re-endorsement. Some of the principles and assumptions behind the framework have since been superseded by newer developments, such as the new school improvement roles of Directors of School Improvement and instructional mentors, as well as school improvement priorities outlined in the *Future of Education*. The major implication of this is that the supporting cyclical school improvement activities do not reflect the current arrangements, and this may lead to confusion about the policy intent of these supports (discussed further in paragraph 3.24).

#### *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement (2019)*

- 3.16 In April 2019 the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* was released. The *Evidence and Data Plan* states that it:
- ... represents an actioning of the People, Practice and Performance framework with a focus on the use of data to guide decision making about pedagogy, curriculum delivery and school planning for improvement.
- 3.17 The *Evidence and Data Plan* provides guidance to schools on how they can access, prioritise, collect and analyse data sets to monitor and evaluate the impact of school improvement activities. The Education Directorate endorses two approaches to facilitate ACT public schools' continuous scrutiny of data, including:
- Spiral of Inquiry: encourages the use of a series of enabling questions that seek to support a culture of inquiry in professional learning communities (refer to paragraph 4.46). These questions focus teachers and leaders on assessing: the needs of students; teacher knowledge, skills and development; and the impact of changes of activities to improve student outcomes. This is intended to be a cyclical process where

schools are encouraged to continue asking these questions to continually improve student outcomes; and

- Multiple Sources of Evidence: encourages schools to seek data about student learning; school programs and processes; school community demographics; and school community perceptions. Through these domains it is intended that schools use data to predict the required interventions to sustain school improvement.

- 3.18 The *Evidence and Data Plan* provides suggested data sources through a data glossary that is available on the Education Directorate's intranet. The data glossary connects a comprehensive set of data sources across each of the four domains recommended under the Multiple Sources of Evidence and identifies the school communities that each data set is relevant for (from preschools to colleges and specialist schools). It is intended that schools use these tools in the context of school professional learning communities, which are discussed further in paragraphs 4.46 to 4.58.
- 3.19 The *Evidence and Data Plan* acknowledges the replacement of school network leaders with Directors of School Improvement as a means of support for school leadership and improvement, rather than management of operational and incident responses.
- 3.20 The *Evidence and Data Plan* does not refer to, or otherwise acknowledge, the roles and responsibilities of Instructional Mentors or Education Support Office teams that assist schools in improving teaching quality. Similarly, the plan does not satisfactorily explain the purpose and intended outcomes of school improvement visits in the school improvement process. The exclusion of this information in the *Evidence and Data Plan* combined with the outdated information in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework presents a risk that Education Directorate policies designed to enhance school improvement in ACT public schools are not relevant or comprehensive and may lead to confusion and misunderstanding with respect to the Education Directorate's school improvement processes.
- 3.21 While there was no discrete communications strategy to support the launch of the *Evidence and Data Plan*, all divisions of the Education Support Office and all six principals involved in the audit were aware of, and understood, the plan's processes and activities. However, school leaders and classroom teaching staff in five of the six schools were not aware of the plan and its activities.
- 3.22 The *National School Improvement Tool* was designed by the Australian Council of Educational Research in 2012; its purpose is to support Australian schools' improvement activities by documenting the practices displayed by highly performing schools in the form of benchmarks. The *National School Improvement Tool* and its associated performance domains form the basis of the Education Directorate's integrated school improvement process, which includes a series of cyclical activities: school reviews; school improvement plans; actional plans; school improvement visits; and impact reports. Guidance on the use and application of the *National School Improvement Tool* is outlined in the *People, Practice*

and Performance framework (2016) and the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019).

- 3.23 The *People, Practice and Performance* framework was re-endorsed by the Education Directorate in 2018 as the cornerstone for school improvement activities and it has continued to positively influence the school improvement process. However, the framework was not reviewed or updated before its re-endorsement. While the core features of the school improvement process remain relevant in the framework, some of the principles and assumptions behind the framework have since been superseded by newer developments. This includes new school improvement roles of Directors of School Improvement and Instructional Mentors, as well as school improvement priorities outlined in the *Future of Education*. The *Evidence and Data Plan* does not refer to, or otherwise acknowledge, the roles and responsibilities of Instructional Mentors or Education Support Office teams that assist schools in improving teaching quality. Similarly, the plan does not satisfactorily explain the purpose and intended outcomes of school improvement visits in the school improvement process. The exclusion of this information in the *Evidence and Data Plan* combined with the outdated information in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework presents a risk that Education Directorate policies designed to enhance school improvement in ACT public schools may lead to confusion and misunderstanding with respect to the Education Directorate's school improvement processes.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

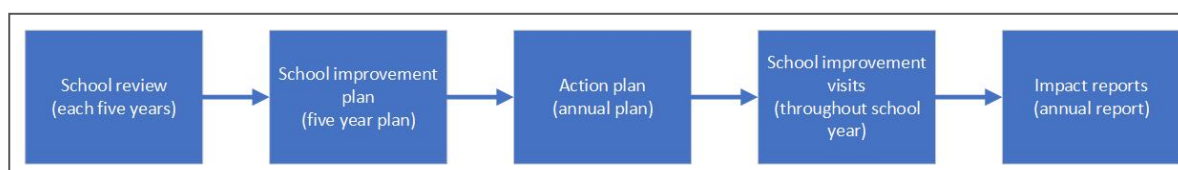
### PEOPLE, PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The Education Directorate should review and update the *People, Practice and Performance* framework to:

- a) reflect the revised structure of the Education Support Office, including the roles of Directors of School Improvement and Instructional Mentors and their role to support and maintain accountability for school principals;
- b) reflect the requirements of the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019); and
- c) require all schools to participate in school improvement activities as well as complete and publish all required school improvement documentation on their website.

### Implementation of the integrated school improvement process

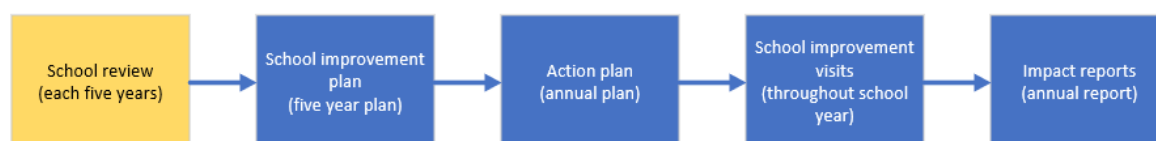
- 3.24 The Education Directorate's integrated school improvement process, as documented in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework and the *Evidence and Data Plan for School Improvement* (2019), is used across ACT public schools to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate school improvement activities, including initiatives to improve teaching quality. The five key cyclical activities in the school improvement process are shown in Figure 3-1.

**Figure 3-1 Education Directorate integrated school improvement cycle**

Source: *Education Directorate Evidence and Data Plan (2019)*

- 3.25 The implementation of these activities was reviewed by the Audit Office in the six schools considered as part of the audit.

### School review



### School review design

- 3.26 The school review is the primary evaluation tool for examining the effectiveness of the planning and management of individual school resources for the purpose of improving student outcomes. Each review is conducted by a panel of experienced educators and is led by a school improvement consultant from the Australian Council for Educational Research. Undertaken in the fifth year of a school's improvement cycle, school reviews use the *National School Improvement Tool* as the framework for assessing a school's progress towards directorate and school priorities, including an assessment of the quality of teaching practices displayed. A school is reviewed every five years, and school reviews are broadly programmed to cover a fifth of ACT public schools each year.
- 3.27 As part of a school review, cumulative data that is collected over the duration of a school's five-year improvement plan is submitted to the panel. The data provides information on students' learning, school processes, demographics and perceptions. Consultation with staff, students, parents and community members also informs the review. The information is analysed and used to determine a school's progress towards the targets of their school improvement plan. The *National School Improvement Tool* performance levels are used as a basis for assessing the school's performance for each domain. The assessment of performance does not provide an overall performance rating of a school. Rather, there are multiple descriptors within each level of performance and the review panel notes the statements that best describe a school's improvement activities. A summary report is given that captures findings, performance levels and recommendations for future school improvement. The report then forms the foundation of the next five-year school improvement plan.

### *Use of school review in ACT public schools*

- 3.28 Of the six schools considered as part of the audit, five schools had undertaken a school review under the current integrated school improvement processes. These reviews recognised school improvement activities that had been completed and those that were underway against the nine domains of the *National School Improvement Tool*. All reviews included specific and actionable recommendations for schools to implement as part of their next five-yearly school improvement plan, and were made available on the school's website.
- 3.29 The school review reports for the five schools included recommendations that focused on better use of data, prioritisation of curriculum planning and delivery and the implementation of strategies to develop teaching staff to inform quality teaching practices to meet the learning needs of all school students. There is evidence that the schools considered the recommendations when designing their next school improvement plan and sought to address the issues in a small number of high-level priorities for the following five years. The priorities focused on improving student educational outcomes, such as improved literacy and mathematics results in standardised testing. There is also evidence that the school review recommendations were then also specifically addressed in subsequent annual action plans. A review of the annual action plans for 2019 and 2020 in the five schools showed that activities had been identified and articulated to specifically address issues arising from the prior school review (further discussed at 3.50).
- 3.30 The remaining school had its last external review under a legacy validation process, and is due for its next school review in 2021. The legacy validation process had a focus on documentary evidence to support the achievement of a school's strategic priorities. The strategic priorities were developed at the school level, but did not provide a common evaluation tool to assess school improvement across the system. The use of the *National School Improvement Tool* in school external reviews provides a common measurement framework to assess school improvement, which can assist evaluation.

### *Use of ACT public school reviews in Education Support Office*

- 3.31 Once the school reviews are completed each year, the Australian Council for Educational Research provides the Education Directorate with a *System School Review Report*. This report informs overall system performance against the *National School Improvement Tool*.
- 3.32 The *System School Review Report* summarises the strengths and areas for improvement for the ACT public schools that had undergone the school review process that year. The report also makes recommendations that are aimed at supporting whole-of-system improvement. As the Education Directorate has used the *National School Improvement Tool* since 2013, it is building comparable data to show system-wide performance over time.
- 3.33 The accumulation of system-wide performance data is facilitating insights into determining areas of ongoing strength and challenge for ACT public schools across the nine *National School Improvement Tool* domains. For example, the 2020 *System School Review Report*

found that ACT public schools reviewed in this year were generally assessed at a *High* level in the following domains:

- Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda;
- Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning;
- Domain 5: An expert teaching team;
- Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices; and
- Domain 9: School-community partnerships.

3.34 The same schools were assessed as largely performing at a *Medium* level for the following domains, indicating that these are areas of challenge for ACT public schools that require improvement:

- Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data;
- Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources;
- Domain 6: Systemic curriculum delivery; and
- Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning.

3.35 Over the longer term, assessment of ACT public schools during the five-year period between 2016 to 2020 showed that schools were consistently performing at a *High* level in following *National School Improvement Tool* domains:

- Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning;
- Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources;
- Domain 5: An expert teaching team; and
- Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices;

3.36 There was a spread of schools performing between the *Medium* and *High* levels in the following domains:

- Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda;
- Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data;
- Domain 6: Systemic curriculum delivery;
- Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning; and
- Domain 9: School-community partnerships.

3.37 Consistent findings from reviews of ACT public schools since 2016 relevant to teaching quality are that:

- there is broad commitment to school improvement as a support for improving teaching quality in ACT public schools, but the wider community is generally unaware of the Education Directorate's improvement agenda. Greater community awareness

would increase accountability for schools to prioritise the improvement of teaching quality;

- the use of evidence to set realistic improvement targets for student learning is challenging across most schools;
- there is a strong culture in schools that promotes learning;
- principals and school leaders place a high level of importance on staff development and actively encourage and support teachers to take on leadership roles in the school;
- a majority of schools have schedules of professional learning but do not have professional learning plans and are not measuring the impact of professional learning on improved student outcomes;
- school leaders encourage teachers to work collaboratively to develop learning programs, and are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practice but do not always have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring in the school; and
- there is a need to support teachers in strengthening their practice in differentiating teaching and learning to meet individual student needs.

3.38 Based upon the five-year findings, the 2020 *System Review Report* suggests the Education Support Office continue to focus on target setting in school improvement plans, analysis and discussion of data, systematic curriculum delivery, differentiated teaching and learning, and the evaluation of school and community partnerships.

3.39 Each year the Education Directorate prepares a response to the *System Review Report* and this is provided to the Minister for Education. There is evidence of the Education Directorate responding to *System Review Reports* since 2016 with actions targeted at improving teaching quality against ACT public schools across some recommendations in these reports. For example, a 2018 ministerial brief identified the directorate's intention to resource the 'Strengthening Leadership for School Improvement Series' due to declining performance assessments between 2016 and 2017 in *Domain 5: Expert Teaching Team*.

3.40 Since 2019, the Education Directorate's responses to *System Review Reports* have further improved in addressing the Australian Council for Education Research's recommendations for system-level improvement. The 2019 and 2020 responses to *System Review Reports* address the recommendations provided across the nine Domains for the *National School Improvement Tool* through the identification of specific actions. Actions are attributed to Education Support Office branches to progress and monitor throughout their implementation.

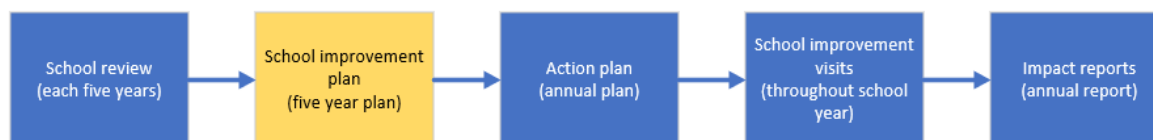
3.41 In reviewing the 2019 and 2020 responses, evidence of the implementation of suggested improvements was observed in the six schools that participated in the audit. For example, in the Education Directorate's response to the 2019 and 2020 *System Review Reports* an action was identified in response to Recommendation 5 of both reports that all primary

schools were to have engaged in the *Early Years Literacy Initiative* (refer to paragraph 4.24) which includes the provision of formal coaching practices.

- 3.42 The Education Directorate's responses to the *System Review Reports* have not included reference to how prior year recommendations have been implemented. The Directorate's response to the 2020 report includes similar or identical actions to those identified in its response to the 2019 report across all nine domains of the *National School Improvement Tool*. The response to the 2020 report includes 22 from a total of 31 actions that are similar or identical to those identified in the response to the 2019 report. The details of any progress made or any challenges or delays to the implementation of the actions is not explicitly addressed or acknowledged in the documentation.
- 3.43 Under the *National School Improvement Tool*, the school review is the primary evaluation tool for examining the effectiveness of the planning and management of individual school resources for the purpose of improving student outcomes. Undertaken in the fifth year of a school's improvement cycle, school reviews use the *National School Improvement Tool* as the framework for assessing a school's progress towards directorate and school priorities, including an assessment of the quality of teaching practices displayed. Five of the six schools considered as part of the audit had undertaken a school review under the current integrated school improvement processes. All reviews included specific and actionable recommendations for schools to implement as part of their next five-yearly school improvement plan, and were made available on the school's website. There is evidence that the schools considered the recommendations when designing their next school improvement plan and sought to address the issues in a small number of high-level priorities for the following five years. There is also evidence that the school review recommendations were then also specifically addressed in subsequent annual action plans.
- 3.44 On the basis of the school reviews that are conducted each year, the Australian Council for Educational Research provides the Education Directorate with a *System School Review Report*. The *System School Review Report* summarises the strengths and areas for improvement for the ACT public schools that had undergone the school review process that year. There is evidence of the Education Directorate responding to *System Review Reports* since 2016 with actions targeted at improving teaching quality against ACT public schools across some recommendations in these reports. Since 2019, the Education Directorate's responses to *System School Review Reports* have improved in how they address the Australian Council for Education Research's recommendations for system-level improvement. Actions have been attributed to Education Support Office branches to progress and monitor throughout their implementation. However, the Education Directorate's responses to the *System School Review Reports* have not included reference to how prior year recommendations have been implemented. The Directorate's response to the 2020 report includes similar or identical actions to those identified in its response to the 2019 report; the details of any progress made or any challenges or delays to the implementation of the actions is not explicitly addressed or acknowledged in the documentation. While the reports are necessarily focused on historical performance in improving student educational outcomes and improvements across the system might take

some years to be observed, there is an opportunity to better reflect and recognise progress that may be being made.

### School improvement plan



#### *School improvement plan design*

- 3.45 School improvement plans seek to document the direction and priorities for a school in the form of improvement goals over a five-year period. They are initially developed after the completion of a school review and are informed by the performance information obtained from the school's assessment against the *National School Improvement Tool* as well as other school performance and demographics data. School improvement plans are intended to be reviewed by the principal and the Director of School Improvement throughout the five-year period and are designed to align with the Education Directorate's strategic plan. This is achieved by the plans having a consistent design that requires principals to specify how each of their school goals contributes to system-wide targets identified in the Education Directorate's strategic plan. The school improvement plan is then used to determine the priorities in each annual action plan under which supports and resources that are designed to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices are identified and documented.
- 3.46 School improvement plans replaced school strategic plans from 2018. School strategic plans typically included many improvement targets, increasing the risk of a lack of achievability and measurability in school improvement targets. In contrast, school improvement plans focus on a maximum of three priorities that are to be undertaken during the five-year cycle.
- 3.47 School improvement plan priorities are informed by school operational and performance data provided by the Education Directorate during the school review. The Education Directorate provides guidance to schools on how to analyse this data using the Multiple Sources of Evidence approach (discussed further at paragraph 4.49) so that school improvement plan priorities and associated measures are specific, relevant and measurable.

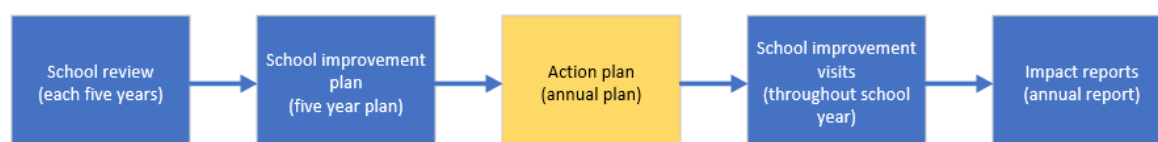
#### *School improvement plans in ACT public schools*

- 3.48 Four of the six schools considered as part of the audit had developed and were implementing school improvement plans, while the remaining schools had school strategic plans due to the timing of previous external reviews. School improvement plans had a common structure and, as expected, had a sharper focus on a small number of improvement priorities. Examples of school improvement plan priorities that clearly rely on improving teaching quality found in the selected documentation included:

- improve growth in student performance in writing achievement standards across all year levels;
- improve growth in student performance in reading comprehension, across all year levels;
- increase growth in student performance in numeracy across all year levels; and
- to advance the effectiveness of teaching practice to enhance student learning outcomes.

3.49 All plans included measures to track the achievement of school improvement priorities. However, one of the four school improvement plans did not use the Education Directorate's Multiple Sources of Evidence approach as intended. This school improvement plan indicated the use of one or two sources of data rather than the recommended four which, as a consequence, may not adequately measure progress towards the intended priority.

### Action plans



### School action plan design

3.50 A school's action plan is the delivery mechanism for achieving the priorities identified in the school improvement plan. Developed annually, an action plan seeks to document the resources, time and processes that are to be implemented to achieve improvement goals.

3.51 Individual school action plans are a key monitoring mechanism for the Education Support Office. The actions identified in a school action plan are intended to align with system-wide actions. This is achieved by assigning each school action plan activity to the relevant strategic priority from the Education Directorate's strategic plan. Through the annual approval and review cycle led by the Directors of School Improvement, there are opportunities to determine whether the key objectives of the whole-of-system strategies are clearly understood by school leaders; this seeks to ensure that consistency across the system can be maintained. Additionally, this oversight can also assist schools to appropriately design and implement mechanisms to capture evidence that improvement activities are meeting the needs of the school community, while aligning with the directorate's broader improvement agenda.

### Action plans in schools

3.52 Schools are required to publish annual action plans. Only two of the six schools considered as part of audit published action plans in 2019 and only three of these six schools published action plans for 2020.

- 3.53 Of these five action plans published for 2019 and 2020, all identified key activities that demonstrated a logical alignment with school reviews, school improvement plans and Education Directorate strategic priorities. Table 3-3 provides an example of this alignment within one school's action plan and its activities to improve teaching quality.

**Table 3-2 School action plan alignment with system level strategic priorities**

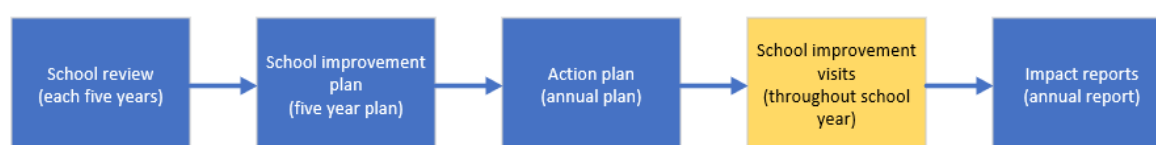
Education Directorate Strategic Plan indicator	Example School Improvement Plan priorities	Action Plan Strategies	Action Plan activities to improve Teaching quality
To facilitate high quality teaching in ACT public schools and strengthen educational outcomes	Improve student performance in reading and writing across all year levels	Build capacity of staff in literacy development.	Provide targeted literacy-based professional learning to staff across the school
	Increase growth in student performance in numeracy across all year levels	Using Data to inform teaching and practice.	Provision of a numeracy/literacy coordinator.

Source: ACT Audit Office using documentation submitted by ACT public schools

- 3.54 In preparing annual action plans, it is apparent that school leadership teams are largely identifying activities to address their school's improvement priorities without considering the supports offered by the Education Support Office. Supports available from the Education Support Office such as Instructional Mentors, coaching and leadership support for implementing professional learning communities, and universally available professional learning programs (discussed further in chapter four) are not consistently identified in annual action plans to achieve school improvement plan priorities in ACT public schools.
- 3.55 Three of the five action plans from 2019 and 2020 analysed for this audit did not consider Education Support Office supports available to schools for this purpose. Despite improved oversight of the development and implementation of annual action plans by Directors of School Improvement, school leaders' knowledge of supports available to them from the Education Support Office is lacking.
- 3.56 An examination of available action plans and consultation with teachers and school leaders at the six schools considered as part of the audit also showed that there was variability in schools' intentions to use prioritised Education Support Office programs or supports to meet school improvement priorities. School leader awareness of the prioritised system-level programs or supports was inconsistent across the schools; a correlation was identifiable between individual school action plans that identified Education Directorate supports and school leaders' knowledge of the programs or supports available.
- 3.57 Education Support Office executives advised that school action plans are an important input to planning and delivery of supports to schools. However, the analysis completed of school action plans is not formally reported when planning and reviewing the design of supports to improving teaching quality in schools.

- 3.58 School improvement plans seek to document the direction and priorities for a school in the form of improvement goals over a five-year period. They are developed initially after the completion of a school review and are informed by the performance information obtained from the school's assessment against the *National School Improvement Tool* as well as other school performance and demographics data. Four of the six schools considered as part of the audit had developed, and were implementing, school improvement plans (the remaining schools had school strategic plans due to the timing of previous external reviews). School improvement plans had a common structure and, as expected, had a sharper focus on a small number of improvement priorities. All plans included measures to track the achievement of school improvement priorities.
- 3.59 A school's action plan is the delivery mechanism for achieving the priorities identified in the school improvement plan. They should be developed annually and seek to document the resources, time and processes that are to be used to achieve improvement goals. Only two of the six schools considered as part of audit published action plans in 2019 and only three of these six schools published action plans for 2020. By not publishing annual action plans as required by the school improvement process, schools lack transparency and accountability for actions designed to progress school improvement plan priorities. For those annual action plans that were completed in the three schools, it is apparent that school leadership teams are largely identifying activities to address their school's improvement priorities in isolation of the Education Support Office supports available to ACT public schools. Supports available from the Education Support Office such as Instructional Mentors, coaching and leadership support for implementing professional learning communities, and universally available professional learning programs are not consistently identified in annual action plans to achieve school improvement plan priorities in ACT public schools. Guidance provided to all schools in completing their action plans does not prompt them to consider the appropriateness of these supports in achieving their improvement priorities.

### School improvement visits



### Design of school improvement visits

- 3.60 School improvement visits are a monitoring mechanism that are intended to provide differentiated support and feedback to schools on their progress towards priorities identified in their school improvement plan. This approach is designed to balance the autonomy of individual schools with oversight and support from the Directors of School Improvement to maintain consistency of effort towards school improvement. These visits involve a variety of stakeholders including Directors of School Improvement, instructional mentors, principals and deputy principals from other schools, as well as the school's leadership team. This broad representation seeks to encourage learning and sharing of

practice across the ACT public school system. The Education Directorate advised that while many of these activities have been in place for some time, they have been prioritised and formalised as a key responsibility of the Directors of School Improvement since 2019 when the *Evidence and Data Plan* (2019) was released.

3.61 Education Directorate guidelines specify that all ACT public schools should participate in at least one visit annually and this may include:

- a school review;
- a post-review visit, to confirm the implementation status of a recently designed school improvement plan and check the validity of its accompanying action plan to ensure it is focused on addressing the school community's needs. A post-review visit may result in the identification of school improvement priorities that require additional supports to ensure their successful implementation;
- a focused visit, also referred to as a 'Learning Walk and Talk', which is designed to target and support specific areas of a school's improvement agenda. The initiative available to schools who require extra intervention and support can be used to:
  - a) progress the implementation of a school's current action plan;
  - b) check-in on the implementation of agreed directorate practices such as the Early Years Literacy Initiative, Secondary Writing Project, or Positive Behaviors for Learning Program;
  - c) build the capacity of staff;
  - d) identify the level of variance in teaching across a team or school;
  - e) share quality teaching practices across ACT public school classrooms through observation and feedback; and
  - f) engage and evaluate Education Support Office led improvement initiatives.
- immersion visits, which are more extensive visits that focus on the school's improvement efforts. The purpose of the process, which may incorporate the Learning Walk and Talk model, is to gather information pertaining to improvement actions which may include evidence of school processes and culture, or artefacts of student learning and school programs. Feedback is provided that focuses on next steps for improvement activities.

#### *Use of school improvement visits in ACT public schools*

3.62 For the six schools considered as part of the audit, there was evidence of six school improvement visits conducted between 2018 and 2020 in five of the six schools including:

- one post-review visit;
- one 'Learning Walk and Talk' focused on a school's implementation of the Early Years Literacy Initiative; and
- four immersion visits.

- 3.63 Of these six visits, four of the school improvement visits occurred in two schools that have early career principals. While this is compatible with the intent of Education Directorate's school improvement supports to build the capability of new principals, the remaining schools did not receive the minimum of one school improvement visit per year. Two schools received one visit over this three-year period and there was no evidence to demonstrate a school improvement visit had occurred in the remaining school.

#### *Design of school principal performance and development plans*

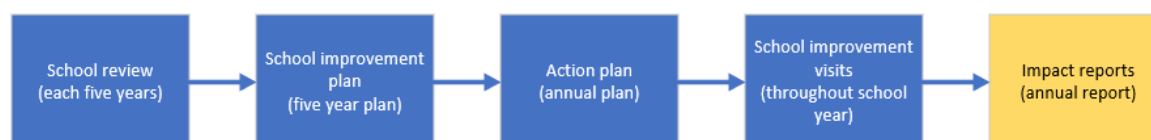
- 3.64 A feature of the Education Directorate's school improvement process is incorporating the development of the school principal's performance and development plan, and the associated review processes, as part of the improvement monitoring activities for the school. This recognises the important contribution that principals make in developing and sustaining a school culture that supports teaching quality. The principal's performance and development plan, which is developed in conjunction with a school's annual improvement documentation, is another means by which Directors of School Improvement and principals consider the school's progress in achieving its improvement targets.
- 3.65 The *Principal Performance and Development Guidelines* outline a three phased process that is to occur annually, including:
- 1) Performance Planning: through this process a principal articulates key priorities and outcomes of their school improvement plan against the five professional practices articulated in the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*. In doing so they identify areas of professional development to assist them in meeting predetermined goals. Key enablers, risk mitigation actions and activities are identified to assist the principal for the purpose of career development and meeting the deliverables set out in school improvement plans.
  - 2) Mid-cycle review of professional practice and learning: through this process the principal and the Director of School Improvement examine evidence of progress towards the goals identified in the principal's performance and development plan. Development goals and support activities including professional learning are evaluated and revised accordingly.
  - 3) End-cycle review and feedback: through this process evidence of performance and achievement towards development goals identified in the plan are reviewed collaboratively by the principal and the Director of School Improvement. Additionally, the Director of School Improvement provides verbal and written feedback on the overall performance of the principal.

#### *Use of school principal performance and development plans*

- 3.66 The priorities and activities contained in the performance and development plans for the principals of the six schools considered as part of the audit aligned with their school's improvement plan and the Education Directorate 2018-2021 Strategic Plan.

- 3.67 Principals' adherence to the requirements of the *Principal Performance and Development Guidelines* was largely consistent in the documentation reviewed. Mid-cycle and end-cycle reviews demonstrated principals' efforts to deliver on their plan's targets through tangible, measurable and evidence-based activities.
- 3.68 Compliance by Directors of School Improvement with their obligations within the process documented in the *Principal Performance and Development Guidelines* was inconsistent. Of the 11 performance and development plans submitted by the six principals participating in the audit, 27 percent were signed off by Directors of School Improvement. Further analysis of the documentation demonstrated that the Directors of School Improvement provided the required written or verbal supervisor feedback during principal performance development processes in 36 percent of instances. Without this necessary input by the Director of School Improvement, it is difficult to ascertain whether the principal's assessment of their own performance (refer to 3.67) is well informed, fair or reasonable.
- 3.69 School improvement visits are a monitoring mechanism that are intended to provide differentiated support and feedback to schools on their progress towards priorities identified in their school improvement plan. Education Directorate guidelines specify that all ACT public schools should participate in at least one visit annually. For the six schools considered as part of the audit, there was evidence of six school improvement visits conducted between 2018 and 2020 in five of the six schools.
- 3.70 A feature of the Education Directorate's school improvement process is incorporating the development of the school principal's performance and development plan, and the associated review processes, as part of the improvement monitoring activities for the school. This recognises the important contribution that principals make in developing and sustaining a school culture that supports teaching quality. The principal's performance and development plan, which is developed in conjunction with a school's annual improvement documentation, is another means by which Directors of School Improvement and principals consider the school's progress in achieving its improvement targets. The priorities and activities contained in the performance and development plans for the principals of the six schools considered as part of the audit aligned with their school's improvement plan and the Education Directorate 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. Principals' adherence to the requirements of the *Principal Performance and Development Guidelines* was largely consistent in the documentation reviewed. Mid-cycle and end-cycle reviews demonstrated principals' efforts to deliver on their plan's targets through tangible, measurable and evidence-based activities.

## Impact report



### Design of impact reports

- 3.71 Impact reports are developed at the end of the school year and are intended to demonstrate a school's progress against its annual action plan. They are designed to monitor and evaluate how the school has contributed to the strategic priorities of the directorate, delivered on its improvement agenda through progress towards its school improvement plan priorities and determined the impact of these actions on student outcomes.
- 3.72 Impact reports follow a common format and are informed by system-level data such as standardised testing results and workforce survey data provided by the directorate, as well as school-level longitudinal performance information detailing student learning, perception and school program and process information. The system-level data is used to establish a baseline and school-level performance information is analysed and reported against in the impact report to measure progress towards targets identified in a school improvement plan. This information is then used as evidence of school progress or to support the school adjusting its improvement goals in the next annual action plan cycle. Impact reports, which are published publicly on school websites, promote transparency and accountability across ACT public schools.

### Impact reports in ACT public schools

- 3.73 The impact reports of the six schools considered as part of audit showed there was a focus in these reports on improving student performance through improved quality teaching practices. Each school had designed and implemented various actions to achieve this goal ranging from the establishment of staff coaching and mentoring programs, to the introduction of student feedback tools, as well as the use of evidence-based professional learning communities to perform active research projects to identify effective pedagogical practices.
- 3.74 Despite *Domain Two - Analysis and discussion of data of the National School Improvement Tool* being an area that requires improvement in ACT public schools, there was evidence in the impact reports considered as part of this audit that school leadership teams were developing a deeper understanding of its purpose. The Education Directorate impact report template requires school leaders to detail student performance data and using this information determined what activities were effective, and any challenges that must be addressed in the school's next action plan.

- 3.75 The impact reports of the six schools considered as part of audit did not consistently review or assess the quality of universally available supports implemented by the Education Support Office. The guidance for schools in completing their impact reports also does not provide a clear instruction to provide feedback on the quality and appropriateness of Education Support Office supports. Education Support Office representatives advised that school impact reports are examined across the system for themes and areas that could be prioritised for system-wide support, but this analysis is not formalised.
- 3.76 Impact reports are developed at the end of the school year and are intended to demonstrate a school's progress against its annual action plan. They are designed to monitor and evaluate how the school has contributed to the strategic priorities of the directorate, delivered on its improvement agenda through progress towards its school improvement plan priorities and determined the impact of these actions on student outcomes. The impact reports of the six schools considered as part of the audit showed there was a focus in these reports on improving student performance through improved quality teaching practices. Each school had designed and implemented various actions to achieve this goal ranging from the establishment of staff coaching and mentoring programs, to the introduction of student feedback tools, as well as the use of evidence-based professional learning communities to perform active research projects to identify effective pedagogical practices. However, impact reports do not provide consistent feedback on system-wide supports for school improvement that can be turned into actionable information to assess impact and areas for improvement. The current process for schools to complete impact reports does not provide a clear prompt to schools to give feedback on the appropriateness and quality of system-wide supports. While the Education Support Office examines impact reports for this purpose, this process is not formalised.

**RECOMMENDATION 4****EVALUATION OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DOCUMENTATION**

As part of Recommendation 3, the Education Support Office should review and revise the *People, Practice and Performance* framework to require the formal evaluation of school improvement documentation on an annual basis. The evaluation should involve consideration of school improvement plans, action plans, school visits feedback and impact reports as a method of gaining specific, actionable and timely information about ACT public schools' progress in improving student educational outcomes. The evaluation should then be used to assess and review Education Support Office supports for teaching quality to determine any refinements or additional assistance required to support schools achieve this outcome.

## School improvement supports

### Education Support Office school improvement support

#### *Directors of School Improvement and School Operations Unit*

- 3.77 In 2017 the Education Directorate retitled the positions of school network leaders to Directors of School Improvement. Through their supervisory responsibility over principals, Directors of School Improvement are the link between ACT public schools and the Education Support Office. The four Directors are each responsible for a geographically-based school network.<sup>21</sup> They directly supervise principals and provide support to school leaders through the different stages of the school improvement process. This model provides a network of approximately 20 schools that are mostly within a small distance of each other. The model is intended to facilitate networking, communication and sharing of practice.
- 3.78 The intent of the change in the title was to prioritise school improvement activities as recommended by a series of reviews. The Education Directorate identified that school improvement activities should be the predominant focus of the relationship between Directors of School Improvement and school principals. The Directors of School Improvement were expected to be experts in school improvement and have a deeper understanding of the assistance offered by the Education Support Office to help principals and schools to improve student educational outcomes.
- 3.79 However, not all of the operational structures were in place to support the focus on school improvement when the change in title to Directors of School Improvements was implemented. Discussions with principals and Directors of School Improvement identified that, at the time, there was still a significant effort from Directors of School Improvement dealing with more operational issues such as complaints and critical incidents at the school level. The Education Directorate recognised this and established the School Operations Team as a ‘first responder’ in supporting principals to help deal with these issues and release Directors of School Improvement to focus on their core activities of school improvement.
- 3.80 Principals and Directors of School Improvement have identified that the establishment of the School Operations Team has helped to prioritise the focus of their activity on school improvement. Principals advised that they valued the high-quality support that they received from their Director of School Improvement. However, the frequency with which the Directors of School Improvement attended the six schools considered as part of the audit was variable (discussed further in paragraphs 3.60 to 3.70 and 3.77). While the Education Directorate acknowledged there could be valid reasons for such discrepancies, principals did not consistently understand these reasons. On this matter, a principal stated:

[My] DSI [provides] good support ... I know [they are] under the pump and I don't think [they] can devote a heap of time to me. [It] would be of value to have a few more DSIs. [The DSI's]

<sup>21</sup> The four ACT public school networks are: North/Gungahlin, South/Weston, Belconnen and Tuggeranong

role is more like director of school issues and is taken up largely by supporting people with issues.

- 3.81 A further issue is that the rationale for having Directors of School Improvement responsible for a geographically clustered set of schools has not been revisited. In the supports for school improvement and teaching quality considered as part of the audit, there is an emphasis on targeting supports that are appropriate for the various school types (colleges, high schools, primary and early childhood settings). Despite being close in distance, schools within a school network can vary widely in the nature of their school communities (from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds) and educational setting (colleges to preschools). Each Director of School Improvement also has many principals, school leaders, teachers and students within their area of responsibility. There is a risk that the complexity of this role could limit the effectiveness of Directors of School Improvement in targeting supports that are relevant to the needs of individual school communities.
- 3.82 Principals and school leaders valued the network structure for collaboration with nearby schools, but the value of the structure for accountability and central support purposes is questionable. In this model, Directors of School Improvement have to demonstrate expertise across a large number of varied educational settings, and an understanding of how Education Directorate supports can be selected, targeted and applied in these settings. There may be more value in tasking Directors of School Improvement to specialise in areas of particular types of school settings or pedagogical practice, and assessing whether they have adequate resources to fulfil this mandate to achieve the desired result in upskilling and leading principals to improve student educational outcomes.

#### *School Planning and Review Unit*

- 3.83 Another initiative from the Education Support Office has been the establishment of the School Planning and Review Unit. This team provides differentiated support to school leadership teams undertaking school planning and review processes. The unit assists school leaders to analyse, prioritise and evaluate short and long-term strategies for improvement whilst ensuring alignment with the directorate's strategic plan and *Future of Education* strategy through a consistent reporting approach. In recent years, the School Planning and Review Unit has assisted schools in focusing on more specific and achievable improvement goals; this was evident in the school improvement plans considered as part of the audit.

#### *Instructional Mentors*

- 3.84 Another initiative from the Education Support Office was the establishment of a team of four Instructional Mentors in the Education Support Office in 2018. An Instructional Mentor's responsibility is to:
- collaborate and liaise with Directors of School Improvement to build relationships, capacity, culture, conditions, and structures within school leadership teams;
  - work alongside school leaders in their school to build leadership capabilities; and
  - aim to deliver targeted and differentiated support to ACT public schools.

- 3.85 A school's engagement with an Instructional Mentor is initiated through a referral from a Director of School Improvement who has identified a need based on evidence found during the school improvement cycle. Once appropriate differentiated supports have been identified, an instructional mentor and the school leadership team develop a partnership agreement that details the expectations of the engagement in alignment with the school improvement plan.
- 3.86 Instructional Mentors have assisted with engagement with school leaders to strengthen the adoption of professional learning communities under the 'Spiral of Inquiry' model across the ACT public school system. Additionally, Instructional Mentors have been tasked with developing school leader expertise in coaching and mentoring as part of the Education Directorate's initiative aimed at enhancing leadership capabilities across all levels.
- 3.87 However, there are still challenges in making use of the Instructional Mentors. The Education Directorate has advised that some unintended consequences have resulted from the introduction of Instructional Mentors including:
- their role being misinterpreted as performance managers; and
  - an incorrect assumption being made regarding school's readiness to undertake leadership coaching.
- 3.88 A key challenge in the use of the Instructional Mentors has been high turnover in the roles. The Education Directorate advised that due to the skill sets of these staff, they have moved into school leadership roles. Three years into the program, school leaders across ACT public schools also remain largely unaware of the role of Instructional Mentors or confused regarding the support role they provide. A school leader interviewed for the purpose of the audit summarised their experience with Instructional Mentors stating 'schools were reaching out for support from Instructional Mentors but the lens of focus was on primary schools as this was [the] expertise of [the] people who were attracted to the role and wasn't so relevant to the challenges experienced by other sectors. [Instructional Mentor] support needs to be developed in-depth with schools and not done to the schools'.
- 3.89 The Education Support Office has implemented a range of supports that are designed to assist in the implementation of school improvement activities. These include: Directors of School Improvement, the School Planning and Review Unit and Instructional Mentors. Through their supervisory responsibility over principals, Directors of School Improvement are the link between ACT public schools and the Education Support Office. The four Directors are each responsible for a geographically-based school network and they directly supervise principals and provide support to school leaders through the different stages of the school improvement process. This model, which is intended to facilitate networking, communication and sharing of practice, provides a network of approximately 20 schools that are mostly within a small distance of each other. Principals valued the support and collaboration of peers provided by this structure. The effectiveness of the Directors of School Improvement has been improved with the establishment of the School Operations Unit to handle critical incidents at schools which historically were the responsibility of

Directors of School Improvement. However, there are risks in the complexity of this role that may challenge its effectiveness. There may also be opportunities to focus each Director of School Improvement on particular educational settings, rather than on a geographically clustered set of schools to expand on the intent of meeting individual school needs to better align supports with the intent of the *Future of Education*.

- 3.90 The School Planning and Review Unit has also assisted with focusing school improvement activities on measurable and achievable priorities at schools. In recent years, the School Planning and Review Unit has assisted schools in focusing on more specific and achievable improvement goals; this was evident in the school improvement plans considered as part of the audit. Instructional Mentors have also assisted with engaging with school leaders to strengthen the adoption of professional learning communities under the 'Spiral of Inquiry' model across the ACT public school system and developing school leader expertise in coaching and mentoring as part of the Education Directorate's initiative aimed at enhancing leadership capabilities across all levels. A key challenge in the use of the Instructional Mentors has been high turnover in the roles. Three years into the program, school leaders across ACT public schools also remain largely unaware of the role of Instructional Mentors or confused regarding the support role they provide.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5 DIRECTORS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Education Directorate should review the role of Directors of School Improvement and in doing so:

- a) consider whether individual directors should specialise in sector-specific oversight and support (such as roles focusing on colleges, high schools, primary schools) to better target the implementation of supports for improving teaching quality; and
- b) determine if the directors' span of control allows them to fulfil the requirements of the *People, Practice and Performance* framework.

### Leadership Development Strategy

- 3.91 High quality school leadership is important for supporting teaching quality and delivering improved student performance. Research demonstrates that effective school leaders use their educational expertise and management skill to develop a school culture in which teachers can focus on improving their practice and understanding its impact, thus resulting in improved outcomes for children and young people.<sup>22</sup>
- 3.92 In 2018 the Education Directorate committed \$5.4 million to a three-year Leadership Development Strategy; the *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Program*. The program's content was designed with the intention of improving teaching quality through

<sup>22</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2017). Leading for Impact [online] Available at: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/build-leadership-in-Australian-schools/leading-for-impact-online> [Accessed 3 February 2021].

enhanced instructional leadership. This was expected to be delivered in a cascading structure model in which professional learning seminars and conferences are led by Education Support Office staff and principals. Principals, deputy principals and school executives (School Leader C staff) attend and participate in the sessions and are expected to use the learnings in their school settings with classroom teaching staff.

3.93 The program consists of five key improvement strategies. Strategies of relevance to teaching quality include:

- strengthening the capability of School Leaders to create the culture, structures, and conditions for everyone to understand their impact on student outcomes;
- deepening the pedagogical and curriculum expertise of leaders at all levels; and
- developing the instructional capabilities of leaders in the Education Support Office and creating a suite of school improvement resources.

3.94 The *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Program* strategy document confirms these key improvement strategies were designed with the intention of shifting five leadership practices in ACT public schools to systematically improve the quality of teaching practices. Table 3-2 shows the expected outcomes as a result of the Leadership Development Strategy; the *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Program*.

**Table 3-3 Leadership Development Strategy outcomes**

Outcome	Leadership Development Strategy outcome description
1	Leadership team's capability in implementing effective professional learning communities
2	Ongoing development of school leadership as instructional leaders
3	Development of school leader knowledge and understanding of leading with an inquiry approach
4	Development in the connection between colleagues with school leadership roles
5	School Leaders knowledge and understanding of the Multiple Sources of Evidence approach

Source: ACT Audit Office, based on Education Directorate's Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan (2018-2021)

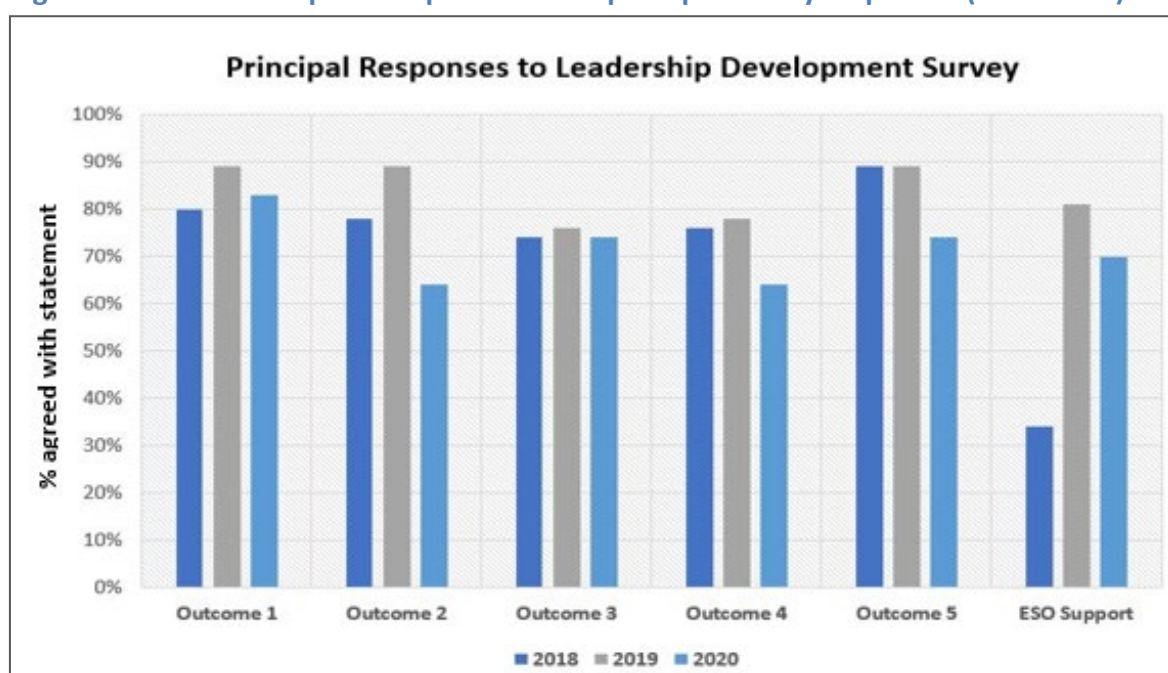
3.95 A series of professional learning supports have been designed to support principals and school leaders through the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan. This includes professional learning for all principals (with a focus on new principals), developing finance, human resources and business skills, an annual leadership symposium and a biennial leadership conference. This is being supported with a principal and deputy principal coaching and mentoring program that involves experienced and retired principals providing support to upskill principals and deputy principals in leadership practice.

3.96 Following the completion of these activities, principals and deputy principals are surveyed to gauge whether they felt more confident in displaying the expected outcomes of the

Leadership Development Strategy, and with the levels of support they are receiving from the Education Support Office.

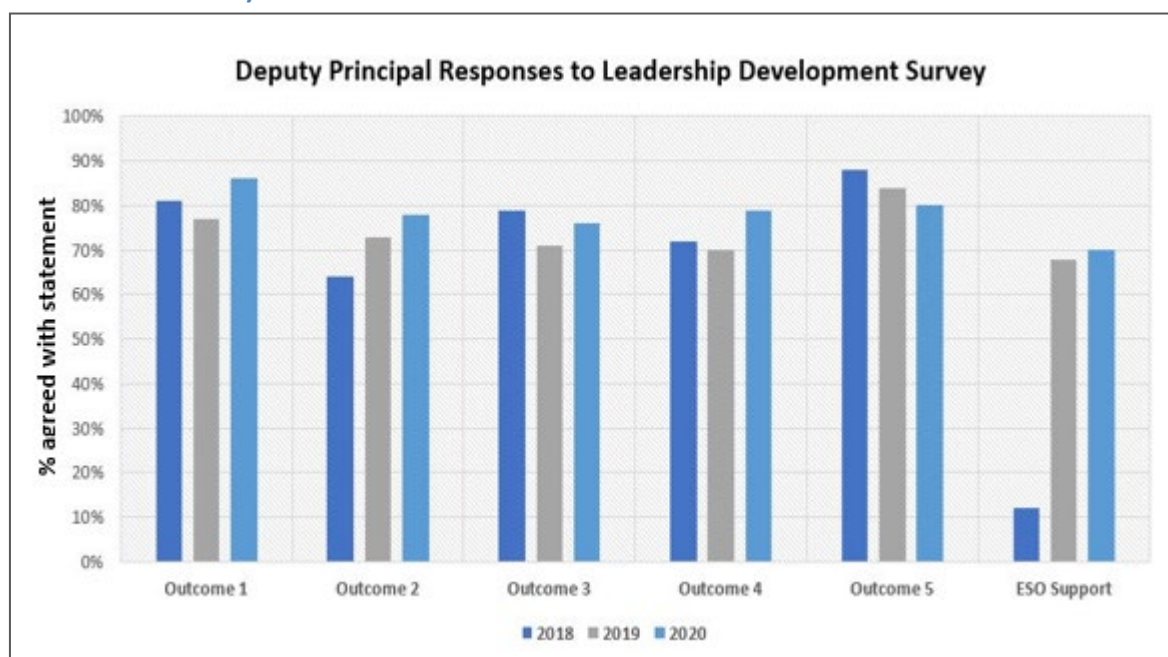
- 3.97 Figures 3-2 and 3-3 summarise the feedback data that has been captured in a series of surveys of principals and deputy principals between 2018 and 2020, against each of the Leadership Development Strategy outcomes. The information demonstrates that the Leadership Development Strategy has contributed to some shifts in leadership practice that facilitate improved quality teaching practices in ACT public schools. Notably, there is a significant increase in the perceptions of the quality of support from Education Support Office through these activities.

**Figure 3-2 Leadership Development Series principal survey responses (2018-2020)**



Source: Education Directorate survey data

**Figure 3-3 Leadership Development Series deputy principal survey responses (2018-2020)**



Source: Education Directorate survey data

- 3.98 Through this initiative the implementation of development activities for school executives (School Leader C) has been commenced but not yet been fully actioned. Through focus group discussions with School Leader C staff it was apparent that most were not aware of the supports under the Leadership Development Strategy with two of six groups of School Leaders referencing the professional learning supports within the strategy. Education Support Office representatives advised that some scheduled activities were cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic but were intended to be recommenced in 2021.
- 3.99 Unlike for principals, there is no development program for new school executives (School Leader C staff). This is a significant cohort of over 400 staff, that are expected to have a significant impact on improving student outcomes through leading classroom teachers. There was also a recognition from school executives that offsite training for all school leaders was sometimes impractical due to their required onsite presence to support teachers with everyday classroom issues such as student behavioural management or back-filling of teaching staff in lieu of available relief teachers. The Education Support Office has sought feedback via survey to determine the best mix of face-to-face and remote activities for the development program.
- 3.100 In 2018 the Education Directorate committed \$5.4 million to a three-year Leadership Development Strategy; the *Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Program*. A series of professional learning supports have been designed to support principals and school leaders through the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan, including professional learning for all principals (which has an aspect that focuses on new principals), developing finance, human resources and business skills, an annual leadership symposium and a biennial leadership conference. This is being supported with a principal and deputy

principal coaching and mentoring program that involves experienced and retired principals providing support to upskill principals and deputy principals in leadership practice. Feedback data from attendees shows that the Leadership Development Strategy has contributed to some shifts in leadership practice that facilitate improved quality teaching practices in ACT public schools. Notably, there is a significant increase in the perceptions of the quality of support from Education Support Office through these activities.

- 3.101 Through focus group discussions with school executives (School Leader C staff) it was apparent that most executives were not aware of the supports under the Leadership Development Strategy, with only two of six groups of School Leaders referencing the professional learning supports within the strategy. While the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan has an aspect that specifically focuses on new principals there is no similar approach for new school executives (School Leader C staff). While there are supports available to all school leaders, and some of the key activities under the Strategy that were planned for commencement in 2020 were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a significant cohort of over 400 staff. This cohort of school executives is expected to have a significant impact on improving student outcomes through leading classroom teachers.

#### RECOMMENDATION 6 SCHOOL EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Education Directorate should establish a development program for new school executives (School Leader C staff) that upskills these staff on the instructional leadership practices of the *Empowered Learning Professional Leadership Plan* during the initial years of their appointment.

### Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers

- 3.102 National certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers was established by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership in 2012 as a method of formally recognising exemplary teachers who demonstrate quality teaching practices and leadership in schools.<sup>23</sup> The initiative aims to provide a reliable indication of quality pedagogical practice as framed by the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*<sup>24</sup> and promote the systematic improvement of teaching quality in Australian schooling. Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers are expected to lead this work from the classroom by displaying high quality teaching practice to other teachers, school leaders and the community. Such

<sup>23</sup> Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership. (2012). Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia [online] Available at: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/certification-of-highly-accomplished-and-lead-teachers-in-australia> (Accessed 12 February 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership. (2011). Australian Professional Standards for Teachers [online] Available at: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards> (Accessed 30 April 2020)

practice also aligns with Domain 5 of the *National School Improvement Tool* in developing an expert teaching team.

- 3.103 The Education Directorate has emphasised the importance of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools. The *Future of Education* states:

Teachers and School Leaders, certified at the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher standard play a vital role in ensuring that every teacher in every school experiences high-quality professional support.

- 3.104 The *Future of Education* committed to 'work towards ensuring a highly accomplished and lead teacher is in every school' by the end of its first phase in 2020. At this time, 32.9 percent of ACT public schools had at least one school leader or teacher on staff with the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification.

- 3.105 ACT public school teachers can apply for the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification through the ACT Teacher Quality Institute for a paid fee totaling \$1300. Applicants are required to undertake an extensive three-phased modular process that requires them to reflect on their teaching practice and provide evidence demonstrating excellence in the quality of their teaching that is assessed as satisfying professional practice criteria at either of the two higher career stages (Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher) described in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. Successful progression through each stage of the certification is assessed by two trained external assessors appointed by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. Once certification is granted, a teacher will maintain accreditation for a fixed five-year period. Renewal of the certification requires re-assessment against the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher Standards through written statements and referees with knowledge of the applicant's recent teaching practice. As a reward for obtaining the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification, ACT public school teachers are remunerated with an additional salary increment, or a fixed payment of \$6,499 in 2021 for teachers at the top of their salary progression structure.

- 3.106 Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public school settings interviewed for the purpose of this audit have been formally recognised by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute as a 'teacher who provide[d] evidence from multiple sources that [has been] assessed as satisfying professional practice criteria at either of the two higher-level career stages described in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers'.<sup>25</sup> It is also recognised that the process of becoming a Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher represented a valuable professional development activity as it encouraged participants to be intentional in developing their practice across all of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

- 3.107 Despite this advanced knowledge and additional remuneration, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools do not have defined roles or responsibilities beyond

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<sup>25</sup> ACT Teacher Quality Institute. (2017). *National Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers policy*. [online] Available at: [https://www.tqi.act.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1088913/National-Certification-of-Highly-Accomplished-and-Lead-Teachers-Policy-Approved-20-June-2017.pdf](https://www.tqi.act.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1088913/National-Certification-of-Highly-Accomplished-and-Lead-Teachers-Policy-Approved-20-June-2017.pdf) Accessed 16 March 2021.

that of their classroom teacher band. The *2018-2021 Education and Training Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement* states 'teachers who achieve certification at the higher career stages of the Standards will be encouraged to take up leadership roles in modelling exemplary teaching practice and in building capacity for excellent teaching within schools and across the system'. This is the extent to which the Education Directorate has articulated its expectation for this role. No further guidance is provided as to what these leadership roles are expected to achieve, and no resourcing is identified (including classroom release time) to achieve these expectations.

- 3.108 School leaders, including qualified ACT Teacher Quality Institute assessors, as well as Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers advised during focus group discussions that higher-level certified individuals are used variably in ACT public schools and their impact was limited by a lack of resources and time. Teachers with the certification advised that they are not used as a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teachers in their school, with any work pertaining to their certification occurring as self-directed initiatives. This is in contrast with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's guidance that states Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers should be used to 'support other teachers, lead initiatives and improvement and champion expertise' by school leaders who 'create roles, allocate time and resources and initiate inter-school collaboration'.<sup>26</sup> A Highly Accomplished Teacher advised their role was limited, stating:

We become the 'go to' experts on the teaching standards and teaching staff will often informally request advice regarding their [ACT Teacher Quality Institute mandatory professional learning] reflections or methods in which they can implement the standards into their teaching practices.

- 3.109 A principal interviewed for the purpose of the audit advised that Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers often are employed as school leaders or have multiple high-level, time intensive and administrative roles in schools unrelated to their higher certification level. Feedback from one principal indicated that a lack of defined and resourced leadership and learning responsibilities led to these teachers having the same classroom hours as their classroom teacher colleagues, which limits their ability to complete their assigned leadership tasks including coaching and mentoring teachers to drive improvements in practice.
- 3.110 There was a lack of interest from teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of this audit in obtaining the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. Teachers and school leaders repeatedly identified the cost of obtaining the certification, the workload associated with obtaining the certification and the lack of perceived benefits from having the certification as the major disincentives in pursuing the accreditation. Furthermore, the teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of the audit questioned the purpose and effectiveness of the certification, advising that it does not necessarily lead to promotional

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<sup>26</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2018). *Getting the best from your teachers- A principals' guide to national teacher certification*. [online] available at: [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/school-leadership/school-leader-guide-\(online\).pdf?sfvrsn=d113f63c\\_14](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/school-leadership/school-leader-guide-(online).pdf?sfvrsn=d113f63c_14) Accessed 16 March 2021.

or enhanced career opportunities. A principal interviewed for the audit identified that they have a number of teachers who could obtain Lead Teacher certification if they undertook the process, but that there is resistance from the teachers because of the time involved. The principal advised:

'We have offered [to support teachers] through the process – it's up to them and I am not pressuring them – in the current state of teaching, which is exhausting, I see nothing that would make this more attractive for teachers'.

- 3.111 The intent of the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher certifications is highly compatible with school improvement activities, particularly as a support to developing an expert teaching team as recommended under Domain 5 of the National School Improvement Tool. As there are a limited number of Directors of School Improvement and instructional mentors from the Education Support Office, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers could be a useful support to assist school principals in pursuing their school improvement priorities. The role of these teachers in promoting teaching quality could include working with Directors of School Improvement, Instructional Mentors and principals to better understand the school's improvement needs, mentor and coach teachers to improve practice that leads to improved student outcomes, and network with other professionals to source better practice for use in their school settings.
- 3.112 National certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers was established by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership in 2012 as a method of formally recognising exemplary teachers who demonstrate quality teaching practices and leadership in schools. The *Future of Education* sought to 'work towards ensuring a highly accomplished and lead teacher is in every school' by the end of its first phase in 2020. At this time, 32.9 percent of ACT public schools had at least one school leader or teacher on staff with the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. The Education Directorate established a professional learning community to create a networking and sharing space for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers, but its implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.113 Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools do not have defined roles or responsibilities beyond that of their classroom teacher band. The *2018-2021 Education and Training Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement* states 'teachers who achieve certification at the higher career stages of the Standards will be encouraged to take up leadership roles in modelling exemplary teaching practice and in building capacity for excellent teaching within schools and across the system'. No further guidance is provided as to what these leadership roles are expected to achieve, and no resourcing is identified (including classroom release time) to achieve these expectations.
- 3.114 School leaders, including qualified ACT Teacher Quality Institute assessors, as well as Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers advised during focus group discussions that they are used variably in ACT public schools and their impact was limited by a lack of resources and time. There was a lack of interest from teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of this audit in obtaining the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification. Teachers and school leaders perceived the cost of obtaining the certification, the workload associated

with obtaining the certification and the lack of perceived benefits from having the certification as the major disincentives in pursuing the accreditation. Furthermore, the teachers and school leaders interviewed as part of the audit questioned Education Directorate's use of teachers with this certification, advising that it does not necessarily lead to promotional or enhanced career opportunities.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7      HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED AND LEAD TEACHERS**

The Education Directorate should clearly identify and articulate its expectations for the role and responsibilities of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in ACT public schools. The role could include working with principals and Education Support Office to support school improvement activities, and better using the school network model to connect with other professionals to promote better teaching practice in their school settings.

## 4 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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- 4.1 Professional learning and development is an important function in improving the quality of teaching practices in schools. This chapter considers the Education Directorate's activities to improve teaching quality in ACT public schools through a centralised suite of professional learning programs delivered by the Education Support Office, as well as the professional learning and development activities facilitated within schools.

### Summary

### Conclusion

The Education Support Office has developed professional learning programs, supports and resources for ACT public school teachers and leaders to improve teaching practices. The Education Support Office organises and manages professional learning programs that are intended for use across all ACT public schools, but there is variability in teachers' and school leaders' awareness of the programs. This reduces the effectiveness of the programs to improve teaching quality. Where programs are accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and teachers make use of them, there is evidence that the programs help improve teaching practice at the school level. However, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the programs are still maturing and there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the programs are having a system-level impact on teaching quality in ACT public schools.

Professional learning communities are a mandated professional development practice in ACT public schools. They involve school leaders and teachers collaborating to address the immediate educational needs of their students. The Education Directorate has implemented the 'Spiral of Inquiry' and 'Multiple Sources of Evidence' research-based better practice approaches to guide ACT public school teachers and leaders' engagement in professional learning communities. However, schools considered as part of the audit did not consistently use these supports. There is a need for more support for all schools to implement these approaches in their professional learning communities. Annual professional learning programs required by the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* were not consistently implemented in the schools considered as part of the audit or used to focus professional learning communities on improving student educational outcomes through improved teaching quality. Consistent and reliable implementation of professional learning communities could help to establish their role as the primary accountability mechanism for improving student outcomes at the school level.

The ACT Teacher Quality Institute receives rich data on ACT public school teachers and leader professional learning activities. However, the Education Directorate has not sought advice from the ACT Teacher Quality Institute or requested data for the purpose of holistically monitoring or evaluating the impact of teacher professional learning programs on improving the quality of teaching practices. This impairs the Education Support Office's efforts to plan and deliver professional learning to improve teaching quality.

The New Educator Support Program is a recognised support under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* for developing new teachers in the first three years of their career. Provisions include a five-day central induction, reduced face-to-face teaching hours and six days of classroom release to facilitate professional learning activities. However, these supports are not implemented in a way that is accessible for all New Educators. The *New Educator Support Guidelines* and the *New Educator Support Plan* provide a framework for implementation, but there is a lack of clarity associated with common expectations for New Educators' development throughout the three years of the New Educator Support Program. Furthermore, the Education Directorate does not have sufficient data or mechanisms to evaluate the efficiency or effectiveness of the New Educator Support Program, or whether New Educators are reliably accessing their enterprise agreement entitlements.

## Key findings

### Paragraph

Since 2018 the Education Support Office has been taking an increasing role in the development and implementation of professional learning programs and resources that are made available across all ACT public schools. The programs aim to address system-wide needs that have been identified in previous reviews or through school improvement activities. The key programs that have been established since this time are: the Cultural Integrity Program; the Academy of Future Skills; the Affiliated Schools Program; the Early Years Literacy Initiative; the Digital Solutions Program; Positive Behaviours for Learning; and Enabling Pedagogies. These programs have established some useful practices to improve teaching quality in schools. Three of the seven programs are fully accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and two are partially accredited.

4.35

The most consistently valued programs by teachers were programs that included resources that could be used in classes and used coaches or mentors to support teachers to improve their practice. While programs such as Positive Behaviours for Learning and Cultural Integrity had a high level of teacher awareness and satisfaction, teachers were less aware of newer programs such as the Affiliated Schools Program, the Academy of Future Skills and Enabling Pedagogies. Professional learning resources are being increasingly made available through the Education Directorate's Service Portal, but there is a low level of awareness of this resource.

4.36

The *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* requires principals to develop an annual professional learning program for their school leaders and teaching staff. The annual program is required to integrate professional learning community programs and school-led professional learning activities. None of the six schools who participated in the audit could provide evidence demonstrating they had consistently implemented annual professional learning programs for each year between 2014 and 2020 as required by the two most recent enterprise agreements.

4.44

A review of the schools' professional learning programs showed there was variability in the quality and comprehensiveness of the programs and their implementation. Two of the five schools' programs did not reference the school's professional learning community and three schools could not demonstrate that the activities in their program had been completed as planned. The enterprise agreement requirement of principals to develop an annual professional learning program is not integrated into the school improvement process. As a result, schools are not effectively using their mandatory annual professional learning programs under the enterprise agreement to demonstrate how professional learning is contributing to progress towards school improvement priorities.

4.45

Professional learning communities are a method of school improvement where groups of teachers meet regularly to work in a structured and collaborative process to improve student outcomes. ACT public school teachers and school leaders' participation in professional learning communities is a requirement of the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*. All six ACT public schools considered as part of the audit had implemented professional learning communities, which focused on improving student outcomes. Documents from schools showed that themes explored in professional learning communities are derived from each school's improvement priorities outlined in its school improvement plan. However, a review of planning documentation for professional learning communities and their presentations reflecting the findings or impact the process has had on student outcomes, as well as discussions with school focus groups showed there was wide variability in the quality and rigour of professional learning communities across ACT public schools.

4.57

Experienced teaching staff who participated in the audit commonly voiced a frustration that the professional learning community model is not facilitated by the Education Directorate to take place across networks of schools. This was particularly noticeable in high schools and colleges where one teacher in the whole school may be responsible for a school subject, and was not able to easily collaborate with other like teachers. Evaluation mechanisms of professional learning community impact were highly variable across all settings as no formal requirement or guidance is provided by the Education Support Office. Two schools had designed their own evaluation mechanisms to guide improvement in professional learning community processes and ensure staff feedback informed future processes. Directors of School Improvement had designed a simple assessment tool based on their observations of effective professional learning communities in ACT public schools. This tool gave sound examples of what effective professional learning communities looked like. However, schools were not aware of this tool or other resources to identify how they could improve the effectiveness of their professional learning communities.

4.58

All teachers in public schools must be registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and complete 20 hours of professional development annually. Teachers are also required to record their professional development with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute through a dedicated online learning portal. Data associated with ACT public school teachers' professional development has been captured for over ten years since the establishment of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute, but the Education Directorate does not have access to a consolidated view of this data to:

4.67

- identify trends in teacher professional learning; or
- help inform how professional learning impacts on student outcomes.

The Education Directorate does receive data on ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited programs it runs on an activity-by-activity basis and this can help inform the development of individual programs and give feedback on the quality of each accredited professional learning activity. However, there is no consolidated view of data for all programs that allows the Education Directorate to more broadly monitor the quality of its professional learning programs across ACT public schools, or their impact on student educational outcomes. 4.68

Some schools have attempted to receive recognition for their teachers in completing school-led professional development; two of the six school leadership teams advised that they sought to have activities during the two days prior to the commencement of the school year recognised as accredited learning, but reflected this was an onerous process. Furthermore, not all professional learning programs implemented by the Education Support Office were recognised accredited learning with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. For example, mentoring activities under the Affiliated Schools Program were not recognised as accredited professional learning. Similarly, three of eight of the professional learning programs associated with the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program are not accredited for registration purposes with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. While this does not mean that the programs are of lesser value and teachers can record their participation as teacher-identified professional learning for registration purposes, there is a missed opportunity for the Education Directorate to receive specific and targeted feedback from teachers through professional learning evaluations, which would be the case if the program was registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. 4.69

Analysis of school expenditure data for the six schools participating in this audit showed that there was substantial variation in the amount spent by schools on fee for service professional learning. The amount spent on fee for service professional learning varied between \$733 and \$1,409 per full-time equivalent teacher or school leader. A number of school principals consulted as part of the audit, as well as some industry peak bodies advised that the funds provided to schools to support fee for service professional learning was insufficient to meet the needs of teachers. Principals advised that they used more than their notional allocation to allow staff to pursue professional learning opportunities. The Education Support Office has recognised these issues and has sought to provide the new universally offered programs across all ACT public schools in order to provide scale, with the expectation that school professional learning activities could focus on professional learning communities, and meeting specific needs of individual teachers that could not be fully addressed through these programs. An evaluation of the first phase of the *Future of Education* reported teachers' perception of the Education Directorate's commitment to professional learning. It noted 79 percent of teachers reporting strong and consistent support for professional learning in 2018, which declined slightly to 76 percent in 2020. 4.78

Graduate teachers are considered 'New Educators' for their first three years in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has demonstrated its commitment to the development of New Educators in the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate* 4.86

(Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022 through the New Educator Support Program, which comprises a range of supports such as: a five-day centralised induction prior to the commencement of the school year; reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate support and mentoring; six New Educator Support Days to be used to facilitate professional learning and development; and the provision of coaching and mentorship from experienced teaching colleagues. These supports and high level suggestions for New Educator development activities for schools to provide are documented in the *New Educator Support Guidelines* (March 2020). A template plan is also provided for schools to agree development activities with their New Educators. Schools also have an accountability to apply these entitlements through the annual completion of a *School Annual EA Implementation Plan* checklist which is co-signed by an Australian Education Union delegate.

Despite this policy and compliance framework, there is no visibility as to whether New Educators are receiving these entitlements and whether they are being used effectively across the Education Directorate. This presents a risk that New Educators will receive inconsistent access to professional development across their first three years as an ACT public school teacher. In this respect there is no:

4.87

- analysis or confirmation of how New Educators use reduced teaching hours and New Educator Support Days to improve their teaching practice; and
- examination of the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring activities for New Educators.

A mandatory five-day centralised induction is held for all first-year New Educators prior to the commencement of the school year. According to the Education Directorate's *New Educator Guidelines*, the purpose of the induction is to ensure all New Educators are 'effectively supported, prepared and informed of their responsibilities and entitlements as they begin in their roles'. The centralised induction for New Educators is not accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and therefore cannot be counted towards the accredited training requirement under their annual registration requirements. In focus groups conducted for the purpose of this audit, there was persistent negative feedback regarding the delivery of the centralised induction from all levels of school leaders and teaching staff, including New Educators. This feedback centred on the timing of this training before New Educators start teaching, and this should instead predominantly occur after they have an opportunity to teach and understand what they need to learn to improve the quality of their teaching practice.

4.92

New Educators are expected to have reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate enhanced support and mentoring. This allowance is calculated as a reduced number of minutes per week of classroom time that reduces as the New Educator progresses through the development program. It is designed to provide schools with a provision of time for coaching and mentoring support programs designed to meet the development needs of each New Educator. The specific organisational details are decided by individual school management to allow program flexibility to meet the needs of each New Educator over time. School leaders and New Educators who participated in focus groups for the purpose of this audit advised that the provision of additional classroom release hours for New Educators were largely used to catch

4.97

up on administrative tasks rather than for coaching and mentoring purposes. New Educators and school leaders also advised that the reduction in face-to-face teaching hours was largely provided on an adhoc basis. School leaders advised that making time for New Educators to collaborate with their experienced teacher mentor within school hours is difficult and considered impractical within school settings. New Educators reflected that the additional time allowance was not allocated in a consistent or structured way that would assist them to improve the quality of their teaching practice. The allowance of reduced face-to-face teaching hours for new educators is not effectively implemented in all ACT public schools. Not all new educators can access this time, and it is not consistently used to improve teaching quality.

The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018 – 2022* provides for six additional classroom release days for each New Educator. These can be taken as two leave days for each year of the three year program. While New Educators and school leaders in all schools were aware of the provision of New Educator Support Days, focus groups involving both cohorts showed a lack of understanding of the exact allocation of days and the circumstances in which to use them. School leaders and New Educators reflected that accessing the provision in full was impractical due to staffing pressures including the difficulty in obtaining relief teaching staff. 4.101

The combination of supports provided under the New Educator Support Program are not evaluated to determine whether they are effective in developing a series of expected pedagogical competencies in New Educators. Documenting expected pedagogical competencies that New Educators should display at the program's completion, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the program could allow the Education Directorate to determine whether there are barriers for to accessing these supports. 4.102

## Professional learning in ACT public schools

- 4.2 The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has developed a *Charter for Professional Learning* that identifies the importance of professional learning to improve teaching practice and student outcomes.<sup>27</sup> Teacher and school leader professional learning is made up of formal and informal activities that aim to improve professional knowledge, practice and engagement.
- 4.3 A world-wide survey of teachers conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2011 reported that individual or collaborative research,

<sup>27</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2018). *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*. [online] Available at: [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/national-policy-framework/australian-charter-for-the-professional-learning-of-teachers-and-school-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=6f7eff3c\\_6](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/national-policy-framework/australian-charter-for-the-professional-learning-of-teachers-and-school-leaders.pdf?sfvrsn=6f7eff3c_6) Accessed 9 February 2021 (p.6)

higher-qualification courses and informal dialogue have the greatest impact on improving pedagogical practices.<sup>28</sup>

## ACT Teacher Quality Institute

- 4.4 To practice as a teacher and school leader in the ACT, teachers must be registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI). Part of the requirement to maintain teaching registration is to complete 20 hours of professional learning annually. Teachers must then record their reflection of how the professional learning can improve their practice.
- 4.5 ACT public school teachers and school leaders who participated in focus groups for the purpose of this audit advised professional learning is most effective and has the highest value when:
- it is an area the teacher has self-identified for development;
  - it is delivered by facilitators who demonstrate recent and relevant expertise in teaching; and
  - the content is directly applicable to their classroom setting or helps meet the individual needs of their students.
- 4.6 ACT public school teachers access professional learning through two key sources:
- Education Support Office programs - the Education Support Office provides a suite of centralised programs available for the consumption of ACT public school teachers and school leaders; and
  - School led activities - school leaders may design or externally source programs that meet the individual development needs of their teachers, including through Professional Learning Communities and school-based coaching and mentoring activities.

## Education Support Office programs

- 4.7 Since 2018 the Education Support Office has been taking an increasing role in the development and implementation of professional learning programs and resources that are made available across all ACT public schools. This has been in response to a series of reviews which highlighted the need for more support from the Education Support Office for schools to lead system-wide improvements, rather than placing an emphasis on the autonomy of schools to individually pursue efforts to improve student educational outcomes. These reviews included evaluations of school reviews by the Australian Council of Educational Research, a 2015 review of school improvement activities by Professor Brian Caldwell and

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<sup>28</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2011). *Building a High-Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from around the world, background report for the International Summit on the Teaching Profession*. Paris: OECD publishing. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518775.pdf>

the ACT Auditor-General's *Report No.4/2017: Performance Information in ACT Public Schools*.

- 4.8 The Education Support Office programs aim to address system-wide needs that have been identified in previous reviews or through school improvement activities discussed in Chapter 3. The key programs that have been established since this time are:
- the Cultural Integrity Program;
  - the Academy of Future Skills;
  - the Affiliated Schools Program;
  - the Early Years Literacy Initiative;
  - the Digital Solutions Program;
  - Positive Behaviours for Learning Program; and
  - Enabling Pedagogies.

### Cultural Integrity

- 4.9 The Cultural Integrity Program aims to improve inclusion in ACT public schools, with a focus on supporting the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The program includes professional learning support to improve teaching quality through a number of activities such as online courses, face-to-face workshops, and the establishment of an online community for ACT public school teachers.
- 4.10 Between 2018-19 and 2019-20 193 staff completed an online cultural competence course with supplementary face-to-face workshops. Professional learning is also targeted at principals, school leaders and new educators through specific events and symposiums. A significant achievement of the program has been to establish an online community of approximately a quarter of all ACT public school teachers to share teaching and professional learning resources, including demonstrational videos and other content which can be re-used in classrooms.
- 4.11 To measure the impact of this program, in 2018 a cultural integrity domain was added to the School Review process in order to measure how each school has progressed in establishing culturally safe learning environments and practices. Through a four-point rating scale schools are asked to self-assess their cultural integrity practices (from 'enquiring' at the lowest to 'leading' at the highest), including specific consideration of how the school is teaching with cultural integrity. This has been used for three School Review cycles, and schools have consistently rated themselves at the two lowest levels of the self-assessment tool as 'enquiring' to 'developing'.
- 4.12 Despite these low self-assessments across the public school system, teaching staff involved in focus groups in all six schools involved in the audit were aware and reflected positively on the Cultural Integrity Program, and the ability to use shared resources from other schools through a digital platform to use in their own lessons.

## Academy of Future Skills

- 4.13 The Academy of Future Skills is a \$5.26 million program over four years between 2018-19 and 2021-22 that seeks to improve teaching quality in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) across ACT public schools. Its aim is to build the skills of teachers to confidently teach STEM curriculum through professional learning events. It also seeks to partner specialist STEM teachers with teachers in schools. This partnership involvement can include providing resources and instruments to teach lessons, as well as working with teachers in delivering lessons in schools.
- 4.14 The Academy commenced in 2019 with a focus on facilitated mentoring activities for 89 teachers in 17 schools. This expanded during 2020 to working with 143 teachers across 30 schools. Engagements with teachers can be relatively short and contained, with a focus on particular needs such as loaning scientific equipment, through to term-long engagements to build science inquiry skills that are planned with teachers to determine curriculum areas to be covered and resources required. This work also includes consideration of how student learning will be evidenced and assessed.
- 4.15 A survey of teachers was conducted in 2019 in relation to the Academy's mentoring activities. The survey considered teacher attitudes to teaching STEM subjects both before and after engaging with the academy. Although the surveys only involved a small number of teachers, the evaluation identified that, after engaging with the Academy:
- 83 percent of respondents were more confident to plan and teach STEM subjects;
  - 75 percent of teachers reported being more confident with STEM content knowledge and teaching scientific inquiry; and
  - benefits to teacher assessment practices and use of digital technology were also noted in teacher comments in response to the survey.
- 4.16 To build teaching quality further, the Academy has developed professional learning programs that are to be delivered at its two learning centres as well as online. Four programs on different areas of science inquiry were held between October 2019 and October 2020 and involved 141 attendees in total. All sessions were accredited programs with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. The programs were targeted to help teachers understand the services of the Academy as well as demonstrate practical ways to build science inquiry into units of work.
- 4.17 Surveys were conducted of participants across the four professional learning programs. Ninety-one survey responses were received, all of which identified that the participants gained useful knowledge and understanding from the programs. Survey respondents also reported that the programs addressed the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, and were appropriate and valuable, as well as enhancing or affirming for their professional practice. At this stage of the academy's implementation, no data is available on whether this teacher confidence in STEM content has translated to improved learning outcomes for students. Focus groups with ACT public school teachers in the six schools involved in the

audit indicated there was a low level of awareness for the Academy with staff at only one school being aware of the Academy.

### **Affiliated Schools Program**

- 4.18 The Affiliated Schools Program commenced in 2018. It is managed by the Education Directorate in conjunction with the University of Canberra. The Program is supported by a memorandum of understanding between the Education Directorate and the University of Canberra.
- 4.19 The Affiliated Schools Program has two key streams of activity:
- building the skills of pre-service teachers to prepare them for teaching in ACT public schools; and
  - building the skills of experienced teachers through masterclass, postgraduate and teacher-as-researcher programs.
- 4.20 As at 2020, ten ACT public schools are ‘full program’ schools that take up all elements of the Affiliated Schools Program including through:
- full participation in pre-service and in-service teacher development activities;
  - receipt of funding of \$50,000 for a school coordinator for administering the program;
  - release of teachers for research and professional learning; or
  - purchase of research expertise.
- 4.21 A further 15 schools are affiliated schools that participate in some of the elements of the program. These schools are expected to transition to become full program schools by 2023 through a phased implementation.
- 4.22 There was evidence that the program was effective in introducing pre-service teachers to the supports to improve teaching quality in ACT public schools. The Affiliated Schools Program provided training on behaviour management to University of Canberra students studying their Bachelor of Education degree in Term 3, 2020. The content of this program was developed in the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program (discussed at paragraph 4.28) and delivered by Education Directorate staff. Providing professional learning on Education Directorate supports at this early stage may help future teachers be more familiar with these supports and increase the speed at which they become highly effective teachers. Programs to assist with mentoring and supervision of pre-service teachers were also in place through professional learning for experienced teachers.
- 4.23 While the program is early in its implementation phase, performance measures have been designed for each component of the program as part of a strategic plan. Short term and medium-term measures are identified. Short term measures are mostly activity-based, although two measures of student and teacher satisfaction are also included. Medium term measures are more outcome-focused but focus on teacher outcomes. Two measures for

student outcomes are identified in the strategic plan, with the supporting evaluation methodology based on students' NAPLAN results and school satisfaction surveys to measure impact. This may expose the Education Directorate to the risk of being unable to measure and demonstrate the impact of the Affiliated Schools Program. There is also a relatively low level of awareness of the program in ACT public schools at this time, with only three of six schools involved in the audit aware of the program, particularly in regard to the teacher-as-researcher and professional learning supports through this program. Only two of the six schools considered as part of the audit had direct involvement with the program as affiliated schools.

### Early Years Literacy Initiative

- 4.24 The Early Years Literacy Initiative involves engaging an education researcher to partner with Education Directorate instructional mentors to design student literacy assessment and monitoring tools based on an evidence-based series of literacy practices. These resources are then rolled out to schools with accompanying mentoring for school leaders and teaching staff to improve literacy education practice.
- 4.25 An initial pilot of the initiative involving two phases totalling 14 schools was conducted in 2017 and 2018. The results of student assessments following the pilot demonstrated growth in 12 schools of the number of students who showed expected or better learning progress in literacy in the following school year. For eight schools in the first phase of the initiative, the number of students meeting or exceeding literacy benchmarks increased by 15 percentage points on average across these schools. For the remaining six schools in the second phase, there was an improvement in the number of students meeting or exceeding these benchmarks of three percentage points on average across these schools. The program has since been rolled out to all 50 ACT public primary schools, and related development included as part of new educator professional learning.

### Digital Solutions Program

- 4.26 The Education Directorate developed the Digital Solutions Program as part of its assistance to schools, students, and families to transition to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from 24 March 2020. Part of this assistance included tools, guides, resources, and professional learning for teachers to develop their teaching practice in this environment. An online teacher resources centre was established as well as a digital professional learning community for teachers to use and collaborate with 2,500 other teachers across the ACT. Professional learning was also accredited through the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.
- 4.27 During the pupil free period of Term 1 2020, a total of 50 professional learning sessions were run; this involved over 6,000 participants, which comprised of over 1,000 teachers who attended multiple sessions on different aspects of remote learning. These sessions were accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. Of the 358 teachers who had submitted satisfaction surveys for the programs, at least 98 percent found the course addressed the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, and that the program provided useful knowledge, appropriate and valuable content, and enhanced or affirmed teacher

professional practice. No further analysis of the effect on student outcomes from this professional learning is currently available.

### Positive Behaviours for Learning Program

- 4.28 The Positive Behaviours for Learning Program is available in all schools. The intent of the program is to develop a framework in schools to support wellbeing and positive behaviour. Part of the program involves professional learning and coaches working with schools and teachers to implement the Positive Behaviours for Learning framework in their school. The coach works with the school leadership and a school-appointed coach, who then works within the school to implement the program's recommended teaching and learning practices. This professional learning supports teachers who are expected to have a leading role in setting high expectations for behaviour in their school. Five of eight of the program's professional learning supports are accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.
- 4.29 An evaluation of the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program was conducted to determine whether it had an impact on student outcomes. The evaluation found that the program improved student mental health and learning engagement. It was also found to improve perceptions of school climate and school identification which are shown to also improve student educational outcomes.
- 4.30 Comments from focus groups of teaching staff in five of the six schools considered as part of the audit reflected positively on the Positive Behaviour for Schools Program, and teaching staff positively reflected on the availability of coaches in combination with a 'train the trainer' approach to upskill a teacher in the school to assist with implementing the program for the school community.

### Enabling Pedagogies and the Service Portal

- 4.31 Enabling Pedagogies is a program of work by the Education Directorate that was informed by the *Great Teachers by Design* strategy. It sought to establish a pedagogical framework for ACT public schools. A pedagogical framework sets the expectations for teaching and learning in school settings and seeks to capture the teaching quality expectations for the school's teaching staff.
- 4.32 As an outcome of the Enabling Pedagogies program of work, the Education Directorate has designed the ACT Public Schools Pedagogical Framework Guide. The guide places an expectation on schools to design a framework that is compatible with the system-wide pedagogical framework and that aligns with the *National School Improvement Tool*. The Framework Guide aligns well with the *National School Improvement Tool*, and comprehensive supporting resources are given to schools to help them develop their own pedagogical frameworks.
- 4.33 To assist schools and teachers to develop high quality teaching practices, the Education Directorate has also established an online resource of curriculum material that is aligned with the *National School Improvement Tool* on a dedicated Service Portal available to all ACT

public school teachers. Coaches are also available to assist schools and teachers to improve teaching quality in each of the six domains of the program, such as assessment and use of evidence. The Service Portal which contains the content for the Enabling Pedagogies program was recently launched at the time of the audit and only one school was aware of the service at that time.

- 4.34 Professional learning has been planned to support the Enabling Pedagogies program of work, but has not yet commenced. The Education Directorate has conducted initial user testing of the Service Portal with school leaders and teaching staff, and this has generated some positive feedback on the quality of this service.
- 4.35 Since 2018 the Education Support Office has been taking an increasing role in the development and implementation of professional learning programs and resources that are made available across all ACT public schools. The programs aim to address system-wide needs that have been identified in previous reviews or through school improvement activities. The key programs that have been established since this time are: the Cultural Integrity Program; the Academy of Future Skills; the Affiliated Schools Program; the Early Years Literacy Initiative; the Digital Solutions Program; Positive Behaviours for Learning; and Enabling Pedagogies. These programs have established some useful practices to improve teaching quality in schools. Three of the seven programs are fully accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and two are partially accredited.
- 4.36 The most consistently valued programs by teachers were programs that included resources that could be used in classes and used coaches or mentors to support teachers to improve their practice. While programs such as Positive Behaviours for Learning and Cultural Integrity had a high level of teacher awareness and satisfaction, teachers were less aware of newer programs such as the Affiliated Schools Program, the Academy of Future Skills and Enabling Pedagogies. Professional learning resources are being increasingly made available through the Education Directorate's Service Portal, but there is a low level of awareness of this resource.

## School-based professional learning

### Annual professional learning program

- 4.37 The *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* requires principals to develop an annual professional learning program for their school leaders and teaching staff. (This requirement was also in the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2014-2018*). The annual program is required to integrate professional learning community programs (refer to paragraph 4.46) and school-led professional learning activities.
- 4.38 Principals must allow for two days of professional learning to be conducted before the commencement of each school year. One day of this professional learning should be

dedicated to system or sector priorities, while the second day should be reserved for school-based professional learning activities.

- 4.39 The audit considered whether the six schools considered as part of the audit had developed annual learning programs between 2014 and 2020 as required by the enterprise agreements. Of the six ACT public schools that participated in this audit:
- one school had not developed an annual professional learning program at any time between 2014 and 2020 as required;
  - one school had developed annual professional learning programs for the period between 2015 and 2019;
  - one school had developed annual professional learning programs for the period between 2017 and 2019;
  - one school had developed an annual professional learning program for 2018 only; and
  - two schools had developed annual professional learning programs for 2020 only.
- 4.40 None of the six schools who participated in the audit could provide evidence demonstrating they had consistently implemented annual professional learning programs for each year between 2014 and 2020 as required by the two most recent enterprise agreements.
- 4.41 A review of the schools' professional learning programs showed there was variability in the quality and comprehensiveness of the programs and their implementation. Two of the five schools' programs did not reference the school's professional learning community, despite it accounting for the largest share of time and activity of professional learning in these schools. Three schools could not demonstrate that the activities in their program had been completed as planned. The Education Support Office does not provide any guidance or support to schools with respect to the development of their professional learning programs outside of the requirements contained in the enterprise agreement.
- 4.42 The requirement of principals to develop an annual professional learning program is not integrated into the school improvement process (refer to paragraph 3.24 to 3.76). As a result, schools are not effectively using annual professional learning programs to demonstrate how professional learning is contributing to progress towards school improvement priorities. For example, schools that identify a need to improve literacy outcomes for students in their school improvement and annual action plans (refer to paragraphs 3.45 to 3.58) may not have an accompanying annual professional learning program to address teachers' learning needs required to improve literacy teaching practices. The development and implementation of the annual professional learning programs is not overseen by the Directors of School Improvement or the Education Support Office.
- 4.43 The inclusion of the annual professional learning program in the school improvement process would strengthen its value as an external accountability mechanism for schools. Directors of School Improvement could assess the validity of each school's program in addressing the priorities of school improvement plans and annual action plans. Additionally,

an integrated approach would promote internal accountability in schools. In this approach school leaders would be required to develop annual professional learning programs in response to their school's improvement plan and annual action plan. This would include school leaders developing and implementing an agenda for their professional learning communities (refer to paragraph 4.46), scheduling timely teacher professional learning opportunities and identifying Education Support Office programs or external professional learning and development facilitators that address school improvement priorities.

- 4.44 The *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* requires principals to develop an annual professional learning program for their school leaders and teaching staff. The annual program is required to integrate professional learning community programs and school-led professional learning activities. None of the six schools who participated in the audit could provide evidence demonstrating they had consistently implemented annual professional learning programs for each year between 2014 and 2020 as required by the two most recent enterprise agreements.
- 4.45 A review of the schools' professional learning programs showed there was variability in the quality and comprehensiveness of the programs and their implementation. Two of the five schools' programs did not reference the school's professional learning community and three schools could not demonstrate that the activities in their program had been completed as planned. The enterprise agreement requirement of principals to develop an annual professional learning program is not integrated into the school improvement process. As a result, schools are not effectively using their mandatory annual professional learning programs under the enterprise agreement to demonstrate how professional learning is contributing to progress towards school improvement priorities.

#### RECOMMENDATION 8

#### ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

The Education Directorate should develop a practice for the Education Support Office to oversee:

- a) the completion of each school's annual professional learning program; and
- b) the development of a school's annual professional learning program as part of the school improvement process. The program should identify the development needs of teaching staff in connection with school improvement goals, and the expected impacts on student outcomes.

### Professional Learning Communities

- 4.46 Professional learning communities are a method of school improvement where groups of teachers meet regularly to work in a structured and collaborative process to improve student outcomes. ACT public school teachers and school leaders' participation in professional learning communities is a requirement of the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, which requires schools to use professional learning communities to build 'quality teaching practice'.

### *Spiral of Inquiry and Multiple Sources of Evidence*

- 4.47 Teachers are expected to use professional learning communities to conduct investigations in partnership with colleagues to address educational issues directly relevant to the way in which their own pedagogical practices meet the learning needs of their students. The Education Directorate has introduced a best practice model entitled the 'Spiral of Inquiry' to facilitate a consistent approach in professional learning communities in ACT public schools. This model is designed to focus on student outcomes with short time horizons to plan activities and review their effectiveness, while maintaining enough flexibility in the design to meet the individual needs of school communities.
- 4.48 The Spiral of Inquiry model encourages professional learning communities in ACT public schools to work through iterative five-week long investigations known as 'inquiry spirals' aimed at improving the quality of teaching practices and therefore raising student performance. These investigations centre on asking inquiry-based questions to understand how students are learning, what evidence there is to support this understanding, and what practices have been important to improving student learning.
- 4.49 The Spiral of Inquiry model incorporates the Multiple Sources of Evidence<sup>29</sup> approach, which identifies and uses data sets from four main sources to provide a basis for professional learning communities throughout inquiry spirals. Schools are encouraged through this model to gather data from each of these sources to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors which can affect student outcomes. The four data sources include:
- student learning;
  - demographics;
  - school programs and processes; and
  - perceptions.
- 4.50 The usefulness of using the Multiple Sources of Evidence approach in professional learning communities was confirmed in a focus group with teaching staff. A teacher commented on their utilisation of student achievement data to inform their professional learning community and implement school improvement priorities:

We have evidence which gets linked back to the annual action plan which has whole of school goals, targets and strategies. We all use the same document, then we decide what the strategies will be for those goals. We are very aware of what goes on, and why we are doing it. We all get the chance to be involved and contribute to bigger things and own it.

### *Developing teachers by using professional learning communities*

- 4.51 Training to guide ACT teachers' participation in professional learning communities occurs via a cascading professional learning model employed in the Education Directorate's Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan (refer to paragraph 3.92). Principals and

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<sup>29</sup> Bernhardt, V. (1998). Multiple Measures. [online] Available at: [https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/curriculum/pdf/multiple\\_measures.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/curriculum/pdf/multiple_measures.pdf) Accessed 24 February 2021

deputy principals attended leadership forums on implementing professional learning communities and how to facilitate them through the Spiral of Inquiry model. This knowledge was designed to be passed on to teachers through leadership in professional learning communities in their school setting. Instructional Mentors were also available to provide coaching and mentoring to school leaders identified as requiring targeted support in implementing the Spiral of Inquiry model.

- 4.52 All six ACT public schools considered as part of the audit had implemented professional learning communities, which focused on improving student outcomes. Documents from schools showed that themes explored in professional learning communities are derived from each school's improvement priorities outlined in its school improvement plan, and all schools had considered the Multiple Sources of Evidence approach at least as early as 2018. However, a review of planning documentation for professional learning communities and their presentations reflecting the findings or impact the process has had on student outcomes, as well as discussions with school focus groups showed there was wide variability in the quality and rigour of professional learning communities across ACT public schools. For example:
- direction given to teachers on the expectation of work to be performed in professional learning communities did not consistently outline an agreed upon structure such as that provided by the Spiral of Inquiry model;
  - teachers did not consistently understand the purpose of the work performed in their professional learning community; and
  - evaluations were not consistently performed to gather evidence of the impact of professional learning communities on improving teaching practices and student educational outcomes.
- 4.53 Documentation from the six schools revealed none adhered to the five-week timeframe for professional learning community investigations recommended under the Spiral of Inquiry approach used by the Education Directorate. Instead, topics were generally explored over the course of one year.
- 4.54 There was variability in the extent to which the Education Support Office-supported Spiral of Inquiry approach was implemented across the schools; three of the six schools were using the model to guide their practices. Notably all three of these schools had taken part in a limited coaching program with an educational researcher to work with 11 ACT public schools to implement the Spiral of Inquiry model. The remaining three schools did not use the Spiral of Inquiry approach or an alternative better practice structure to make sure professional learning communities focussed on student outcomes, seeking evidence of impact, and having an inquiry-based approach to knowing why teaching practices have an impact on student learning. All schools reflected positively on the use of 'critical friends' such as educational consultants and instructional mentors to help improve the implementation of professional learning communities in ACT public schools.

- 4.55 Experienced teaching staff who participated in the audit commonly voiced a frustration that the professional learning community model is not facilitated by the Education Directorate to take place across networks of schools. This was particularly noticeable in high schools and colleges where one teacher in the whole school may be responsible for a school subject, and were not able to easily collaborate with other like teachers. A teacher stated:

We are expected to make connections but where is mechanism to collaborate and create a network? I don't know any other teachers for my subject area in [my local area]. The directorate could set up structures to make networking more organic, opening up gateways and they could set up an agenda that we could all [contribute to].

- 4.56 Evaluation mechanisms of professional learning community impact were highly variable across all settings as no formal requirement or guidance is provided by the Education Support Office. Two schools had designed their own evaluation mechanisms to guide improvement in professional learning community processes and ensure staff feedback informed future processes. Directors of School Improvement had designed a simple assessment tool based on their observations of effective professional learning communities in ACT public schools. This tool gave sound examples of what effective professional learning communities looked like. However, schools were not aware of this tool or other resources to identify how they could improve the effectiveness of their professional learning communities.

- 4.57 Professional learning communities are a method of school improvement where groups of teachers meet regularly to work in a structured and collaborative process to improve student outcomes. ACT public school teachers and school leaders' participation in professional learning communities is a requirement of the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*. All six ACT public schools considered as part of the audit had implemented professional learning communities, which focused on improving student outcomes. Documents from schools showed that themes explored in professional learning communities are derived from each school's improvement priorities outlined in its school improvement plan. However, a review of planning documentation for professional learning communities and their presentations reflecting the findings or impact the process has had on student outcomes, as well as discussions with school focus groups showed there was wide variability in the quality and rigour of professional learning communities across ACT public schools.

- 4.58 Experienced teaching staff who participated in the audit commonly voiced a frustration that the professional learning community model is not facilitated by the Education Directorate to take place across networks of schools. This was particularly noticeable in high schools and colleges where one teacher in the whole school may be responsible for a school subject, and was not able to easily collaborate with other like teachers. Evaluation mechanisms of professional learning community impact were highly variable across all settings as no formal requirement or guidance is provided by the Education Support Office. Two schools had designed their own evaluation mechanisms to guide improvement in professional learning community processes and ensure staff feedback informed future processes. Directors of School Improvement had designed a simple assessment tool based on their observations of effective professional learning communities in ACT public schools. This tool gave sound

examples of what effective professional learning communities looked like. However, schools were not aware of this tool or other resources to identify how they could improve the effectiveness of their professional learning communities.

#### RECOMMENDATION 9 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Education Directorate should establish universal professional learning for all school leaders and teachers on the Spiral of Inquiry Model and Multiple Sources of Evidence approach in order to support school leaders to facilitate these activities. This support should focus on increasing understanding and consistency in the quality and impact of professional learning communities for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching practices in all ACT public schools.

#### ACT Teacher Quality Institute data

- 4.59 All teachers in public schools must be registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and complete 20 hours of professional development annually. Teachers are also required to record their professional development with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute through a dedicated online learning portal and in doing so they must reflect on:
- how the activity reinforced their practice;
  - how it aligns with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*;
  - what new knowledge and skills they learnt;
  - how the activity will improve outcomes for students; and
  - how knowledge sharing from the activity can contribute to school improvement.
- 4.60 Principals are then required to verify on an annual basis that the teachers they are responsible for have completed their reflections and the required number of hours of professional learning.
- 4.61 This data has been captured for over ten years since the establishment of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. However, the Education Directorate does not have access to a consolidated view of this data to:
- identify trends in teacher professional learning; or
  - help inform how professional learning impacts on student outcomes.
- 4.62 The Education Directorate does receive data on all ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited programs it runs on an activity-by-activity basis. This can help inform the development of individual programs and give feedback on the quality of each accredited professional learning activity. Each accredited program has a nominated contact officer who is responsible for the activity. This contact officer receives the feedback from teachers who participated in the activity and can use it to evaluate the effectiveness of their particular program. However, there is no consolidated view of data for all programs that allows the

Education Directorate to more broadly monitor the quality of its professional learning programs across ACT public schools. The Education Directorate does not seek advice from, or have effective and regular communication with, the ACT Teacher Quality Institute to determine whether there are opportunities to better use the teacher registration and professional learning process to monitor the quality of teaching in ACT public schools. The ACT Teacher Quality Institute is not invited as a participant to key planning and governance activities to help the Education Directorate plan, deliver and evaluate initiatives to improve teaching quality in public schools.

- 4.63 Principals and teachers who were consulted as part of the audit viewed the professional learning aspects of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute predominantly as a regulatory process, and not as a knowledge source to improve teaching practice. Under phase one of the *Future of Education*, a commitment was made between the Education Directorate and the ACT Teacher Quality Institute to establish a clearing house of excellent practice. The clearing house was envisaged to be a platform through which the ACT Teacher Quality Institute would share examples of excellent practice in ACT schools and contemporary research with school leaders and teachers. As at August 2020 this had only progressed as far as initial discussions between the two organisations. In response to the draft proposed report the ACT Teacher Quality Institute advised that progression of this initiative in 2020 was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ACT Teacher Quality Institute also advised that research activities under the Affiliated Schools Program (discussed at paragraph 4.18), and through networks of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers led by the institute, may also assist in progressing this initiative.
- 4.64 Teachers and school leaders involved in focus groups as part of the audit were unaware that their participation in professional learning communities could be recognised as teacher-identified professional learning for registration purposes. Despite professional learning communities (discussed at paragraph 4.46) being the single common activity for improving the professional knowledge of teachers and lifting teaching quality in all primary schools, high schools and colleges, teachers and school leaders did not understand there were processes to recognise this work as recognised professional learning. All schools had implemented regularly scheduled activities, considered the professional needs of teachers, and included reflective practices as part of professional learning communities. Despite the time and resources invested in these activities, and that they should feature as an important component of a school's annual professional learning plan, schools and teachers reflected in focus groups that they need to find other sources of professional learning outside of these communities to meet their annual requirement for teacher registration purposes. The ACT Teacher Quality Institute has also implemented a process that is intended to facilitate more efficient recognition and reflection of school-based professional learning communities and their contribution to teachers' professional development. Teachers participating in school-based professional learning communities can recognise and reflect how the development in the professional learning community aligns with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* as a group through a single group reflection.

- 4.65 Where schools seek to have their professional learning activities recognised as accredited learning with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute, this could be an onerous and time-consuming process. It was noted that some schools attempt to receive recognition for their teachers in completing school-led professional development. Two of the six school leadership teams advised that they sought to have activities during the two days prior to the commencement of the school year recognized as accredited learning, but reflected this was an onerous process.
- 4.66 Not all professional learning programs implemented by the Education Support Office were recognised accredited learning with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. For example, mentoring activities under the Affiliated Schools Program were not recognised as accredited professional learning. Similarly, three of eight of the professional learning programs associated with the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program (refer to paragraph 4.28) are not accredited for registration purposes with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. This does not mean that the programs are of lesser value and teachers can record their participation as teacher-identified professional learning for registration purposes. However, there is a missed opportunity for the Education Directorate to receive specific and targeted feedback from teachers through professional learning evaluations, which would be the case if the program was registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. Programs that are accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute must provide satisfaction surveys to teachers that participate in the program and this can provide useful feedback to the Education Directorate to improve the quality of its professional learning programs.
- 4.67 All teachers in public schools must be registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and complete 20 hours of professional development annually. Teachers are also required to record their professional development with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute through a dedicated online learning portal. Data associated with ACT public school teachers' professional development has been captured for over ten years since the establishment of the ACT Teacher Quality Institute, but the Education Directorate does not have access to a consolidated view of this data to:
- identify trends in teacher professional learning; or
  - help inform how professional learning impacts on student outcomes.
- 4.68 The Education Directorate does receive data on ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited programs it runs on an activity-by-activity basis and this can help inform the development of individual programs and give feedback on the quality of each accredited professional learning activity. However, there is no consolidated view of data for all programs that allows the Education Directorate to more broadly monitor the quality of its professional learning programs across ACT public schools, or their impact on student educational outcomes.
- 4.69 Some schools have attempted to receive recognition for their teachers in completing school-led professional development; two of the six school leadership teams advised that they sought to have activities during the two days prior to the commencement of the school year recognised as accredited learning, but reflected this was an onerous process. Furthermore,

not all professional learning programs implemented by the Education Support Office were recognised accredited learning with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. For example, mentoring activities under the Affiliated Schools Program were not recognised as accredited professional learning. Similarly, three of eight of the professional learning programs associated with the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program are not accredited for registration purposes with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. While this does not mean that the programs are of lesser value and teachers can record their participation as teacher-identified professional learning for registration purposes, there is a missed opportunity for the Education Directorate to receive specific and targeted feedback from teachers through professional learning evaluations, which would be the case if the program was registered with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.

#### RECOMMENDATION 10 ACT TEACHER QUALITY INSTITUTE LEARNING

The Education Directorate should work with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute to:

- a) receive and analyse data to use for evaluating the quality of Education Directorate professional learning activities, and identifying trends and insights from its teachers' professional learning to help determine the impact this has on improving student outcomes; and
- b) design methods and practices to recognise key professional learning supports, including professional learning communities, as accredited learning that meets the requirements of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

### Teacher and School Leader Professional Development Fund

4.70 Funding for fee for service professional learning activities is distributed to schools through a formula based on full-time equivalent teaching staff and student enrolments. Table 4-1 shows professional learning funding available to schools per full-time equivalent teaching staff member (excluding principals) for the years 2014-15 to 2019-20.

**Table 4-1 Education Directorate Teacher and School Leader Professional Development Funding**

Financial Year Expenditure	Teacher and School Leader Professional Development Fund	Allocation Per FTE Teacher or School Leader
2014-2015	\$910 848	\$289
2015-2016	\$973 321	\$299
2016-2017	\$829 752	\$250
2017-2018	\$1 967 957	\$576
2018-2019	\$1 305 893	\$371
2019-2020	\$737 471	\$201

Source: ACT Audit Office, based on Education Directorate funding and headcount (FTE) data

4.71 A review of the allocation of professional learning funding between 2014-15 and 2019-20 shows:

- in 2014-15 and 2015-16 funding was relatively stable at approximately \$289 to \$299 per full-time equivalent teaching staff member, before decreasing slightly to \$250 in 2016-2017;
- in 2017-18 funding increased significantly to \$576 per full-time equivalent teacher. The 57 percent increase on the previous year represents Education Support Office expenditure on an additional four staff hired to the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program team between 2017-18 and 2018-19 (refer to paragraph 4.28). The core role of these staff was to improve teachers' practice in using the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program to support curriculum delivery within classrooms. The increase in funding was not allocated to schools to address teacher professional learning needs; and
- there has been a steady decline in funding from the high of 2017-18. Funding was reduced by \$205 in 2018-19 (36 percent) and \$170 in 2019-20 (46 percent) on a per full-time equivalent teacher basis.

4.72 A number of school principals consulted as part of the audit, as well as some industry peak bodies advised that the funds provided to schools to support professional learning was insufficient to meet the needs of teachers. Principals advised that they used more than their notional allocation to allow staff to pursue professional learning opportunities.

4.73 Analysis of school expenditure data for the six schools participating in this audit showed that there was substantial variation in the amount spent on professional learning. Table 4-2 shows the average amount spent at each of the ACT public schools per full-time equivalent teaching staff member (excluding principals) for each year between 2017 and 2019.

**Table 4-2 Professional learning funding across the six schools (2017 to 2019)**

	2017 funding per FTE teacher or school leader	2018 Funding per FTE teacher or school leader	2019 Funding per FTE teacher or school leader
School 1	\$302	\$355	\$733
School 2	\$538	\$615	\$508
School 3	\$601	\$460	\$413
School 4	\$303	\$184	\$296
School 5	\$857	\$604	\$770
School 6	\$41	\$997	\$1,409

Source: ACT Audit Office, based on Individual school funding records and headcount (FTE) data

4.74 A potential additional and often unrecognised cost of professional development is the additional cost to schools of replacing teachers who are absent for professional learning purposes with a relief teacher. In 2020, this cost amounted to an average rate of \$548 per day. One principal advised that the cost of professional release to their school's budget is in

the tens of thousands of dollars per year. The cost of this across all schools cannot be ascertained due to a lack of accessible data.

- 4.75 Teachers and school leaders also advised of their concerns regarding their ability to access relief teaching staff. Some schools had significant difficulty in attracting relief staff, which impacted the ability of teachers and school leaders at that school to attend professional learning programs. A principal interviewed for the purpose of this audit stated

There are times I can't send staff to professional learning [courses] because I can't get relief teachers. Getting relief teachers to travel here is hard... This is an ongoing issue for a number of the experienced teachers I have.

- 4.76 The Education Support Office advised that it was intended that new universally offered programs were intended to provide scale, while school professional learning activities could focus on professional learning communities, and meeting specific needs of individual teachers that could not be fully addressed through these programs. Some decisions have been taken to reduce the funding from the Teacher and School Leader Professional Learning Fund to prioritise system-wide needs such as principal mentoring and coaching programs, and central curriculum development, support and coaching for teachers. This includes some of the programs discussed earlier in this chapter, such as the Positive Behaviours for Learning Program. These decisions have been based on providing programs aimed at addressing the needs of the ACT public school system, and funding them in part through using some funds from the Teacher Professional Development Fund which funds school-level professional development, as well as being funded through budget initiatives.
- 4.77 In its response to the draft proposed report, the Education Directorate noted that this analysis does not take account of other professional learning that takes place in a school setting, including through coaching in a classroom situation. Professional learning such as this is not reflected in the financial analysis. The Education Directorate advised 'while fee for service professional learning can be valuable, teachers report higher levels of satisfaction with professional learning that is provided via coaching in the classroom situation and/or support from the [Education Support Office]'. In this respect it is noted that ACT public school teachers reflect positively on the Education Directorate's commitment to professional learning, as noted in the evaluation report of the first phase of the *Future of Education*. The evaluation report noted 79 percent of teachers perceived strong and consistent support for professional learning in 2018, while in 2020 this declined slightly to 76 percent. Nevertheless, consideration of funding distributed to schools for fee for service professional learning activities, and schools' expenditure on these activities, provides useful information on school-specific professional learning priorities and activities.
- 4.78 Analysis of school expenditure data for the six schools participating in this audit showed that there was substantial variation in the amount spent by schools on fee for service professional learning. The amount spent on fee for service professional learning varied between \$733 and \$1,409 per full-time equivalent teacher or school leader. A number of school principals consulted as part of the audit, as well as some industry peak bodies advised that the funds provided to schools to support fee for service professional learning was insufficient to meet the needs of teachers. Principals advised that they used more than their

notional allocation to allow staff to pursue professional learning opportunities. The Education Support Office has recognised these issues and has sought to provide the new universally offered programs across all ACT public schools in order to provide scale, with the expectation that school professional learning activities could focus on professional learning communities, and meeting specific needs of individual teachers that could not be fully addressed through these programs. An evaluation of the first phase of the *Future of Education* reported teachers' perception of the Education Directorate's commitment to professional learning. It noted 79 percent of teachers reporting strong and consistent support for professional learning in 2018, which declined slightly to 76 percent in 2020.

## New Educators Support Program

- 4.79 Enrolments in ACT public schools are growing at a rate of 2.5 percent per year. The expansion of the ACT public school system and the annual 4 percent turnover of teaching staff requires approximately 250 additional teachers in ACT public schools each year. To meet these needs a steady supply of classroom ready graduate teachers is required, along with support for graduate teachers to build the quality of their teaching practices in order to improve student outcomes.
- 4.80 Graduate teachers are considered 'New Educators' for their first three years in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has demonstrated its commitment to the development of New Educators in the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*. The enterprise agreement requires New Educators receive:
- a five-day centralised induction prior to the commencement of the school year;
  - reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate support and mentoring;
  - six New Educator Support Days to be used to facilitate professional learning and development; and
  - the provision of coaching and mentorship from experience teaching colleagues.
- 4.81 Policy guidance to administer these entitlements is given to schools through the *New Educator Support Guidelines* (March 2020). In addition to confirming enterprise agreement entitlements, the guidelines provide a brief explanation of how these entitlements should be used and suggested professional development activities for New Educators. Schools are also provided a template *New Educator Support Plan* to record agreed supports for the New Educator over their first three years of service.
- 4.82 Across the Education Directorate there is no visibility as to whether New Educators are receiving these entitlements and whether they are being used effectively. In this respect there is no:
- analysis or confirmation of how New Educators use reduced teaching hours and 'New Educator Support Days' to improve their teaching practice; and
  - examination of the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring activities for New Educators.

4.83 Accountability for compliance with these obligations is met by principals, who complete a *School Annual EA Implementation Plan* checklist which is co-signed by an Australian Education Union delegate. This is an assurance statement that attests that all enterprise agreement obligations in a school setting, including New Educator provisions, have been met. However, while individual schools may have their own data on how their New Educators have been supported to access these provisions, this data is not able to be analysed in an efficient manner through a single data source. This is because these entitlements may not have a record attached to them in the ACT Government's human resources management system such as a leave record, or may be attached to a separate event which does not directly confirm that support was provided to a new educator; such as a school hiring a relief teacher to cover face-to-face teaching time. This means that it is not possible to easily identify how many New Educators actually received their entitled supports, and in what form this support was provided.

4.84 The lack of accessible data also limits the Education Directorate's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the New Educator Support Program to improve the quality of new educators' teaching practices. Principals and school leaders who contributed to this audit through focus groups unanimously agreed that the New Educator Support Program is not effective in its current form and does not accurately reflect the level of support graduate teachers require in ACT public schools. They reflected that the directorate needs to provide more support to schools if the program is to be effective in improving New Educators' teaching practices. A school leader advised:

With new educators what is important is consistency. I think [the schools] do a good job guiding new educators but that comes through our own efforts rather than having direction [from Education Directorate]. With New Educators comes lots of compliance; the allocated days and mentors [provisions specified in the Enterprise Agreement] but there is not much guidance [for school leaders] on how to utilise this to develop the new educators, so it left up to interpretation. We might need to coordinate a bit [more].

4.85 While schools are provided guidelines to confirm the appropriate types of New Educator development activities at a high level, there is no document or policy which confirms for New Educators and schools what the core expected development needs and pedagogical competencies are throughout the three years of the New Educator Support Program. While the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* show the expected standard for a proficient teacher which newly registered teachers have five years to meet, there is no learning program which captures the key capabilities that New Educators are expected to demonstrate as ACT public school teachers at the end of their three-year program. This means schools have to determine their own priorities for New Educator development, resulting in the potential for New Educators to receive inconsistent professional development across schools during this time. It also means that schools may be unaware of Education Support Office programs that could be available to help develop new educators.

4.86 Graduate teachers are considered 'New Educators' for their first three years in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has demonstrated its commitment to the development of New Educators in the *ACT Public Sector Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* through the New Educator Support Program, which comprises a

range of supports such as: a five-day centralised induction prior to the commencement of the school year; reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate support and mentoring; six New Educator Support Days to be used to facilitate professional learning and development; and the provision of coaching and mentorship from experienced teaching colleagues. These supports and high level suggestions for New Educator development activities for schools to provide are documented in the *New Educator Support Guidelines* (March 2020). A template plan is also provided for schools to agree development activities with their New Educators. Schools also have an accountability to apply these entitlements through the annual completion of a *School Annual EA Implementation Plan* checklist which is co-signed by an Australian Education Union delegate.

4.87 Despite this policy and compliance framework, there is no visibility as to whether New Educators are receiving these entitlements and whether they are being used effectively across the Education Directorate. This presents a risk that New Educators will receive inconsistent access to professional development across their first three years as an ACT public school teacher. In this respect there is no:

- analysis or confirmation of how New Educators use reduced teaching hours and New Educator Support Days to improve their teaching practice; and
- examination of the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring activities for New Educators.

#### *New Educator Induction*

4.88 A mandatory five-day centralised induction is held for all first-year New Educators prior to the commencement of the school year. According to the Education Directorate's *New Educator Guidelines*, the purpose of the induction is to ensure all New Educators are 'effectively supported, prepared and informed of their responsibilities and entitlements as they begin in their roles'. Although not accredited for the purpose of ACT Teacher Quality Institute registration, the induction aims to provide New Educators with key information, knowledge and skills to assist in their first year of teaching in ACT public schools, as well as providing information regarding the supports available to them. An example of the content derived from the 2021 centralised induction is below:

- Day 1: New Educators receive information regarding the Education Directorate's vision for education in ACT public schools.
- Day 2-4: New Educators attend a selection of interactive workshops that include content regarding professional responsibilities, safety and wellbeing, and the Education Directorate's Enabling Pedagogies program (refer to paragraph 4.31).
- Day 5: New Educators attend their school placement and complete online learning modules.

4.89 In focus groups conducted for the purpose of this audit, there was persistent negative feedback regarding the delivery of the centralised induction from all levels of school leaders and teaching staff, including New Educators. School leaders spoke of the disconnect

between the Education Directorate's understanding of what New Educators need and their facilitation of the centralised induction. They reflected that the five-day induction program is misplaced, taking New Educators away from school-based targeted professional learning. Separately a New Educator commented:

The central Induction in 2019 was waste of time, not useful, they just read out policies. It didn't tell me anything I didn't know or couldn't find myself and the whole day I just sat there, and people were talking at us the whole time. It felt like box ticking and I have not spoken to single teacher who said it was useful.

4.90 A New Educator in another setting concurred, stating:

Induction felt like it was put together at last minute with a lot of busy stuff – didn't get much out of it – met some people but didn't see them again – would have been better off here, even if we just went over policies and procedures and I got to see my classroom.

4.91 Teachers and school leaders participating in focus groups for the audit reflected that five days of centralised induction was not effective in supporting new educators to start their careers as a teacher. Rather, an approach of one or two days of the key compliance messages before teachers start at schools was accepted as necessary. Content beyond this could be delivered after New Educators have had an opportunity to teach and understand what they need to learn to improve the quality of their teaching practice.

4.92 A mandatory five-day centralised induction is held for all first-year New Educators prior to the commencement of the school year. According to the Education Directorate's *New Educator Guidelines*, the purpose of the induction is to ensure all New Educators are 'effectively supported, prepared and informed of their responsibilities and entitlements as they begin in their roles'. The centralised induction for New Educators is not accredited with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute and therefore cannot be counted towards the accredited training requirement under their annual registration requirements. In focus groups conducted for the purpose of this audit, there was persistent negative feedback regarding the delivery of the centralised induction from all levels of school leaders and teaching staff, including New Educators. This feedback centred on the timing of this training before New Educators start teaching, and this should instead predominantly occur after they have an opportunity to teach and understand what they need to learn to improve the quality of their teaching practice.

#### *Reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate support and mentoring*

4.93 New Educators have reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate enhanced support and mentoring. The amount of reduced teaching hours reduces over the three years of the New Educator Support Program:

- Year 1: 60 hours in preschool or primary schools' settings and 80 hours in secondary schools per year of reduced teaching hours; and
- Year 2 and 3: 20 hours in preschool or primary schools' settings and 60 hours in secondary schools per year of reduced teaching hours.

- 4.94 This allowance is designed to provide schools with a provision of time for coaching and mentoring support programs designed to meet the development needs of each New Educator. The specific organisational details are decided by individual school management to allow program flexibility to meet the needs of each New Educator over time. Examples of ways in which schools use the reduced teaching hours for New Educators may include:
- releasing the New Educator and/or the mentoring teacher from classroom duties for coaching support;
  - allocating the time weekly, fortnightly or monthly for planned purposes such as professional learning; or
  - concentrating the time allocation and support program within an appropriate period, e.g., within the first semester to support the New Educator in undertaking their duties as a classroom teacher.
- 4.95 School leaders and New Educators who participated in focus groups for the purpose of this audit advised that the provision of additional classroom release hours for New Educators were largely used to catch up on administrative tasks rather than for coaching and mentoring purposes. New Educators and school leaders also advised that the reduction in face-to-face teaching hours was largely provided on an adhoc basis. The reason for this was that the amount of reduced teaching time did not equate to an amount of teaching time that could be easily planned for relief purposes. The reduction in face-to-face teaching time usually amounted to between 30 minutes and an hour each week which is a fraction of a timetabled lesson in most school settings. School leaders advised that making time for New Educators to collaborate with their experienced teacher mentor within school hours is difficult and considered impractical within school settings. New Educators reflected that the additional time allowance was not allocated in a consistent or structured way that would assist them to improve the quality of their teaching practice.
- 4.96 One school was noted as an exception to these issues of being unable to allocate reduced teaching hours to New Educators. The school had produced a structured New Educator training program which programmed all New Educators to be released at the same time each week to participate in planned development activities facilitated by a dedicated school-based new educator co-ordinator. To facilitate the program, the school has invested in providing its New Educators with a greater reduction in face-to-face teaching time than specified in the enterprise agreement. The weekly program is designed to respond to the development needs of New Educators in response to their upcoming work-related responsibilities. Training included sessions focused on use of assessment systems, report writing in preparation of mid or end of year reporting, or portfolio guidance in preparation for new educators to advance their teaching registration. Notably, the school had a high proportion of experienced staff available and the principal advised that the program was a significant self-funded investment which the school community could afford. In the absence of more central support for New Educators, allocation of resourcing for these purposes may not be possible for all ACT public schools.

- 4.97 New Educators are expected to have reduced face-to-face teaching hours to facilitate enhanced support and mentoring. This allowance is calculated as a reduced number of minutes per week of classroom time that reduces as the New Educator progresses through the development program. It is designed to provide schools with a provision of time for coaching and mentoring support programs designed to meet the development needs of each New Educator. The specific organisational details are decided by individual school management to allow program flexibility to meet the needs of each New Educator over time. School leaders and New Educators who participated in focus groups for the purpose of this audit advised that the provision of additional classroom release hours for New Educators were largely used to catch up on administrative tasks rather than for coaching and mentoring purposes. New Educators and school leaders also advised that the reduction in face-to-face teaching hours was largely provided on an adhoc basis. School leaders advised that making time for New Educators to collaborate with their experienced teacher mentor within school hours is difficult and considered impractical within school settings. New Educators reflected that the additional time allowance was not allocated in a consistent or structured way that would assist them to improve the quality of their teaching practice. The allowance of reduced face-to-face teaching hours for new educators is not effectively implemented in all ACT public schools. Not all new educators can access this time, and it is not consistently used to improve teaching quality.

#### *New Educator Support Days*

- 4.98 The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018 – 2022* provides for six additional classroom release days for each New Educator. New Educators typically negotiate with their supervisor during the first term of each year on the use of these support days and this should then be documented in their individual New Educator Support Plan.
- 4.99 While New Educators and school leaders in all schools were aware of the provision of New Educator Support Days, focus groups involving both cohorts showed a lack of understanding of the exact allocation of days and the circumstances in which to use them. School leaders and New Educators reflected that accessing the provision in full was impractical due to staffing pressures including the difficulty in obtaining relief teaching staff.
- 4.100 School leaders advised that, in its current unstructured form, accessing the entitlement of New Educator Support Days can be more detrimental to a New Educator's learning as they are seen as unstructured. New Educators agreed, and advised that taking a support day increased their workload as they are required to plan learning materials for their students ahead of their absence for a relief teacher to deliver and would often need to redeliver content to their students to ensure they understood the subject matter. New Educators also advised that accessing support days places added pressures on New Educators' teaching colleagues and this was perceived as a disincentive. Of all New Educators interviewed, none had used their full allocation of New Educator Support Days. A school leader participating in the audit summarised a common opinion of school-based staff:

New educator days only have value as far as they are actually organised. Rather than the adhoc current arrangements the [Education] Directorate need to organise the support days and have purpose behind them.

- 4.101 The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018 – 2022* provides for six additional classroom release days for each New Educator. These can be taken as two leave days for each year of the three year program. While New Educators and school leaders in all schools were aware of the provision of New Educator Support Days, focus groups involving both cohorts showed a lack of understanding of the exact allocation of days and the circumstances in which to use them. School leaders and New Educators reflected that accessing the provision in full was impractical due to staffing pressures including the difficulty in obtaining relief teaching staff.
- 4.102 The combination of supports provided under the New Educator Support Program are not evaluated to determine whether they are effective in developing a series of expected pedagogical competencies in New Educators. Documenting expected pedagogical competencies that New Educators should display at the program's completion, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the program could allow the Education Directorate to determine whether there are barriers for to accessing these supports.

#### RECOMMENDATION 11 NEW EDUCATOR SUPPORT PROGRAM

The New Education Support Program should be reviewed and redesigned. The program should:

- a) be facilitated by the Education Support Office to provide centralise oversight of all Enterprise Agreement provisions, centralised support and resourcing to New Educators in ACT public schools;
- b) document a core set of highly-effective pedagogical competencies that New Educators are expected to acquire within the first three years of their teaching careers;
- c) include a series of centralised, scaffolded professional development activities to build New Educators' capabilities over the course of the three years of the program;
- d) provide schools with clear guidelines and expectations to facilitate experienced teacher coaching and mentoring for New Educators; and
- e) establish an annual monitoring and evaluation process for the program, which incorporates feedback from New Educators, experienced teacher mentors and school leaders.



## 5 TEACHING WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

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- 5.1 Recruiting, developing and retaining highly effective teachers is an important part of achieving improved educational outcomes for students. This chapter discusses the Education Directorate's strategies and initiatives to achieve this, particularly through the implementation of the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* and *People, Practice and Performance Framework for Performance and Accountability* (2016) framework.

### Summary

### Conclusion

The management of the teaching workforce is an important determinant in achieving teaching quality across all ACT public schools. The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* includes a structure that recognises the importance of teacher experience. The Education Directorate has assigned roles and responsibilities to classroom teachers at the top of this structure at the 'Experienced Teacher 2' level to mentor New Educators and contribute to improving student educational outcomes. Principals are also assigned responsibilities to manage the school teaching workforce to improve student outcomes. However, the Education Directorate does not centrally plan or monitor the distribution of experienced teachers to determine if New Educators and schools have equitable access to them. Principals can exclude highly experienced teachers from the annual teacher transfer round, and teachers are not transferred to schools which they have not expressed a preference to teach at through this process. These practices limit the ability of schools to access highly experienced teachers to improve teaching quality.

The teacher performance development process is not effective in supporting teaching quality. While it refers to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, it does allow teachers to demonstrate their compliance with mandatory professional learning processes under the *ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act* (2010). The Education Directorate also cannot use the process to plan, deliver or evaluate the effectiveness of supports to improve teaching quality across all ACT public schools as it is a manual process managed at the school level. The performance development process does not effectively support teacher appraisals which was regularly reflected as a highly valued support to improve practice by teachers who contributed to the audit. Schools develop their own ways to encourage these activities which are variable in quality and effectiveness.

The performance management process under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* is not implemented effectively in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate advised that one teacher had been managed through these processes in the 2019-20 financial year. However, this is not likely to reflect the true level of

underperformance in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate does not have an informed understanding of the true level of teacher underperformance.

## Key findings

### Paragraph

Research shows that there is a relationship between years of teaching experience and the quality of practice demonstrated by an individual teacher: the quality of a teacher's practices most steeply increases in their initial years in the classroom; and the effectiveness of their teaching practices continues to improve significantly until their seventh year of service. Sixty one percent of ACT teachers are classified as Experienced Teacher 2 teachers, with at least eight years' experience, which the research suggests is the point at which they are expected to have an ongoing positive impact on student outcomes through high quality teaching. Twenty two percent are classified as Experienced Teacher 1 (four to seven years' experience) and 17 percent are identified as New Teachers (less than three years' experience). There is variability between the deployment of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers across ACT public schools, for example 26 schools have a workforce made up of more than 70 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff and 22 schools have a workforce of less than 50 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff. The school with the lowest proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 staff has only 26 percent at this level.

5.23

The proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers in a school may have a direct impact on student educational outcomes and the ability of New Educators to access their industrial rights. When a school's workforce is made up of 50 percent or less Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers, the additional duties designed to contribute towards improved teaching quality assigned to these teachers are at risk of not being performed or being performed to a subpar standard. The proportion of experienced teachers at a school can also have a persisting impact on student outcomes, as the effects of high-quality teaching are cumulative. If the classroom teaching workforce remains stable over three years, students at the ACT public school with the lowest proportion of experienced teachers currently have a 1.8 percent chance of being taught by a series of Experienced Teacher 2 teachers over this time. This compares with the students at the school with the highest proportion of experienced teachers, which have a 77.1 percent chance of this occurring.

5.24

Under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, teachers permanently employed by the Education Directorate are placed at a particular school for an initial five-year term. At the end of this period, teachers are expected to apply for transfer to another ACT public school through an annual process known as the 'transfer round'. The annual teacher transfer round is an important process for developing and deploying highly experienced teachers across the ACT public school system. However, there are confounding factors that interfere with the effective operation of the transfer round and its effect on teaching quality across the school system. This includes the opportunity for school principals to hold on to their experienced teachers and exclude them from the transfer round by simply extending a teacher's placement for up to five years. There has also been limited

5.38

central oversight of when teachers are due for transfer. Until a recent update in December 2020 of teacher placement end date records by the People and Performance Branch the Education Directorate did not have complete and accessible data on when teachers were due to complete their five-year school placements. Placement end dates were not centrally recorded for 621 teachers and school leaders (approximately 18.4 percent of the total number of 3,382 teachers as at February 2020). Extensions to teaching placements increases the risk of highly experienced teachers being clustered in a smaller number of schools, thereby reducing the impact they could otherwise have if deployed where the ACT public school system as a whole may need them for the purposes of equity and lifting student outcomes and may also interfere with New Educators' rights to access experienced mentors to improve their teaching quality.

To maintain teaching quality in ACT public schools, the Education Directorate must recruit sufficient teachers to account for growth in student numbers and staff turnover. Presently, this rate is approximately 6.5 percent. Resignations have accounted for 67 percent of teacher separations between 2014 and 2020, and the majority of these teachers have left in the first seven years of service, which is before research suggests they become highly effective teachers. The Education Directorate has recently established a *2021-2023 Workforce Strategy* which outlines high level goals to manage the risk of being unable to secure sufficient high-quality teachers, along with potential programs and projects identified to address this risk over the next three years. While retention measures are identified in this strategy, the Education Directorate does not monitor the reasons teachers resign from ACT public schools through exit surveys to determine if such activities are appropriately targeted.

5.45

Teacher and school leader performance and development plans are intended to be the process by which principals and teachers identify, plan, action and evaluate targeted professional learning and development to improve teaching quality. To set the performance expectations of school leaders, the Education Directorate has established an *ACT School Leadership Capability Framework* that specifies the competencies expected of: principals (School Leader A); deputy principals (School Leader B); and school executives (School Leader C). The Education Directorate has not designed a similar capability framework for classroom teachers.

5.65

A consistent approach to the performance development process was observed in the six schools considered as part of the audit. However, of the 54 performance development plans considered for the purpose of the audit, 79 per cent were incomplete in terms of content, supervisor endorsement or evidence of feedback to teaching staff. Teaching workforce data cannot be easily used to monitor whether performance and development plans are completed, or timely and complete feedback is given. While it is accepted best practice that teachers and school leaders link their performance and development plan goals with school improvement priorities, the generic approach observed in the six schools resulted in a lack of evidence of teachers reflecting on how they individually needed to improve their teaching practice in support of school improvement priorities. Focus groups within the six schools considered as part of the audit indicated that the professional development plans were not used to support teaching quality within the workforce.

5.66

Teachers and school leaders alike viewed the performance and development process as a mandatory compliance exercise.

The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership recommends the use of classroom observations to provide teachers with clear feedback and direction in the form of evidence-based strategies for developing the quality of their teaching practice. Despite this, the Education Directorate does not maintain a policy or guidelines for regular teacher appraisals or classroom observations for permanent teaching staff in ACT public schools. Rather, they are a widely understood and suggested practice that each school should pursue, but it is not mandated. Only two of six schools conducted regular effective teaching appraisals and the leaders of these schools actively supported and encouraged this practice. In the absence of central tools and supports for teaching appraisals, these school leaders developed their own resources to support this activity. Opportunities to encourage and model classroom observations could have a meaningful impact on systemic teaching quality in ACT public schools.

5.72

Effective performance management of teaching staff is important to maintain the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has established policies, protocols and mechanisms to support performance management. This includes the human resources business partners who are available to school leaders to help manage underperformance in their setting. However, only one teacher was reported as underperforming in 2019-20. This is low for a workforce of over 4,000 teachers and school leaders. This is supported by discussions with Education Support Office executives and school leaders who suggest the number of teachers and school leaders who are not demonstrating quality teaching is underreported. The Education Directorate has no informed understanding as to whether performance management of ACT public school teachers is underreported, or the supports required to help school leaders to improve teaching quality through these processes.

5.85

## System level management of the teaching workforce

### Classroom teacher experience

5.2 The deployment and management of ACT public school teaching staff is informed by two key documents:

- the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*; and
- the *People, Practice and Performance Framework for Performance and Accountability* (2016).

5.3 The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* specifies the processes by which teachers are employed and deployed to ACT public schools. Clause R3.8 of the Agreement states:

Successful experience in a range of settings is valued for its contribution to quality teaching, quality student outcomes, professional development, career advancement and promotion.

5.4 The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* rewards teachers as they become more experienced through a process of annual progression through an incremental salary structure. The salary structure is classified into three broad bands:

- New Educators; and
- two levels of Experienced Teachers.

5.5 Each of these bands has multiple salary increments and most teachers progress one increment each school year. Table 5-1 shows ACT public school teachers' classification based on years of teaching experience and the corresponding salary band.

**Table 5-1 ACT public school teacher service bands**

Classification	Years of teaching experience	Salary band
New Educator	0-3 years	\$73 246 - \$81 046
Experienced Teacher 1	4-7 years	\$84 945 - \$96 644
Experienced Teacher 2	8 years and beyond	\$103 144 - \$109 641

Source: The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, Annex A, Classifications and rates of pay

5.6 The structure of these bands of service aligns with a significant body of research that shows there is a relationship between years of teaching experience and the quality of practice demonstrated by an individual teacher.<sup>30</sup> A summary of longitudinal research that analysed the relationship between teacher experience and effectiveness demonstrated that:

- the quality of a teacher's practices most steeply increases in their initial years in the classroom; and
- the effectiveness of their teaching practices continues to improve significantly until their seventh year of service.

5.7 The research also found that teachers with more than seven years of classroom experience had a positive effect on student outcomes in 95 percent of the studies analysed.<sup>31</sup>

5.8 The Education Directorate's own research shows that increasing the proportion of teachers with less than three years' experience across the ACT public school system can have a negative effect on the standardised test scores of students.

<sup>30</sup> Sinclair, C., McInerney, D. M., & Liem, G. A. (2008). Attracting, training, and retaining high quality teachers : the effect of initial teacher education in enhancing student teacher motivation, achievement, and retention. In *Teaching and Learning : International Best Practice*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

<sup>31</sup> Kini, T. & Podolsky, A. (2016). Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness? A Review of Research. [online] Available at: [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Teaching\\_Experience\\_Report\\_June\\_2016.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Teaching_Experience_Report_June_2016.pdf) Accessed 19 January 2021.

## Roles and responsibilities for managing the teaching workforce

- 5.9 Roles and responsibilities for the management of the teaching workforce are documented in the *People, Practice and Performance* framework. The framework acknowledges that school leaders are responsible for ‘effectively [managing] the human and financial resources of the school’. The framework positions principals as having an obligation to assemble an expert teaching team that develops a culture of continuous professional improvement.
- 5.10 The *People, Practice and Performance* framework does not explicitly assign a role to the Education Support Office for managing and monitoring the teacher workforce at a system level. However, the framework notes that the Education Support Office is responsible for, amongst other things, ‘[setting] system strategies for improvement’, ‘[providing] support and accountability mechanisms to achieve system goals’ and ‘[building] skills and leadership capacity at all system levels’.
- 5.11 Although the People and Performance Branch in the Education Support Office facilitates teacher deployment through annual recruitment and teacher transfers (refer to paragraphs 5.25 to 5.28), the *People, Practice and Performance* framework does not assign any role or responsibility to the branch or the Education Support Office more generally for the oversight of the ACT public schools’ teaching workforce and its distribution.
- 5.12 Placing the primary responsibility for the management of the school teaching workforce on principals through the *People, Practice and Performance* framework without a balancing responsibility in the Education Support Office to oversight the distribution of teachers and help relieve pressures for individual schools carries risks. It creates a tension between:
- an individual principal’s responsibility to manage their workforce in a manner that results in the best composition of classroom teachers for their school community; and
  - the needs of the ACT public school system as a whole in ensuring all schools have an equitable opportunity to access highly effective teachers.

## ACT public school teaching workforce distribution

- 5.13 At the commencement of Term 2 2020, the ACT public school classroom teaching workforce consisted of a total of 3,382 teachers in 88 schools. The breakdown of this workforce against the classroom teacher salary structure in the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* is shown in Table 5-2.

**Table 5-2 Composition of ACT public school classroom teaching workforce by experience level**

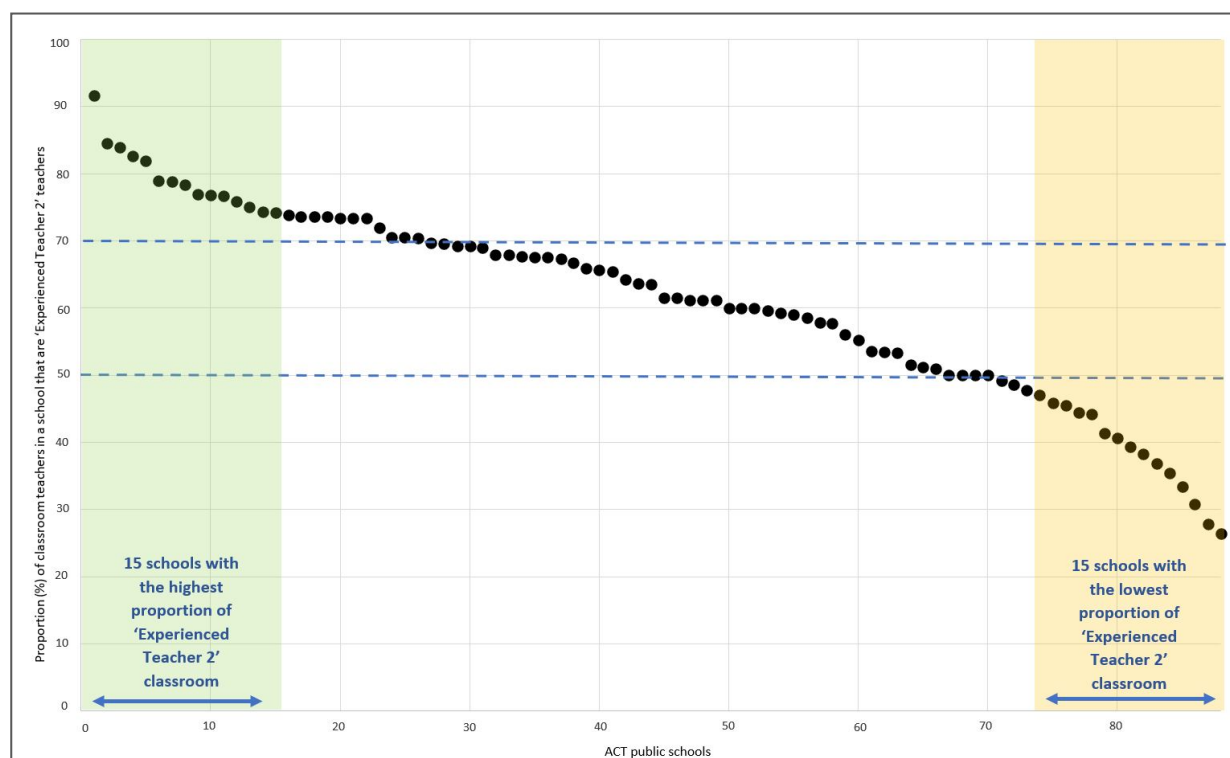
Level	Number	% of total classroom teaching workforce
New Educators (0-3 years’ experience)	580	17
Experienced Teachers 1 (4-7 years’ experience)	739	22
Experienced Teachers 2 (8+ years’ experience)	2,063	61

Level	Number	% of total classroom teaching workforce
Total	3,382	100

Source: Education Directorate workforce data (as at Term 2, 2020)

- 5.14 Table 5-2 shows that of the total classroom teacher cohort, 61 per cent have reached the highest band of Experienced Teacher 2, which the research suggests is the point at which they are expected to have an ongoing positive impact on student outcomes through high quality teaching.
- 5.15 The Education Directorate recognises the importance of Experienced Teacher 2 teachers in modelling teaching quality by assigning them with professional responsibilities to develop New Educators. Under the Education Directorate's *Expectations of Performance and Professional Responsibilities* policy, the Experienced Teacher 2 cohort is identified as having a responsibility for coaching and mentoring New Educators. This includes co-planning curriculum and content, observing and team teaching with the New Educator, as well as engaging them in professional dialogue and feedback and providing them with opportunities to shadow their experienced colleague in observing quality teaching practices. Accessing these supports is an industrial right of the New Educator under clause N5 of the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, which states:
- The Directorate and the Australian Education Union are committed to the development of new educators through the delivery of effective induction programs to ensure that they are effectively supported, prepared and informed of their responsibilities and entitlements as they begin in their roles, and provision of high-quality coaching and mentoring programs designed to meet their individual professional development.
- 5.16 The *Expectations of Performance and Professional Responsibilities* policy document also explicitly identifies the responsibilities of staff at the Experienced Teacher 2 level for contributing to student learning outcomes by contributing to the development of school curriculum, teaching and assessment practices within their school or more broadly across their school network.
- 5.17 As 61 per cent of classroom teachers are in the Experienced Teacher 2 band, and if this proportion remains steady over time, then ACT public school students can be expected to have a 22.7 percent chance of accessing a succession of highly-experienced teachers over three years across the system. However, Education Directorate workforce data shows there is variability between the deployment of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers at individual schools. This is because some schools have a higher proportion of less experienced classroom teachers, while others have a more experienced teaching cohort.
- 5.18 Figure 5-1 shows the proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 teachers across the 88 ACT public schools in 2020.

**Figure 5-1 Proportion of ‘Experienced Teacher 2’ classroom teachers in ACT public schools (2020)**



Source: ACT Audit Office based on Education Directorate workforce data

5.19 Despite Experienced Teacher 2 teachers comprising 61 percent of the classroom teaching workforce there is variability in their allocation across schools. While some level of variation from the 61 percent system-wide proportion can be expected, there are a significant number of schools that have a materially different level of experience in their classroom teaching workforce. Figure 5-1 shows:

- 26 ACT public schools have a workforce made up of more than 70 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers; and
- 22 schools have a workforce made up of less than 50 percent of ‘Experienced Teacher 2’ classroom teachers.

5.20 The proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers in a school may have a direct impact on student educational outcomes and the ability of New Educators to access their industrial rights. When a school’s workforce is made up of 50 percent or less Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers, the additional duties designed to contribute towards improved teaching quality assigned to these teachers (refer to paragraph 5.15 and 5.16) are at risk of not being performed or being performed to a subpar standard. For example, in a school with less Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers it is more likely that each experienced teacher will be required to take on more than one New Educator to mentor (refer to paragraph 5.15). In turn, this increased workload reduces the time the Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teacher has available to mentor each New Educator to foster quality teaching practices. Equally, with fewer Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers to

contribute to the development of school curriculum, quality teaching and assessment practices there is a risk to the improvement of student outcomes that could be achieved with equal workforce distribution.

- 5.21 The proportion of experienced teachers at a school can also have a persisting impact on student outcomes, as the effects of high-quality teaching are cumulative. If the classroom teaching workforce remains stable over three years, students at the ACT public school with the lowest proportion of experienced teachers currently have a 1.8 percent chance of being taught by a series of Experienced Teacher 2 teachers over this time. This compares with the students at the school with the highest proportion of experienced teachers, which have a 77.1 percent chance of this occurring.
- 5.22 The unequal distribution of teachers at the Experienced Teacher 2 level could be justified on the basis of equity, which is an aim of the *Future of Education*. That is, schools that have students with a lower level of socioeconomic advantage could be allocated a higher proportion of highly experienced teachers to potentially correct for other factors which can negatively impact on student outcomes. However, analysis of the distribution of Experienced Teacher 2 staff against schools' Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)<sup>32</sup> rating shows that there is no relationship between these two factors across the spectrum of ACT public schools. In this respect there were examples of schools with comparatively high ICSEA values that had lower proportions of Experienced Teacher 2 staff. Similarly, there were examples of schools with comparatively low ICSEA values that had high proportions of Experienced Teacher 2 staff. It was noted, however, that eight of the schools with the lowest ICSEA ratings in the ACT also were among the schools with the lowest proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 staff.
- 5.23 Research shows that there is a relationship between years of teaching experience and the quality of practice demonstrated by an individual teacher: the quality of a teacher's practices most steeply increases in their initial years in the classroom; and the effectiveness of their teaching practices continues to improve significantly until their seventh year of service. Sixty one percent of ACT teachers are classified as Experienced Teacher 2 teachers, with at least eight years' experience, which the research suggests is the point at which they are expected to have an ongoing positive impact on student outcomes through high quality teaching. Twenty two percent are classified as Experienced Teacher 1 (four to seven years' experience) and 17 percent are identified as New Teachers (less than three years' experience). There is variability between the deployment of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers across ACT public schools, for example 26 schools have a workforce made up of more than 70 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff and 22 schools have a workforce of less than 50 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff. The school with the lowest proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 staff has only 26 percent at this level.

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<sup>32</sup> The *Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage* provides an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students.

- 5.24 The proportion of Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers in a school may have a direct impact on student educational outcomes and the ability of New Educators to access their industrial rights. When a school's workforce is made up of 50 percent or less Experienced Teacher 2 classroom teachers, the additional duties designed to contribute towards improved teaching quality assigned to these teachers are at risk of not being performed or being performed to a subpar standard. The proportion of experienced teachers at a school can also have a persisting impact on student outcomes, as the effects of high-quality teaching are cumulative. If the classroom teaching workforce remains stable over three years, students at the ACT public school with the lowest proportion of experienced teachers currently have a 1.8 percent chance of being taught by a series of Experienced Teacher 2 teachers over this time. This compares with the students at the school with the highest proportion of experienced teachers, which have a 77.1 percent chance of this occurring.

### Teacher deployment through the annual transfer round

#### *Design of the annual teacher transfer round*

- 5.25 Under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, teachers permanently employed by the Education Directorate are placed at a particular school for an initial five-year term. At the end of this period, teachers are expected to apply for transfer to another ACT public school through an annual process known as the 'transfer round'. Alternatively, due to compassionate or professional circumstances, teachers may elect to be considered in the transfer round before their placement period expires or seek an extension to the term of their placement by approval of their school principal.
- 5.26 Teachers are expected to have an annual career development discussion with their school principal. For teachers in their final year of placement, this should include consideration of whether the teacher's placement will be extended for up to a further five years or whether they will be placed in the annual transfer round. A list of expected vacant teaching positions is compiled based on this process and the transfer round is commenced in Term 3 of each school year. Processes for the allocation of teachers to ACT public schools are fully documented in the *Procedures for Filling Classroom Teacher Vacancies*. The annual transfer round is managed by the People and Performance Branch.
- 5.27 Permanent teachers are advised of expected vacancies and are asked to express their ranked preferences for a minimum of five schools that they are interested to teach in. They must also submit a curriculum vitae and a two-page statement of claims based on the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. Teachers' preferences are collated by the People and Performance Branch and distributed to school principals, who then review the applicants that have expressed a preference for teaching at their school. School principals subsequently make ranked preferences for the teachers they wish to offer a five-year placement.
- 5.28 A panel of principals is then convened to allocate teacher placements based upon the preferences information. Priority schools are identified where there is a risk of staff shortages for the following school year, which the panel checks to manage any identified

schools with a lack of teachers. Upon completion, the People and Performance Branch advises schools and teachers of their teaching placements for the following school year.

#### *Annual teacher transfer round and risks to teaching quality*

- 5.29 The processes associated with the annual transfer round are designed to support teaching quality by providing teachers with a diversity of teaching opportunities and give opportunities for schools and students to access experienced teachers. Despite this, there are confounding factors that interfere with the effective operation of the transfer round and its effect on teaching quality across the school system.
- 5.30 First, an established practice of the transfer round is that teachers will not be offered a placement that they have not expressed a preference for. If a teacher cannot be placed at one of their preference schools, they have typically been allocated an extension to their current placement. This can result in a narrower pool of experienced teachers that are available through the process, despite there being schools that could benefit from their experience.
- 5.31 Second, school principals also have the authority to hold on to their experienced teachers and exclude them from the transfer round by simply extending a teacher's placement for up to five years. Multiple examples of placement extensions were observed in the six schools examined in this audit, including one Experienced Teacher 2 that had been granted an extension after being placed in a school for 20 years. Extensions to teaching placements increases the risk of highly experienced teachers being clustered in a smaller number of schools, thereby reducing the impact they could otherwise have if deployed where the ACT public school system as a whole may need them for the purposes of equity and lifting student outcomes. It may also interfere with New Educators' rights to access experienced mentors to improve their teaching quality. Some schools may also have to rely more heavily on recruiting New Educators, which could have adverse impacts on student outcomes.
- 5.32 The most recent teacher deployment data identified that this clustering issue is evident in the secondary sector. In Term Two 2020:
- ACT public high schools had a workforce comprising 60.8 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff; and
  - ACT public colleges had a workforce comprising 76.1 percent of Experienced Teacher 2 staff.
- 5.33 Data to confirm whether clustering of experienced staff was affecting the primary school years was not readily available due to the staffing profile of early childhood and P-10 schools.
- 5.34 This workforce distribution process, and the lack of central oversight by the Education Support Office, does not help all principals meet their obligations under the *People, Practice and Performance* framework to manage their school workforce in a way that maximises student educational outcomes. This impact occurs in two ways. Firstly, as some principals are unable to access sufficient highly experienced teachers, they cannot provide their

students with the associated teaching quality benefits. Secondly, where highly experienced teachers are deployed later in a student's education, such as at college, there are fewer early intervention opportunities, and the benefits of high-quality teaching cannot be used to reduce the chance of lower-achieving pupils falling further behind their peers.<sup>33</sup>

- 5.35 The transfer round has been largely performed by manual processes and there has been limited central oversight of when teachers are due for transfer. Until a recent update in December 2020 of teacher placement end date records by the People and Performance Branch, the Education Directorate did not have complete and accessible data on when teachers were due to complete their five-year school placements. As part of this update, the People and Performance Branch identified that placement end dates were not centrally recorded for 621 teachers and school leaders (approximately 18.4 percent of the total number of 3,382 teachers as at February 2020). These have since been updated, but there remains a need for the People and Performance Branch to ensure this data is kept up-to-date to support the equitable distribution of experienced teachers in ACT public schools.
- 5.36 During the teacher transfer round in 2020, the People and Performance Branch requested more in-depth workforce data from school principals to allow better oversight of the school teaching workforce and facilitate teacher placements. This information is intended to be used to anticipate positions which are expected to become vacant within the next 12 months, as well as prepare for teachers returning from long term leave who require placement.
- 5.37 The process of matching teachers to placements in the annual teacher transfer round is still done by largely manual means and there is a reliance on paper files and manual matching processes to fill school teaching positions.
- 5.38 Under the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*, teachers permanently employed by the Education Directorate are placed at a particular school for an initial five-year term. At the end of this period, teachers are expected to apply for transfer to another ACT public school through an annual process known as the 'transfer round'. The annual teacher transfer round is an important process for developing and deploying highly experienced teachers across the ACT public school system. However, there are confounding factors that interfere with the effective operation of the transfer round and its effect on teaching quality across the school system. This includes the opportunity for school principals to hold on to their experienced teachers and exclude them from the transfer round by simply extending a teacher's placement for up to five years. There has also been limited central oversight of when teachers are due for transfer. Until a recent update in December 2020 of teacher placement end date records by the People and Performance Branch the Education Directorate did not have complete and accessible data on when teachers were due to complete their five-year school placements. Placement end dates were not centrally recorded for 621 teachers and school leaders (approximately 18.4

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<sup>33</sup> UNESCO. (2021). Teacher Recruitment and Deployment. [online] Available at: <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/issue-briefs/improve-learning/teachers-and-pedagogy/teacher-recruitment-and-deployment> Accessed 19 February 2021.

percent of the total number of 3,382 teachers as at February 2020). Extensions to teaching placements increases the risk of highly experienced teachers being clustered in a smaller number of schools, thereby reducing the impact they could otherwise have if deployed where the ACT public school system as a whole may need them for the purposes of equity and lifting student outcomes and may also interfere with New Educators' rights to access experienced mentors to improve their teaching quality.

#### RECOMMENDATION 12 CLASSROOM TEACHING WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

The Education Directorate should review and revise the mechanisms that support the distribution and monitoring of the teaching workforce across ACT public schools by:

- a) monitoring the distribution of experienced teachers across ACT public schools to ensure it aligns with Education Directorate priorities under the *Future of Education*; and
- b) developing processes to monitor and review principal decisions to extend teacher placements to ensure schools have appropriate and equitable access to experienced teachers.

### Teacher recruitment and separations

5.39 The ability of the Education Directorate to maintain teaching quality across ACT public schools relies on accessing high quality candidates to fill vacant teaching positions as they arise. Where there are schools that have been unable to address their expected vacancies through the annual transfer round, there are number of processes used to fill vacant positions on an ongoing or non-ongoing basis. This includes:

- accessing an established pool of suitable candidates from directorate-led recruitment activities. This can include recent graduates and experienced teachers from the independent or Catholic education systems within the ACT, or from interstate school systems;
- offering a position to a pre-service teacher in the final year of their university education; or
- directly advertising the position in an open recruitment round.

5.40 Education Directorate data shows that there has been 2.5 percent annual growth in the number of students attending ACT public schools as well as a four percent teaching workforce turnover rate. This means approximately 264 additional teachers<sup>34</sup> are needed to fill vacancies in ACT public school classrooms each year. The *Education Directorate Workforce Strategy 2021* identifies national teacher shortages as a key risk to the achievement of the Directorate's strategic plan. Broad priority actions to address the risks of teacher shortages in the *Education Directorate Workforce Strategy 2021* include:

<sup>34</sup> As at term 2, 2020, there were a total of 4,074 classroom teachers and school leaders across 88 ACT public schools.

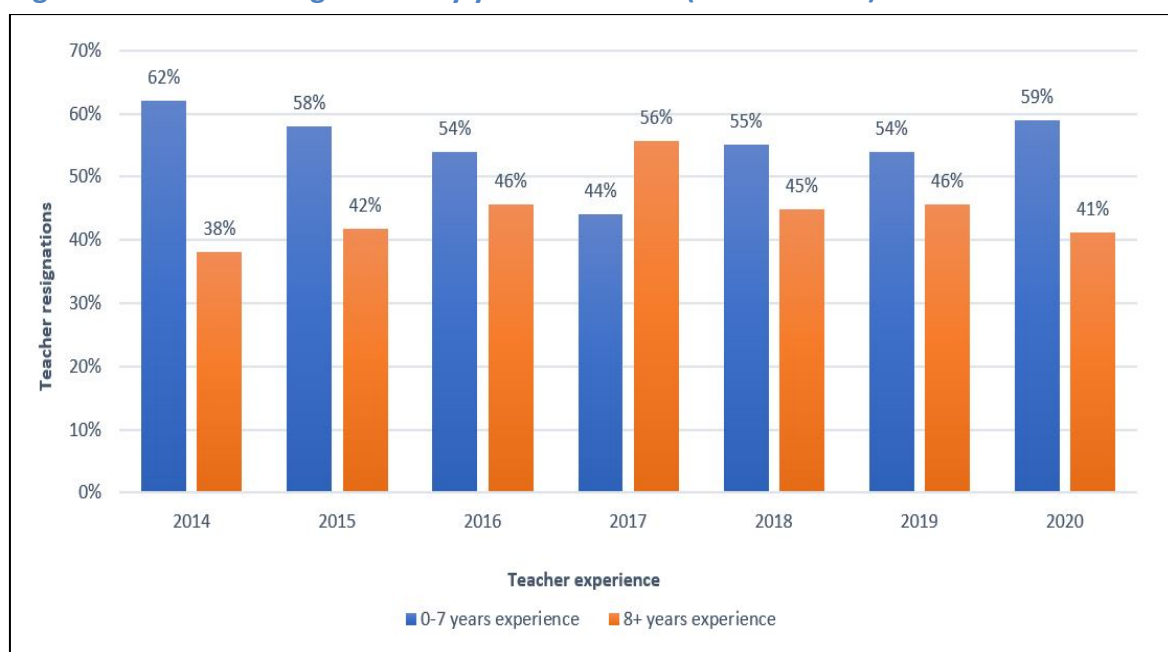
- continuing a partnership with the University of Canberra through the Affiliated Schools Program (see paragraph 4.18) to develop a pipeline of graduate teachers; and
- the recruitment and retention of classroom teachers with qualifications and specialisations that are identified as priority areas of need for the ACT community.

5.41 Managing the risk of a lack of teachers can also be addressed through staff retention initiatives more broadly. Analysis of Education Directorate workforce data shows that of the 2,403 teacher separations from ACT public schools between 2014 and 2020:

- 1,184 teachers resigned; and
- 580 teachers retired.

5.42 Resignation accounted for 67.1 percent of teacher separations between 2014 and 2020. Analysis of Education Directorate workforce data shows that most teachers that resign do so in the first seven years of service, as shown in Figure 5-2.

**Figure 5-2 Teacher resignations by years of service (2014 to 2020)**



Source: Audit Office, based on Education Directorate data

5.43 While the Education Directorate may be able to replace some of these teachers with experienced teachers from other systems and jurisdictions, the remainder are likely to be New Educators who can take up to eight years to become highly effective teachers.

5.44 The Education Directorate does not undertake surveys of teachers who leave ACT public schools. As a result, the Education Directorate does not have an understanding of the reasons why teachers leave or where they intend to go afterwards. This means that the Education Directorate is not able to use data and insights from staff to inform its practices and potentially reduce teaching staff turnover.

- 5.45 To maintain teaching quality in ACT public schools, the Education Directorate must recruit sufficient teachers to account for growth in student numbers and staff turnover. Presently, this rate is approximately 6.5 percent. Resignations have accounted for 67 percent of teacher separations between 2014 and 2020, and the majority of these teachers have left in the first seven years of service, which is before research suggests they become highly effective teachers. The Education Directorate has recently established a *2021-2023 Workforce Strategy* which outlines high level goals to manage the risk of being unable to secure sufficient high-quality teachers, along with potential programs and projects identified to address this risk over the next three years. While retention measures are identified in this strategy, the Education Directorate does not monitor the reasons teachers resign from ACT public schools through exit surveys to determine if such activities are appropriately targeted.

#### RECOMMENDATION 13      TEACHER WORKFORCE SEPARATION

The Education Directorate should develop and analyse data associated with teaching workforce separations by implementing exit surveys and conducting analysis on the reasons teachers resign from ACT public schools.

## School level management of the teaching workforce

### Responsibilities for Teacher and School Leader Performance Development

- 5.46 The performance of individual teachers and their teaching quality is managed by school leaders and principals at the school level. Teacher performance development and evaluation, as mandated by the *2018-2022 Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement*, places this responsibility predominantly on school principals.
- 5.47 Nevertheless, central oversight of this and other workforce practices is monitored for compliance by the Education Directorate through an annual *Enterprise Agreement Implementation Plan*. This document comprises a checklist to be completed by the school principal and endorsed by a sub-branch president of the Australian Education Union to provide assurance with respect to compliance with employment conditions outlined in the Enterprise Agreement.
- 5.48 The Education Directorate's *People, Practice and Performance* framework attributes responsibility for ongoing teacher development to every level of the organisation. It details the responsibilities for teacher performance development at the school level and attributes roles to classroom teachers and school leaders, and outlines the Education Support Office's responsibility. Echoing the responsibilities outlined in the Enterprise Agreement, the framework emphasises the need for high-calibre school-based instructional leadership teams to develop teaching practices.

### Performance development plans

- 5.49 Teacher and school leader performance and development plans are intended to be the process by which principals and teachers identify, plan, action and evaluate targeted professional learning and development to improve teaching quality.
- 5.50 The process to design, agree and review these documents each year is supported by the Education Directorate's *Performance and Development Guidelines*. The guidelines, and an accompanying template, are provided to schools by the People and Performance Branch to guide teachers and school leaders through formal discussions sequenced over the course of the school year. There are three stages to this process: Performance Planning, Mid-Cycle Review and End Cycle Review. The timing of these stages is aligned with individual school improvement and annual Action Plan activities. The design of these documents also aligns with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and the *ACT Public Service Performance Framework*.
- 5.51 To set the performance expectations of school leaders, the Education Directorate has established an *ACT School Leadership Capability Framework* that aligns with the competencies associated with the five professional practice domains of the *Australian Professional Standards for Principals*. The framework specifies the competencies expected of:
- principals (School Leader A);
  - deputy principals (School Leader B); and
  - school executives (School Leader C).
- 5.52 The Education Directorate has not designed a similar capability framework for classroom teachers. The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* identifies in broad terms the expected duties of classroom teachers and the *Expectations of Performance and Professional Responsibilities* document further identifies the additional expectations determined by the classroom teacher bands. However, this document does not describe the capabilities needed to improve teaching quality across ACT public schools, and improve student educational outcomes as desired by Education Directorate's strategic goals identified in the *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* and the *Future of Education* strategy.

### Professional development plans in schools

- 5.53 Teachers' and school leaders' professional development plans were reviewed in the six schools considered as part of the audit. Fifty-four plans were reviewed for the period 2016 to 2020.
- 5.54 Of the 54 performance development plans considered for the purpose of the audit, 79 per cent were incomplete in terms of content, supervisor endorsement or evidence of feedback to teaching staff. Nevertheless, the substance of the plans was reviewed to identify how the schools more generally, and teaching staff more specifically, approached the development and implementation of the plans.

- 5.55 A consistent approach to the performance development process was observed in the six schools considered as part of the audit. Commonly, a document was created by school leaders for all teaching staff in the school, which included two goals and accompanying planned performance actions. These were predetermined and derived directly from the school's strategic planning documentation.
- 5.56 With respect to the third and final goal in the performance and development plans, it was observed as common practice within the six schools for individual teachers or school leaders to self-identify this goal. The individual goals in the performance and development plans considered as part of the audit primarily focused on developing leadership and student wellbeing supports, but not on improving teaching quality.
- 5.57 While it is accepted best practice that teachers and school leaders link their performance and development plan goals with school improvement priorities, the generic approach observed in the six schools resulted in a lack of evidence of teachers reflecting on how they individually needed to improve their teaching practice in support of school improvement priorities. Similarly, school leaders and teachers with near identical performance and development plans to that of their school colleagues did not specifically identify development opportunities that catered to their individual need, nor was there evidence of tailored feedback in the performance development plans on how individuals contributed to achieving their goals or the identification actions to further staff development to be implemented in future performance cycles.
- 5.58 Focus groups within the six schools considered as part of the audit indicated that the professional development plans were not used to support teaching quality within the workforce. Teachers and school leaders alike viewed the performance and development process as a mandatory compliance exercise.
- 5.59 Teachers interviewed in focus groups advised that they received the most support from classroom observations, mentoring, coaching and teacher-identified professional learning. However, the professional development plans considered as part of the audit typically did not identify or recognise these activities. Rather, the plans identified the increased use of particular software tools to communicate with families, supervision of university students undertaking practicum placements and collection of student wellbeing data to be used to inform school pastoral care programs.
- 5.60 Feedback to teachers on the progress made against the goals was not recorded in these documents or was not sufficiently specific to action improvements in practice.
- 5.61 The performance and development process has no connection with annual registration requirements legislated under the *ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010*.<sup>35</sup> This requires teachers and school leaders to register as professionally trained teachers and complete and reflect on 20 hours of professional learning annually. Teachers and school leaders regularly

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<sup>35</sup> ACT Parliamentary Council. (2010). ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010. [online] Available at: [www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2010-55/current/pdf/2010-55.pdf](http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2010-55/current/pdf/2010-55.pdf) Accessed 02 February 2021.

expressed their frustration with the duplication of workload required to complete the administration for both processes, rather than a single integrated process to meet both purposes.

#### *Use of systems to support performance management*

- 5.62 The classroom teacher and school leader workforce comprises of over 4,000 staff in 89 schools across the ACT. Despite this size, processes to manage the performance and development of staff through performance development plans rely on Microsoft Office documents stored on individual school or teaching staff's hard drives or in paper copies within school-based employment files.
- 5.63 Central oversight of the performance development plan process is limited to principals declaring that *'all teachers will have a performance development plan focusing on individual professional and capability development'* on an annual School Enterprise Agreement Implementation plan checklist. Monitoring of the performance development plan process in ACT public schools, review and collation of identified training needs or oversight of the completion of the annual cycle is not monitored by the Education Support Office.
- 5.64 Teaching workforce data cannot be easily used to monitor teaching quality at the system level. It is not possible to determine if performance processes are completed for all staff, and whether timely and complete feedback as part of these processes is given. It is also not possible to use this data to obtain insights into the professional learning activities and needs of the teaching workforce, or use this data to evidence the impact of school improvement activities or supports to improve teaching quality.
- 5.65 Teacher and school leader performance and development plans are intended to be the process by which principals and teachers identify, plan, action and evaluate targeted professional learning and development to improve teaching quality. To set the performance expectations of school leaders, the Education Directorate has established an *ACT School Leadership Capability Framework* that specifies the competencies expected of: principals (School Leader A); deputy principals (School Leader B); and school executives (School Leader C). The Education Directorate has not designed a similar capability framework for classroom teachers.
- 5.66 A consistent approach to the performance development process was observed in the six schools considered as part of the audit. However, of the 54 performance development plans considered for the purpose of the audit, 79 per cent were incomplete in terms of content, supervisor endorsement or evidence of feedback to teaching staff. Teaching workforce data cannot be easily used to monitor whether performance and development plans are completed, or timely and complete feedback is given. While it is accepted best practice that teachers and school leaders link their performance and development plan goals with school improvement priorities, the generic approach observed in the six schools resulted in a lack of evidence of teachers reflecting on how they individually needed to improve their teaching practice in support of school improvement priorities. Focus groups within the six schools considered as part of the audit indicated that the professional development plans

were not used to support teaching quality within the workforce. Teachers and school leaders alike viewed the performance and development process as a mandatory compliance exercise.

### Teacher appraisals

- 5.67 Student outcomes significantly depend on teachers' professional knowledge, practices and engagement.<sup>36</sup> In order to develop quality teaching practices, it is important to regularly evaluate teacher classroom practices to identify how they impact on student learning. In 2012, the Australian Productivity Commission published an analysis of teacher performance in Australian schools that found teachers were not receiving the feedback and support they needed in developing their practice. The Productivity Commission recommended that schools be required to maintain an effective appraisal system and be given the necessary resources, training and guidance to do so.<sup>37</sup>
- 5.68 The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership recommends the use of classroom observations to provide teachers with clear feedback and direction in the form of evidence-based strategies for developing the quality of their teaching practice. The Institute provides resources to support schools to implement effective classroom observations, including a 'Classroom Practice Continuum' document that can be used during classroom observations to assess a teacher's practice against the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.<sup>38</sup>
- 5.69 The ACT Education Directorate does not require regular performance observations of teaching practice (known more commonly as 'classroom observations'). The Education Support Office advised that it is a widely understood and suggested practice that each school should pursue, but it is not a mandatory requirement. In the focus group discussions conducted for the audit, classroom teachers in all schools advised that engaging in classroom observations significantly assisted them to improve the quality of their teaching practices. However, schools did not place the same priority on this practice. Documentation provided by schools and information received from school leaders and teachers participating in focus groups showed that classroom observations were conducted irregularly and inconsistently across ACT public schools.
- 5.70 A review of teacher appraisals in the six schools considered as part of the audit showed that evaluation of practices through observation was widely inconsistent. Of the six schools considered as part of the audit, two schools conducted regular teaching appraisals. This process was implemented by the school's leadership who recognised the value of this process as evidenced in principal and school leader focus groups. Policies, procedures and

<sup>36</sup> Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2011). *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. AITSL, Melbourne.

<sup>37</sup> Productivity Commission (2012), *Schools Workforce*, Research Report, Canberra.

<sup>38</sup> Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2014). *Classroom Practice Continuum*. [online] available at: [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/classroom\\_practice\\_continuum.pdf?sfvrsn=21a0ec3c\\_0](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/classroom_practice_continuum.pdf?sfvrsn=21a0ec3c_0) Accessed 30 March 2021

documents to support the activity were designed and used within the school by these leaders. These resources varied in quality from an appropriate level of documentation to encourage discussion and reflection to those which were largely informal and unrecorded.

- 5.71 Challenges for ACT public schools in conducting effective teacher appraisals include staff shortages and lack of availability due to face-to-face classroom teaching requirements. Teacher appraisals require a time commitment from both the teacher and the observer to complete the observation, provide feedback and participate in any further discussions or observations. Additionally, accessing teachers who could offer expertise in particular speciality areas of teaching (e.g. language or disability inclusion) was important for teachers in getting value from classroom observations, potentially adding additional demand for observations from a smaller group of teachers with specific expertise. Encouraging and modelling teacher appraisals through school leaders aligns with the mentoring and leadership activities of the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan discussed in Chapter 3 (refer to paragraph 3.92).
- 5.72 The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership recommends the use of classroom observations to provide teachers with clear feedback and direction in the form of evidence-based strategies for developing the quality of their teaching practice. Despite this, the Education Directorate does not maintain a policy or guidelines for regular teacher appraisals or classroom observations for permanent teaching staff in ACT public schools. Rather, they are a widely understood and suggested practice that each school should pursue, but it is not mandated. Only two of six schools conducted regular effective teaching appraisals and the leaders of these schools actively supported and encouraged this practice. In the absence of central tools and supports for teaching appraisals, these school leaders developed their own resources to support this activity. Opportunities to encourage and model classroom observations could have a meaningful impact on systemic teaching quality in ACT public schools.

### Performance management

- 5.73 The *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022* sought to increase clarity around managing underperformance in ACT public schools by removing the previous 'Pathways to Improvement Process' and replacing it with a formalised 'Underperformance Process'.
- 5.74 Schools had provided feedback to the People and Performance Branch prior to 2018 that the 'Pathways to Improvement Process' was not explicit or helpful in dealing with teaching staff's underperformance and closely resembled the annual teacher performance and development cycle. Therefore, the aim of the policy change as part of the latest Enterprise Agreement was to clearly distinguish between underperformance and professional development processes.
- 5.75 The People and Performance Branch has established 'Business Partners' to be available at the request of a school principal to support formal underperformance proceedings. In this model, the People and Performance Branch, in cooperation with the school principal,

develop the communications to be delivered to an underperforming staff member while following an established four-step performance management action plan outlined in the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*. The action plan must:

- identify expected standards of work;
- progress learning and development strategies;
- specify the period in which the staff member is under review; and
- specify the assessment criteria against which they will be measured.

5.76 The action plan is also required to identify the potential consequences that may be undertaken if the teacher does not meet the expected standard.

5.77 The *Teacher and School Leader Performance and Development Guidelines* states that when there are concerns a teacher is not meeting performance expectations, and there is sufficient evidence supporting concerns of underperformance, school leadership can start underperformance processes detailed in section H4.7 of the *Education Directorate (Teaching Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2018-2022*.

5.78 Practical guidance for school leaders and teaching staff on ways to address performance issues is lacking within Education Directorate frameworks and policies, with procedural guidance limited to the *Underperformance Process* outlined in the Enterprise Agreement. Practical guidance and documentation to guide school leaders' engagement with underperforming teachers prior to formal proceedings is also missing. Guidance and documentation that is missing includes:

- the need to raise concerns regarding underperformance with a teacher early;
- the establishment of clear improvement expectations with predetermined timeframes;
- strategies to assist the teacher in achieving the identified expectation such as professional learning; and
- the supports available to both the teacher and school leader undertaking informal underperformance procedures.

5.79 Despite the redesign of performance management protocols, the number of teachers formally identified as underperforming in ACT public schools is very low. Only one teacher was performance managed through these processes in 2019-20. The People and Performance branch of the Education Directorate suggested this number indicates there may be an issue with identifying and reporting teacher underperformance in ACT public schools.

5.80 Contributions received by five principals and three teams of school leaders who participated in the audit also suggest a lack of identifying and reporting underperforming teachers with

ACT public schools. A principal speaking to teacher underperformance in ACT public schools stated:

By far, underperformance is managed in an informal and in house manner. By pursuing formal underperformance, this sometimes [leads to principals being] pursued for harassment or bullying....[I have] tried to use the formal underperformance process and it's been a struggle.

5.81 In the absence of reliable and accurate identification of teacher underperformance at the school level, the Education Directorate is not able to demonstrate what level of underperformance may exist due to issues of poor teaching quality in ACT public schools, and the supports required to address them.

5.82 In the six schools considered as part of the audit, two principals indicated they were not confident in formalising underperformance processes and a further two principals indicated that although they were willing to formalise the process if required, they found the processes difficult, cumbersome and time consuming. Five principals reflected that they tended to manage performance concerns informally within the school setting and not escalate beyond this stage due to the complexity and time-consuming nature of formal proceedings. These principals also reflected this was perceived as a method of avoiding allegations of bullying or harassment from the underperforming employee.

5.83 In contrast, deputy principals and school executives (School Leader C staff) who are responsible for the daily management of teachers advised that they felt that escalating underperformance concerns beyond school-based management to the People and Performance Branch for matters of teaching quality was more effort than it was worth. A school leader consulted as part of the audit stated

We do anything to do to skirt around the edges. We will wait five years and move them on [in the transfer round]. This happens. There are [underperforming] people in the system we all know about because they are constantly moved on.

5.84 School leadership staff also identified that formalising performance management proceedings not only prevented the transfer of the underperforming staff member to another school but made their everyday working environment untenable. A principal summarised a widely agreed upon sentiment in the audit focus groups stating:

There are a number of teachers and school leaders who are not up to the job [of managing underperformance] and this has a huge impact on education of young people ... a teacher can only get sacked for reportable conduct rather than poor performance. There has to be a cut-off point. We need to be able to tell people early in their career they're not suitable for teaching and not wait until they approach retirement.

5.85 Effective performance management of teaching staff is important to maintain the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has established policies, protocols and mechanisms to support performance management. This includes the human resources business partners who are available to school leaders to help manage underperformance in their setting. However, only one teacher was reported as underperforming in 2019-20. This is low for a workforce of over 4,000 teachers and school leaders. This is supported by discussions with Education Support Office executives and school leaders who suggest the number of teachers and school leaders who are not

demonstrating quality teaching is underreported. The Education Directorate has no informed understanding as to whether performance management of ACT public school teachers is underreported, or the supports required to help school leaders to improve teaching quality through these processes.

#### RECOMMENDATION 14 PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The Education Directorate should:

- a) develop policies and guidelines and support for school leaders that enable regular, development-focussed teacher appraisals aligned with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. These should be modelled and encouraged through the Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan and aligned with the professional learning requirements of the *ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010* to gain additional benefit from these activities;
- b) systematise the performance development process to improve efficiency and make teacher professional development data available for central oversight and management to improve teaching quality; and
- c) develop supports for school leaders to manage underperformance for poor teaching practices. These supports should emphasise the need to quickly address performance issues, identify ways to successfully improve performance, and connect underperforming teachers with practical supports to improve their practice.



## Audit reports

Reports Published in 2020-21	
Report No. 05 – 2021	Management of Closed-Circuit Television Systems
Report No. 04 – 2021	ACT Government's vehicle emissions reduction activities
Report No. 03 – 2021	Court Transport Unit vehicle – Romeo 5
Report No. 02 – 2021	Total Facilities Management Contract Implementation
Report No. 01 – 2021	Land Management Agreements
Report No. 10 – 2020	2019-20 Financial Audit – Financial Results and Audit Findings
Report No. 09 – 2020	2019-20 Financial Audits Overview
Report No. 08 – 2020	Annual Report 2019-20
Report No. 07 – 2020	Management of care of people living with serious and continuing illness
Reports Published in 2019-20	
Report No. 06 – 2020	Transfer of workers' compensation arrangements from Comcare
Report No. 05 – 2020	Management of household waste services
Report No. 04 – 2020	Residential Land Supply and Release
Report No. 03 – 2020	Data Security
Report No. 02 – 2020	2018-19- Financial Audits – Computer Information Systems
Report No. 01– 2020	Shared Services Delivery of HR and Finance Services
Report No. 11 – 2019	Maintenance of ACT Government School Infrastructure
Report No. 10 – 2019	2018-19 Financial Audits – Financial Results and Audit Findings
Report No. 09 – 2019	2018-19 Financial Audits – Overview
Report No. 08 – 2019	Annual Report 2018-19
Reports Published in 2018-19	
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Report No. 04 – 2019	2017-18 Financial Audits Computer Information Systems
Report No. 03 – 2019	Access Canberra Business Planning and Monitoring
Report No. 02 – 2019	Recognition and implementation of obligations under the <i>Human Rights Act 2004</i>
Report No. 01 – 2019	Total Facilities Management Procurement
Report No. 12 – 2018	2017-18 Financial Audits – Financial Results and Audit Findings
Report No. 11 – 2018	2017-18 Financial Audits – Overview
Report No. 10 – 2018	Annual Report 2017-18
Report No. 09 – 2018	ACT Health's management of allegations of misconduct and complaints about inappropriate workplace behaviour

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