

ACT AUDITOR–GENERAL’S REPORT

**FIVE ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS’
ENGAGEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS,
FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY**

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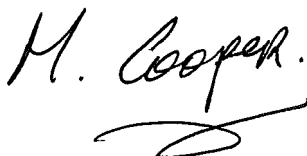
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The Speaker
ACT Legislative Assembly
Civic Square, London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Madam Speaker

I am pleased to forward to you a Performance Audit Report titled 'Five ACT public schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community' for tabling in the Legislative Assembly pursuant to Subsection 17(5) of the *Auditor-General Act 1996*.

Yours sincerely



Dr Maxine Cooper
Auditor-General
28 June 2018

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

In February 2018 there were 1,887 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending 87 public schools in the ACT.¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people account for two percent of the ACT population and four percent of ACT public school enrolments. While Canberra is on Ngunnawal Country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT come from across Australia, representing many different country and language groups.

The Education Directorate, through the implementation of Cultural Integrity, is working to increase the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community with the education system. This occurs in the context of a history in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may have felt disengaged from the education system, and from government agencies more broadly; intergenerational trauma, unconscious bias, shame, identity and dislocation add to the complexity.

Acknowledgement and thanks

The Audit Office acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and honours the Elders, past, present and future. Their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region is acknowledged and respected.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this audit report, have patiently explained so generously their perspectives and their situations. Particular thanks to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Every effort has been made to present the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices heard and capture the messages in this audit report; if some are missing, I apologise.

Conclusions

ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

The Education Directorate is focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in terms of progress, strengths and improvements to build cultural integrity. This is a move to positive discourse away from centring on deficit discourse or mindsets: 'When all the thinking, all the conversations and all the approaches are framed in a discourse that sees Aboriginality as a problem, very little positive movement is possible'.²

The Education Directorate has modified its strategic indicators in its budget papers to focus on a positive discourse. Furthermore, there are strategies and actions relating to Aboriginal and Torres

¹ This includes Jervis Bay Primary School and ACT public preschools.

² Scott Goringe, for Indigenous X, Aboriginal culture is not a problem. The way we talk about it is, 15 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/aboriginal-culture-is-not-a-problem-the-way-we-talk-about-it-is> Accessed 9 April 2018

Strait Islander students' education in the Directorate's strategic plan and action plans that have moved to a strengths based focus on growth and achievement.

While most of the audited schools' strategic and action plans mirrored those of the Directorate, not all did. This can be achieved by including, in each school's strategic and action plans, explicit strategies and objectives for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community; these should be accompanied by performance measures to monitor the effectiveness of the engagement.

ENGAGEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

All audited schools are engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community and are exhibiting cultural sensitivity. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community perceptions of engagement varied; many positive, some negative. A significant issue affecting engagement is the fear of mandatory reporting if a person identifies that they need any help. This occurs in the context of experiences of unconscious bias, intergenerational trauma, and deficit discourse.

While mandatory reporting is not solely about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the high rate of removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, locally and nationally, is of note. Addressing the fear of mandatory reporting is beyond the remit of just the Education Directorate. However, there is an opportunity for the Directorate, in partnership with Community Services Directorate, to train and support all school staff in how 'to have a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations'.³

Furthermore, there is currently a review, *Our Booris, Our Way*, into the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the child protection system in the ACT where ways to mitigate the fear of mandatory report might best be examined.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF TO ENGAGE WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the Education Directorate (which includes schools) under the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17* is a significant achievement. In the new plan being developed, given the pivotal role of teachers and school leaders in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, and their ability to increase cultural awareness, there needs to be a focus on increasing their numbers and providing them with professional support.

The additional professional training support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is having an effect and its continuation is important. Also important is continuing cultural

³ Refer to key finding paragraph 3.36, as advised by the Community Services Directorate.

awareness training for all staff. Training, however, needs to be guided by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training strategy covering all staff and supported by a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training. Without this strategy, and an employment and support action plan, gauging the effectiveness of these measures will depend on anecdotal evidence only.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs)) have an important role in supporting teachers and staff in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. However, more has been expected of them in providing direct support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. Ways of providing direct support need to be identified by asking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community to provide direction on what would assist them and how this could be achieved. It may be appropriate to build capacity in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to provide the direct support.

Key findings

ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

Paragraph

A feature of the 2018-19 Budget Papers was the removal of mean NAPLAN scores (for all students) as strategic indicators, with a focus instead on students' gain in NAPLAN scores. This accords with the Education Directorate's focus on a positive discourse.

2.9

The Education Directorate's *Strategic Plan 2014-17 Education Capital: Leading the Nation*, and its annual Action Plans from 2014 to 2017, include actions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes. From 2016 the language in the annual Action Plans changed from 'closing the achievement gap'; the Directorate's *2016-17 Annual Report* articulated this change, noting that '*our vision is for schools that meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and we are working towards achieving this through building cultural integrity. Cultural integrity represents a break from past approaches which have focussed on deficit mindsets. It engages a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement. It is positive and constructive, and benefits the whole school community*'. The Directorate's 2016 and 2017 Action Plans reflect the Directorate's change of focus from 'deficit mindsets' and instead focus on 'a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Its draft 2018 strategic plan is 'out for comment'.

2.17

Analysis of the five audited schools' Strategic Plans shows that, while all of the plans identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities generally, there was a mixed approach to specifically identifying and articulating strategies or actions relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. Three schools' Strategic Plans refer to specific strategies or priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including:

2.25

- two schools' plans to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational achievements or goals; and
- one school's plan to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' attendance at school and participation in school based programs.

Analysis of the five audited schools' 2018 Action Plans showed that, in line with the Strategic Plans' identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities, all Action Plans identified activities and associated indicators relating to these strategies or priorities. Two of the Action Plans identified specific actions or indicators relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These schools' annual Action Plans also identified and articulated the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer. 2.26

The Education Directorate has developed guidance for ACT public schools on engaging with parents and community, including specific guidance for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community. The guidance includes the *ACT Engaging Schools Framework* (2015); *Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT*; and the *Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Families*, which has been available since 2015. The guidance was not consistently referred to or consistently used in the five schools selected for audit. 2.39

The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative is the Education Directorate's new approach for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and engaging with their families and community; *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* is being implemented during 2018. The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* Google+ Community has been developed by the Education Directorate to provide resources and best practices from other jurisdictions to support schools implement the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*. To date, there has been limited evidence of regular discussion by, or questions from, schools via the Google+ Community about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, although the Education Directorate advised that it is a source of information and ideas and 'while staff may post discussion points and questions, these generally take place in other forums'. 2.47

Complaints regarding education services are generally managed at the local level by schools, however, complainants may contact the Education Directorate directly. The Education Directorate does not collect, automatically, information on whether complaints received by the Directorate relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students although this may be included in free text. The Education Directorate's Complaints and Liaison Unit has provided information about the complaint process to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's Education Representative. 2.52

The Education Directorate provided information in its *2016-17 Annual Report* in the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes' section. This section describes programs and projects and particular school initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that have been implemented during 2016-17. While the 2.55

projects and initiatives do not specifically state that their focus is on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, it may be inferred from some that they involve engagement. The projects and initiatives include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence – Campbell High School, a centre that provides programs and initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Melrose High School Indigenous Studies Centre, a centre that provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and Big Picture Academy, a learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in year 9 and 10 to study subject areas they are passionate about; and
- Wanniasa School – Ganbra Program, the program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to learn more about their culture and fostering parental engagement by encouraging families to participate in Ganbra activities.

The Education Directorate reports annually to the Legislative Assembly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. These annual reports are published on the Directorate's website, however, there is no direct link to these publications from the Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education webpage; it would be helpful to provide a link.

2.64

ENGAGEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Paragraph

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who spoke with the audit team described deeply felt experiences, including inter-generational trauma, shame, unconscious bias and deficit discourse, which can impact on the daily lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their interaction and engagement with government agencies. Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised that:

3.22

- *The role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in addressing these experiences' impact is fundamental ... [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community] know the answers but have little opportunity to do anything about it. Self-determination through measures such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations provide the means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in identifying appropriate responses.*

The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed audit report, on 19 June 2018 advised:

3.23

- *The ACT Government is privileged to have a formally elected body to represent the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT. The Community Services Directorate has also advised that The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body is currently undertaking consultations in the*

community for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, which will hold the ACT Government accountable for the outcomes outlined in the Agreement. All aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of engagement with government might best be considered within the context of the Elected Body consultations and accountability framework.

The fear of mandatory reporting for children and young people at harm or risk of harm in the ACT affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's engagement with ACT public schools and other ACT Government services. Feedback about the fear of mandatory reporting was received from different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders. A stakeholder commented:

- *There is fear in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community regarding care and protection and students being taken away from families and mandatory reporting by schools feeds into this fear. Families struggle with trusting the schools and the teachers and some of this is caused by mandatory reporting requirements where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families fear that they will lose their children. The trust deficit is also exacerbated at times because families do not understand the processes around child Care and Protection.*

Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised:

- *If I place myself in a teacher's position, how do I have a relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and family if every time they speak to me they're filtering the experience through their understanding of 'my mandatory reporting responsibilities'?*

The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed report, on 19 June 2018 advised:

- *In June 2017, the ACT Government announced a review into the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the child protection system in the ACT. The Our Booris, Our Way review is guided by a wholly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee and is being conducted in accordance with the principles of self-determination. This review will investigate the circumstances of approximately 350 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children currently engaging with the child protection system, to understand their experience and to advise how best Aboriginal Child Placement Principles might be realised in the ACT community.*
- *The Our Booris, Our Way review will make recommendations to the ACT Government on the best way to fully implement the SNAICC Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, including development of advice about how best to move towards self-determination in the child protection system. Our Booris, Our Way will deliver an interim report later in 2018 focussing on early learnings and initial*

improvements to the system. The final report will be delivered in August 2019 and will focus on major systemic improvements.

The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed report, on 19 June 2018 further advised: 3.36

- *Data collected by Children, Youth and Families highlight that school personnel provide the largest number of reports to CYPS raising concerns for the wellbeing of children and young people. This is not unusual given that teachers and school personnel are the adults outside of a family unit that engage mostly with children, young people and their families. For many children, the relationship between them and their teacher will be the closest outside their family.*
- *The Children and Young People Act 2008 allows for some discretion around reporting not fully utilised by school personnel. This may highlight that school personnel require additional support in determining what response is required when deciding if they should make a report to child protection. This may include better and more timely advice on what is the appropriate response to concerns so that the most appropriate support is available to the child and their family.*
- *Across Government, non-government and the community sector, both voluntary and mandatory reporters need to have a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations. This is not to diminish the importance of reporting when children are experiencing severe abuse and neglect and have no parent willing and able to protect them. A culture of support, however, does acknowledge that a family may feel more comfortable and thus be more open to receiving support and referrals from school personnel that they have an existing relationship with, rather than through the statutory system.*
- *It also must be acknowledged that a report to child protection may be received more adversely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in light of their experiences with the Stolen Generation and history of dispossession.*

The Education Directorate sought to understand the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group (the Consultative Group). The Consultative Group ceased to operate on 30 November 2017 and will be replaced by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (the Advisory Group). The Advisory Group is expected to meet four times per year and provide advice to the ACT Government on education matters that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities. Information about the Advisory Group is available on the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group's 'betteroutcomestogether' website but not on the ACT Education Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education webpage. 3.46

ACT public schools use various ways to seek the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Of the five schools selected for audit, all had established ways to discuss and record a student's goals, interests and specific needs; the schools reported their processes involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' families and community. One method that schools may choose to use, in agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, is a *Personalised Learning Plan*, or something similar, to record the student's goals and aspirations. Representatives from one school provided positive feedback about the usefulness of *Personalised Learning Plans* in facilitating communication with families and carers:

- *[Personalised Learning Plan] meetings are an excellent way to build strong relationships with families and carers. They are an opportunity for families to share their hopes and dreams for their children and set aspirational goals for the year ahead. Previously there was negative stuff like children not doing homework- now we keep it simple – baseline is that all children are capable and competent – teachers are empowered to feel they are making a difference and know that they can make a change for any child at any point of time in their classes.*

However, representatives from other schools' comments about *Personalised Learning Plans* were more cautious, noting that the use of a *Personalised Learning Plan* for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may not be needed and 'can look like a deficit as well as lumping students together in one cohort'.

There were mixed views from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community about how schools engage them. However, the majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who contributed to the audit were positive about the schools selected for audit engagement, e.g.

- *At [this school] we get more support and understanding.*
- *More encouragement towards us all.*

Professor Chris Sarra of the University of Canberra and head of Queensland Government's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships said:

- *Relationships with Community – all students and families must be connected to the work of schools - how can we address together - start with connecting with the student.*
- *Connectedness is key regardless of how dishevelled or stressed a student might be – they have a human right to be embraced and nurtured by us – in the ACT we should be able to do that.*
- *Students will come with different needs and it is about ensuring that the teacher and student are enabled to be the best they can be in class. Part of this means ensuring the student is confident, capable and connected. Part of this also means they are not sitting in class hungry or having hearing difficulties.*
- *School leadership has to be better equipped with people deeply committed to reaching out to the margins. It's about Heart, Head, Hand and doing all three.*

Professor Sarra suggested one way to nurture students would be to allocate every teacher in a school the responsibility to focus on one or two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the total number that attend the school to enable the teacher to build a relationship with the student, starting with saying 'good morning' and asking how things are going.

The five schools selected for audit described the ways that they have tailored their communication with families, such as meeting families on neutral ground and in places they feel comfortable until the families feel comfortable to meet in the school, meeting families in school over something to eat, and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations or members of the community to engage more or assist with engaging with families. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder suggested that to enhance a school's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, schools should tailor their information; the community stakeholder said:

3.92

- *If schools want to enhance engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community the key to achieving this is to provide tailored information specific to the community needs and concerns.*

This community stakeholder also advised that:

- *Effective engagement is dependent on the accessibility of schools teachers and leaders.*

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder and a school principal also noted that providing support to families as well as the students is important for more improvement to engagement; the community stakeholder advised:

3.93

- *There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;*

and the principal stated:

- *Key to improving engagement is to support families just as much as students.*

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is well connected and will share information about schools; this may affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's view of a school. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised:

3.94

- *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is connected in the ACT and due to this information about various schools and their reputation quickly spreads within the community. This can result in parents avoiding certain schools while schools with a good reputation attracting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students.*

<p>The Education Directorate and ACT public schools regularly communicate with all students and families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families, via electronic communications. However, the audit team heard mixed views about whether all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community had internet access; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders' comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Not a lot of families have internet connection; reasons may be affordability; and</i> – <i>The internet is a luxury and not necessarily for everyone.</i> 	3.102
<p>ACT public schools selected for audit comments about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' home internet access included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Email is difficult because of access to the internet and literacy can be a problem so it is far better to phone families. [I]do not set homework instead [I]set research tasks in class when the students can access the school's internet; and</i> – <i>Most people have phones that have 3G connectivity and so they have access when in free Wi-Fi even if they don't have access at home. The provision by the ACT Government of a Chrome notebook to all year 7 – 10 students this year has contributed to increasing access for some families.</i> 	3.103
<p>In the Australian National University working paper, <i>Dynamic of the Digital Divide</i>, it was stated that internet access in 2016 in the ACT in Indigenous households was at 88.1 percent and in other ACT households internet access was at 91.9 percent.</p>	3.104
<p>Initiatives like the Inner North School Cluster's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Partnership Agreement provide on-going opportunities for ACT public schools to communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community on matters related to the cluster schools and demonstrate the schools' inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. School cluster events also provide opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to connect with older students at the high schools or college in their cluster and to see the pathways to those high schools and college for themselves; and • to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture with other schools' students and staff. 	3.110
<p>The five schools selected for audit demonstrated various ways in which they are progressing their connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, such as using an Aboriginal language at school assemblies, plans to co-name areas of the school in different languages and creating a space to try new things. One school principal advised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>We have to create space so we can have a go; like getting our kids to give acknowledgment to country; and</i> – <i>seek more opportunities to strive for successful things. [Schools] sharing experiences [with one another].</i> 	3.116

The Education Directorate has activated a Google+ Community website as part of its Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools initiative. The Google+ Community provides a mechanism for schools to share information and experiences.	3.117
Visible representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in schools was observed by the audit team. This included the use of art, artefacts, school resources (books etc) and furniture; outdoor features and activities such students' hand paintings; and making coolamons from the bark of local trees.	3.120
The Audit Office team member, Mr Ben Mitchell, who is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, reported that he observed sensitivity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during audit fieldwork at a Koori Preschool, a Centre of Excellence and a variety of other settings including specific rooms, areas and activities. Mr Mitchell considered that approaches used at an ACT public school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre of Excellence can provide a model for other schools, including the incorporation of teaching pedagogies such as '8 ways of learning'. The audit team observed different approaches at different schools; a teacher suggested that there should be an evaluation of what schools are doing.	3.130
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders expressed a range of opinions regarding engagement by schools including the need for teachers to have more cultural competency; the challenge for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to afford extracurricular activities; and the challenges for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in communicating with schools. Some of the schools selected for audit considered the school's cultural competency 'patchy' and engagement, in general, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was 'piecemeal'. Feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Although teachers should demonstrate empathy for the situation some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families are in, this should not be mixed with pity or 'oh poor you' attitude;</i> – <i>There is a high staff turnover in the public schools and this means that it is hard to retain staff who are culturally competent and to build a whole of organisation ethos that is culturally safe;</i> – <i>Schools need to be affordable for all families as there are expenses such as excursions, after school care, which some of our families cannot afford; and</i> – <i>There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families'.</i> 	3.140
The Education Directorate conducts an annual online school satisfaction survey of parents and carers, students and staff. While information may be collected through this survey from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents, families and caregivers there is no option to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and responses to the survey are anonymous; therefore, it is not possible to differentiate	3.143

information that corresponds to the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF TO ENGAGE WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Paragraph

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed by the Education Directorate, which includes schools, has increased from 56 to 101 between March 2013 and April 2018 (an 88 percent increase). This is a significant advancement, although it is six fewer than the Education Directorate's June 2017 target of 107.

4.14

While around 41 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are employed as teachers and school leaders they only comprise 1 percent of the total number of teachers and school leaders in the Education Directorate. Teachers are particularly important role models and, on a daily basis, are central in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Increasing teacher numbers will not only support engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but also contribute to non-Indigenous children gaining a cultural understanding. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander not-for-profit organisation stakeholder consulted during audit fieldwork advised that:

4.15

- *ACT Education Directorate employs one of the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees ... this is largely due to the positive image of the Directorate in the Community.*

The Education Directorate advised that no monitoring or evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program has been done or is planned; however, the Education Directorate expects that the program will be reviewed as part of the evaluation of the employment action plan which is currently underway.

4.25

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in addition to support available for all staff, are offered other support: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network; Our Mob: Our Voices survey; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program; Garma Festival participation; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Scholarships (for prospective staff); and Public Education Awards. The additional support is having an effect.

4.37

- *The Staff Network meeting minutes shows that the Network felt that meeting with Senior Executives was having a significant impact and that it is seen as a valuable voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and in a leadership role across the Directorate. Furthermore it had been discussed in national Australian Education Union forums as a prominent and leadership voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and over the previous 18 months the Staff Network had contributed to key activities on education.*
- *A recipient of an ACT Public Education Award in 2017 for Leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education was a young Aboriginal woman who grew up in the Canberra region. Acknowledging outstanding performance by Aboriginal and Torres*

Strait Islander teaching staff signals to all staff the importance of the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in increasing cultural awareness.

The Education Directorate's focus on increasing employment and the provision of professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is having effect. This was guided by several initiatives including the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17*. The Education Directorate advised it is currently developing the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Support Action Plan. This plan needs to incorporate targets and actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people become teachers and school leaders. 4.38

The number of ACT public school teachers having cultural awareness training through attending accredited ACT Teacher Quality Institute programs referencing Standards 1.4 (Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and 2.4 (Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians) decreased between 2015 and 2017 (2155 to 571). The figures to date (268 at 31 May 2018) are in line with 2017 figures. (As of June 2017 there were 4,375 teachers employed in ACT public schools.) Although the Education Directorate provides other training for cultural awareness, as data on attendance, at a systems level, are not available it is not possible to assess if the shortfall is being met through alternative training. 4.47

The Education Directorate has provided cultural awareness training, delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, since 2009 which has, necessarily, focused on school principals and the Education Support Office leadership group. 4.52

One hundred and twenty three staff participated in a 90 minute cultural integrity training session held across the four School Networks, Belconnen, Tuggeranong, North Gungahlin and South Weston, in September 2017 in preparation for the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative. The response by 78 participants was positive with some expressing interest in participating in further training. 4.55

One hundred and twenty four school leaders and Education Support Office staff were invited to a three day Cultural Integrity Training session held in October-November 2017. Attendance varied from 84 to 94 (67 percent to 76 percent of those invited). Seventy four percent of attendees responded in a survey that it was professionally relevant and rewarding, and 75 percent of attendees identified that it was personally relevant. As the training was targeted at, and offered to, 124 school leaders and Education Support Office staff it covers two percent of the Education Directorate staff. 4.59

Although the Education Directorate has advised that it has a Professional Learning 2018 Calendar there is no cultural awareness training strategy with training targets and timeframes, quality control principles to guide the training, and a supporting monitoring and evaluation method. A strategy and a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training is needed. 4.65

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and representatives of community groups provided a range of views on Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs') and their role. While all are important the following are emphasised: 4.74

- *[IEOs] say they have a conflict of interest by getting involved ... but why are they there if they cannot get involved?*
- *[IEOs] are public servants with reporting lines and managers to answer to;*
- *[IEOs'] role should be redefined to that of case managers where they can work directly with families. Also, there is a need to increase their numbers;*
- *Some [IEOs] are very good with dealing with children and families while others are not so. The ones who are good are generally locals who have lived in the area for several years and know the families;*
- *[IEOs] need flexibility and not reminding that they work for the Education Directorate when they should be advocating for the child, not the Directorate – this would create a shift in the thinking of the [IEO]; and*
- *[IEOs] do good work with students but it's site specific, inconsistent and sporadic.*

IEOs provided many insights into how they see their role. While all are important the following are emphasised: 4.77

- *[providing] advice about appropriate communication with students and families to bring the kids into school;*
- *Cultural Integrity is everyone's business; there should be a movement away from teachers asking IEOs to do things like advise students and families on particular key dates in schools - teachers should be doing this;*
- *some students are happier to speak with IEOs; this may be because they are a bit scared as to how information will be used by the school;*
- *new teachers can be scared to engage [with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families];*
- *IEOs are seen as part of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community and are seen as someone who students, families and community can yarn with; IEOs can help to take the stigma away and engagement can grow organically; and*
- *[the biggest challenge] is people understanding what an Education Officer's job is; people includes teachers and school office staff.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Directorate stakeholders and education peak bodies indicated that the role of IEOs in schools was valued, if not always available: 4.81

- *Every school, whether governmental or non-government, needs Indigenous Education Officers [IEOs] to work one to two days a week in the school to work beside teachers and to help them engage;*
- *IEOs are critical to improvement because schools have transitory workforces – teachers and principals come and go – however IEOs,*

when they are locally engaged Aboriginal people, are stable and passionate about what they do;

- *In general, IEOs are contracted by Education Departments, are not full time and are not in every school – it is rare [in Australia] to have funding for IEOs’ professional development; and*
- *Principals can fund the position or not – if there is no KPI for Indigenous educational outcomes and a principal doesn’t see that it is an issue for a school’s discretionary funding then they probably won’t fund or top up a salary.*

There is an expectation gap with respect to the role of IEOs. The role of the IEO is to support teachers to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. This is different from directly supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community yet Aboriginal students, families and community have a need to be directly supported and expect IEOs to fill this vacuum. This expectation gap indicates that there is a need to examine how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community can be provided with direct support. 4.84

The Education Directorate needs to identify a means of providing culturally appropriate direct support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community at schools. This may involve calling on members within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or building capacity in the Aboriginal community to provide support rather than this being provided directly by Education Directorate staff. Direction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community on this matter is needed regarding what would assist them and how this could be done. 4.85

The current allocation of IEOs to ACT public schools does not reflect the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the schools. There was no documentation as to the contribution of other factors as the basis for allocation, including: cultural safety in the school/school readiness; school need; student need; and community. Reasons for allocating IEOs need to be documented. 4.91

Information on allocation of IEOs to schools, and the basis for the allocation, needs to be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and placed on the Directorate’s website. This would contribute to facilitating engagement through providing an understanding of the Directorate’s decision-making; it also increases transparency. 4.93

The *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* need to be finalised and, in so doing, clarify ‘...what: ‘default allocation’; ‘adjustment’; ‘priority’ and ‘general’ support by IEOs means. Information is needed on: how schools are to assess each ‘School’s commitment to Cultural Integrity’; what IEOs will not be doing; how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section will combine and apply information on ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment numbers’ and how to apply ‘Flexibility for community links, relationships, school need and cultural factors’ in the allocation of IEOs. It would be useful to: specify a target date for finalising, and subsequently updating, the Guidelines; outline how and when the use of the Draft Guidelines is to 4.107

be monitored, and how these are to be evaluated and updated; and state how the role of IEOs might change, e.g. as the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative matures.

The *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* need to be supported by a succinct, easily readable summary document (say one page). The summary document needs to be shared widely via the website and also off-line. 4.108

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1 SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLANS AND ANNUAL ACTION PLANS

The Education Directorate should improve the quality and comprehensiveness of ACT public schools' Strategic Plans and annual Action Plans with respect to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community by requiring:

- a) an explicit strategy and objective for a school's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community; and
- b) performance measures to monitor and evaluate the school's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

RECOMMENDATION 2 EXPERIENCES THAT CAN AFFECT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

The ACT Government should continue with the process it has adopted for developing the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, and note the concerns expressed during the audit about intergenerational trauma, unconscious bias and deficit discourse.

RECOMMENDATION 3 MANDATORY REPORTING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HARM OR RISK OF HARM IN THE ACT

The ACT Government should continue to progress the work of the review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people known to the child protection system, *Our Booris*, *Our Way*, and note the concerns expressed during the audit about the fear of mandatory reporting when help is sought.

RECOMMENDATION 4 MANDATORY REPORTING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HARM OR RISK OF HARM IN THE ACT

The Education Directorate and the Community Services Directorate (including the Office for Family Safety) should, within the context of the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, develop training that emphasises the provision of support for children and families based on 'a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations'.

RECOMMENDATION 5 SHARING SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES AMONG SCHOOLS

The Education Directorate should request all schools to share information about their engagement methods, successful or not, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community by posting the information on the ACT Education's Google Community website. The ACT Education Directorate should monitor and analyse this information to inform engagement strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 6 PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES

The Education Directorate should develop, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait families and community, a range of information, in different formats and in ways that are easily accessible, including information on:

- a) the ACT school curriculum; and
- b) support funding for Aboriginal and Torres Islander students, how it is accessed and in what circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION 7 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EMPLOYMENT ACTION PLAN

The Education Directorate should finalise and implement the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and support action plan and, in so doing, give particular emphasis to increasing the number of, and support provided for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders.

RECOMMENDATION 8 CULTURAL AWARENESS

The Education Directorate should develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development and cultural awareness training strategy for staff that:

- a) covers all staff;
- b) sets targets and timeframes for staff to complete training;
- c) has quality control principles for guiding the training;
- d) guides how to monitor and evaluate training; and

This strategy should be supported by a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training.

RECOMMENDATION 9 SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

The Education Directorate should identify a means of providing culturally appropriate direct support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community at schools. In doing so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community should be requested to provide direction on what would assist them and how this could be done.

RECOMMENDATION 10 ALLOCATION OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION OFFICERS TO SCHOOLS

The Education Directorate should place information on its website to inform families about the IEO support provided for students, including where this is available. This information should also be provided through other formats to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

RECOMMENDATION 11 DRAFT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION OFFICER PROGRAM GUIDELINES – JANUARY 2018

The Education Directorate should review and finalise its *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* and, in so doing, provide greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the IEOs and outline how and when the Guidelines are to be monitored, evaluated and updated.

RECOMMENDATION 12 SUMMARY DOCUMENT OF THE DRAFT GUIDELINES

The Education Directorate should produce a summary document from its *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* and share widely via the website and off-line.

Agency responses

In accordance with subsection 18(2) of the *Auditor-General Act 1996*, the Education Directorate, Community Services Directorate and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, were 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. As part of this process, the Directorates were offered the opportunity to provide a statement for inclusion in the final report in the Summary Chapter.

The Education Directorate provided comments for inclusion in the Summary Chapter. The Community Services Directorate and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate did not provide comments.

Education Directorate response

The Education Directorate appreciates the efforts of the ACT Auditor-General and her team in acknowledging and recognising the Directorate's aim to create an environment of cultural integrity which describes the environment a school creates to support and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

The Directorate's approach recognises that the whole school community benefits from higher cultural integrity, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives embedded throughout teaching and learning and the physical environment.

The development of the ACT Government's Cultural Integrity Policy and the Directorate's Cultural Integrity Continuum demonstrates the commitment to a strengths-based, non-deficit approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 Canberra is situated on the country of the Ngunnawal people. Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also live in the ACT, for example from nearby Wiradjuri, Eora (Sydney area) and Malpa (Western Australia).
- 1.2 At the 2016 census, there were 6,508 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT, two percent of the total ACT population of 397,397. This is an increase of 26 percent from the 2011 census of 5,184 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 1.3 Of the ACT school population of 77,142 in February 2018, there were 2,401 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 3 percent of the total, enrolled in independent private schools, Catholic schools and public schools. This is an increase of 4 percent on 2017. Of the 2,401 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 1,887 (79 percent) attend public schools, 167 attend independent private schools and 347 attend Catholic schools; only one school has no students who have identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Eighty-six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in the five Koori preschool programs with 41 students enrolled in both Koori and mainstream preschool programs.⁴

Education Directorate's and Public Schools' responsibilities

- 1.4 A context issue for this audit is the respective responsibilities of the Education Directorate and public schools for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community:
 - the delivery of services is primarily the responsibility of schools; and
 - schools are supported by the Education Support Office, which provides policy and practice guidance to schools, and provides some services directly, e.g. the Network Student Engagement Teams and the Secondary Scholarships Program which support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in years 11 and 12.
- 1.5 Subsection 21(1) of the *Education Act 2004* provides that the Director-General of the Education Directorate is responsible to the Minister for the operation of government schools; subsection 30(1) of the Act provides that the Director-General must decide the curriculum requirements for students attending government schools.

⁴ ACT Education Directorate Census of ACT Schools February 2018

- 1.6 However, 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 outcomes for students. In this respect, subsection 21(4) 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.

- 1.7 In support of the autonomy and responsibility of each ACT public school, section 38 of the *Education Act 2004* provides for the establishment of a School Board for each school. Section 39 of the Act provides for the functions of a School Board, some of which include:

- establishing the strategic direction and priorities for the school;
- developing and reviewing education policies at the school;
- developing relationships between the school and the community and between the school and community organisations; and
- encouraging parent participation in their children's learning.

- 1.8 A School Board and the school's Principal work in partnership to establish the strategic direction and priorities of the school. The *ACT School Board Manual* states that:

School boards work in partnership with the principal and have specific responsibility for establishing the strategic direction and priorities of the school, monitoring and reviewing school performance, developing, maintaining and reviewing curriculum, approving budgets and policies for the effective use of school resources and management of financial risk.

- 1.9 The *Education Act 2004* identifies school principals as having responsibility for 'educational outcomes for students at the school'. The responsibility of school principals is exercised within the overarching guidance and responsibility of the Director-General of the Education Directorate and the support provided by the Education Directorate's Education Support Office, which includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section. This means there are shared responsibilities and accountabilities, including in relation to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools initiative

- 1.10 In 2016 the Education Directorate commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to undertake a review to support the development of the Student Resource Allocation model.⁵

⁵ Deloitte Access Economics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resource allocation, Setting the Direction Final Report, February 2017, p 3, p 5.

1.11 According to the report provided by Deloitte Access Economics:

The clear consensus from the literature is that fundamental differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and prevailing practices in mainstream education across all Australian schools – and the challenges in schools to recognise, understand and facilitate these different education, cultural and wellbeing needs – are central to explaining the consistent and persistent differentials in the education system. Thus, ensuring that schooling is culturally safe and relevant is essential to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes and is a precursor to social and economic equity.⁶

1.12 The Deloitte Access Economics report informed the Education Directorate's *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative which aims to '... break from the negative discourse that has dominated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for many years'.⁷

1.13 According to various Education Directorate reports and publications relating to Cultural Integrity:

Cultural Integrity represents a break from the deficit discourse which has dominated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for many years. It is focused on the environment a school creates to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to welcome and engage their families and communities.

Cultural Integrity describes the environment a school creates to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to welcome and engage their families, and to support all students to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages and perspectives. Every school's story and community is unique, so Cultural Integrity will mean something different to each school.

The whole school community will benefit from higher Cultural Integrity, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives embedded throughout teaching and learning, and into the physical school environment.

ACT school leaders will be change agents building a culture of high achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and ensuring improved cultural integrity is a priority.

1.14 The Education Directorate's *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative details four dimensions on which schools 'should focus':

- Engagement with families and community;
- Teaching with Cultural Integrity;
- Leadership, celebration and environment; and
- High expectations and successful transitions.

1.15 While the audit criteria were informed by the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative's first dimension (Engagement with families and community) the planning, development and implementation of the initiative was not audited.

⁶ Deloitte Access Economics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resource allocation, Setting the Direction Final Report, February 2017, p 2.

⁷ Education Directorate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools, https://www.education.act.gov.au/school_education/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education Accessed 21 March 2018

Acknowledge contribution of all stakeholders

- 1.16 Many thanks to the (60 plus) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to this audit report and have patiently, generously and honestly explained their perspectives and situations. In this audit report there has been a focus on having their voices expressed. Thanks also to Mr Ben Mitchell of Coolamon Advisors who, as a member of the audit team, with unlimited patience and good humour, educated the rest of the team, increasing their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, locally and more generally.

Audit objective and scope

Audit objective

- 1.17 The objective of this audit is to provide an independent opinion to the Legislative Assembly on the effectiveness of ACT public schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Engagement

- 1.18 For the purpose of the audit the meaning of engagement was taken from the Education Directorate's Cultural Integrity Continuum, which was developed as part of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative. The *Engagement with families and communities* dimension includes partnering with families to support students and community engagement.

Audit scope

- 1.19 The audit examined a selection of ACT public schools' activities and initiatives for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community to identify:
- better practice activities and initiatives undertaken in ACT public schools (as well as better practice activities and initiatives undertaken by students, families and community); and
 - barriers that hinder engagement between ACT public schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.
- 1.20 A strong focus was given to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and the community as part of audit fieldwork, in order to obtain their views on ACT public schools' (and the Education Directorate's) activities. To this end more than 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were interviewed.
- 1.21 In accordance with the Education Directorate's school based management model, the audit focused on activities and initiatives by the selected ACT public schools. It also recognised and reflected, where appropriate, on support and guidance provided by the Education

Directorate (including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section provides a point of contact in the Directorate for staff seeking advice or resources relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education programs.⁸

- 1.22 The audit examined activities and initiatives of five ACT public schools. In the course of fieldwork two other schools were visited with specific objectives, a Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and a school's Friendship Hub. In selecting schools consideration was given to numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled and geographic location; the selected schools are named A,B,C,D and E through the report.
- 1.23 The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in ACT public schools varies from zero (one school only) to 88, with around 50 percent of schools having between 7 to 16 students. The numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the five schools selected for the audit are shown in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the five ACT public schools selected for the audit.

School	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled	Network
School A	21	Tuggeranong
School B	66	Belconnen
School C	88	North Gungahlin
School D	39	South Weston
School E	14	North Gungahlin

Source: Education Directorate – February 2018 census

Out of scope

- 1.24 Non-government, private schools and childcare (private or government) were not in scope.
- 1.25 Neither the Education Directorate's curriculum nor mandatory reporting under the *Children and Young People Act 2008* were audited. They were, however, mentioned by stakeholders.

⁸ The Office is situated within the Learning and Teaching Branch of the School Performance and Improvement Division. It describes its role as supporting the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from a strength-based approach through improving system capability. The Office plans to achieve this through increasing cultural integrity and raising awareness of achievement of Indigenous students.

Audit criteria, approach and method

Audit criteria

- 1.26 Proposed criteria to guide the conduct of the audit and address the objective of the audit are listed below. The criteria are based on the engagement with families and community dimension that is part of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative.
- 1.27 The audit criteria are:
- 1) Schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is effectively managed; and
 - 2) School staff are effectively supported and trained in their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.
- 1.28 During the audit it was considered that aspects of governance relating to the engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community were important and was therefore examined.

Audit approach and method

- 1.29 The audit adopted the Office's *Performance Audit Methods and Practices (PAMPr)* and related Policies, Practice Statements and Guidance Papers. These policies and practices have been designed to comply with the requirements of the *Auditor-General Act 1996* and relevant professional standards (including *ASAE 3500 – Performance Engagements*).
- 1.30 In preparing for this audit the audit team was informed of the reservations held by the Education Directorate and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders regarding presenting material that reinforces a deficit discourse. The implementation of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative by the Education Directorate contributes to the policy intent of moving away from a focus on the deficit discourse to '[s]chools meet[ing] the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students', as 'a deliberate shift away from the deficit discourse toward a more strengths-based approach'.⁹ This reflects the move away from deficit reporting such as 'closing the gap' although it should be noted that Australian jurisdictions continue to be required to report to the Australian Government using this terminology.

⁹ Education Directorate website: https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/publications_a-z/annual-report/annual-report-2016-2017/part-b/b2.-performance-analysis Accessed 30 April 2018

1.31 According to Mr Scott Gorringe, Director, Murrinmatters Consulting:

[d]eficit discourse describes a mode of thinking that frames and represents Aboriginal identity in a narrative of negativity, deficiency and disempowerment. When all the thinking, all the conversations and all the approaches are framed in a discourse that sees Aboriginality as a problem, very little positive movement is possible.¹⁰

1.32 The audit approach and method consisted of:

- reviewing relevant literature, practices and work undertaken on this subject by other jurisdictions to identify better practices;
- identifying and reviewing relevant information and documentation including the governance and accountability framework and related policy and procedures, research documents, and relevant reports;
- interviews and discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community representatives, including representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups, organisations and service providers;
- interviews and discussions with school-based staff, including the five schools selected for the audit and other schools that were identified during the course of the audit;
- interviews and discussions with Education Support Office staff, including:
 - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section; and
 - the Network Student Engagement Team;
- an interview with Ms Katrina Fanning, in her capacity as Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, on a specific section as the draft report was being finalised. Ms Fanning is also the Director of Coolamon Advisors but did not undertake any part of the audit and was only interviewed in her role as Chair; and
- employing, to be part of the audit team, Mr Benjamin Mitchell, who is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and a senior consultant at Coolamon Advisors. Mr Mitchell led the engagement and discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, community and other stakeholders. This engagement included asking questions related to engagement (included in Appendix A) and other techniques with particular stakeholder groups, e.g. college students, such as ‘thumbs up/thumbs down’ from the students in response to a list of answers (anonymously provided by the students) to a series of questions posed by Mr Mitchell. The views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders stakeholders are presented without question.

1.33 The audit team interviewed:

- one hundred and twenty seven people, of these there were:
 - 37 Education Support Office staff, 14 of whom identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
 - 22 school staff, 7 of whom identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;

¹⁰ Scott Gorringe, for Indigenous X, Aboriginal culture is not a problem. The way we talk about it is, 15 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/aboriginal-culture-is-not-a-problem-the-way-we-talk-about-it-is> Accessed 9 April 2018

- 17 students, 15 of whom identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
 - 13 family members, all identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
 - 1 representative from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body;
 - 30 community members, 20 of whom identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; and
 - 5 academics and training professionals, all identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- 1.34 Mr Mitchell led all the interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Islander students, families and community, other than one interview with some of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs).
- 1.35 Mr Mitchell completed a qualitative analysis of the discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and identified recurring themes from the responses to his questions. Additionally, Mr Mitchell identified positive and negative feedback about the five selected ACT public schools' engagement, as well as some other schools' engagement, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.
- 1.36 Mr Mitchell's material is provided below in full without alteration other than to de-identify schools or particular organisations and formatting changes. His report includes matters that are broader than the audit's focus.

THE VOICE of the Students

Theme: Indigenous Identity

Finding

Students engaged identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander however many students were uncertain about their ancestry or language group.

Evidence

Some Year 11 and 12 students stated that they come from:

- *"New South Wales, but I don't know"*
- *"Victoria but that's all I know"*

Others stated:

- *"I am Wiradjuri but I don't know how to say it"; or*
- *"I'm not Sure"*

Other stakeholders stated:

- *"Some kids do not know their identity"*
- *"You know about [your identity from] when young not [just] when you can access funding; this is the issue about ticking a box"*

- *“A lot of kids moved from high school to [a] College and now they identify”*

Finding

Indigenous students feel supported when an Indigenous Education officer is employed in the school and/or a teacher who they feel comfortable to engage with.

Evidence

Students transferring from schools with no Indigenous Education Officer, to a school with an Indigenous Education Officer were more engaged and felt comfortable being at school. Comments from students include:

- *“we get more support and understanding”*
- *“the College provides Support”*
- *“In my previous school, year 11, they did not know what to teach” [in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures]*
- *“There is positive approach to learning about Aboriginal culture”*

Finding

Students felt parts of the education curriculum and expectations are not inclusive toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.

Evidence

Students engaged felt that the current curriculum did not include Aboriginal culture nor does it address some of the barriers that Aboriginal students were experiencing regards expectations. Their responses included the following;

- *“not much Aboriginal content in the Curriculum”*
- *“everything [The Curriculum], evolves around the ability to write at college”*
- *“Teachers [don’t] understand that students have family responsibilities as well as going to school”. [Some students have to provide for their family by working after school]*
- *“There are no specific programmes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”*

Theme: Schools Engagement and Resource Supports

Finding

Students felt that there are positive levels of engagement from some teachers and allocation of school resources meet their learning needs.

Evidence

Students of the K-10 cohort felt engaged for the most part and were appreciative of the school resources that allowed greater engagement and participation in a culturally safe and learner friendly environment. When students were asked what they liked about their school as well as the level of engagement from teachers, students responses were:

Primary School –

- *“They have books and I like reading and making books”*

- *"The school lets me read and make books"*
- *"My teacher is Good"*

High School –

- *"I love having the Homework hub, as I use it a lot with doing my homework"*
- *Does the school support you? "Yes they do, there are a lot activities and workshop they do here which is good"*
- *"We do a lot here"*
- *"Teachers are culturally engaged"*
- *"Yes they are very engaged"*

Finding

Students felt in some instances teachers are not fully engaged or aware of student's personal situations and family obligations that cause undue pressure.

Evidence

When students were asked what are the challenges at school, their response were;

- *"They are strict"*
- *"When I take my sister to sign at pre-school I have to walk all the way to the other side of the school to get to my class. The teacher then records me as late and when I try to speak to him, he doesn't want to listen"*
- *"They don't follow through", "They threaten us but they do nothing"*
- *"I am moving schools anyways"... "Because my cousin is moving"*

THE VOICE of the Families

Theme: Bullying and Suspensions

Finding

Families felt that some of their students are being exposed to increase levels of bullying within schools.

Evidence

Feedback from parents and kinship carers including Grandmothers, state that:

- *"Bullying is an issue and we feel we are stuck and teachers cannot control the situation of bullying"*
- *"Families have to move their kids to another school but how many times do they have to move schools"*
- *"Our kids are being bullied and are blamed for it when they retaliate"*
- *"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Liaison Officers/Education Workers say they have a conflict of interest by getting involved [with Bullying incidences] but why are they there if they cannot get involved"*
- *"Our kids retaliate to bullying and get suspended"*
- *"Our kids tell the teacher that they are being bullied but the teacher does nothing"*

- *"We have to defend kids against teachers"*

Finding

Families felt that some of their students are being suspended for reacting to increase levels of bullying.

Evidence

Feedback from parents and kinship carers including Grandmothers, state that;

- *"Other kids at school know what buttons to push – at home my grandchild behaves differently"*
- *"My grandchild was suspended without any home work being sent home with him"*
- *"My grandchild has told me that 'no one listens' at school; the teachers say to my grandchild 'I don't want to hear'; my grandchild feels unheard"*
- *"Being suspended means our kids don't get the education they need and the kids don't want to go back to school"*
- *"We feel about our kids the same way that white fellas do about their kids"*
- *"I picked up the phone and spoke with the Principal about bullying going on at the school and asked the Principal to sort it out"*
- *"I didn't hear back from the Principal, but I will call [the Principal] back"*

Theme: Schools Engagement

Finding

Families felt that the schools suspension actions and reengagement processes are unjust and ineffective respectively.

Evidence

Feedback from parents and kinship carers including Grandmothers, state that;

- *"Schools are not engaged with us; we have to engage because we are sick of our kids being suspended"*
- *"We will accompany our children and their children (our grandchildren) in order to see the teacher and the Principal of the school"*
- *"We understand that schools have no tolerance to violence"*
- *"There is no follow up with the child once suspended and at home"*
- *"On return to school the only conversation is between the Principal and the child – the child is asked 'what is going to change?'"*
- *"Can't just be one sided – what is happening with the other kid?"*
- *"Something has to be done about it" [bullying and suspensions]*
- *"When children are suspended they miss out on other things like sport" [football]*
- *"The well-being of children is important and it should not just be about sending them home; this becomes an issue and the kids think they are bad"*
- *"The schools don't do anything until the suspension is over; the onus is on the young person"*
- *"Sometimes the young person has to sign a contract to say they won't use violence at school"*

Theme: Ways to Improve

Finding

Families felt that there needs to be greater Engaging and supporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through different means of resources and activities, providing greater engagement and participation.

Evidence

Feedback from parents and kinship carers including Grandmothers, state that:

- *"Kids need additional support in school – such as an area or room [of ownership] – a [positive] time out centre"*
- *"Play to develop' is one approach to support kids – an example of this is under 12's mixed netball tournaments"*
- *"Kids can be more engaged through sport"*
- *"Time out spaces could help so that a young person can recognise triggers in themselves and they can learn to develop their skills"*
- *"Black kids should not just be expected to be good at sports; they should not be denied an education – every kid needs an education, remaining in school and enjoying it"*
- *"Teachers are not really culturally capable"*
- *"Front office staff need to be culturally aware"*
- *"Schools do not engage with the Nannies Group"*
- *"It should be about building the child up, child centred support, teaching the children to recognise their triggers"*
- *"There has to be another way of dealing with it (rather than missing out on playing sport)"*
- *"The Education system should sustain kids in schools and have them enjoy it"*
- *"The schools should consider having Time Out Centres"*
- *"Teachers should be asking what is happening here"*
- *"[We – Grannies Group] would like any supports that would keep our kids in school"*
- *"Education should acknowledge 'intergenerational trauma' – it should be about the well-being of the child"*
- *"Reconciliation Action Plans are words on paper but how are the words interpreted"*

Theme: Aboriginal Education Officers

Finding

Families felt an uncertainty as to the correct name or title of the "Aboriginal Education Officer" along with ill-defined roles and responsibilities that make it difficult to effectively engage.

Evidence

Families provided their thoughts about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers:

- *"We need to know what they [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers] are supposed to do".*

- *"They will take a back seat when things are going on"*
- *"Who are they supporting? It seems they are supporting the Education Department"*
- *"We expect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers/Education Workers to support us – don't give them this name if they are not doing that"*
- *"If the Liaison Officers/Education Workers are burnt out they should get out of the job"*
- *"We have no direct engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers – ... a contact in the Catholic Education System will help put people in touch with right education department people"*
- *"Treat black to black; treated as second class"*
- *"Education Officers are asked to do a lot of mainstream issues"*
- *"Teachers can lack cultural competency"*
- *"How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Education Officers understand; can develop relationships by talking with kids but some don't have kids themselves"*
- *"What are the KPIs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers?"*
- *"Too much is put on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers; the school is accountable"*

Theme: Complaint Process

Finding

The complaints process is less appealing and underutilised due to non-awareness and communication.

Evidence

Families provided their thoughts regarding the complaints process that included:

- *"There probably was a complaints process but they don't hear anything back"*
- *"A lot of [us] parents don't have the gift of the gab"*
- *"We have different communication style and use choice words"*
- *"If we talk nice, they think we are intimidated by them"*
- *"The schools engage when they've had enough – not before"*

Theme: Finances and School Money

Finding

Families felt an uncertainty of the allocation and purpose of funding attributed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Evidence

- *"We don't know what the Education Department is doing with money for Aboriginal Support Programmes"*
- *"What are Aboriginal Gardens for? Is money being used to support a garden rather than the children?"*
- *"Principal told me the school had no funding for a speech therapist and when I asked what I could do I was advised 'send your daughter to school'. My daughter goes to a catholic school, she has*

access to a speech therapist and her own personal learning plan for each class"

- *"Schools don't inform you of incidental money they have access to; equity funding for extra support; if you don't know they won't tell you. When parents do ask the school's front office staff say the funding is for all kids not just Aboriginal kids; front office staff need to be competent on what support there is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families"*
- *"Money is not going to the right place"*
- *"There is an issue with funding being targeted to kids who don't need it"*
- *"The department doesn't clarify unless funding sought"*
- *"Not all parent know what money their kids have a right to"*
- *"Some need funding and some don't"*
- *"Our kids are missing out on what is rightfully theirs"*
- *"Biggest challenge is unconscious bias racism; the more Koori kids the more money there is"*
- *"MURA Awards for kids that are doing well - may be a kid who has just found out that they are Koori, is nominated but what about other kids; nominations are made by the teachers and there may be unconscious bias racism"*

Theme – Technology and Internet Access

Finding

Most student and families have access to mobile phones and can be contacted by schools.

Evidence

Students and parents/carers can have contact numbers change frequently.

The group's comments included:

- *"It was not an issue really, the school will ring me as I am the Nanny"*
- *"Mobile phones are an issue for kids while at school; the children focus on their phones rather than school work"*

Ben asked about families' access to the internet. The group said:

- *"Kids have a tablet but don't bring home"*
- *"Not a lot of families have internet connection; reasons may be affordability"*
- *"If there is no internet connection kids don't do their homework and they become disengaged; the issue is lack of access to the internet"*

Ben asked the group if they had access to the internet. All group members said they did.

Ben asked if it was a challenge for kids do to their homework. The group's comments included:

- *"Some kids might have shame doing their homework"*
- *"Teachers treat all the children as white middle-classed and issues are suppressed; the teachers should ring the family; if the teachers don't deal with the issues it is disengagement"*

Ben asked about experiences at [a] Primary. The group member said the school informs her on what is going on.

Other comments were:

- *"The catholic school uses an app that is used to keep families up to date on both positive and negative information about children's classwork – families receive an email notification and they use the app to receive information"*
- *"The internet is a luxury and not necessarily for everyone"*

Theme – Good Engagement

Ben asked if there were any public schools that had good engagement.

The group said:

- *"[a] School; don't think there are problems with the school and teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers are forthcoming"*
- *"It's hard if a child doesn't want to do the work because it's difficult – they would rather be on their mobile phones"*
- *"Kids can switch from app to app in school time and it is allowed by the school"*
- *"There should be no phones in the class room"*
- *"I went to [a] School and then to [other school] but I don't go anymore; there was more support at [a] School"*

Ben asked how [a] School supported students. The group said:

- *"If a student needs to catch up with work they could go to a designated room and if they were angry they could go to a quiet room. [The school] didn't have a specific room for Aboriginal students; [b] School does"*
- *[a] School has good engagement and they don't make students feel they are being judged*
- *"They used to have an Indigenous worker but not any longer"*

Theme: Out of Home Care

- *"As someone who works in a residential care home for young people my experience is the black kids are treated with same brush; any time there is escalation I am called to come and get them; the school did not know the kids were in care. Kids might run off and it wouldn't be until an hour later I was called"*
- *[a school] – "Improve inter agency dialogue and communication to enhance the welfare of the child. Like [the school staff] also gave the example of CYPS, Centrelink and the schools not communicating effectively"*

Theme: Dedicated Class room / Breakout area

- *"Schools may have rooms that are associated with being a bad room; there is not a teacher in the room"*
- *"Teachers did not know about the culture"*
- *"Teachers don't take the time to know the kids; Principals are the same"*
- *"Schools don't care like they used to"*
- *"At [a school] there are a few teachers who are good and other ones who didn't take the time to get to know me"*

Ben asked how the teachers were good. *"The group member said that teachers come up to me and talk to me; when I asked a question they would answer and get to know me."*

Theme: [A particular school]

Other comments from the group included:

- *"[the school] does not have an appropriate space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; there is a little room out the back for 50 Indigenous kids but the room can only really fit 20 students"*
- *"When kids want support they come to [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisation]; we see a cluster of 8 to 10 Koori kids every day and 15 to 20 throughout the day. They come because it is a safe place"*
- *"An issue for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisation] is not being privy to students' timetables so don't know if the student is meant to be in class; if we had communication with school we could help"*
- *"If they weren't at [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisation] they would be somewhere else"*
- *"[the school] need[s] the support of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer"*

Theme: What Does Successful Engagement Look Like?

- *"A place that is safe for students so that they remain in school"*
- *"Cultural sensitive support towards kids"*
- *"Knowing kids spend a lot of time in the school's care, the school needs to know what approaches to take"*
- *"Take out zoning areas"*
- *"Private system is not assessable unless get sponsored"*
- *"Every school should have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer"*

- 1.37 Auditing Standard ASAE 3500 requires that an audit consider events up to the date of the report. To achieve this, the audit team will, when seeking comments on the draft report, ask the agency to inform the team of any significant events affecting audit findings since fieldwork ceased.

2 ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

- 2.1 This chapter examines aspects of governance that relate to the Education Directorate's (and schools') engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Summary

Conclusions

The Education Directorate is focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in terms of progress, strengths and improvements to build cultural integrity. This is a move to positive discourse away from centring on deficit discourse or mindsets: 'When all the thinking, all the conversations and all the approaches are framed in a discourse that sees Aboriginality as a problem, very little positive movement is possible'.¹¹

The Education Directorate has modified its strategic indicators in its budget papers to focus on a positive discourse. Furthermore, there are strategies and actions relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education in the Directorate's strategic plan and action plans that have moved to a strengths based focus on growth and achievement.

While most of the audited schools' strategic and action plans mirrored those of the Directorate, not all did. This can be achieved by including, in each school's strategic and action plans, explicit strategies and objectives for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community; these should be accompanied by performance measures to monitor the effectiveness of the engagement.

Key findings

	Paragraph
A feature of the 2018-19 Budget Papers was the removal of mean NAPLAN scores (for all students) as strategic indicators, with a focus instead on students' gain in NAPLAN scores. This accords with the Education Directorate's focus on a positive discourse.	2.9
The Education Directorate's <i>Strategic Plan 2014-17 Education Capital: Leading the Nation</i> , and its annual Action Plans from 2014 to 2017, include actions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes. From 2016 the language in the annual Action Plans changed from 'closing the achievement gap'; the	2.17

¹¹ Scott Gorringer, for Indigenous X, Aboriginal culture is not a problem. The way we talk about it is, 15 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/aboriginal-culture-is-not-a-problem-the-way-we-talk-about-it-is> Accessed 9 April 2018

Directorate's 2016-17 Annual Report articulated this change, noting that '*our vision is for schools that meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and we are working towards achieving this through building cultural integrity. Cultural integrity represents a break from past approaches which have focussed on deficit mindsets. It engages a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement. It is positive and constructive, and benefits the whole school community*'. The Directorate's 2016 and 2017 Action Plans reflect the Directorate's change of focus from 'deficit mindsets' and instead focus on 'a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Its draft 2018 strategic plan is 'out for comment'.

Analysis of the five audited schools' Strategic Plans shows that, while all of the plans identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities generally, there was a mixed approach to specifically identifying and articulating strategies or actions relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. Three schools' Strategic Plans refer to specific strategies or priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including:

- two schools' plans to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational achievements or goals; and
- one school's plan to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' attendance at school and participation in school based programs.

Analysis of the five audited schools' 2018 Action Plans showed that, in line with the Strategic Plans' identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities, all Action Plans identified activities and associated indicators relating to these strategies or priorities. Two of the Action Plans identified specific actions or indicators relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These schools' annual Action Plans also identified and articulated the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer.

The Education Directorate has developed guidance for ACT public schools on engaging with parents and community, including specific guidance for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community. The guidance includes the *ACT Engaging Schools Framework* (2015); *Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT*; and the *Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Families*, which has been available since 2015. The guidance was not consistently referred to or consistently used in the five schools selected for audit.

The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative is the Education Directorate's new approach for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and engaging with their families and community; *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*

is being implemented during 2018. The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools'* Google+ Community has been developed by the Education Directorate to provide resources and best practices from other jurisdictions to support schools implement the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*. To date, there has been limited evidence of regular discussion by, or questions from, schools via the Google+ Community about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, although the Education Directorate advised that it is a source of information and ideas and 'while staff may post discussion points and questions, these generally take place in other forums'.

Complaints regarding education services are generally managed at the local level by schools, however, complainants may contact the Education Directorate directly. The Education Directorate does not collect, automatically, information on whether complaints received by the Directorate relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students although this may be included in free text. The Education Directorate's Complaints and Liaison Unit has provided information about the complaint process to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's Education Representative. 2.52

The Education Directorate provided information in its *2016-17 Annual Report* in the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes' section. This section describes programs and projects and particular school initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that have been implemented during 2016-17. While the projects and initiatives do not specifically state that their focus is on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, it may be inferred from some that they involve engagement. The projects and initiatives include: 2.55

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence – Campbell High School, a centre that provides programs and initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Melrose High School Indigenous Studies Centre, a centre that provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and Big Picture Academy, a learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in year 9 and 10 to study subject areas they are passionate about; and
- Wanniasa School – Ganbra Program, the program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to learn more about their culture and fostering parental engagement by encouraging families to participate in Ganbra activities.

The Education Directorate reports annually to the Legislative Assembly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. These annual reports are published on the Directorate's website, however, there is no direct link to these publications from the Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education webpage; it would be helpful to provide a link. 2.64

Planning for engagement

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015

2.1 The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* was formulated by the Education Council¹² and endorsed by Education Ministers, including the ACT's Minister on behalf of the ACT Government, on 18 September 2015. The Strategy's vision is that:

all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people achieve their full learning potential, and are empowered to shape their own futures, and are supported to embrace their culture and identity as Australia's First Nation peoples.

2.2 High level guidance is provided in the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*, including a vision and principles on relationships and cultural recognition as well as culture and identity. These are matters that are particularly pertinent to this audit.

2.3 The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* is available on the Education Directorate's website page on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

ACT Education Directorate Strategic Plan

2.4 The Education Directorate's *Strategic Plan 2014-17* 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.¹³

2.5 Analysis of the *Strategic Plan 2014-17* with respect to the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community shows:

- one of the five identified priorities is 'connecting with families and the community', which further states 'we will partner with families and engage with the community to build meaningful relationships';
- one of the strategies listed under the priority of 'connecting with families and the community' is to 'build and sustain partnerships with parents, carers and families';
- one of the strategies listed under the priority of 'high expectations, high performance' is to 'close the achievement gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'; and

¹² The Education Council consists of Ministers from the Commonwealth, states and territories responsible for early childhood education, school education and higher education.

¹³ ACT Education (and Training) Directorate, *Strategic Plan 2014-17 Education Capital: Leading the Nation*, p 4.

- a series of indicators are identified, some of which include:
 - reduce the number of students who are not achieving:
 - halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading and numeracy;
 - increase the number of children who benefit from early childhood education and care:
 - increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in preschool;
 - increase qualification levels of the ACT community:
 - increase commencements of higher level qualifications (Certificate III and above) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁴

2.6 The Education Directorate's Strategic Plan 2014-17, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation*, does not provide any further information or guidance with respect to the indicators, including:

- how they are to be measured, including what measures and reference points are to be used; or
- the quantitative targets to be associated with the indicators.

2.7 The Education Directorate advised that it is developing a new strategic plan and, as at 7 May 2018, the plan is 'out for comment'.

Strategic and accountability indicators

2.8 As part of the ACT's annual budget process, the Education Directorate identifies strategic and accountability indicators. For the purpose of the 2018-19 ACT Budget, a series of accountability indicators have been identified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These indicators primarily relate to:

- preschool enrolments;
- retention rates; and
- vocational education qualifications.

¹⁴ ACT Education (and Training) Directorate, Strategic Plan 2014-17 Education Capital: Leading the Nation.

Table 2-1 ACT Education Directorate's Strategic Indicators 2017-18 and Accountability Indicators 2018-19 relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Selected Education Directorate Strategic Indicators 2017-18 and Accountability Indicators (2018-19)
Strategic Indicators 2017-18
Strategic Indicator 1.5: Mean NAPLAN achievement score for reading of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 5 public school students (2017 Target 451)
Strategic Indicator 1.6: Mean NAPLAN achievement score for numeracy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 5 public school students (2017 Target 444)
Strategic Indicator 1.7: Mean NAPLAN achievement score for reading of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 9 public school students (2017 Target 556)
Strategic Indicator 1.8: Mean NAPLAN achievement score for numeracy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander year 9 public school student (2107 Target 552)
Strategic Indicator 3.2: Percentage of year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public school students who received a Senior Secondary Certificate (2017 Target 80.0%)
Strategic Indicator 3.3: Percentage of public school year 12 graduates employed or studying six months after completing year 12 (2017 Target 92.8%)
Accountability Indicators 2018-19
Number of enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in preschool in public schools (2017-18 and 2018-19 Targets 250) ¹
Percentage of year 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who proceed to public secondary college education (2017-18 Targets 80%, 2018-19 Targets 85%) ²
Apparent retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public school students from year 7 to year 12 (2017-18 Targets 75%, 2018-19 Targets 90%) ³
Percentage of year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who receive a Tertiary Entrance Statement (2017-18 Targets 20%, 2018-19 Targets 20%) ⁴
Percentage of year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who receive a nationally recognised vocational qualification (2017-18 Targets 60%, 2018-19 Targets 60%) ⁵

Source: ACT Government Budget 2017-18 and 2018-19, Budget Statements F, Education Directorate.

- 1 The indicator data for 2018-19 should be considered a projection as preschool is not compulsory and is subject to parental choice.
- 2 This is an anticipated outcome rather than a target as it is based on the historical pattern of student/parental choice as per section 7 of the *Education Act 2004* which allows for parents to choose the most suitable education setting for their child.
- 3 This provides an indicative measure of the proportion of full-time public school students who have stayed at school from years 7 to 12 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in ACT schools, assuming an expected rate of progression of one grade per year.
- 4 This is predominately an anticipated outcome rather than a target as it is based on the historical pattern of student choice. Students may choose courses leading to a Tertiary Entrance Statement (TES) and/or a vocationally recognised qualification which may result in the sum of TES and vocationally recognised qualifications exceeding 100%. To the extent that the measure captures the rate of non-attainment of a TES, it can be considered partially as a target.
- 5 This is predominately an anticipated outcome rather than a target as it is based on the historical pattern of student choice. Students may choose courses leading to a vocationally recognised qualification and/or a TES which may result in the sum of TES and vocationally recognised qualifications exceeding 100%. To the extent that the measure captures the rate of non-attainment of a vocational qualification, it can be considered partially as a target.

Note: There are no Strategic Indicators specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the 2018-19 Budget Statements. Strategic Indicators were included in the 2017-18 Budget Papers.

- 2.9 A feature of the 2018-19 Budget Papers was the removal of mean NAPLAN scores (for all students) as strategic indicators, with a focus instead on students' gain in NAPLAN scores. This accords with the Education Directorate's focus on a positive discourse.

Education Capital: Leading the Nation Action Plans 2014 to 2017

- 2.10 Supporting the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan 2014-2017, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation* is an annual Action Plan, the most recent of which is *Education Capital 2017*. The Education Directorate has sought to implement its Strategic Plan 2014-17 through action plans for each of the years from 2014 to 2017. The *Education Capital 2017* Action Plan identifies several activities under each Strategic Plan priority (refer to paragraph 2.4).

- 2.11 The *Education Capital 2017* Action Plan also reiterates the overarching objectives and indicators identified in the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan 2014-2017, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation* (refer to paragraph 2.4). However, it is noted that the Strategic Plan indicator 'halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading and numeracy' has been amended in the 2017 Action Plan to 'improve reading and numeracy skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'.

- 2.12 Each Action Plan from 2014 to 2017 includes a list of activities or strategies to be implemented under each of the Strategic Plan priorities. Under the 'high expectations, high performance' priority a series of activities have been identified that are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In the 2014 and 2015 Action Plans these were articulated as 'closing the achievement gap' but in the 2016 and 2017 Action Plans the language has changed:

Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes by:

- leadership opportunities and mentoring programs;
- improved attendance;
- personalised learning, increased pathway opportunities and year 12 completions; and
- implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Whole of Government Agreement.

- 2.13 The change in language from the 'closing the achievement gap' was articulated by the Education Directorate in its *2016-17 Annual Report*:

The Education Directorate provides a range of supports, programs and initiatives dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff. Our vision is for schools that meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and we are working towards achieving this through building cultural integrity.

Cultural integrity represents a break from past approaches which have focussed on deficit mindsets. It engages a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement. It is positive and constructive, and benefits the whole school community.

The 2016 review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in the ACT found that the cultural supports available to students can make a significant difference to their experience.

The whole school community will benefit from higher cultural integrity, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives embedded throughout teaching and learning, and into the physical school environment. Implementation of the Student Resource Allocation Program (SRA) has been a key driver behind the new focus on cultural integrity and has been supported by a number of key advisory groups. The SRA Principal Advisory Group, SRA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Group and SRA Reference Board have all contributed to the development of new policy direction to support cultural integrity in schools. The main objective of these groups is to ensure that community and schools' perspectives are reflected in strategic directions, project planning, policy development and shaping the design and delivery of support services associated with implementing the SRA.

2.14 The Education Directorate's *2016-17 Annual Report* identified that the Directorate is working to meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by 'building cultural integrity' and that 'cultural integrity represents a break from past approaches which have focussed on deficit mindsets. It engages a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement. It is positive and constructive, and benefits the whole school community'. More information about the Directorate's *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative is provided at paragraph 2.40.

2.15 The issue of deficit discourse is discussed in Chapter 3, paragraphs 3.20 to 3.23. Mr Scott Gorringer, a Mithaka man and Director of Murrimatters Consulting stated in *The Guardian* in May 2015:

We are caught in this thing called a "deficit discourse" and we don't even know we're in it.¹⁵

2.16 And, according to Mr Gorringer:

[d]eficit discourse describes a mode of thinking that frames and represents Aboriginal identity in a narrative of negativity, deficiency and disempowerment. When all the thinking, all the conversations and all the approaches are framed in a discourse that sees Aboriginality as a problem, very little positive movement is possible.¹⁶

2.17 The Education Directorate's *Strategic Plan 2014-17 Education Capital: Leading the Nation*, and its annual Action Plans from 2014 to 2017, include actions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes. From 2016 the language in the annual Action Plans changed from 'closing the achievement gap'; the Directorate's *2016-17 Annual Report* articulated this change, noting that '*our vision is for schools that meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and we are working towards achieving this through building cultural integrity. Cultural integrity represents a break from past approaches which have focussed on deficit mindsets. It engages a strengths-based attitude to growth and achievement. It is positive and constructive, and benefits the whole school community*'. The Directorate's 2016 and 2017 Action Plans reflect the Directorate's change of focus from 'deficit mindsets' and instead focus on 'a strengths-based attitude to

¹⁵ Scott Gorringer, for Indigenous X, Aboriginal culture is not a problem. The way we talk about it is, 15 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/aboriginal-culture-is-not-a-problem-the-way-we-talk-about-it-is> Accessed 9 April 2018

¹⁶ Scott Gorringer, for Indigenous X, Aboriginal culture is not a problem. The way we talk about it is, 15 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/aboriginal-culture-is-not-a-problem-the-way-we-talk-about-it-is> Accessed 9 April 2018

growth and achievement' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Its draft 2018 strategic plan is 'out for comment'.

School Strategic Plans and Annual Action Plans

- 2.18 The Education Directorate's *People, Practice and Performance Framework* identifies a number of key planning and reporting mechanisms that are relevant to schools. Through these mechanisms schools' performance is planned for, reviewed and evaluated. The *People, Practice and Performance Framework* requires each ACT public school to develop:
- a five-year school Strategic Plan to establish the strategic direction and priorities for the school; and
 - an annual Action Plan consistent with the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan 2014-2017, *Education Capital: Leading the Nation*.
- 2.19 Each school's Strategic and annual Action Plan is required to be endorsed by the Chair of the School Board, the Principal and the relevant Director, School Improvement. The annual Action Plan is reported against in the school's Annual Report, which is endorsed by the Chair of the School Board and the Principal.
- 2.20 The Audit Office reviewed the current (or the available and most recent) five year Strategic Plans and 2018 Action Plans for the five schools included in the audit for:
- strategies on engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community; and
 - performance measures for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Strategies for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community

- 2.21 Analysis of the five audited schools' Strategic Plans shows that:
- all of the Strategic Plans identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities; and
 - three schools refer to specific strategies or priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including:
 - two schools' plans include specific aims to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational achievements or goals; and
 - one school's plan includes a focus on improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' attendance at school and participation in school based programs.
- 2.22 In articulating strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities, including associated performance targets or indicators, the Strategic Plans make reference to the annual survey of students and parents/carers; this

survey is conducted by the Education Directorate as a source of information in measuring outcomes.

Annual Action Plans for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community

2.23 Analysis of the five audited schools' annual Action Plans shows that:

- in line with the Strategic Plans' identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities, all Action Plans identified activities, and associated indicators, relating to these strategies or priorities;
 - two schools' Action Plans identified specific actions or indicators relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, e.g. one school identified that a specific target associated with engagement would be to 'increase the percentage of indigenous students attending 70% or more of the time to 75-80%'. These schools' Action Plans also identified and articulated the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer (refer to paragraphs 4.67 to 4.85); and
- all Action Plans identified activities and associated indicators relating to improved educational outcomes for students. Some of these were specifically identified and articulated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:
 - two schools have targets or indicators for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student education goals, e.g. one school had the following performance measure 'difference between school Indigenous mean and the ACT non-Indigenous mean in NAPLAN writing, reading and numeracy'. One of these schools also had a specific and quantifiable target related to the use of Personal Learning Plans (refer to paragraph 3.56), 'a 10 percentage point annual improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving 75% of short term Personalised Learning Plan/ILP goals from 36% in 2015'.

2.24 Similar to the Strategic Plans the schools' annual Action Plans make reference to the annual survey of students and parents/carers that is conducted by the Education Directorate as a source of information in measuring outcomes.

2.25 Analysis of the five audited schools' Strategic Plans shows that, while all of the plans identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities generally, there was a mixed approach to specifically identifying and articulating strategies or actions relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. Three schools' Strategic Plans refer to specific strategies or priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including:

- two schools' plans to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational achievements or goals; and
- one school's plan to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' attendance at school and participation in school based programs.

- 2.26 Analysis of the five audited schools' 2018 Action Plans showed that, in line with the Strategic Plans' identified strategies or priorities relating to enhancing relationships with students, families and communities, all Action Plans identified activities and associated indicators relating to these strategies or priorities. Two of the Action Plans identified specific actions or indicators relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These schools' annual Action Plans also identified and articulated the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer.

RECOMMENDATION 1**SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLANS AND ANNUAL ACTION PLANS**

The Education Directorate should improve the quality and comprehensiveness of ACT public schools' Strategic Plans and annual Action Plans with respect to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community by requiring:

- a) an explicit strategy and objective for a school's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community; and
- b) performance measures to monitor and evaluate the school's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Policies, frameworks, standards and guidance for engagement

- 2.27 There is a range of policy and procedural documents that are applicable and relevant to the Education Directorate's and ACT public schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. These include:
- guidance from the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, *Protocols for working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples*; and
 - directorate-specific policy and procedural guidance.

Protocols for working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples

- 2.28 In September 2015 the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body released *Protocols for working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples* (the Protocols). The Protocols were developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and individuals. The Protocols were developed to provide 'a practical resource guide for all public, private, and not-for-profit sector agencies and organisations seeking to engage with our communities'.¹⁷

¹⁷ Little, Rod – ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, *Protocols for working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples*, September 2015, p 3.

- 2.29 The Protocols detail information on *Protocols for engagement*, including information about:
- understanding the community and the region;
 - seeking advice from ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations and existing community networks;
 - engagement practices and processes;
 - traditional customs; and
 - feedback and follow-up process.
- 2.30 In responding to requests for information from the audit team, the Education Directorate's Education Support Office referred to, and identified, the Protocols.

Directorate guidance, frameworks and policies for engagement

- 2.31 The Education Directorate has specific guidance and a framework that relate to ACT public schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community as well as a policy for employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Education Directorate. These are:
- *Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families* (refer to paragraph 2.34);
 - *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative (refer to paragraph 2.40); and
 - *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17* (refer to chapter 4, paragraph 4.4 to 4.15).
- 2.32 While there are professional standards for teachers and specific policies, frameworks and guidance that relate to the Education Directorate and ACT public schools' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, there are other policies and frameworks that are also relevant. These include:
- *ACT Engaging Schools Framework (2015)*;
 - *Education Capital Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT*; and
 - ACT Education Directorate Complaints Policy and Guidance (refer to paragraph 2.48).
- 2.33 Table 2-2 lists the policies, frameworks and guidance, their purpose and their relevance to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Table 2-2 ACT Education Directorate guidance, frameworks and guidance relevant to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community

Policy/Framework/Guidance	Purpose/aim of policy/framework/guidance	Relevance to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community
<i>ACT Engaging Schools Framework (2015)</i>	This framework outlines what schools can do to engage with all students, underpinned by four principles and four areas of good practice.	This framework addresses belonging, engagement, community and high expectations, although is not specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
<i>Education Capital Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT</i>	This two year project (2014-2015) was undertaken by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth in partnership with the former ACT Education and Training Directorate, Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools. The project's objective was 'to provide a strong, evidence-informed foundation for parental engagement in ACT schools'.	There are no specific references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in the broader document produced as a result of this project. However, as part of the project a factsheet was produced titled <i>Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families</i>
<i>Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families</i>	This factsheet states it was prepared to help schools assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to 'reach in' to schools.	This factsheet is directly related to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
<i>Cultural Integrity in ACT public schools</i>	The policy intent of the <i>Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools</i> is 'schools that meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'.	<i>Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools</i> is specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ACT.

Source: ACT Audit Office

Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families

- 2.34 As part of the *Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT* project a factsheet was prepared to help schools; the factsheet is called *Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families*.

2.35 This factsheet states that it was prepared to help schools '(a)ssist Indigenous Australian families to 'reach in' to schools'. It explains some of the challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families including:

- past negative schooling experiences;
- poverty;
- unemployment and poor job prospects;
- inadequate housing;
- poor physical and mental health;
- racism and cultural dislocation; and
- legacies of dispossession and trans-generation trauma.

2.36 The factsheet explains that schools 'can make a big difference by creating a working partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, to assist parental engagement'. Three tips follow:

- 1) a culturally inclusive school;
- 2) a partnership approach; and
- 3) reach out and get involved.

2.37 Representatives from the five schools visited during fieldwork provided varied responses as to their schools use of the *Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT* resources. Some comments were positive:

I am aware of Parental Engagement work but could not provide specific examples of when and where we have used the resource in [the school];

I haven't used these documents yet, but I have read and know them. Our RAP is nearly completed and the theories/practices for engaging parental support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are procedures we will follow; and

The fact sheet for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents is also being utilised as a part of the refurbishment process we have for the support centre and a broader community consultation on cultural competency training. Each document would be used as needed but I couldn't give you a figure of once a semester as an accurate statement as it may be three times in one day and then not referred to for a period of time.

2.38 Some comments from representatives from the five schools visited during fieldwork were less positive:

[A teacher] said that once a policy was in a glossy format it was generally forgotten about; and;

I am aware of the framework but to be honest it has not featured in our conversations with families and we have not referred to it in our documentation.

2.39 The Education Directorate has developed guidance for ACT public schools on engaging with parents and community, including specific guidance for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community. The guidance includes the *ACT Engaging Schools Framework* (2015); *Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT*; and the

Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Families, which has been available since 2015. The guidance was not consistently referred to or consistently used in the five schools selected for audit.

Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools

- 2.40 The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative represents the Education Directorate's new direction for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The policy intent of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative is 'schools that meet the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'.¹⁸
- 2.41 Implementation of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative is part of the Education Directorate's move away from a deficit discourse related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to focus on the environment a school can create to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to welcome and engage their families and communities.
- 2.42 In this respect, the Education Directorate states in its *Student Resource Allocation Fact Sheet: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* that:
- (t)he whole school community will benefit from higher Cultural Integrity, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives embedded throughout teaching and learning, and into the physical school environment.¹⁹

Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools' Google+ Community

- 2.43 As part of the implementation of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative, the Education Directorate has set up a Google+ Community group as a key mechanism to support staff through the provision of resources and peer interaction and support.
- 2.44 Cultural Integrity in Canberra Public Schools is a Google+ Community group that is administered by the Education Directorate. The Google+ Community platform is an aid to ACT public schools in building their cultural integrity and competency. The Google+ Community is promoted as providing resources and best practices from other jurisdictions and within the ACT to support schools with implementing the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative.
- 2.45 The Google+ Community layout has seven different areas including four areas named after the four dimensions of the Cultural Integrity Continuum. These areas are:
- Engagement with families and community;
 - Teaching with Cultural Integrity;
 - Leadership, celebration and environment;
 - High expectations and successful transitions;

¹⁸ Education Directorate, *Student Resource Allocation Fact Sheet: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*, p 1.

¹⁹ Education Directorate, *Student Resource Allocation Fact Sheet: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*, p 1.

- Contacts;
- Questions; and
- Cultural Integrity Toolkit.

2.46 As at 11 May 2018, the Google+ Community had 475 members; in June 2018 there were 560. The ‘engagement with families and community’ area, relevant to this audit, had recent posts from one to three weeks old relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events, such as a book launch and a public discussion. The majority of postings to this area were by the Directorate’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers. To date, there has been limited evidence of regular discussion by, or questions from, schools on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. Notwithstanding the limited evidence of schools’ use of the Google+ Community, the Education Directorate advised that it is a source of information and ideas and that the other three areas of *Teaching with cultural integrity*, *Leadership and environment* and *Pathways and expectations* include material related to engagement. Additionally, ‘while staff may post discussion points and questions, these generally take place in other forums’.

2.47 The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative is the Education Directorate’s new approach for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and engaging with their families and community; *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* is being implemented during 2018. The *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*’ Google+ Community has been developed by the Education Directorate to provide resources and best practices from other jurisdictions to support schools implement the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*. To date, there has been limited evidence of regular discussion by, or questions from, schools via the Google+ Community about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, although the Education Directorate advised that it is a source of information and ideas and ‘while staff may post discussion points and questions, these generally take place in other forums’.

Complaints Policy

2.48 The Education Directorate’s complaints policy is about ‘the prompt, fair and impartial resolution of complaints about ACT public schools and the Education and Training Directorate’.^{20 21}

2.49 Complaints are generally managed at the local level by schools; however, complainants may contact the Education Directorate directly. The Education Directorate’s online complaint form does not require the user to identify if they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander although this information may be included in free text.

²⁰ ACT Education Directorate, Complaints Policy, 2016, p 1.

²¹ Section 22 of the *Education Act 2004* requires the ACT Education Director-General to ‘develop and implement a complaints policy for government schools’ and, if it is not a ‘frivolous or vexatious complaint’ the Director-General is required to ‘investigate any complaint about the administration, management and operation of government schools’ as soon as practical. ACT Education Act, section 22

- 2.50 The Education Directorate's Manager, Complaints and Liaison Unit, advised that they met with the Education Representative of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in early 2018. During this meeting a description of the complaints process was provided and the Education Representative was invited to make contact with the complaints unit should an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family require assistance.
- 2.51 Complaints are included in the Education Directorate's Annual Report. The Audit Office was advised by the Manager, Complaints and Liaison Unit, Education Directorate, that there was limited complaints analysis performed by the Complaints and Liaison Unit.
- 2.52 Complaints regarding education services are generally managed at the local level by schools, however, complainants may contact the Education Directorate directly. The Education Directorate does not collect, automatically, information on whether complaints received by the Directorate relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students although this may be included in free text. The Education Directorate's Complaints and Liaison Unit has provided information about the complaint process to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's Education Representative.

Reporting on engagement

ACT Education Directorate's Annual Report

- 2.53 The Education Directorate *2016-17 Annual Report* contains a section named 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes'; the Directorate states in this section that:

The Education Directorate provides a range of supports, programs and initiatives dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff ... ACT public schools deliver a broad range of programs to meet the learning needs, interests and aspirations of all students.

- 2.54 In this particular section of the Annual Report, the Education Directorate describes programs and projects and particular school initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that have been implemented during 2016-17. While these projects and initiatives do not specifically state that their focus is on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, it may be inferred from some of the projects that they involve engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The projects and initiatives include:

- Strengthening and promoting Nggunawal culture and history in schools, including embedding Indigenous languages and cultural competence in schools;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence – Campbell High School, a centre that provides programs and initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Melrose High School Indigenous Studies Centre, a centre that provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and Big Picture Academy, a learning

program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in year 9 and 10 to study subject areas they are passionate about;

- Wanniassa School – Ganbra Program, the program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to learn more about their culture and fostering parental engagement by encouraging families to participate in Ganbra activities; and
- Mura achievement awards, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in years 4 to 11 who demonstrate particular personal achievements such as excellent school attendance, strong commitment to their learning and greatly improved engagement in their learning.

2.55 The Education Directorate provided information in its *2016-17 Annual Report* in the ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes’ section. This section describes programs and projects and particular school initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that have been implemented during 2016-17. While the projects and initiatives do not specifically state that their focus is on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, it may be inferred from some that they involve engagement. The projects and initiatives include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence – Campbell High School, a centre that provides programs and initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Melrose High School Indigenous Studies Centre, a centre that provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and Big Picture Academy, a learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in year 9 and 10 to study subject areas they are passionate about; and
- Wanniassa School – Ganbra Program, the program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to learn more about their culture and fostering parental engagement by encouraging families to participate in Ganbra activities.

Annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education report

2.56 The Education Directorate reports annually to the ACT Legislative Assembly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education; the most recent report is titled the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2016-17, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory*.

2.57 These reports were requested by the ACT Legislative Assembly in 2000. The then ACT Government Education and Training Directorate’s *Performance in Indigenous Education, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, Annual Report 2007* stated:

In 2000, the ACT Legislative Assembly requested that a report on Indigenous education be tabled in the Assembly every six months. In 2006, the ACT Legislative Assembly agreed to amend the reporting timeframe to allow for the preparation of a progress report covering January to June and an annual report for the January to December period. This report to the

ACT Legislative Assembly on Indigenous education covers the period January to December 2007 inclusive.

2.58 The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2016-17, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory* states:

This report reflects the Education Directorate's commitment to meeting the needs and aspirations for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students - purposefully moving to strengths-based approaches and a focus on developing cultural integrity in every school and classroom.

2.59 The report advises that:

Information in this report is presented according to the five priorities outlined in the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan 2014-17: Education Capital. The five priorities are:

1. Quality learning;
2. Inspirational teaching and leadership;
3. High expectations, high performance;
4. Connecting with families and the community; and
5. Business innovation and improvement.

2.60 Under the section on connecting with families and community the report states:

We partner with families and engage with the community to build meaningful relationships. Strengthening school capacity to engage with families and the community is a priority for the Directorate. There are a number of mechanisms and strategies in place to build and sustain meaningful partnerships with representatives from the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

2.61 The mechanisms that the Directorate lists are meetings with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body representative for education, support of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group and Community Yarns (developed as part of the Directorate's *Connection Collaboration Careers Leadership: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-2017*).

2.62 The report also includes information on 'Strategies to improve student engagement and attendance':

Programs in ACT public schools such as the Student Aspirations Program, Flexible Learning Options, Tutorial Support and scholarships were instrumental in motivating and engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in school activities. Attendance is intrinsically linked to engagement in school. Staying connected to school is also a positive influence on students' social and emotional wellbeing. ACT schools took a multi-faceted approach to engaging students.

2.63 The Education Directorate's annual reports to the Legislative Assembly from 2001 to 2017 are listed on the Directorate's website under publications. There is no link to these publications from the Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education webpage.

- 2.64 The Education Directorate reports annually to the Legislative Assembly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. These annual reports are published on the Directorate's website, however, there is no direct link to these publications from the Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education webpage; it would be helpful to provide a link.

3 ENGAGEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

- 3.1 This chapter presents information on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community perceive how the school they were associated with engaged with them.

Summary

Conclusion

All audited schools are engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community and are exhibiting cultural sensitivity. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community perceptions of engagement varied; many positive, some negative. A significant issue affecting engagement is the fear of mandatory reporting if a person identifies that they need any help. This occurs in the context of experiences of unconscious bias, intergenerational trauma, and deficit discourse.

While mandatory reporting is not solely about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the high rate of removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, locally and nationally, is of note. Addressing the fear of mandatory reporting is beyond the remit of just the Education Directorate. However, there is an opportunity for the Directorate, in partnership with Community Services Directorate, to train and support all school staff in how 'to have a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations'.²²

Furthermore, there is currently a review, *Our Booris, Our Way*, into the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the child protection system in the ACT where ways to mitigate the fear of mandatory report might best be examined.

Key findings

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who spoke with the audit team described deeply felt experiences, including inter-generational trauma, shame, unconscious bias and deficit discourse, which can impact on the daily lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their interaction and engagement with government agencies. Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised that:

Paragraph

3.22

²² Refer to key finding paragraph 3.36, as advised by the Community Services Directorate.

- *The role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in addressing these experiences' impact is fundamental ... [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community] know the answers but have little opportunity to do anything about it. Self-determination through measures such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations provide the means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in identifying appropriate responses.*

The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed audit report, on 19 June 2018 advised: 3.23

- *The ACT Government is privileged to have a formally elected body to represent the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT. The Community Services Directorate has also advised that The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body is currently undertaking consultations in the community for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, which will hold the ACT Government accountable for the outcomes outlined in the Agreement. All aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of engagement with government might best be considered within the context of the Elected Body consultations and accountability framework.*

The fear of mandatory reporting for children and young people at harm or risk of harm in the ACT affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's engagement with ACT public schools and other ACT Government services. Feedback about the fear of mandatory reporting was received from different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders. A stakeholder commented: 3.34

- *There is fear in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community regarding care and protection and students being taken away from families and mandatory reporting by schools feeds into this fear. Families struggle with trusting the schools and the teachers and some of this is caused by mandatory reporting requirements where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families fear that they will lose their children. The trust deficit is also exacerbated at times because families do not understand the processes around child Care and Protection.*

Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised:

- *If I place myself in a teacher's position, how do I have a relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and family if every time they speak to me they're filtering the experience through their understanding of 'my mandatory reporting responsibilities'?*

The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed report, on 19 June 2018 advised: 3.35

- *In June 2017, the ACT Government announced a review into the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the child protection system in the ACT. The Our Booris, Our Way review is guided by a wholly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee and is being conducted in accordance with the principles of self-determination. This review will investigate the circumstances of approximately 350 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children currently engaging with the child protection system, to understand their experience and to advise how best Aboriginal Child Placement Principles might be realised in the ACT community.*
- *The Our Booris, Our Way review will make recommendations to the ACT Government on the best way to fully implement the SNAICC Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, including development of advice about how best to move towards self-determination in the child protection system. Our Booris, Our Way will deliver an interim report later in 2018 focussing on early learnings and initial improvements to the system. The final report will be delivered in August 2019 and will focus on major systemic improvements.*

The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed report, on 19 June 2018 further advised:

3.36

- *Data collected by Children, Youth and Families highlight that school personnel provide the largest number of reports to CYPS raising concerns for the wellbeing of children and young people. This is not unusual given that teachers and school personnel are the adults outside of a family unit that engage mostly with children, young people and their families. For many children, the relationship between them and their teacher will be the closest outside their family.*
- *The Children and Young People Act 2008 allows for some discretion around reporting not fully utilised by school personnel. This may highlight that school personnel require additional support in determining what response is required when deciding if they should make a report to child protection. This may include better and more timely advice on what is the appropriate response to concerns so that the most appropriate support is available to the child and their family.*
- *Across Government, non-government and the community sector, both voluntary and mandatory reporters need to have a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations. This is not to diminish the importance of reporting when children are experiencing severe abuse and neglect and have no parent willing and able to protect them. A culture of support, however, does acknowledge that a family may feel more comfortable and thus be more open to receiving support and referrals from school personnel that they have an existing relationship with, rather than through the statutory system.*
- *It also must be acknowledged that a report to child protection may be received more adversely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

families in light of their experiences with the Stolen Generation and history of dispossession.

The Education Directorate sought to understand the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group (the Consultative Group). The Consultative Group ceased to operate on 30 November 2017 and will be replaced by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (the Advisory Group). The Advisory Group is expected to meet four times per year and provide advice to the ACT Government on education matters that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities. Information about the Advisory Group is available on the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group's '*betteroutcomestogether*' website but not on the ACT Education Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education webpage.

3.46

ACT public schools use various ways to seek the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Of the five schools selected for audit, all had established ways to discuss and record a student's goals, interests and specific needs; the schools reported their processes involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' families and community. One method that schools may choose to use, in agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, is a *Personalised Learning Plan*, or something similar, to record the student's goals and aspirations. Representatives from one school provided positive feedback about the usefulness of *Personalised Learning Plans* in facilitating communication with families and carers:

3.61

- *[Personalised Learning Plan] meetings are an excellent way to build strong relationships with families and carers. They are an opportunity for families to share their hopes and dreams for their children and set aspirational goals for the year ahead. Previously there was negative stuff like children not doing homework- now we keep it simple – baseline is that all children are capable and competent – teachers are empowered to feel they are making a difference and know that they can make a change for any child at any point of time in their classes.*

However, representatives from other schools' comments about *Personalised Learning Plans* were more cautious, noting that the use of a *Personalised Learning Plan* for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may not be needed and 'can look like a deficit as well as lumping students together in one cohort'.

3.62

There were mixed views from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community about how schools engage them. However, the majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who contributed to the audit were positive about the schools selected for audit engagement, e.g.

3.77

- *At [this school] we get more support and understanding.*
- *More encouragement towards us all.*

Professor Chris Sarra of the University of Canberra and head of Queensland Government's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships said: 3.78

- *Relationships with Community – all students and families must be connected to the work of schools - how can we address together - start with connecting with the student.*
- *Connectedness is key regardless of how dishevelled or stressed a student might be – they have a human right to be embraced and nurtured by us – in the ACT we should be able to do that.*
- *Students will come with different needs and it is about ensuring that the teacher and student are enabled to be the best they can be in class. Part of this means ensuring the student is confident, capable and connected. Part of this also means they are not sitting in class hungry or having hearing difficulties.*
- *School leadership has to be better equipped with people deeply committed to reaching out to the margins. It's about Heart, Head, Hand and doing all three.*

Professor Sarra suggested one way to nurture students would be to allocate every teacher in a school the responsibility to focus on one or two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the total number that attend the school to enable the teacher to build a relationship with the student, starting with saying 'good morning' and asking how things are going.

The five schools selected for audit described the ways that they have tailored their communication with families, such as meeting families on neutral ground and in places they feel comfortable until the families feel comfortable to meet in the school, meeting families in school over something to eat, and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations or members of the community to engage more or assist with engaging with families. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder suggested that to enhance a school's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, schools should tailor their information; the community stakeholder said: 3.92

- *If schools want to enhance engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community the key to achieving this is to provide tailored information specific to the community needs and concerns.*

This community stakeholder also advised that:

- *Effective engagement is dependent on the accessibility of schools teachers and leaders.*

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder and a school principal also noted that providing support to families as well as the students is important for more improvement to engagement; the community stakeholder advised: 3.93

- *There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative*

processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;

and the principal stated:

- *Key to improving engagement is to support families just as much as students.*

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is well connected and will share information about schools; this may affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's view of a school. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised: 3.94

- *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is connected in the ACT and due to this information about various schools and their reputation quickly spreads within the community. This can result in parents avoiding certain schools while schools with a good reputation attracting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students.*

The Education Directorate and ACT public schools regularly communicate with all students and families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families, via electronic communications. However, the audit team heard mixed views about whether all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community had internet access; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders' comments included: 3.102

- *Not a lot of families have internet connection; reasons may be affordability; and*
- *The internet is a luxury and not necessarily for everyone.*

ACT public schools selected for audit comments about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' home internet access included: 3.103

- *Email is difficult because of access to the internet and literacy can be a problem so it is far better to phone families. [I]do not set homework instead [I]set research tasks in class when the students can access the school's internet; and*
- *Most people have phones that have 3G connectivity and so they have access when in free Wi-Fi even if they don't have access at home. The provision by the ACT Government of a Chrome notebook to all year 7 – 10 students this year has contributed to increasing access for some families.*

In the Australian National University working paper, *Dynamic of the Digital Divide*, it was stated that internet access in 2016 in the ACT in Indigenous households was at 88.1 percent and in other ACT households internet access was at 91.9 percent. 3.104

Initiatives like the Inner North School Cluster's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Partnership Agreement provide on-going opportunities for ACT public schools to communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community on matters related to the cluster schools and demonstrate the 3.110

schools' inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. School cluster events also provide opportunities:

- for younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to connect with older students at the high schools or college in their cluster and to see the pathways to those high schools and college for themselves; and
- to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture with other schools' students and staff.

The five schools selected for audit demonstrated various ways in which they are progressing their connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, such as using an Aboriginal language at school assemblies, plans to co-name areas of the school in different languages and creating a space to try new things. One school principal advised 3.116

- *We have to create space so we can have a go; like getting our kids to give acknowledgment to country and*
- *seek more opportunities to strive for successful things. [Schools] sharing experiences [with one another].*

The Education Directorate has activated a Google+ Community website as part of its Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools initiative. The Google+ Community provides a mechanism for schools to share information and experiences. 3.117

Visible representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in schools was observed by the audit team. This included the use of art, artefacts, school resources (books etc) and furniture; outdoor features and activities such students' hand paintings; and making coolamons from the bark of local trees. 3.120

The Audit Office team member, Mr Ben Mitchell, who is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, reported that he observed sensitivity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during audit fieldwork at a Koori Preschool, a Centre of Excellence and a variety of other settings including specific rooms, areas and activities. Mr Mitchell considered that approaches used at an ACT public school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre of Excellence can provide a model for other schools, including the incorporation of teaching pedagogies such as '8 ways of learning'. The audit team observed different approaches at different schools; a teacher suggested that there should be an evaluation of what schools are doing. 3.130

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders expressed a range of opinions regarding engagement by schools including the need for teachers to have more cultural competency; the challenge for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to afford extracurricular activities; and the challenges for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in communicating with schools. Some of the schools selected for audit considered the school's cultural competency 'patchy' and engagement, in general, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was 'piecemeal'. Feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders included: 3.140

- *Although teachers should demonstrate empathy for the situation some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their*

families are in, this should not be mixed with pity or 'oh poor you' attitude;

- *There is a high staff turnover in the public schools and this means that it is hard to retain staff who are culturally competent and to build a whole of organisation ethos that is culturally safe;*
- *Schools need to be affordable for all families as there are expenses such as excursions, after school care, which some of our families cannot afford; and*
- *There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families'.*

The Education Directorate conducts an annual online school satisfaction survey of parents and carers, students and staff. While information may be collected through this survey from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents, families and caregivers there is no option to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and responses to the survey are anonymous; therefore, it is not possible to differentiate information that corresponds to the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

3.143

Experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community

- 3.2 The audit team included Mr Benjamin Mitchell, who is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Mr Mitchell is a Senior Consultant of Coolamon Advisors as well as co-chair of the national NAIDOC committee, among many other responsibilities.
- 3.3 During the audit Mr Mitchell led the audit team's discussion with people from the five ACT public schools selected for the audit and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community stakeholders.
- 3.4 Mr Mitchell performed qualitative analysis of these discussions from which he drew themes from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices he heard. These are presented in full in Chapter 1 of the audit report. Mr Mitchell also identified feedback, both positive and negative, about the five selected ACT public schools' (as well as some other schools') engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. As part of this feedback, there were suggestions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community as to how engagement could be improved. These are presented in full in Chapter 1 of the audit report and are included where relevant in this chapter.
- 3.5 Some of the themes that Mr Mitchell drew from consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community relate to experiences commonly raised or referred to during the conduct of the audit. These included dislocation, identity, inter-generational trauma, unconscious bias, shame and the deficit discourse. These experiences are described below to highlight the complexities associated with engagement.

Dislocation

- 3.6 While the ACT is identified as Ngunnawal country there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who move into the ACT from another 'country'. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use the English word 'country' it has a particular meaning; for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culture, nature and land are all linked. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a cultural connection to the land, which is based on each community's distinct culture, traditions and laws; 'country' takes in everything within the landscape. Professor Mick Dodson, Director, Australian National University National Centre for Indigenous Studies explains:

When we talk about traditional 'Country'...we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians...we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the title-holders to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Country of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land.²³

- 3.7 Moving from country, which is a significant part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's identity, may make it more difficult to feel comfortable in, and accepting of, schools particularly if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and therefore country, is not evident or overtly acknowledged.
- 3.8 In relation to the recognition of country, and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, and the importance of recognising this diversity for the purpose of engagement, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised the audit team that:

The community is so diverse and therefore communication is diverse.

Identity

- 3.9 In the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*, Australian Education Ministers have 'collectively identified seven priority areas ... to improve outcomes for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] children and young people'.²⁴ One of the seven priority areas is 'culture and identity':

(t)hrough the delivery of the Australian Curriculum, education sectors acknowledge, respect and reflect the histories, values, languages and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ... (a)ll Australian children and young people have the opportunity to learn about the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.²⁵

²³ <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Welcome-to-and-Acknowledgement-of-Country.pdf>

²⁴ Australian Education Council, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* 2015, p 4.

²⁵ Australian Education Council, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* 2015, p 5.

- 3.10 The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's *Protocols for Working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (the Protocols) similarly highlight the importance of identity, stating:

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples identity is defined by heritage, belonging and connection to country. An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person is someone who:

- is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent and/or
- identifies themselves as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and
- is accepted as such by the community in which they live or have lived.²⁶

- 3.11 In her article in *The Conversation* (September 2014) on Aboriginal identity, *Culture, not colour, is the heart of Aboriginal Identity*, Dr Victoria Greives states that most people who identify as Aboriginal do so on the basis of culture, not race, and:

... more particularly the intangible aspects of culture that are transmitted through families and kinship systems.²⁷

Have to see it to be it

- 3.12 It is important for all students to see models of what they might become, and careers they might pursue, while growing up. In relation to the importance of role models one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised the audit team:

For the most part parents love the curriculum in the ACT – the issues are with how it's being taught, with how their children feel when they turn up to school – no black fellas on staff. Children need to see successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors to be inspired to emulate them. They need a celebration of the uniqueness of their culture – face, place and space.

- 3.13 Another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised the audit team:

Staff/ teachers at schools play a big part in shaping the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community experience about the school. Also it is very helpful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to see successful examples of other people from their community around them in the form of teachers or other mentors.

Inter-generational trauma

- 3.14 According to the Australian Government Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies joint publication:

The trauma of historical events associated with colonisation of Indigenous land can pass to children (inter-generational trauma). Even if protected from the traumatic life experiences of family some families and communities are unable to, or are still working to, heal the trauma of past events, including displacement from Country, institutionalisation and abuse. ... The Stolen Generations also represent a significant cause of trauma. In 2008, an estimated 8% of Indigenous people aged 15 and over reported being removed from their natural family and

²⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, *Protocols for Working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, September 2015, p 12.

²⁷ Dr Victoria Greives, *Culture, not colour, is the heart of Aboriginal Identity*, September 2014, *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/culture-not-colour-is-the-heart-of-aboriginal-identity-30102> Accessed 30 April 2018.

38% had relatives who had been removed from their natural family (ABS 2009). This trauma can pass to children (inter-generational trauma) (Atkinson 2002; Atkinson et al. 2010).²⁸

- 3.15 The implications of inter-generational trauma for effective engagement was raised during fieldwork by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder group, which advised:

Education should acknowledge intergenerational trauma – it should be about the well-being of the child.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents are angry and frustrated and at times the teachers are at the receiving end of this which does not help the relationship with the school. At times teachers and school staff need to display more empathy to the situation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in and of past injustices.

Unconscious bias

- 3.16 Unconscious bias opinions and actions are the result of biases that a person holds unconsciously. According to Beyond Blue research, negative views and stereotypes towards Indigenous Australians still exist and motivation to modify behaviours is low for some.²⁹ During audit fieldwork one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder commented:

Unconscious bias racism continues to be an issue – at a recent ... celebration, specific families had been identified for media to focus attention on but instead the attention went to the children who had recently identified as Aboriginal and were deemed easier to engage with.

- 3.17 Professor Chris Sarra of University of Canberra, founder of the Stronger Smarter Institute and recently appointed head of the Queensland Government's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships says:

Consider the Bell curve diagram – Indigenous Australians have been anchored in deficit discourse and treated as being in the far left corner of the bell curve – this treatment is offensive and we become disengaged. Our families should not be described as if they are in that left hand corner; this is deficit discourse. Schools may be trying to do the right thing by having a go but their actions may be anchored by deficit discourse – policies need to pull the schools to the right. Those in the left hand corner of the bell curve are affected by poverty and not about being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

- 3.18 This 'soft bigotry of low expectation' is described by Professor Sarra in *Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach* where he states:

Education systems have demonstrated a tendency to readily accept Indigenous underachievement in schools as somehow 'normal' or 'given' ... It has seemingly been easier for education authorities to hold Indigenous communities culpable for failing to engage with schools for the purpose of education ... However the professional challenges for classroom teachers and their support infrastructures is to reflect inwards and evaluate the effectiveness

²⁸ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian Children, p 2.

²⁹ Beyond Blue, Discrimination against Indigenous Australians: A snapshot of the views of non-Indigenous people aged 25 – 44, 2014, p 2.

of their own teaching practices and ask what it is that they are doing not doing as a teacher that contributes to Indigenous student failure.³⁰

Shame

- 3.19 'Shame' was mentioned specifically in four interviews during the audit. In relation to the concept of 'shame' and its effect on a student's engagement with their school, Dr Jean Harkins, author and lecturer at the University of Newcastle (Australia) in Humanities and Social Science says:

Aboriginal students ... talk about their experiences of difficulty and discomfort in certain fairly common classroom situations, for example when the teacher calls on an individual student to answer a questions, or when a student is singled out for either reprimand or praise. The name of this experience, in most varieties of Australian Aboriginal English, is SHAME. The feeling of SHAME is of course not limited to educational contexts but teachers of Aboriginal students have expressed particular concern about shame or shyness as a problem in the classroom, and a possible barrier to education achievement for these students.³¹

Deficit Discourse

- 3.20 The Education Directorate has recognised the risks associated with a 'deficit discourse' (discussed in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.15 and 2.16) and has sought to describe its activities and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with reference to a 'strengths-based approach'. In describing a new policy intent with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in its *2016-17 Annual Report*, the Education Directorate noted that references to '[s]chools [meeting] the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' are 'a deliberate shift away from the deficit discourse toward a more strengths-based approach'.³² The Education Directorate also reported to the Legislative Assembly in 2015 that in April of that year they had held a forum on deficit discourse for principals and deputies from the Woden/Weston Network and Education Support Office staff. This forum was to discuss the roots of deficit discourse and its impact on the learning and life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 3.21 In considering experiences of dislocation, identity, intergenerational trauma, unconscious bias, shame and deficit discourse, Ms Katrina Fanning³³, Chair, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised:

The role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in addressing these experiences' impact is fundamental ... [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community] know the answers but have little opportunity to do anything about it. Self-determination through measures such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations provide the means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in identifying appropriate responses.

³⁰ Chris Sarra (2011, p 161) in Stronger Smarter Institute 2017, Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach, A comprehensive reflection of the characteristics of a Stronger Smarter Approach in action, p 5.

³¹ Jean Harkins, Shame and shyness in the aboriginal classroom: A case for 'practical' semantics', pp 293-306, Australian Journal of Linguistics, Vol 10, 1990, Issue 2.

³² Education Directorate website: https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/publications_a-z/annual-report-2016-2017/part-b/b2.-performance-analysis Accessed 30 April 2018

³³ Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, is also the Director of Coolamon Advisors, through which Mr Ben Mitchell assisted the Audit Office.

3.22 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who spoke with the audit team described deeply felt experiences, including inter-generational trauma, shame, unconscious bias and deficit discourse, which can impact on the daily lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their interaction and engagement with government agencies. Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised that:

- *The role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in addressing these experiences' impact is fundamental ... [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community] know the answers but have little opportunity to do anything about it. Self-determination through measures such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations provide the means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in identifying appropriate responses.*

3.23 The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed audit report, on 19 June 2018 advised:

- *The ACT Government is privileged to have a formally elected body to represent the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT. The Community Services Directorate has also advised that The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body is currently undertaking consultations in the community for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, which will hold the ACT Government accountable for the outcomes outlined in the Agreement. All aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of engagement with government might best be considered within the context of the Elected Body consultations and accountability framework.*

RECOMMENDATION 2

EXPERIENCES THAT CAN AFFECT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

The ACT Government should continue with the process it has adopted for developing the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, and note the concerns expressed during the audit about intergenerational trauma, unconscious bias and deficit discourse.

Mandatory reporting for children and young people in the ACT

3.24 During audit fieldwork many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders related their own or others' anxiety regarding interactions with government agencies, including the Education Directorate, where they were fearful that expressing concerns, asking for help or identifying needs may result in a referral to the ACT's Child and Youth Protection Services.

3.25 The ACT has legislated mandatory reporting for children and young people, including by staff working in schools, through the *Children and Young People Act 2008*. According to the Education Directorate's *Child Protection and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Policy*, school staff are:

To notify Child and Youth Protection Services when they believe, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person has experienced, or is experiencing, sexual abuse and/or non-accidental physical injury. Subject to certain exceptions, failure to meet these mandatory reporting obligations may be an offence under the Act.³⁴

3.26 The Education Directorate's *Child Protection and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Policy* further states:

The Act supports voluntary reporting of suspected abuse or neglect of a child or young person. Consistent with wider legal obligations, staff are expected to make these reports.³⁵

3.27 According to the Education Directorate's *Child Protection, Abuse and Neglect Procedure*, it is the school Principal's responsibility to provide:

... annual training in mandatory reporting processes and procedures and in codes of conduct for all staff.³⁶

3.28 The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Child and Youth Protection Services was highlighted by the Child Family Community Australia (the Australian Institute of Family Studies' information hub for evidence, resources and support for professionals working in the child, family and community welfare sector):

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in child protection and out-of-home care services compared to non-Indigenous children. The reasons for this are complex and are connected to past policies and the legacy of colonisation. Poverty, assimilation policies, intergenerational trauma and discrimination and forced child removals have all contributed to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care, as have cultural differences in childrearing practices and family structure.³⁷

3.29 Table 3-1 shows the number of children aged 0-17 years who were the subject of substantiated reports of harm or risk of harm, rates per 1,000 children, by Indigenous status in 2015-16 in the ACT, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

³⁴ ACT Education Directorate, Child Protection and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Policy.

³⁵ ACT Education Directorate, Child Protection and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Policy.

³⁶ ACT Child Protection Reporting Abuse Neglect Procedure

³⁷ <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children> Accessed 25 January 2018 Child Family Community Australia is Australian Institute of Family Studies' information hub for evidence, resources and support for professionals working in the child, family and community welfare sector.

Table 3-1 Number of children aged 0-17 years subject to substantiated reports of harm or risk of harm, rates by 1,000 children, by Indigenous status in 2015-16 in the ACT*

Indigenous (per 1,000 children)	Non-Indigenous (per 1,000 children)	All children (per 1,000 children)	Rate ratio Indigenous/non-Indigenous
45.5	3.5	5.1	13.2

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2017a, Table 3.5, p. 28

* In the ACT, the higher proportion of children with unknown Indigenous status may affect the reliability of the rate ratio calculation. Rate ratios should therefore be interpreted with caution.

- 3.30 A number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders advised of their concerns regarding the effects of mandatory reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities in the ACT. These concerns are reported without ACT Government agencies recognition and implementation of mandatory reporting being audited. These concerns are as follows:

There is fear in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community regarding care and protection and students being taken away from families and mandatory reporting by schools feeds into this fear. Families struggle with trusting the schools and the teachers and some of this is caused by mandatory reporting requirements where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families fear that they will lose their children. The trust deficit is also exacerbated at times because families do not understand the processes around Child Care and Protections. Even though ACT has one of the highest rates of child Care and Protection reports, it is the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not use the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles.

ACT has one of the highest rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Child Care and Protection. The main priority for the Directorate should be to keep families together and provide them with support to ensure this happens. The Directorate should also recognise the importance of the kinship structures within the community.

Schools need to understand the complexities that may arise when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and that it takes time to build trust. Stronger family partnerships take time and require a strong commitment and skillset to ensure appropriate responses to families can be made. It is really important that a strong cultural lens is applied to this work. There is a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ACT who home-school their kids. A reason for this could be that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families consider dealing with the Education Directorate is too hard and the families feel they are better off home schooling.

... (p)rogram delivery for Aboriginal families [was] limited due to families not wanting to access the centre as it was seen as a Government/authority centre where some staff are mandatory reporters.

3.31 In relation to mandatory reporting and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Ms Fanning advised:

If I place myself in a teacher's position, how do I have a relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and family if every time they speak to me they're filtering the experience through their understanding of 'my mandatory reporting responsibilities'?

Also, in the ACT there is a service gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from pregnancy to age 12 where there is no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation to provide services, e.g. Gugan Gulwan is only funded to provide services for the over 12s.

3.32 While Child and Family Centres provide services for pregnancy to 12, as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder reported, some families are reluctant to access Government services due to a fear of mandatory reporting.

3.33 With respect to the challenges posed by mandatory reporting, one ACT public school principal commented as follows:

Reportable conduct scheme is recent and the definition on what staff do day by day is thin.

If kids come to this school without food we feed them, we don't disproportionately report on Aboriginal kids. The school is level handed and considers the student's circumstances; for example ... a student [may] look after [a family member] who has mental health issues and this affect[s] the student's attendance.

A policy letter will hit an Aboriginal family harder.

3.34 The fear of mandatory reporting for children and young people at harm or risk of harm in the ACT affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's engagement with ACT public schools and other ACT Government services. Feedback about the fear of mandatory reporting was received from different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders. A stakeholder commented:

- *There is fear in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community regarding care and protection and students being taken away from families and mandatory reporting by schools feeds into this fear. Families struggle with trusting the schools and the teachers and some of this is caused by mandatory reporting requirements where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families fear that they will lose their children. The trust deficit is also exacerbated at times because families do not understand the processes around child Care and Protection.*

Ms Katrina Fanning, Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, advised:

- *If I place myself in a teacher's position, how do I have a relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and family if every time they speak to me they're filtering the experience through their understanding of 'my mandatory reporting responsibilities'?*

3.35 The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed report, on 19 June 2018 advised:

- *In June 2017, the ACT Government announced a review into the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the child protection system in the ACT. The Our Booris, Our Way review is guided by a wholly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee and is being conducted in accordance with the principles of self-determination. This review will investigate the circumstances of approximately 350 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children currently engaging with the child protection system, to understand their experience and to advise how best Aboriginal Child Placement Principles might be realised in the ACT community.*
- *The Our Booris, Our Way review will make recommendations to the ACT Government on the best way to fully implement the SNAICC Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, including development of advice about how best to move towards self-determination in the child protection system. Our Booris, Our Way will deliver an interim report later in 2018 focussing on early learnings and initial improvements to the system. The final report will be delivered in August 2019 and will focus on major systemic improvements.*

3.36 The Community Services Directorate, in response to the draft proposed report, on 19 June 2018 further advised:

- *Data collected by Children, Youth and Families highlight that school personnel provide the largest number of reports to CYPS raising concerns for the wellbeing of children and young people. This is not unusual given that teachers and school personnel are the adults outside of a family unit that engage mostly with children, young people and their families. For many children, the relationship between them and their teacher will be the closest outside their family.*
- *The Children and Young People Act 2008 allows for some discretion around reporting not fully utilised by school personnel. This may highlight that school personnel require additional support in determining what response is required when deciding if they should make a report to child protection. This may include better and more timely advice on what is the appropriate response to concerns so that the most appropriate support is available to the child and their family.*
- *Across Government, non-government and the community sector, both voluntary and mandatory reporters need to have a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations. This is not to diminish the importance of reporting when children are experiencing severe abuse and neglect and have no parent willing and able to protect them. A culture of support, however, does acknowledge that a family may feel more comfortable and thus be more open to receiving support and referrals from school personnel that they have an existing relationship with, rather than through the statutory system.*
- *It also must be acknowledged that a report to child protection may be received more adversely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in light of their experiences with the Stolen Generation and history of dispossession.*

3.37 The Education Directorate, in response to the final proposed report, on 26 June 2018 advised that:

In 2017 a new position, CYPS Liaison Officer, was created to strengthen the relationship between Education and Child and Youth Protection Services. The Liaison Officer interprets and articulates the relevant services, policies and procedures relevant to both Education and Community Services Directorates and provides training and communication where necessary. CSD and Education staff can seek advice from the Liaison Officer on individual and systemic issues and processes.

The main tasks of the role include building staff capacity, identifying and addressing systemic and individual issues, policy writing, information sharing, and training, collaboration, sustainability, building relationships and respectful workplace practices.

RECOMMENDATION 3 MANDATORY REPORTING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HARM OR RISK OF HARM IN THE ACT

The ACT Government should continue to progress the work of the review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people known to the child protection system, *Our Booris, Our Way*, and note the concerns expressed during the audit about the fear of mandatory reporting when help is sought.

RECOMMENDATION 4 MANDATORY REPORTING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HARM OR RISK OF HARM IN THE ACT

The Education Directorate and the Community Services Directorate (including the Office for Family Safety) should, within the context of the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, develop training that emphasises the provision of support for children and families based on ‘a child protection system focused on a culture of support while meeting reporting obligations’.

3.38 The audit considered four ways in which ACT public schools (with the support of the Education Support Office) facilitates engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and students. These are:

- seeking views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community;
- recognising and identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and their specific relationships and engagements needs with their school;
- providing appropriate forums for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities to communicate with, and provide feedback to, the school; and
- regularly monitoring and evaluating the level of engagement and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and making timely improvement.

Seeking the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community

3.39 The audit considered how the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community was sought:

- at a whole-of-Directorate level; and
- in individual ACT public schools.

Education Directorate

3.40 At the Education Directorate level there is a number of mechanisms for seeking the views of, and providing information to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. These include:

- the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group (now Advisory Group);
- consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body;
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network (discussed at paragraph 4.18);
- the ACT schools satisfaction survey (more information about this survey is provided at paragraph 3.142);
- Community Yarns; and the *Our Mob: Our Voices* survey; and
- the *Our Mob, Our Stories, Our Voices* publication.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group

3.41 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group (the Consultative Group) was established in the 1990s; it has since been replaced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group in 2018. It was comprised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members appointed by the ACT Minister for Education. It met with ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, groups and organisations and advised the ACT and Australian Governments on education related matters. Its vision was:

for an ACT in which our young people thrive in schools and other learning environments and have every opportunity to realise their dreams.³⁸

3.42 It met on a monthly basis and received some administrative support from the Education Directorate's ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section. The Consultative Group's members' appointments expired on 30 November 2017. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group will replace the Consultative Group.

³⁸ ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group website, accessed 24 April 2018, <http://www.betteroutcomestogether.org.au/>

3.43 Feedback from two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders about the former Consultative Group included:

The Consultative Group was parent, family and teacher facing. The families that [the Consultative Group was] representing didn't know that the Consultative Group was there and acting on their behalf so, in the early days, [the Consultative Group] let the families know that they were there and ... set up the website: <http://www.betteroutcomestogether.org.au/>.

It has never been smooth sailing for the Consultative Group; comes down to people not being prepared to be learners – to change and try new things – don't like change, especially the bureaucracy – there are detractors – parents just want things to be as they need them to be.

It is hard to engage with community about mainstream education. A lot can be based on assumptions; have to identify assumptions and what is the problem that is trying to be solved.

[The Consultative Group] received lots of contacts from educators for things such as 'please check out my lesson plan'. There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff [in the Education Directorate] but they are very caught up with reacting to events so the Consultative Group was not a priority. The Directorate was meant to be responsible for setting up meetings, providing the secretariat and refreshments. [Someone other than the Directorate] provided the secretariat and the refreshments most of the time.

3.44 The new ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) is appointed by the ACT Government Minister for Education and Early Child Development. The Advisory Group has nine members made up of four parents/caregiver members, i.e. one person to represent the four school network areas, representatives of ACT higher education institutions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and a representative from the Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network. The Advisory Group is expected to meet four times per year and provide advice to the ACT Government on education matters that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities.

3.45 Information about the cessation of the Consultative Group and its replacement by the Advisory Group is available on the Consultative Group's website: <http://www.betteroutcomestogether.org.au/>. To date, however, there has been no reference to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group on the ACT Education Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education webpage.

3.46 The Education Directorate sought to understand the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group (the Consultative Group). The Consultative Group ceased to operate on 30 November 2017 and will be replaced by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (the Advisory Group). The Advisory Group is expected to meet four times per year and provide advice to the ACT Government on education matters that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities. Information about the Advisory Group is available on the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group's '*betteroutcomestogether*' website but not on the ACT Education Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education webpage.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

- 3.47 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body appoints a representative from the Elected Body to liaise with the Education Directorate. Between 2014 and 2017 *Schooling and Early Childhood* was one of the identified priorities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. Priority One within this priority was 'Communication and engagement'.³⁹ The representative meets monthly with the Education Directorate's Director-General; the agenda is generally set by the representative and includes issues of concern to the representative and concerns raised with them by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Topics have included Student Resource Allocation and Indigenous Education Officers. Additionally, the representative has visited some schools to speak to principals and teachers.

Community Yarns

- 3.48 The Community Yarns project resulted from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-2017*. With respect to the purpose of the Community Yarns, the ACT Education Directorate's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2016-17, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the ACT* stated:

The aim was to engage members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for employment opportunities with the Directorate.⁴⁰

- 3.49 Community Yarns is one method used by the Education Directorate to provide information to, and hear from, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. A Community Yarn event held in 2016 at the Narrabundah Early Childhood School attracted casual employees interested in career development and permanent employment with the Directorate.
- 3.50 Two Community Yarns were held in 2017 at the University of Canberra with the aim of connecting to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were interested in employment in the Directorate; additionally, they were described as opportunities for attendees to network, seek advice and register for employment.

Our Mob: Our Voices Survey

- 3.51 The *Our Mob: Our Voices Survey* seeks feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education staff through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Staff Network. The survey has taken place from 2014 to 2016 and will occur again in 2018. The survey did not take place in 2017.

³⁹ ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, 2015-2018, p 6.

⁴⁰ Education Directorate, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2016-17, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the ACT*, p 20.

Our Mob, Our Stories, Our Voices

3.52 The Education Directorate publication *Our Mob, Our Stories, Our Voices* states that it:

tells the story of seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed across the [ACT Education Directorate]. Teachers, school leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and administrative support staff have shared their journeys, their passion for education, hopes for the future and what were their influences in joining the education community.⁴¹

3.53 While the publication does not seek input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, it profiles the experiences of seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and, in doing so, provides local role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

3.54 With respect to the overall positivity of the Education Directorate and its engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community, one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised the audit team that:

ACT Education Directorate has one of the best records of engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT and this is mostly because of the Directorate being in the 'positive' business of Education; and ACT Education Directorate employs one of the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and, again, this is largely due to the positive image of the Directorate in the Community.

ACT public schools

3.55 The ACT public schools selected for the audit advised that they use a number of mechanisms for seeking the views and wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. These include student *Personal Learning Plans* (or something similar), parent/family–teacher meetings and school specific mechanisms such as school gate catch ups, arranging meetings in neutral places, the school's Facebook page or inviting families to the school for a yarn and something to eat.

Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

3.56 The use of *Personalised Learning Plans* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was described by the ACT Education Directorate:

While strengths-based and goal oriented Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been encouraged in the past, the approach over the last couple of years has been "whole school approaches to personalised learning" which may include PLPs, particularly if they are something parents want. ... A number of schools use variations of a PLP as a strength-based strategy to engage with all students and parents. These are generally developed in collaboration with students and parents based on interests, aspirations and learning needs. Other schools use Pathways Planning to facilitate the conversations with students. It is not so much the document but the conversation that is important. Having students develop their own learning plans as a class activity has also proved to be successful. PLPs have never been mandatory.

⁴¹ Education Directorate, *Our Mob, Our Stories, Our Voices*, 2013, p3.

- 3.57 Representatives from the schools selected for the audit provided a range of views about *Personalised Learning Plans*, their use and effectiveness:

PLPs weren't useful from [teacher's] discussion - (w)ritten but were they every looked at again. With the new CIC [Cultural Integrity Continuum] make sure they succeed like everyone else.

[Personalised Learning Plan] meetings are an excellent way to build strong relationships with families and carers. They are an opportunity for families to share their hopes and dreams for their children and set aspirational goals for the year ahead. [Previously there was negative stuff like children not doing homework- now we keep it simple – baseline is that all children are capable and competent – teachers are empowered to feel they are making a difference and know that they can make a change for any child at any point of time in their classes.

Some students need PLPs but high flyers will say why do we need it; it's about making sure no-one is going under the radar and students are getting support if it's needed.

- 3.58 Representatives from a school advised of the usefulness of students' *Personalised Learning Plans* to record information that will help teachers to better know a student, for example if the student has been out of school for a period of time for cultural reasons or if a student's assignments should be completed in school with access to the school's internet:

The school use the students' PLPs to record information that will help teachers to know the student.

[I] will note discretely in the student's PLP if there is an issue related to internet connection at home, for example [I] will note 'ensure class time to complete assessment' - if the student has low literacy [I] will note in the PLP 'images and diagrams for assessment'.

- 3.59 Representatives from this school also advised of the usefulness of the *Personalised Learning Plans* in facilitating discussion with students' families and carers:

We have 6 month reviews of PLPs with the students' families; the review can be difficult to arrange. Mandating PLPs can look like a deficit as well as lumping students together in one cohort; PLPs may not always be needed.

Having meetings with students' families/carers allows us to share the student's journey to their goals; we establish a commitment between each other and consider how we can support one another to get to smart goals to ensure students' sense of achievement and we can show what has been done.

- 3.60 In one high school it was apparent that all students participate in the Pathways process, which involves student working out their *Personalised Learning Plan* with a teacher; for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students this may be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher. In one of the schools visited during fieldwork, each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher has three to four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for whom they are responsible. The teachers then discuss the *Personalised Learning Plans* with the parents. While representatives from the school advised that:

Kids are interested in ongoing relationships, not very interested in PLPs (not the school's process). At least there's been a conversation and reflection if there's a PLP.

- 3.61 ACT public schools use various ways to seek the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Of the five schools selected for audit, all had established ways to discuss and record a student's goals, interests and specific needs; the schools reported their

processes involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' families and community. One method that schools may choose to use, in agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, is a *Personalised Learning Plan*, or something similar, to record the student's goals and aspirations. Representatives from one school provided positive feedback about the usefulness of *Personalised Learning Plans* in facilitating communication with families and carers:

- *[Personalised Learning Plan] meetings are an excellent way to build strong relationships with families and carers. They are an opportunity for families to share their hopes and dreams for their children and set aspirational goals for the year ahead. Previously there was negative stuff like children not doing homework – now we keep it simple – baseline is that all children are capable and competent – teachers are empowered to feel they are making a difference and know that they can make a change for any child at any point of time in their classes.*

- 3.62 However, representatives from other schools' comments about *Personalised Learning Plans* were more cautious, noting that the use of a *Personalised Learning Plan* for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may not be needed and 'can look like a deficit as well as lumping students together in one cohort'.

Recognising and identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and their specific needs

- 3.63 According to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015:

Meaningful relationships value community cultural knowledge, wisdom and expertise, and demonstrate trust and respect.⁴²

- 3.64 The importance of recognising and identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community for the purpose of developing relationships was identified by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder during the audit:

The community is so diverse and therefore communication is diverse. There are various degrees of relationship. It's about knowing and numbering the flock.

- 3.65 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisation provided guidance on what successful engagement would involve:

A place that is safe for students so that they remain in school;

Cultural sensitive support towards kids;

Knowing kids spend a lot of time in the school's care, the school needs to know what approaches to take; and

⁴² National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015, p 3

Every school should have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer.

3.66 Another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder commented that:

Majority of people in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are satisfied with the Directorate, however the directorate still needs to go a long way in terms of being culturally competent.

Engagement with the schools has not been that good for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families because of their transient nature and moving in and out of schools.

3.67 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised that schools could empower families by helping them understand the school curriculum and the school administrative processes:

There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families

3.68 When enrolling in ACT public schools parents/carers are asked to identify whether the student is 'of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin'. While there is provision on the enrolment form to identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, some students and families may choose not to identify.

3.69 After the school census in February each year, each school is provided with a student list that includes information as to which students have identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. It is up to the school as to how they use the information at a local level, noting that a student that identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander attracts extra funding to the school through the Student Resource Allocation model. This includes an enrolments-driven allocation, higher for students in the early years of schooling and for students in transition phases of Years 7 and 11.⁴³

3.70 A school teacher noted that their school's engagement extends to the families' kinship structures and include Grandparents, Uncles and Aunties. The teacher advised:

For those students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander engagement may not come back to a parent but it may be an Aunty or Uncle.

3.71 A principal also suggested that some families may need support as well as students; the principal advised:

Key to improving engagement is to support families just as much as students.

⁴³ Education Directorate, Student Resource Allocation Fact Sheet: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools, p 2.

- 3.72 Several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders spoke of the importance of schools showing sensitivity to, and awareness of, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are in the Territory's Care and Protection system. Several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders commented:

There are a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in the Care and Protection system in the ACT and CYPs staff and school teachers need to show sensitivity and an awareness to the needs of these children.

The school did not know the kids were in care.

- 3.73 With respect to the importance of relating with, and to, families and community Professor Chris Sarra advised the audit team:

Relationships with Community – all students and families must be connected to the work of schools - how can we address together - start with connecting with the student.

Connectedness is key regardless of how dishevelled or stressed a student might be – they have a human right to be embraced and nurtured by us – in the ACT we should be able to do that.

Students will come with different needs and it is about ensuring that the teacher and student are enabled to be the best they can be in class. Part of this means ensuring the student is confident, capable and connected. Part of this also means they are not sitting in class hungry or having hearing difficulties

School leadership has to be better equipped with people deeply committed to reaching out to the margins. It's about Heart, Head, Hand and doing all three.

- 3.74 Professor Sarra suggested one way to nurture students would be to allocate every teacher in a school the responsibility to focus on one or two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the total number that attend the school; this would enable the teacher to build a relationship with the student, starting with saying 'good morning' and asking how things are going.

ACT public schools' comments on cultural identity, relationships and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- 3.75 The ACT public schools selected for the audit advised the audit team of the importance of recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their engagement needs:

There were lots of Aboriginal people sucked out from their countries and the distinct culture and traditions were lost and children were lost and Aboriginal people didn't have cultural identity around the dinner table; but now they are stronger and prouder because of societal movement.

At the beginning of every school year [I] will look to make connections with families who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Families who have strongest connections will make connections with the school.

The school needs to know students; who is at home and who cares for the student; secrets and rumours are rife so you need to know what to do for students through connections and the teachers can help find out.

For those students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander engagement may not come back to a parent but it may be an Auntie or Uncle.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' comments on identity, schools' relationships and engagement

- 3.76 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students of a range of ages (from Years 3 to 12) from three schools visited provided positive and negative comments in response to Mr Mitchell's question as to what the students thought about their school's relationship and engagement with them. The students' responses included:

School E

The [school] is better than my old school; there was no aboriginal support for the past 2 to 3 years [at my old school]. [The school] did have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker/Liaison Officer but they left and they were not replaced.

At [this school] I have learned a lot about land and food, I am getting back what I would have been in touch with at a young age. At home I was only told I was Aboriginal.

At [this school] we get more support and understanding.

I am recognised as Aboriginal instead of ... having to say I am Aboriginal.

In my previous school they did not know what to teach [in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures].

I don't like how everything revolves around your ability to write.

School D

More is presented to us; through art and hands on work.

Feel more proud.

More encouragement towards us all.

Recognise our art and proud to show it off.

I hate one class because I have to talk about myself; I don't like talking about myself.

There are heaps of opportunities and more money for boys; girls don't get anything. It's a gender equality issue – there should be more programs for everyone not just based on gender.

- 3.77 There were mixed views from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community about how schools engage them. However, the majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who contributed to the audit were positive about the schools selected for audit engagement, e.g.

- *At [this school] we get more support and understanding.*
- *More encouragement towards us all.*

- 3.78 Professor Chris Sarra of the University of Canberra and head of Queensland Government's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships said:

- *Relationships with Community – all students and families must be connected to the work of schools - how can we address together - start with connecting with the student.*
- *Connectedness is key regardless of how dishevelled or stressed a student might be – they have a human right to be embraced and nurtured by us – in the ACT we should be able to do that.*

- *Students will come with different needs and it is about ensuring that the teacher and student are enabled to be the best they can be in class. Part of this means ensuring the student is confident, capable and connected. Part of this also means they are not sitting in class hungry or having hearing difficulties.*
- *School leadership has to be better equipped with people deeply committed to reaching out to the margins. It's about Heart, Head, Hand and doing all three.*

Professor Sarra suggested one way to nurture students would be to allocate every teacher in a school the responsibility to focus on one or two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the total number that attend the school to enable the teacher to build a relationship with the student, starting with saying 'good morning' and asking how things are going.

- 3.79 ACT public schools need to have an explicit strategy for connecting with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to enhance the relationship and communication between the school and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Recommendation 1 addresses this issue.

Providing appropriate forums for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community to communicate with, and provide feedback to, the school

- 3.80 The five schools selected for the audit use various forums to communicate with, and provide feedback to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including parent/family–teacher meetings and ad hoc, school specific, mechanisms for two-way communication. Some of these include:

- family barbeques at school;
- school gate catch ups;
- arranging to meet parents or family members in the school grounds, outside the school building;
- the school's Facebook page;
- Google communities;
- phone calls, emails and text messages; and
- inviting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders to the school.

- 3.81 A number of representatives from the schools commented that contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and schools can vary. Schools' comments included:

Parental contact will be varied and there is not an exact reason for what the triggers are; if the family have high expectations then there is more likelihood that there will be follow up but this is not culturally specific.

[There can be a] lack of engagement by some families and misunderstanding about how school works.

We have 6 month reviews of PLPs with the students' families; the review can be difficult to arrange.

- 3.82 It was also noted that, as students move through to College, it is usual for all parents (irrespective of whether they are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) to be less engaged as students become more independent. One school teacher advised:

Parents may be off doing other things so parent take-up may be low - college kids are individuals with their own connections to community and culture.

Schools' tailoring of communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community

- 3.83 School principals described ways in which they have been successful in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and/or families:

The school will engage with families in ways that the family are happy to do so; an example of this is meeting a Mum outside the school building to discuss her child's progress.

[At my former primary school I] used to organise a fortnightly catch up with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and this is something [I have] brought to [my] current role.[I] make it a point to meet parents at more neutral venues if that makes them more comfortable. [I have] worked to reduce the stigma around the 'principal's office' and there is a lot of parents who are now comfortable to come in for a yarn.

- 3.84 It was also reported that, at another school, a parent who would not initially come into the school to meet their children will now come in. This followed the school facilitating meetings around the Aboriginal flag, initially in the company of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer.

- 3.85 A school may also work with external agencies as part of their engagement. A school principal advised the audit team:

[I] have been working with Gudan Gulwan and a range of other community organisations to build awareness in the community and to work together to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

- 3.86 Another principal reported that the school's Facebook page is the most popular way for all families and community to engage with the school:

The school's Facebook page is the most popular way for families and community to engage with the school.

- 3.87 However, schools report different experiences with other communication methods. For example, in one school a family barbeque had been attended by three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and was not viewed as successful, whereas in another school Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have been invited for a meal, including Aunties and Uncles, as an opportunity to yarn and to allow students to show their school work to their families.
- 3.88 One school teacher advised that they regularly call families and that these phone calls are especially important when there is positive news to share.
- 3.89 A principal reported that they enlisted the assistance of a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community member to facilitate engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community member also assists the school engage with families, for example, to complete a student's *Personalised Learning Plan* or if an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student is absent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community member assists in maintaining communication between the school and the student and their family.
- 3.90 Several stakeholders commented on the uniqueness of individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families; they advised:
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is connected in the ACT and due to this information about various schools and their reputation quickly spreads within the community. This can result in parents avoiding certain schools while schools with a good reputation attracting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Families will pull kids out of a particular school after only one family's experience – it takes only one teacher to mess up. Families may like a particular Principal or teacher or other kids have gone through the school and were seen as being looked after.
- 3.91 The Education Representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, Mr Maurice Walker, suggested that, in order to enhance a school's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, schools should tailor their information. Mr Walker also referred to the 'good' impact that using an Aboriginal parent/family member to liaise between the school and other families has had on the school's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and effective engagement is dependent on teachers and school leaders being accessible. In this respect Mr Walker advised:
- If schools want to enhance engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community the key to achieving this is to provide tailored information specific to the community needs and concerns.
- Effective engagement is dependent on the accessibility of schools' teachers and leaders.
- [A school] uses some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, to liaise between the school and families, and this has had a good impact on the school's engagement with the community.
- 3.92 The five schools selected for audit described the ways that they have tailored their communication with families, such as meeting families on neutral ground and in places they feel comfortable until the families feel comfortable to meet in the school, meeting families in school over something to eat, and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

community organisations or members of the community to engage more or assist with engaging with families. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder suggested that to enhance a school's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, schools should tailor their information; the community stakeholder said:

- *If schools want to enhance engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community the key to achieving this is to provide tailored information specific to the community needs and concerns.*

This community stakeholder also advised that:

- *Effective engagement is dependent on the accessibility of schools teachers and leaders.*

3.93 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder and a school principal also noted that providing support to families as well as the students is important for more improvement to engagement; the community stakeholder advised:

- *There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;*

and the principal stated:

- *Key to improving engagement is to support families just as much as students.*

3.94 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is well connected and will share information about schools; this may affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's view of a school. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised:

- *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is connected in the ACT and due to this information about various schools and their reputation quickly spreads within the community. This can result in parents avoiding certain schools while schools with a good reputation attracting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students.*

Internet Access

3.95 During audit fieldwork, conflicting feedback was received from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' and families' access to the internet; community stakeholder comments included:

Not a lot of families have internet connection; reasons may be affordability.

The internet is a luxury and not necessarily for everyone.

- 3.96 Mr Mitchell noted in his report on THE VOICE of the families (paragraph 3.4) that responses to his question about the access to the internet also included:

Kids have a tablet but don't bring it home.

If there is no internet connection kids don't do their homework and they become disengaged, the issue is the lack of access to the internet.

- 3.97 Several community organisation stakeholders, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisation referred to some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' difficulty with internet access:

Online enrolment into preschool and schools has proved to be quite challenging to some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (in fact all families experiencing vulnerability) as they may not have access to technology to complete an on-line form. [We have] helped many parents with enrolling their children.

- 3.98 Schools selected for audit comments about electronic communication included:

Email is difficult because of access to the internet and literacy can be a problem so it is far better to phone families. [I do] not set homework instead [I] set research tasks in class when the students can assess the school's internet. [I] will note discretely in the student's PLP if there is an issue related to internet connection at home, for example [I] will note 'ensure class time to complete assessment'

[For] primary school [students' families] [we] use [a] phone call – oral language is the strongest.

- 3.99 The audit team asked the school principals if they had a sense of the level of internet access that their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had at home, and if the level of access may be disproportionately lower in non-Indigenous families. The principals responded:

Do not know how to collect this data without breach of privacy and certainly do not have a sense for it. [As regards to the level being disproportionate to non-Indigenous families] unknown but I expect it is about average or slightly below.

No good sense on internet access at home but good sense that students have access to the internet via mobile phone. [As regards to the level being disproportionate to non-Indigenous families] No, I don't.

All homes have hand held devices with internet access. I would suggest that 40% have reliable access to laptop/desktop/Chromebook/iPad. [As regards to the level of being disproportionate to non-Indigenous families] Not in our school community.

Most people have phones that have 3G connectivity and so they have access when in free Wi-Fi even if they don't have access at home. The provision by the ACT Government of a Chrome notebook to all year 7 – 10 students this year has contributed to increasing access for some families. The form does not ask about internet access but for an email address.

- 3.100 Professor Peter Radoll, writing for the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, and his colleague have recently published an Australian National University working paper called *Dynamic of the Digital Divide*. This paper states that, in 2016, internet access for Indigenous

households in the ACT was 88.1 percent and other ACT households' internet access was at 91.9 percent.⁴⁴

- 3.101 The Education Directorate Planning and Data Analytics Branch stated, in respect of internet access to complete schools' online enrolment forms:

There was not anything from the [public schools enrolment] data that seemed to indicate a problem – schools, Community Services Directorate and libraries will provide assistance with completing online enrolment forms, as will schools.

- 3.102 The Education Directorate and ACT public schools regularly communicate with all students and families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families, via electronic communications. However, the audit team heard mixed views about whether all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community had internet access; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders' comments included:

- *Not a lot of families have internet connection; reasons may be affordability; and*
- *The internet is a luxury and not necessarily for everyone.*

- 3.103 ACT public schools selected for audit comments about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' home internet access included:

- *Email is difficult because of access to the internet and literacy can be a problem so it is far better to phone families. [I]do not set homework instead [I]set research tasks in class when the students can access the school's internet; and*
- *Most people have phones that have 3G connectivity and so they have access when in free Wi-Fi even if they don't have access at home. The provision by the ACT Government of a Chrome notebook to all year 7 – 10 students this year has contributed to increasing access for some families.*

- 3.104 In the Australian National University working paper, *Dynamic of the Digital Divide*, it was stated that internet access in 2016 in the ACT in Indigenous households was at 88.1 percent and in other ACT households internet access was at 91.9 percent.

- 3.105 The above matter is addressed through Recommendation 6.

School Clusters

- 3.106 Schools clusters are another forum for schools to communicate and share information with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community. School clusters are not formal structures but refer to groups of neighbouring schools. Generally a cluster will have a number of primary schools, a high school and a college. The schools in the cluster work together to assist students' transitions from primary to high school and to college. Clusters may also work together in other ways to help students in their journey through the education system.

⁴⁴ *Dynamic of the Digital Divide* [P Radoll and B Hunter CAEPR Working Paper No. 120/2017], page 12

Inner North Cluster Indigenous Celebration

3.107 In 2009 the Inner North School Cluster⁴⁵, with their school communities, developed an agreement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders and families, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Partnership Agreement (Agreement). The Agreement:

promotes positive relationships, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history, quality teaching and social justice.⁴⁶

3.108 One of the schools involved in the developing the Agreement reported that:

the process of developing the North Canberra Cluster Agreement ... was a great way for [their school] to connect with the community and the other schools in the area – at the time there were 20 to 30 people involved in developing the agreement and a parent led the way in writing the agreement.

3.109 The Inner North School Cluster holds an annual gathering, at Corroboree Park in Ainslie, to celebrate the Agreement and to share good news stories; this is known as the Cluster Celebration.⁴⁷ The gathering usually involves a barbeque and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural activities. As well as celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the Cluster Celebration was reported by a school to:

each year shows kids and parents the pathway through the various stages of schools to college and kids get to know each other and staff from the various schools.

3.110 Initiatives like the Inner North School Cluster's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Partnership Agreement provide on-going opportunities for ACT public schools to communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community on matters related to the cluster schools and demonstrate the schools' inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. School cluster events also provide opportunities:

- for younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to connect with older students at the high schools or college in their cluster and to see the pathways to those high schools and college for themselves; and
- to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture with other schools' students and staff.

Schools connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

3.111 All of the five schools visited during audit fieldwork advised that they have taken steps to progress their school's connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

⁴⁵ Dickson College, Campbell Primary and High Schools, Lyneham Primary and High Schools, Ainslie Primary School, North Ainslie Primary School, O'Connor Cooperative School and Turner Primary School.

⁴⁶ Education Directorate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2016-17, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, p 21.

⁴⁷ Education Directorate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2016-17, Report to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, p 21.

- 3.112 One principal advised that their school staff had been learning an Aboriginal language, there were plans to name areas of the school in several languages and the school had been focusing on 'belonging and identity' and increasing cultural knowledge across the school. This school has a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander room, where all students can go to research and work on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity. The principal advised:

[They] welcome students in Aboriginal language to the school assembly, although recognising that there are probably 20 different languages represented by the 40 students that attend the school.

Moving forward to a new phase for the school such as co-naming the school areas in several languages ... [and] learning language in staff meetings.

There had been a focus on belonging and identity – resources for teachers – learning groups – increasing knowledge across the school.

Staff are reflective and creative and don't like to stuff up – a lot of people don't want to offend – have to accept that mistakes will be made.

- 3.113 Several other schools have a dedicated room or area for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students to come together to do cultural activities or meet together.

- 3.114 Another principal, in response to the question as to how teachers could be fearless, said that:

Seek more opportunities to strive for successful things. [Schools] sharing experiences [with one another.]

If we [schools] get it wrong, say so and fix it.

We have to create space so we can have a go; like getting our kids to give acknowledgment to country.

This principal advised that the school has introduced an induction process for all staff to be able to gauge, through the staff member's self-assessment, what areas of cultural integrity the staff member and school need to work on to be more familiar and/or confident.

- 3.115 The Education Directorate has activated a Google+ Community website (discussed at paragraph 2.43) as part of its *Cultural Integrity in ACT public schools* initiative. The website provides one way of sharing information about schools' engagement approaches among one another. The Google+ community website includes an area for posting information about 'engagement with families and community'.

- 3.116 The five schools selected for audit demonstrated various ways in which they are progressing their connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, such as using an Aboriginal language at school assemblies, plans to co-name areas of the school in different languages and creating a space to try new things. One school principal advised

- *We have to create space so we can have a go; like getting our kids to give acknowledgment to country and*
- *seek more opportunities to strive for successful things. [Schools] sharing experiences [with one another].*

- 3.117 The Education Directorate has activated a Google+ Community website as part of its Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools initiative. The Google+ Community provides a mechanism for schools to share information and experiences.

RECOMMENDATION 5

SHARING SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES AMONG SCHOOLS

The Education Directorate should request all schools to share information about their engagement methods, successful or not, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community by posting the information on the ACT Education's Google Community website. The ACT Education Directorate should monitor and analyse this information to inform engagement strategies.

Visible representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in schools

- 3.118 The schools visited during audit fieldwork use various ways of visualising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in and around the school. One school has a painted rock at the front of the school that incorporates the students' hand paintings and a snake painted on the ground leads the way from the rock to the school's front door.
- 3.119 The schools also use art, artefacts, school resources (books etc.) and furniture to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures into the classroom. Additionally, the schools carry out activities that relate to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait cultures.



Source: ACT Audit Office photograph of a mother honey bee mat at School A.



Source: ACT Audit Office photograph of School C's students' coolamons. Mr Mitchell observed, with school staff, the trees from which the coolamons had been cut and students' work on the coolamons.

3.120 Visible representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in schools was observed by the audit team. This included the use of art, artefacts, school resources (books etc) and furniture; outdoor features and activities such students' hand paintings; and making coolamons from the bark of local trees.

Culturally sensitive approaches applied in class rooms

Koori Preschool Program

3.121 The Koori Preschool Program provides a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three to five year olds, aligned with the Early Years Framework; it includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum and each operates for two days per week. Koori Preschools operate at five sites across the ACT:

- Ngunnawal Primary School;
- Kingsford Smith School;
- Narrabundah Early Childhood School;
- Wanniasa School; and
- Richardson Primary School.

3.122 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders advised that:

The Koori kid's preschool is a good program.

Mr Walker, Education Representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body advised that:

... [T]here are some families who do not send their kids to Koori Preschool and/or Kindergarten and these kids then face difficulties in school later on. More efforts should be made to engage these families to get their children participating in early childhood educational opportunities.

3.123 Schools reported during audit fieldwork that teachers incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and cultural references during key dates in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander calendar, such as during NAIDOC and National Reconciliation weeks.

[I] incorporat[e] history of black Australia during Reconciliation Week by using the online resources supplied by Reconciliation Australia (RA) that provides subject resources for educators to use in their curricula delivery.

[My] approach to NAIDOC in 2017 was to encourage all teachers to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture throughout the week – in response to [a] teacher's query about how to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into a maths class [I referred] to the figure on \$50 notes and suggested that the teacher may do some research into Indigenous ... teachers and lecturers.

The teacher also said:

It is everybody's responsibility to be culturally aware; teachers should know the kids and make it a point to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in their teaching through an attitude of 'how will I learn today and pass it on.'

3.124 These schools also reported that responsibility for encouraging and driving the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives may fall to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff member or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer:

[I was] impressed ... as a classroom teacher with the engagement from [the school] towards Indigenous special events like NAIDOC, Sorry Day and Reconciliation week. This was mainly due to the drive from a fellow teacher ... who championed these interactions and ensured that the school fully participated in such events.

Biggest frustration is time and funding – if someone is driving, everyone will jump on it.

3.125 Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders advised that some teachers are apprehensive about how to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the classroom:

New teachers can be scared to engage.

It will depend on the teacher as to whether they are anxious or not.

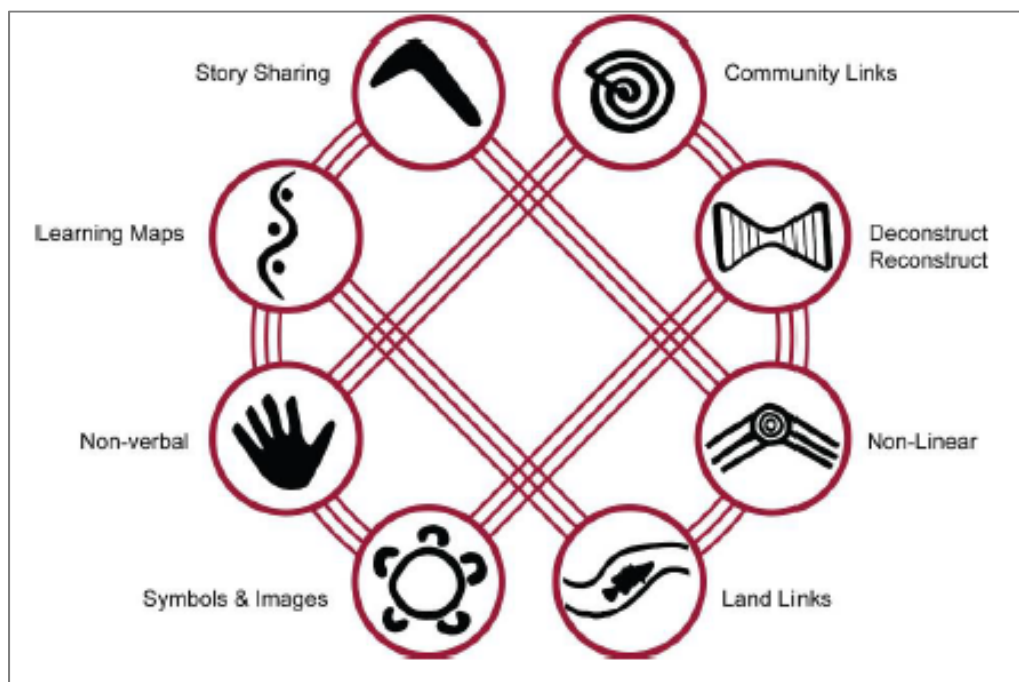
3.126 Two schools described using *8 [Aboriginal] Ways of Learning Framework*⁴⁸ in their teaching support methods and one of these schools also referred to applying the Stronger Smarter Institute's approaches such as celebrating attendance by keeping a students' attendance chart and involving the principal to celebrate students' weekly attendance achievements. One teacher has also mapped the *8 [Aboriginal] Ways of Learning Framework* against the

⁴⁸ A framework that includes eight interconnected pedagogies.

Great Teaching by Design Framework and the *Australian Professional Standards for Teaching*. In this respect, the teacher advised:

We are using best practice - 8 Ways pedagogy and Stronger Smarter linked together. We have had 8 ways teaching training and shared our learnings at staff meetings – it is a concrete set of strategies to take to class and the idea is that 8 ways will roll out across classes.

Figure 3-1 Eight Ways pedagogy



Source: 8 ways of learning factsheet

3.127 One Aboriginal teacher commented:

Ensuring cultural competency is not hard as it's part of our shared history and part of the reconciliation process — part of our practice is assessments can be flexible and can draw on strengths and our own experiences – for example teaching students about Greek gods we reflected on Indigenous people's sense of family and used this to how we looked at ancient Greek gods.

[I am] not an expert of anything but [my] own life, [I] approach students with respect and help students blossom.

Our pedagogy is a real life approach.

3.128 Another Aboriginal teacher advised that a lot of ACT schools are pursuing their own approaches but there needs to be appropriate training and an evaluation of what schools are doing. The teacher advised:

A lot of schools are doing their own stuff and on their own treadmill ... there needs to be training and evaluation of what we are doing. The other challenge is staffing and resources to implement our approach; students and families need individual support. ...over the last year we have families walking in to school who didn't before; it is seen as a safe space. A huge challenge is retraining and recruiting staff; the process can be [a] barrier and overwhelming. A consistent support is needed particularly for Indigenous students and families to help guide them.

- 3.129 Mr Mitchell led the discussion with all the schools and with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community stakeholders. He visited all the schools selected for audit and several other schools that were reported by stakeholders to have good engagement approaches. Through his observations, Mr Mitchell considered that he saw examples of sensitivity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during audit fieldwork at a Koori Preschool, a Centre of Excellence and a variety of other settings including specific rooms, areas and activities and that these examples may provide models of engagement for other schools more broadly.
- 3.130 The Audit Office team member, Mr Ben Mitchell, who is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, reported that he observed sensitivity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during audit fieldwork at a Koori Preschool, a Centre of Excellence and a variety of other settings including specific rooms, areas and activities. Mr Mitchell considered that approaches used at an ACT public school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre of Excellence can provide a model for other schools, including the incorporation of teaching pedagogies such as '8 ways of learning'. The audit team observed different approaches at different schools; a teacher suggested that there should be an evaluation of what schools are doing.

Stakeholders' feedback on relationships and schools' cultural competency

- 3.131 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder stated that:

Schools should instil pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students regarding their cultural heritage and link them with support groups instead of having tokenised programs such as the Indigenous Liaison Officers. Gugan Gulwan is a good example of a community organisation providing support groups to students.

- 3.132 The same stakeholder considered that:

Although teachers should demonstrate empathy for the situation some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families are in, this should not be mixed with pity or 'oh poor you' attitude;

Although schools might encourage staff to undertake cultural training, there are instances where this training is only done online, or conducted by people who are not suitably qualified; and

There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

- 3.133 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher said:

... we can't keep what goes on outside school out of class ... we can give information to families ... ; we will give them support by walking through life with them for a bit to help them to navigate government systems.

- 3.134 With respect to engagement, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised:

It is hard to engage with community about mainstream education.

A strong program and cohort of students in a school can strengthen cultural identity.

There might be a focus on attendance, encouraging speaking up in class, discussing pride and shame, breaking down shame and having programs for kids..

- 3.135 Several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and education stakeholders referred to how a school must reach out to the most vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. One stakeholder said that schools need to be affordable for all families:

Schools need to be affordable for all families as there are expenses such as excursions, after school care, which some of our families cannot afford.

- 3.136 Another stakeholder reflected that there may be problems if parents do not know how to converse with teachers and the principal:

There is a problem where some of the parents don't know how to converse with the teachers and the principals and as a consequence the kids miss out.

- 3.137 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised:

There is a high staff turnover in the public schools and this means that it is hard to retain staff who are culturally competent and to build a whole of organisation ethos that is culturally safe.

Generally teachers are not culturally competent ...

- 3.138 A school commented on its cultural competency:

[School] staff's cultural competency is patchy; staff with a particular cultural interest are more culturally competent.

- 3.139 Another school commented on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in general

[I]t is a piecemeal approach which has very limited effectiveness.

- 3.140 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders expressed a range of opinions regarding engagement by schools including the need for teachers to have more cultural competency; the challenge for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to afford extracurricular activities; and the challenges for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in communicating with schools. Some of the schools selected for audit considered the school's cultural competency 'patchy' and engagement, in general, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was 'piecemeal'. Feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders included:

- *Although teachers should demonstrate empathy for the situation some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families are in, this should not be mixed with pity or 'oh poor you' attitude;*
- *There is a high staff turnover in the public schools and this means that it is hard to retain staff who are culturally competent and to build a whole of organisation ethos that is culturally safe;*

- *Schools need to be affordable for all families as there are expenses such as excursions, after school care, which some of our families cannot afford; and*
- *There are a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not understand the school curriculum or school administrative processes and should be provided help in this regard by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families’.*

RECOMMENDATION 6

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES

The Education Directorate should develop, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait families and community, a range of information, in different formats and in ways that are easily accessible, including information on:

- a) the ACT school curriculum; and
- b) support funding for Aboriginal and Torres Islander students, how it is accessed and in what circumstances.

Monitoring and evaluating the level of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and making timely improvement

3.141 An ACT public schools satisfaction survey and the Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool survey take place annually. These surveys are issued to students, families and school staff. They are voluntary surveys and, up until 2018, have not included respondents’ personal cultural identification. The 2018 surveys will be distributed later in the year. Analysis of the five audited schools’ Strategic Plans and annual Action Plans (refer to paragraphs 2.18 to 2.26) show that these are important data sources for measuring progress on specific strategies and activities.

ACT School Satisfaction Survey

3.142 The Education Directorate conducts an annual (online) satisfaction survey that canvasses students (years 5 – 12), parents and carers and school staff for feedback on ‘the education provided across all Canberra public schools’. While not specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents and carers (and not identifying them), it provides information on the overall satisfaction of ACT public school students, parents and carers and staff. The survey is anonymous.

3.143 The Education Directorate conducts an annual online school satisfaction survey of parents and carers, students and staff. While information may be collected through this survey from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents, families and caregivers there is no option to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and responses to the survey are

anonymous; therefore, it is not possible to differentiate information that corresponds to the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool Survey

3.144 The Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool gathers information on students' emotional engagement, identification to schools and perceived support and safety. This tool also gathers information on parents'/carers' identification with a school, a school and family connections and parents'/carers' involvement at home and at school.

3.145 The Education Directorate stated that:

[the Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool] information has been collected for four years; ACT Education is working with the ANU [the Australian National University] and they are looking at the next phase of project as to who is filling out the survey. There are differences between years in relation to low social economic status and high social economic status - equity measures measure different outcomes; the next round of surveys will gather information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Students that have a stronger identification with their school will correlate to the students' outcomes; stronger teacher identification to school also correlates to students' outcomes then there is a health overlay and early childhood experiences overlay.

The ACT is the first jurisdiction to look at this combination of data for students; ideally [the ACT Education Directorate] hope to be able to gauge who are most likely to struggle and advise schools accordingly.

[ACT Education Directorate] know a fair bit about who is enrolling but we don't know the families; there is Commonwealth data that ACT Education can access – there are correlations between school climate, equity, leadership and stability. We hope to work with the Commonwealth to gain access to this administrative data.

The small numbers in each year group with respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make it difficult to report on outcomes. New strategic indicators are being considered/developed that are growth based – noting that [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment] is a small group and changes in one or two people will make a big difference in the data; it may not be possible to do the same growth measures for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] students .

3.146 The Education Directorate carries out an annual survey of all public schools through the Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool that includes information about how a student and their family feel about their school. From 2018 the Directorate intends to collect information through this survey on whether respondents identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. It is recognised by the Education Directorate that, due to a relatively small population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, differences in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents' answers may greatly affect the outcomes for that cohort.

4 SUPPORT FOR STAFF TO ENGAGE WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

- 4.1 This chapter presents information on how Education Directorate (which includes schools) staff are supported with respect to their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

Summary

Conclusion

Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the Education Directorate (which includes schools) under the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17* is a significant achievement. In the new plan being developed, given the pivotal role of teachers and school leaders in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community, and their ability to increase cultural awareness, there needs to be a focus on increasing their numbers and providing them with professional support.

The additional professional training support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is having an effect and its continuation is important. Also important is continuing cultural awareness training for all staff. Training, however, needs to be guided by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training strategy covering all staff and supported by a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training. Without this strategy, and an employment and support action plan, gauging the effectiveness of these measures will depend on anecdotal evidence only.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs)) have an important role in supporting teachers and staff in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. However, more has been expected of them in providing direct support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. Ways of providing direct support need to be identified by asking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community to provide direction on what would assist them and how this could be achieved. It may be appropriate to build capacity in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to provide the direct support.

Key findings

	Paragraph
The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed by the Education Directorate, which includes schools, has increased from 56 to 101 between	4.14

March 2013 and April 2018 (an 88 percent increase). This is a significant advancement, although it is six fewer than the Education Directorate's June 2017 target of 107.

While around 41 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are employed as teachers and school leaders they only comprise 1 percent of the total number of teachers and school leaders in the Education Directorate. Teachers are particularly important role models and, on a daily basis, are central in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Increasing teacher numbers will not only support engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but also contribute to non-Indigenous children gaining a cultural understanding. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander not-for-profit organisation stakeholder consulted during audit fieldwork advised that:

- *ACT Education Directorate employs one of the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees ... this is largely due to the positive image of the Directorate in the Community.*

The Education Directorate advised that no monitoring or evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program has been done or is planned; however, the Education Directorate expects that the program will be reviewed as part of the evaluation of the employment action plan which is currently underway.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in addition to support available for all staff, are offered other support: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network; Our Mob: Our Voices survey; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program; Garma Festival participation; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Scholarships (for prospective staff); and Public Education Awards. The additional support is having an effect.

- *The Staff Network meeting minutes shows that the Network felt that meeting with Senior Executives was having a significant impact and that it is seen as a valuable voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and in a leadership role across the Directorate. Furthermore it had been discussed in national Australian Education Union forums as a prominent and leadership voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and over the previous 18 months the Staff Network had contributed to key activities on education.*
- *A recipient of an ACT Public Education Award in 2017 for Leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education was a young Aboriginal woman who grew up in the Canberra region. Acknowledging outstanding performance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff signals to all staff the importance of the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in increasing cultural awareness.*

The Education Directorate's focus on increasing employment and the provision of professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is having effect. This was guided by several initiatives including the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17*. The Education

Directorate advised it is currently developing the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Support Action Plan. This plan needs to incorporate targets and actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people become teachers and school leaders.

The number of ACT public school teachers having cultural awareness training through attending accredited ACT Teacher Quality Institute programs referencing Standards 1.4 (Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and 2.4 (Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians) decreased between 2015 and 2017 (2155 to 571). The figures to date (268 at 31 May 2018) are in line with 2017 figures. (As of June 2017 there were 4,375 teachers employed in ACT public schools.) Although the Education Directorate provides other training for cultural awareness, as data on attendance, at a systems level, are not available it is not possible to assess if the shortfall is being met through alternative training. 4.47

The Education Directorate has provided cultural awareness training, delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, since 2009 which has, necessarily, focused on school principals and the Education Support Office leadership group. 4.52

One hundred and twenty three staff participated in a 90 minute cultural integrity training session held across the four School Networks, Belconnen, Tuggeranong, North Gungahlin and South Weston, in September 2017 in preparation for the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative. The response by 78 participants was positive with some expressing interest in participating in further training. 4.55

One hundred and twenty four school leaders and Education Support Office staff were invited to a three day Cultural Integrity Training session held in October-November 2017. Attendance varied from 84 to 94 (67 percent to 76 percent of those invited). Seventy four percent of attendees responded in a survey that it was professionally relevant and rewarding, and 75 percent of attendees identified that it was personally relevant. As the training was targeted at, and offered to, 124 school leaders and Education Support Office staff it covers two percent of the Education Directorate staff. 4.59

Although the Education Directorate has advised that it has a Professional Learning 2018 Calendar there is no cultural awareness training strategy with training targets and timeframes, quality control principles to guide the training, and a supporting monitoring and evaluation method. A strategy and a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training is needed. 4.65

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and representatives of community groups provided a range of views on Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs') and their role. While all are important the following are emphasised: 4.74

- *[IEOs] say they have a conflict of interest by getting involved ... but why are they there if they cannot get involved?*

- *[IEOs] are public servants with reporting lines and managers to answer to;*
- *[IEOs'] role should be redefined to that of case managers where they can work directly with families. Also, there is a need to increase their numbers;*
- *Some [IEOs] are very good with dealing with children and families while others are not so. The ones who are good are generally locals who have lived in the area for several years and know the families;*
- *[IEOs] need flexibility and not reminding that they work for the Education Directorate when they should be advocating for the child, not the Directorate – this would create a shift in the thinking of the [IEO]; and*
- *[IEOs] do good work with students but it's site specific, inconsistent and sporadic.*

IEOs provided many insights into how they see their role. While all are important the following are emphasised:

4.77

- *[providing] advice about appropriate communication with students and families to bring the kids into school;*
- *Cultural Integrity is everyone's business; there should be a movement away from teachers asking IEOs do things like advise students and families on particular key dates in schools - teachers should be doing this;*
- *some students are happier to speak with IEOs; this may because they are a bit scared as to how information will be used by the school;*
- *new teachers can be scared to engage [with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families];*
- *IEOs are seen as part of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community and are seen as someone who students, families and community can yarn with; IEOs can help to take the stigma away and engagement can grow organically; and*
- *[the biggest challenge] is people understanding what an Education Officer's job is; people includes teachers and school office staff.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Directorate stakeholders and education peak bodies indicated that the role of IEOs in schools was valued, if not always available:

4.81

- *Every school, whether governmental or non-government, needs Indigenous Education Officers [IEOs] to work one to two days a week in the school to work beside teachers and to help them engage;*
- *IEOs are critical to improvement because schools have transitory workforces – teachers and principals come and go – however IEOs, when they are locally engaged Aboriginal people, are stable and passionate about what they do;*
- *In general, IEOs are contracted by Education Departments, are not full time and are not in every school – it is rare [in Australia] to have funding for IEOs' professional development; and*
- *Principals can fund the position or not – if there is no KPI for Indigenous educational outcomes and a principal doesn't see that*

it is an issue for a school's discretionary funding then they probably won't fund or top up a salary.

There is an expectation gap with respect to the role of IEOs. The role of the IEO is to support teachers to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. This is different from directly supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community yet Aboriginal students, families and community have a need to be directly supported and expect IEOs to fill this vacuum. This expectation gap indicates that there is a need to examine how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community can be provided with direct support. 4.84

The Education Directorate needs to identify a means of providing culturally appropriate direct support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community at schools. This may involve calling on members within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or building capacity in the Aboriginal community to provide support rather than this being provided directly by Education Directorate staff. Direction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community on this matter is needed regarding what would assist them and how this could be done. 4.85

The current allocation of IEOs to ACT public schools does not reflect the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the schools. There was no documentation as to the contribution of other factors as the basis for allocation, including: cultural safety in the school/school readiness; school need; student need; and community. Reasons for allocating IEOs need to be documented. 4.91

Information on allocation of IEOs to schools, and the basis for the allocation, needs to be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and placed on the Directorate's website. This would contribute to facilitating engagement through providing an understanding of the Directorate's decision-making; it also increases transparency. 4.93

The *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* need to be finalised and, in so doing, clarify '...what: 'default allocation'; 'adjustment'; 'priority' and 'general' support by IEOs means. Information is needed on: how schools are to assess each 'School's commitment to Cultural Integrity'; what IEOs will not be doing; how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section will combine and apply information on 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment numbers' and how to apply 'Flexibility for community links, relationships, school need and cultural factors' in the allocation of IEOs. It would be useful to: specify a target date for finalising, and subsequently updating, the Guidelines; outline how and when the use of the Draft Guidelines is to be monitored, and how these are to be evaluated and updated; and state how the role of IEOs might change, e.g. as the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative matures. 4.107

The *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* need to be supported by a succinct, easily readable summary 4.108

document (say one page). The summary document needs to be shared widely via the website and also off-line.

- 4.2 Support for Education Directorate (which includes school) staff in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community occurs in the following ways:
- employment and professional development support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff including through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network;
 - supporting all staff to be culturally aware; and
 - through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section which employs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs)).

Employment and professional development support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

Employment

- 4.3 The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* (refer to paragraph 2.1), with respect to its priority area of Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development requires that:

Action is taken to ensure children and young people are taught by skilled educators who are culturally competent in the local context. Providers, including principals, set high expectations for learning that incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

Further support for the engagement of children, young people and their families is provided by building a well-qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce.⁴⁹

- 4.4 The Education Directorate had an *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17* to 'provide a new pathway to link education, employment, choice and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT'. The Education Directorate advised that it is developing a 2018 plan; a draft was not available at the time of reporting.

- 4.5 A key component of the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17* was:

to support schools to build strong reciprocal relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engaged in their school communities and create pathways into employment with the local community. Ensuring the Directorate's workplaces are culturally competent and respectful is crucial in both retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and engaging with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Cultural competence and connection will be progressively enhanced for all Directorate staff through professional learning and supervision opportunities, which will build the cultural

⁴⁹ Education Council (National), *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*, p 5

integrity of all employees and the Directorate as a whole. This will be done by continually engaging with and supporting genuine two-way relationships and interactions with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

- 4.6 Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed by the Education Directorate is an identified measure of success of the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17*. In order to facilitate this the Directorate placed recruitment advertising in the *Koori Mail* and the *National Indigenous Times*. Additionally, the Directorate's recruitment marketing teams target teacher training institutions that have a high representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Table 4-1 shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the Education Directorate between March 2013 and April 2018.

Table 4-1 Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the Education Directorate

Date	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the Education Directorate
March 2013	56
June 2015	72
June 2016	91
November 2016	97
February 2017	90
June 2017	99
April 2018	101

Source: Education Directorate

Note: The numbers are not provided at regular intervals.

- 4.7 There was an 88 percent increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island staff employed by the Education Directorate between March 2013 and April 2018 (an approximate five year period).
- 4.8 The Education Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment growth target for June 2017 was 107 (as identified in the Education Directorate brief to the Legislative Assembly, *Connection, Collaboration, Careers, Leadership: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2014-2017*, updated January 2017). The Education Directorate's *2016-17 Annual Report* identified that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff was 99, eight less than the Education Directorate target. While this target was not met, and has not been met to date, the number of staff employed by the Education Directorate who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has generally continued to increase.
- 4.9 The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is reported in the Education Directorate's annual reports. Table 4-2 shows the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander staff, and their percentage of the total directorate workforce, from 2014-15 to April 2018.

- 4.10 In June 2016, of the 91 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed, 44 (48 percent) were administrative and general services officers, four senior officers, 31 teachers and seven school leaders (i.e. 38, 42 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed), one graduate and four trainees. This segregated information was collected through the *Our Mob: Our Voices* survey; segregated information was not available for 2017 but the Education Directorate advised that it plans to collect it in 2018. Of note is that, as at the end of June 2017, of the 4,375 teachers and school leaders employed by the Education Directorate, those identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander made up around 1 percent.

Table 4-2 Education Directorate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff – 2014-15 to 2016-17

Year	Number	Percentage of Education Directorate workforce
2014-15	72	1.2
2015-16	91	1.4
2016-17	99	1.5
April 2018	101	1.5

Source: Education Directorate Annual Reports; figures based on number of staff identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in June each year.

- 4.11 There has been a small increase in the percentage of Education Directorate staff who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander each year between 2014-15 and 2016-17. The latest figures available at the time of reporting, 101 staff as at April 2018, is 1.5 percent of the Education Directorate workforce and is consistent with earlier percentages. The 2016 Australian Census reported that two percent of the ACT population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- 4.12 An Aboriginal not-for-profit organisation stakeholder consulted during audit fieldwork advised that the Education Directorate is perceived positively by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait community as an employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:
- ACT Education Directorate employs one of the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees ... this is largely due to the positive image of the Directorate in the Community.
- 4.13 As discussed in Chapter 3, it is important for students to see people with whom they closely associate in roles in order to be able to aspire to those roles. Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the Education Directorate, particularly teachers and school leaders, will provide role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as they progress through the education system. This will also assist in improving engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community as well as generally raising cultural awareness within schools.

- 4.14 The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed by the Education Directorate, which includes schools, has increased from 56 to 101 between March 2013 and April 2018 (an 88 percent increase). This is a significant advancement, although it is six fewer than the Education Directorate's June 2017 target of 107.
- 4.15 While around 41 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are employed as teachers and school leaders they only comprise 1 percent of the total number of teachers and school leaders in the Education Directorate. Teachers are particularly important role models and, on a daily basis, are central in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Increasing teacher numbers will not only support engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but also contribute to non-Indigenous children gaining a cultural understanding. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander not-for-profit organisation stakeholder consulted during audit fieldwork advised that:
- *ACT Education Directorate employs one of the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees ... this is largely due to the positive image of the Directorate in the Community.*

Professional development support

- 4.16 While there are many ways that the Education Directorate fosters professional development for all staff and therefore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, some initiatives are specifically for them. Following are some specific ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are provided with support in their professional development:
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network;
 - *Our Mob: Our Voices* survey;
 - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program; and
 - Garma Festival.
- 4.17 Additionally, some professional development opportunities, while open to all staff, have a focus on the development of prospective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; acknowledging the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; and raising the awareness of the challenge of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These include:
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Scholarships (for prospective staff).
 - Public Education Awards; and
 - the Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network

- 4.18 The role of the Education Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network (Staff Network), formally established in 2011, is to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with the opportunity to:

- connect across roles and professions; and
 - provide input into strategic directions relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, retention, career pathways and leadership opportunities.
- 4.19 The Staff Network contributes to, and provides membership of, the ACT Government Murranga Murranga Employee Network (previously the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Public Service Network).
- 4.20 The Staff Network is open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees including permanent, contract casual and pre-service teachers, and administrative staff on the casual and relief register.
- 4.21 Since 2016 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network has held quarterly meetings with the Senior Executive Team, Education Directorate; topics discussed include recruitment practices, career development and leadership. The Senior Executive Team updates the staff network on key initiatives and seeks feedback on Directorate activities.
- 4.22 Minutes from 2017 include the Co-Chair reflections which states:
- The development and continuing importance of meeting with the Senior Executive Team (SET), is having a significant impact;
- The Network is seen as a valuable voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and in a leadership role across the Directorate;
- Over the past 18 months the network and co-chairs have contributed to the following:
- School resource Allocation (SRA) Policy Group;
 - Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group and Key Enabler group; and
 - The Network has been discussed in national AEU forums as a prominent and leadership voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Our Mob: Our Voices survey

- 4.23 This survey was conducted from 2014 to 2016; the 2017 survey was not conducted due to other priorities and the 2018 survey had not been conducted at the time of fieldwork. The survey seeks feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network. Audit was advised that this feedback influences the focus of employment strategies and support. Feedback from the 2015 survey influenced the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program and other feedback which raised concern regarding cultural safety resulted in the delivery of cultural awareness training.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program

- 4.24 This program was launched by the Director-General, Education, in April 2017 and provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff the opportunity, through working with a colleague, to further their networks and careers within the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate advised that there are 18 Education Directorate mentors available through the

program and staff may access other mentors as well. The number of mentees fluctuates depending on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within the Directorate; in December 2017 it was 100. While there are currently only three mentee/mentor relationships known to Directorate management, the program is structured so that staff are able engage with mentors as required, formally or informally.

- 4.25 The Education Directorate advised that no monitoring or evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program has been done or is planned; however, the Education Directorate expects that the program will be reviewed as part of the evaluation of the employment action plan which is currently underway.

Garma Festival

- 4.26 In August 2016 a commitment was made by the Director-General, Education Directorate, to sponsor two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend the Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures.⁵⁰
- 4.27 In 2017 four staff attended the Garma Festival, three from ACT public schools and one from the Diversity and Cultural Integrity Section of the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate advised that three staff will be sponsored to attend in 2018. This involves interested staff attending an information session in May 2018 and nominating during Term 2.
- 4.28 The Education Directorate advised that, following the 2017 Garma Festival, a feedback session, attended by an estimated 15 staff, was held as part of the Education Directorate lunch time policy sessions where the four attendees provided information on their experience and shared what they had learned. A meeting with the Director-General was held where the four attendees provided the same information.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Scholarships

- 4.29 In its *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-2017* (discussed at paragraph 4.4) the Education Directorate states that an initiative for attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in the ACT Public Service is to '(i)dentify cadetships, and/or scholarships for potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruits' (Initiative 2.2). Six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarships were awarded in 2016-17, five for students studying teaching and one for a student studying an approved health course. \$80 000 was included in the 2017-18 budget for these scholarships.

⁵⁰ The Garma Festival, hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation, is about the economic challenges, the steps that need to be taken to ensure that there are economic opportunities for Aboriginal people, and at the same time, Garma attempts to strengthen our cultural genius through the preservation and maintenance of a culture 50,000+ years old. <http://www.yyf.com.au/pages/?ParentPageID=116&PageID=117> Accessed 13 April 2018

Public Education Awards

4.30 ACT Public Education Awards acknowledge the contribution of principals, teachers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education leadership, support staff partnerships and volunteers.

4.31 One of the 2017 award recipients was a young Aboriginal woman who grew up in the Canberra region. She received her award for being:

inspirational and sett[ing] high expectations in the AATSI initiatives she has led. These include reaching out to organisations (e.g. Greening Australia) and the community to work with ... Indigenous students in developing tutorial support schemes, Koori Clubs (pastoral care program), and a Koori Cultural space and Bush Tucker Garden ... [She] draws on her community networks to improve pathways planning for our AATSI students, and has led teachers in action inquiry to explore how we can improve support programs and cultural awareness in teaching programs within the College.⁵¹

4.32 As a result of this work and acknowledgement this teacher has:

- been included as a speaker at the Australian Government Department of Education's panel event, Reconciliation: Taking the Next Step;
- participated in the development of the ACT's Indigenous Culture and Language Course; and
- been invited to present a guided discussion regarding current leading practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education as part of the implementation of Cultural Integrity in the Education Directorate.⁵²

Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program

4.33 Between 2010 and 2016, teams of teachers from ACT public schools were engaged in the Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

4.34 The Action Inquiry Program delivered 'professional learning and support for teachers and school leaders to conduct school projects to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children'. It included 63 inquiry reports from 35 schools between 2010 and 2016. Funding was provided for seven years for the program; the Directorate's *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative and other targeted programs have replaced this program.

4.35 The 2015 program focused on inquiries supporting student attendance and outcomes through induction processes; building literacy and/or numeracy outcomes to facilitate successful transition to high school or college; and home school literacy and numeracy engagement in early years. A total of 228 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were

⁵¹ https://www.education.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/act_public_education_awards?SQ_VARIATION_290919=0
Accessed 16 February 2018

⁵² https://www.education.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/act_public_education_awards?SQ_VARIATION_290919=0
Accessed 16 February 2018

enrolled in the 11 participating schools. All schools completed formal reports that include recommendations for 2016 and beyond.

- 4.36 Projects in 2016 included a longitudinal numeracy study; oral language initiatives and support; supporting transitions into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) college subjects; and literacy support in upper primary. The recommendations from Action Inquiry projects were shared with principals and school leaders to inform professional practice and planning. One project completed through the program: *An inquiry into enrolment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Dickson College and the initial impact of an Indigenous Contact Officer and culturally-based program*,⁵³ reported in 2016 that:

The presence of an Indigenous Contact Officer and implementation of a culturally-based program had a positive influence on retention and engagement rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Dickson College. It also found that cultural pride, confidence and knowledge of individual students had increased.⁵⁴

- 4.37 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in addition to support available for all staff, are offered other support: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network; Our Mob: Our Voices survey; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Program; Garma Festival participation; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Scholarships (for prospective staff); and Public Education Awards. The additional support is having an effect.

- The Staff Network meeting minutes shows that the Network felt that meeting with Senior Executives was having a significant impact and that it is seen as a valuable voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and in a leadership role across the Directorate. Furthermore it had been discussed in national Australian Education Union forums as a prominent and leadership voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and over the previous 18 months the Staff Network had contributed to key activities on education.
- A recipient of an ACT Public Education Award in 2017 for Leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education was a young Aboriginal woman who grew up in the Canberra region. Acknowledging outstanding performance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff signals to all staff the importance of the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in increasing cultural awareness.

- 4.38 The Education Directorate's focus on increasing employment and the provision of professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is having effect. This was guided by several initiatives including the *ACT Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan 2014-17*. The Education Directorate advised it is currently developing the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Support

⁵³ Elinor Archer, Niki van Buuren, Erica Brown, *An inquiry into enrolment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Dickson College and the initial impact of an Indigenous Contact Officer and culturally-based program*, 2016 Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program.

⁵⁴ Elinor Archer, Niki van Buuren, Erica Brown, *An inquiry into enrolment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Dickson College and the initial impact of an Indigenous Contact Officer and culturally-based program*, 2016 Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program, p 2.

Action Plan. This plan needs to incorporate targets and actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people become teachers and school leaders.

RECOMMENDATION 7 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EMPLOYMENT ACTION PLAN

The Education Directorate should finalise and implement the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and support action plan and, in so doing, give particular emphasis to increasing the number of, and support provided for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders.

Supporting all staff to be culturally aware

4.39 Cultural awareness training is provided by:

- the ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) through accredited courses for assisting teachers in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
- the Education Directorate through the Cultural Competency training, Cultural Integrity training, online training and workshops with experts in the area.

4.40 Professor Chris Sarra advised, when asked about training in cultural awareness:

It's about Heart, Head, Hand and doing all three; triggering an emotional response and the personal consequence you have if you don't feel adequate - kids are failing each year are you ok with that? ...

You have to get to the heart of that and question professional integrity ... this is to the heart.

The head is the cross cultural cognitive stuff and having an awareness as well as how to understand students and their different languages.

Once you have the heart and head you do something different with the hand – you engage with parents differently.

If Cultural Integrity changes practices that is good but if it is just awareness and not the hand it is no good.

ACT Teacher Quality Institute

4.41 The ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) was established by the ACT Government through the *Teacher Quality Institute Act 2010*. Its role is to build the professional standing of all ACT teachers and to enhance the community's confidence in the teaching profession through professional regulation and practical initiatives to raise teacher quality.⁵⁵

4.42 During 2016-17 the Education Directorate facilitated ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited professional development. The ACT Teacher Quality Institute:

accredited 37 professional learning programs which had content specifically related to Standard 1.4 (Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and

⁵⁵ Education Directorate website:

[Standard] 2.4 (Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians) of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.⁵⁶

- 4.43 This included a Koori Preschool Professional Learning Day and Transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children which provided strategies to support children's early literacy development.⁵⁷ During 2016-17, 23.8 percent of teachers (1,043 out of a total 4,375) participated in at least one of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *Personalised Learning Plans*.
- 4.44 TQI accredits professional learning programs so that these programs can count for teacher registration purposes. Accredited programs are offered by Recognised Providers, including the Education Directorate. The data in Table 4-3 references the attendance, since 2015, of teachers employed by the Education Directorate that have attended TQI accredited programs referencing Standards 1.4 (Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and 2.4 (Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians). Table 4-3

Table 4-3 Number of Education Directorate teachers attending ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited programs (Standards 1.4 and 2.4)

Year	Total number of teachers
2015	2 155
2016	1 433
2017	571
2018 (as at 31 May)	268

Source: Data provided by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute

- 4.45 This data shows a significant decrease in attendance at these programs between 2015 and 2017. However, it is not possible to determine the significance of this as the Education Directorate does not collect comprehensive data (not even in a summary form) of all training which would provide an understanding of whether the provision of other training (e.g. online) is a reason for the decline. Furthermore there is no strategy for training to guide an analysis of what is being provided.
- 4.46 The data in Table 4-3 were provided by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. This data were requested from the Education Directorate, and the Audit Office was directed to the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. (The ACT Teacher Quality Institute advised that the information is provided to the People and Performance Branch, Education Directorate).
- 4.47 The number of ACT public school teachers having cultural awareness training through attending accredited ACT Teacher Quality Institute programs referencing Standards 1.4 (Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and 2.4 (Understand

⁵⁶ Education Directorate Annual Report 2016-17, Appendix A, (ACT TQI Annual Report), p 241.

⁵⁷ Education Directorate Annual Report 2016-17, p 39.

and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians) decreased between 2015 and 2017 (2155 to 571). The figures to date (268 at 31 May 2018) are in line with 2017 figures. (As of June 2017 there were 4,375 teachers employed in ACT public schools.) Although the Education Directorate provides other training for cultural awareness, as data on attendance, at a systems level, are not available it is not possible to assess if the shortfall is being met through alternative training.

Education Directorate

Cultural Competency training

- 4.48 As part of its vision for schools to understand and work towards meeting the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the Education Directorate has provided training in cultural competency which has included Cultural Competency Courses. According to the Education Directorate's *2016-17 Annual Report*:

The purpose of these workshops is to promote cultural integrity in schools and the workplace. The workshops are completed in conjunction with an online Cultural Competence Course promoting cultural integrity and promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

- 4.49 Cultural competency workshops were held by the Education Directorate from 2015 to 2018 for teachers and Education Support Office staff. Table 4-4 shows the number that attended each year (noting that figures are only available for part of 2018).

Table 4-4 Education Directorate staff attending cultural competency workshops – 2015 to 2018 (semester 1)

Year	Number of Education Directorate staff (including teachers) attending
2015	69
2016	78
2017	87
2018 (semester 1)	48
Total (to end semester 1 2018)	282

Source: Education Directorate.

- 4.50 The Canberra Institute of Technology also runs courses, as does a number of other institutions. Data on the total numbers and categories of staff that attend these courses was not available as this is not collected by the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate reported to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in December 2016 that 'systems are not in place to record, at a system level, Cultural Awareness training'.
- 4.51 In February 2015, the Education Directorate engaged Mr Grant Sarra, Grant Sarra Consultancy Services, to run cultural awareness training. Those attending the training included: the (then) Director-General, Directors of School Improvement, Heads of Education

Support Office areas and four principals; approximately 20 staff. The Audit Office was advised that:

this training is an example of the Directorate's desire to grow in cultural awareness as an organisation, with that journey being taken over a period of some years. The [then] newly released *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Action Plan*, and the need to refresh the [Directorate's] Reconciliation Action Plan motivated the connection with Grant Sarra in 2015. The day was of significant impact to senior executive, which in turn influenced the broader 3 day program in 2017.

- 4.52 The Education Directorate has provided cultural awareness training, delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, since 2009 which has, necessarily, focused on school principals and the Education Support Office leadership group.

Cultural Integrity Training

Our Next Most Powerful Step: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools

- 4.53 Training in preparation for the implementation of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative (refer to paragraphs 2.40 - 2.47) was conducted in the four Education Directorate Networks (Belconnen, North Gungahlin, South Weston and Tuggeranong) in September 2017. It consisted of presentations and workshops, a pre-reading list had been provided, and it ran for 90 minutes after school hours. Of the 123 staff who participated 78 staff provided evaluation responses. Table 4-5 shows a summary of evaluation data from the presentations and workshops.

Table 4-5 Summary of evaluation data from cultural integrity presentation and workshops in September 2017

Rating 1 to 5 (low to high)	Presentation		Workshop	
	Number	% of responses	Number	% of responses
5	43	55	52	67
4	29	37	16	21
3	2	3	6	8
2	1	1	0	0
1	0	0	0	0
Nil response	3	4	4	5
Total responses	78		78	

Source: Audit Office analysis of Education Directorate data.

- 4.54 Comments in response to the training included: 'excellent', 'a great window into the work being done and work before us', 'would be good to attend all the workshops', 'great to hear what other schools are doing and get some ideas', 'bit loose, wasn't sure what people wanted' and 'would like more time to share ideas, resources, network'.
- 4.55 One hundred and twenty three staff participated in a 90 minute cultural integrity training session held across the four School Networks, Belconnen, Tuggeranong, North Gungahlin

and South Weston, in September 2017 in preparation for the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative. The response by 78 participants was positive with some expressing interest in participating in further training.

Cultural Integrity Training – Approaches to complex challenges; planning for cultural change – Engoori®

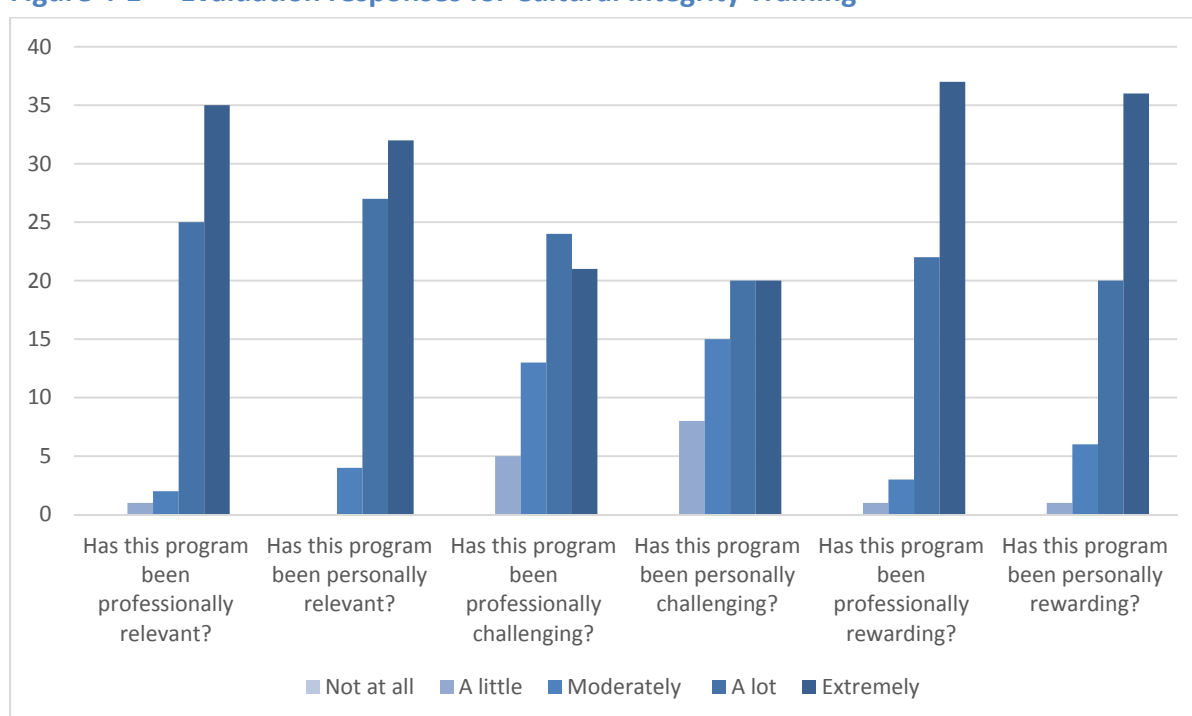
- 4.56 Over October and November 2017 further Cultural Integrity workshops were held by the Education Directorate: *Cultural Integrity Training – Approaches to complex challenges; planning for cultural change – Engoori®*. This included a one day presentation by Mr Grant Sarra, followed by a two day workshop by Murrimatters, delivering Engoori®. One hundred and twenty four school leaders and Education Support Office staff were invited. Table 4-6 shows the numbers and percentages of those attending each of the workshops.

Table 4-6 Numbers and percentages of staff attending Cultural Integrity Training – October - November 2017

Workshop number	Number attending	Percentage of invitees attending	Percentage of invitees not attending
One	93	75	25
Two	94	76	24
Three	84	67	33

Source: Audit Office analysis of Education Directorate data.

- 4.57 Training evaluations were completed by 63 attendees across the three training sessions. Figure 4-1 shows the evaluation responses for the Cultural Integrity Training.

Figure 4-1 Evaluation responses for Cultural Integrity Training

Source: Education Directorate

4.58 Table 4-7 shows further information on attendees' evaluation of the Cultural Integrity Training.

Table 4-7 Evaluation responses (percentage of attendees) for Cultural Integrity Training

Aspect of training assessed	Percentage of attendees that rated 'a lot', 'extremely' or 'moderately'.
Professionally relevant	74
Personally relevant	75
Professionally challenging	69
Personally challenging	65
Professionally rewarding	74
Personally rewarding	74

Source: Audit Office analysis of Education Directorate data.

4.59 One hundred and twenty four school leaders and Education Support Office staff were invited to a three day Cultural Integrity Training session held in October-November 2017. Attendance varied from 84 to 94 (67 percent to 76 percent of those invited). Seventy four percent of attendees responded in a survey that it was professionally relevant and rewarding, and 75 percent of attendees identified that it was personally relevant. As the training was targeted at, and offered to, 124 school leaders and Education Support Office staff it covers two percent of the Education Directorate staff.

Workshops

4.60 Staff, including primary and high school staff, school leaders and Education Support Office staff, have attended different workshops relating to cultural awareness. These include:

- workshops for Education Directorate Senior Executives, Directors and Senior Managers in 2015 and 2016 conducted by different presenters at different times including Mr Grant Sarra, Mr Scott Gorringer and Mr David Spillman (Murrimatters);
- 'professional conversations', in 2016, following school leaders' engagement in the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program⁵⁸ to assist them operationalise what they had learned;
- attendance by Education Support Office and school based staff in Semester 1 2016 at a series of three workshops designed to provide a local (Ngunnawal) context and assist in operationalising what they had learned following participation at a cultural competency course; and
- information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for primary and (separately) high school representatives in 2016. Topics included the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, engagement, attendance and retention strategies and Student Aspirations. This was followed by a networking meeting in May 2016 where information regarding Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week and other curriculum resources and school based programs were shared.

4.61 From the figures available during audit fieldwork, it is difficult to understand the number of Education Directorate staff, school and/or Education Support Office, who have completed, or are engaged in, cultural awareness training as there is a lack of relevant data maintained by the Education Support Office. While professional and cultural awareness training on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has been, and is being, undertaken in various ways, it is not possible to state the number of staff trained due to a lack of centralised data. (In response to the final proposed report, the Education Directorate advised on 26 June 2018 that: *The number could be obtained if required, but would be labour intensive to do so.*) However, from information available at the time of reporting, the proportion of staff trained is limited. All staff need cultural awareness training, to some degree.

4.62 The Education Directorate advised that:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section, Learning and Teaching, is not solely responsible for cultural competency professional learning; and
- training and awareness is undertaken at many levels, e.g. teachers within schools, through the IEOs, through community members and organisations etc.

⁵⁸ The Leadership Program equips school leaders to have challenging conversations with staff and actively engage the school community to have high expectations relationships, promote positive identities and excellence in schools. <http://strongersmarter.com.au/leadership/>

4.63 As part of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative, the Education Directorate advised that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section has developed a Professional Learning 2018 Calendar which includes:

- supporting schools to build Cultural Integrity (Terms 1, 2 and 3);
- an All Colleges Day professional learning workshop on Cultural Integrity (January 2018);
- professional learning workshop for new educators (this has been delayed until there is an appropriate forum, to be included in 2019 planning);
- Cultural Competence training for all Directorate staff (modules delivered through the Centre for Cultural Competence Australia, complemented by three workshops delivered by Learning and Teaching Branch and guest facilitators) (two courses during 2018);
- Cultural Integrity resource workshops (three half day) for all teachers (Terms 1, 2 and 3). Term 1 workshops were undersubscribed and therefore cancelled. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section plans to promote the Term 3 workshops more widely;
- Cultural Integrity workshop at Preschool and Koori Preschool Professional Learning Days. One was held in Koori Preschool in Term 1, next Koori Preschool is Term 3; mainstream Preschool to be negotiated;
- Symposium to build leadership capability through an intensive day of presentations and workshops focusing on 'Rediscovering Our History' for school staff to link with activities during Principal Cultural Integrity Training in Term 4 2017 (Term 3 dependent on presenter); and
- 'On Country Program' to contribute to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate-led 'On Country Program' for schools for all school based staff (2018).

4.64 There are a number of planning documents, including the Professional Learning Calendar, associated with the implementation of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative, however, there is no training strategy with targets, timeframes, monitoring and evaluation processes, etc. to guide and support cultural awareness training in the Education Directorate (and schools).

4.65 Although the Education Directorate has advised that it has a Professional Learning 2018 Calendar there is no cultural awareness training strategy with training targets and timeframes, quality control principles to guide the training, and a supporting monitoring and evaluation method. A strategy and a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training is needed.

RECOMMENDATION 8 CULTURAL AWARENESS

The Education Directorate should develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development and cultural awareness training strategy for staff that:

- a) covers all staff;
- b) sets targets and timeframes for staff to complete training;
- c) has quality control principles for guiding the training;
- d) guides how to monitor and evaluate training; and

This strategy should be supported by a system that records data, at a system level, on cultural awareness training.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section

4.66 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section is in the Learning and Teaching Branch, which is part of the Service Design and Delivery Division in the Education Directorate. It supports schools' communication and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. It includes a manager, project and policy officers, a Student Aspirations Coordinator and a team of ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs). Its responsibilities include:

- employment, management and coordination of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs), including agreeing with particular schools if it is appropriate to allocate an IEO to the school;
- support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (previously the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Group) (refer to paragraph 3.41);
- contribution to Education Directorate annual reports, national reports and the annual *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Report* (refer to paragraphs 2.53 to 0);
- contribution to the implementation and evaluation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* (refer to paragraphs 2.1 to 2.3);
- delivery of cultural competency professional learning and professional learning/curriculum projects to support the implementation of the Cross Curriculum Priority of the Australian Curriculum;⁵⁹
- advice and support to the Education Directorate regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement;

⁵⁹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Culture is one of three Cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum.

- support for the implementation of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative in schools and across the Education Directorate (paragraphs 2.40 - 2.47) including contributing to the Google+ Community and monitoring its use (refer to paragraph 3.115);
- advice and support for the design and implementation of learning and teaching programs focusing on Indigenous languages and cultures; and
- advice to the Minister for Education regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers

- 4.67 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs) have been employed by the Education Directorate for some time; the specific date of their initial employment was not available. Based on past recruitment documentation, the documented role has remained much the same with a focus on the promotion and maintenance of communication networks between school staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.
- 4.68 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section employs ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs) who work across 11 schools. IEOs' responsibilities include supporting schools to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community. The target number of IEOs to be employed in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section is 12, which is to include at least two lead IEOs; the Education Directorate has advised that reaching the target of 12 is expected to occur in 2018. Two schools also employ their own IEO (additional to the ten employed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section) by funding the position from the school's budget.
- 4.69 According to the *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers Program Guidelines – January 2018*⁶⁰ (the Draft Guidelines), and the Education Directorate's website,⁶¹ the role of IEOs is:
- ... to support schools to build their Cultural Integrity. This includes:
- Supporting schools to engage with families and community;
 - Supporting teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum;
 - Providing advice and leadership to schools on celebrating significant events and milestones for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
 - Supporting schools to grow a culture of high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;

⁶⁰ ACT Education, Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers Program Guidelines – January 2018, p 3.

⁶¹ https://www.education.act.gov.au/school_education/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education Accessed 10 April 2018.

- Facilitating successful student transitions between year levels, between schools and to post school study or work; and
- Supporting the school to meet its Cultural Integrity accountability responsibilities.

4.70 The Draft Guidelines also state:

In general terms, the work involves building strong collaborative relationships, supporting school leaders and classroom teachers to improve their skills and practice, and developing and sourcing teaching and learning resources.

Stakeholders' views on the role of IEOs

4.71 During audit fieldwork the role of IEOs was discussed with a range of stakeholders, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education peak bodies;
- IEOs; and
- principals and teaching staff from the five selected schools and from two other schools.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' responses regarding IEOs

4.72 During fieldwork Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students advised that, in relation to IEOs:

The [school] is better than my old school ...; there was no aboriginal support for the past 2 to 3 years. [My former school] did have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker/Liaison Officer but they left and they were not replaced; and

If something happens in the playground they don't tell [the IEO]; incidents can happen and [the IEO] can be there to support the student. My parents can't get to school if something happens and so they want [the IEO] to support me if anything happens. For example I did not want my photo taken – I felt tired – the teacher told me I would get suspended.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups' responses regarding IEOs

4.73 During fieldwork representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholder advised that, in relation to IEOs:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Liaison Officers/Education Workers [IEOs] say they have a conflict of interest by getting involved ... but why are they there if they cannot get involved?

Who are they supporting? It seems they are supporting the Education [Directorate].

The Government's/Directorate's response to not having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations involved in the decision making has been that they have employed [IEOs]. However, [IEOs] are public servants with reporting lines and managers to answer to; Some [IEOs] are very good with dealing with children and families while others are not so. The ones who are good are generally locals who have lived in the area for several years and know the families; ... [a community group representative] has been to some meeting where [IEOs] have been present and felt that the engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was not that effective;

Schools should instil pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students regarding their culture heritage and link them with support groups instead of having tokenised programs such as the Indigenous Liaison Officers [IEOs]; [IEOs'] role should be redefined to that of case managers where they can work directly with families. Also, there is a need to increase their numbers;

Principals need to give the [IEOs] more power ... they have a very limited role. The principals do not give the [IEOs] much credit; [IEOs] need flexibility and not reminding that they work for the Education Directorate when they should be advocating for the child, not the Directorate – this would create a shift in the thinking of the [IEO]; and

[IEOs] do good work with students but it's site specific, inconsistent and sporadic.

4.74 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and representatives of community groups provided a range of views on Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs') and their role. While all are important the following are emphasised:

- *[IEOs] say they have a conflict of interest by getting involved ... but why are they there if they cannot get involved?*
- *[IEOs] are public servants with reporting lines and managers to answer to;*
- *[IEOs'] role should be redefined to that of case managers where they can work directly with families. Also, there is a need to increase their numbers;*
- *Some [IEOs] are very good with dealing with children and families while others are not so. The ones who are good are generally locals who have lived in the area for several years and know the families;*
- *[IEOs] need flexibility and not reminding that they work for the Education Directorate when they should be advocating for the child, not the Directorate – this would create a shift in the thinking of the [IEO]; and*
- *[IEOs] do good work with students but it's site specific, inconsistent and sporadic.*

IEOs' responses regarding their role

4.75 During audit fieldwork IEOs were asked how they saw their roles, particularly with respect to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. They advised that their role includes:

- [providing] advice about appropriate communication with students and families to bring the kids into school;
- [making] the first contact with students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In some instances the IEOs complete a community engagement templates. IEOs may make phone calls to family or guardians and initiate meetings to engage with families; and
- [calling families as] some won't answer a phone call from a school.

4.76 IEOs further advised:

- engagement will depend on the complexities of a student's personal circumstances;
- the IEO's role has moved from the student support model; there is the [Network Student Engagement Team] NSET to help provide support to students with specific needs. The IEO's role has changed with the introduction of [C]ultural [I]ntegrity;

- Cultural Integrity is everyone's business; there should be a movement away from teachers asking IEOs do things like advise students and families on particular key dates in schools - teachers should be doing this;
- some students are happier to speak with IEOs; this may be because they are a bit scared as to how information will be used by the school;
- new teachers can be scared to engage [with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families];
- IEOs are seen as part of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community and are seen as someone who students, families and community can yarn with; IEOs can help to take the stigma away and engagement can grow organically;
- students are more comfortable with Aboriginal workers in the school;
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] students may want the IEOs to be in the room with them when discussing particular matters with teachers;
- ... [the biggest challenge] is people understanding what an Education Officer's job is; people includes teachers and school office staff;
- some families are so angry at the school that they will call the IEO to vent to them instead; and
- the school's processes should be the same for all kids; no-one is treated differently.

4.77 IEOs provided many insights into how they see their role. While all are important the following are emphasised:

- *[providing] advice about appropriate communication with students and families to bring the kids into school;*
- *Cultural Integrity is everyone's business; there should be a movement away from teachers asking IEOs do things like advise students and families on particular key dates in schools - teachers should be doing this;*
- *some students are happier to speak with IEOs; this may be because they are a bit scared as to how information will be used by the school;*
- *new teachers can be scared to engage [with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families];*
- *IEOs are seen as part of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community and are seen as someone who students, families and community can yarn with; IEOs can help to take the stigma away and engagement can grow organically; and*
- *[the biggest challenge] is people understanding what an Education Officer's job is; people includes teachers and school office staff.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education organisation's responses regarding IEOs

4.78 During audit fieldwork a representative from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation advised that, in relation to IEOs:

In general, IEOs are contracted by Education Departments, are not full time and are not in every school – it is rare [in Australia] to have funding for IEOs' professional development;

There are all kinds of permutations and job titles of IEOs [in Australia] – schools may decide to pool resources to fund a position;

IEOs are critical to improvement because schools have transitory workforces – teachers and principals come and go – however IEOs, when they are locally engaged Aboriginal people, are stable and passionate about what they do; and

Principals can fund the position or not – if there is no KPI for Indigenous educational outcomes and a principal doesn't see that it is an issue for a school's discretionary funding then they probably won't fund or top up a salary.

Five selected schools' and staff from two other schools' responses regarding IEOs

4.79 Whether or not, and how, IEOs were engaged varied in the five schools selected for audit fieldwork:

- School B advised that it had an IEO for four days per week up until mid-2017; the school no longer has an IEO.
- School C has a full time IEO who works primarily with years 6 to 10 students. Additionally, School C employs a teacher three days per week, to run the MALPA program⁶², although only one day a week is spent at School C. This teacher identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander;
- School D has a full time IEO;
- School A previously had a full time IEO; and
- School E was not allocated an IEO (as it is a college) and made its own arrangement to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. An Aboriginal teacher was allocated time (a timetable 'line') to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the college. However, this teacher was on leave and had been replaced on a part-time basis by a non-Indigenous teacher.

4.80 A staff representative from another school advised:

Every school, whether governmental or non-government, needs Indigenous Education Officers [IEOs] to work one to two days a week in the school to work beside teachers and to help them engage.

4.81 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Directorate stakeholders and education peak bodies indicated that the role of IEOs in schools was valued, if not always available:

- *Every school, whether governmental or non-government, needs Indigenous Education Officers [IEOs] to work one to two days a week in the school to work beside teachers and to help them engage;*
- *IEOs are critical to improvement because schools have transitory workforces – teachers and principals come and go – however IEOs, when they are locally engaged Aboriginal people, are stable and passionate about what they do;*
- *In general, IEOs are contracted by Education Departments, are not full time and are not in every school – it is rare [in Australia] to have funding for IEOs' professional development; and*

⁶² MALPA: Young doctors is a health leadership program which trains Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people to be health ambassadors in their communities www.malpa.org.au

- *Principals can fund the position or not – if there is no KPI for Indigenous educational outcomes and a principal doesn't see that it is an issue for a school's discretionary funding then they probably won't fund or top up a salary.*

Expectation gap regarding the role of IEOs

- 4.82 During audit fieldwork concerns were raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders as to the primary role of IEOs: is it to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community or to support the Education Directorate and public school staff?

[We] feel [like we're] doing the [IEOs'] job for them ... [the IEO] said nothing, they should have advocated for the child

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Liaison Officers/Education Workers say they have a conflict of interest by getting involved but why are they there if they cannot get involved. We need to know what they [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers] are supposed to do.

... [IEOs] are public servants with reporting lines and managers to answer to.

- 4.83 The duty statements for IEOs, including in the *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers Program Guidelines – January 2018* (refer to paragraph 4.69), clearly state that the role is to support schools, school leaders and teachers through collaboration and advice regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, including on building cultural integrity. Collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is included in one area, i.e. 'school staff, Education Support Office staff, external services providers and families ... to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student wellbeing, transitions, and aspirations'.
- 4.84 There is an expectation gap with respect to the role of IEOs. The role of the IEO is to support teachers to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community. This is different from directly supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community yet Aboriginal students, families and community have a need to be directly supported and expect IEOs to fill this vacuum. This expectation gap indicates that there is a need to examine how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community can be provided with direct support.
- 4.85 The Education Directorate needs to identify a means of providing culturally appropriate direct support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community at schools. This may involve calling on members within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or building capacity in the Aboriginal community to provide support rather than this being provided directly by Education Directorate staff. Direction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community on this matter is needed regarding what would assist them and how this could be done.

RECOMMENDATION 9 SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

The Education Directorate should identify a means of providing culturally appropriate direct support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community at schools. In doing so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community should be requested to provide direction on what would assist them and how this could be done.

Allocation of IEOs

4.86 As stated in paragraph 4.66, there are 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officers (IEOs) employed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section who work across 11 schools.⁶³ These schools and the level of IEO support they receive on a weekly basis are shown in Table 4-8. Table 4-8 also shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled and the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students of all enrolled students this represents at each school.

Table 4-8 IEO support as at 5 April 2018 for ACT public schools (excluding colleges)

School	Network	IEO days per week	Number of ATSI students	ATSI % of students
Melba Copland Secondary	Belconnen	5	40	9
Macgregor Primary School		2	22	4
Macquarie Primary School		2	16	4
Amaroo School	North Gungahlin	3	37	2
Ngunnawal Primary School		5	33	5
Harrison School		5	46	3
Melrose High School	South Weston	5	39	5
Namadgi School	Tuggeranong	5	88	12
Caroline Chisolm School		5	61	9
Wanniassa School		5	42	9
Richardson Primary School		4	13	11.7

Source: Audit Office analysis of Education Directorate data.

Note: Gordon Primary and Neville Bonner Primary employ their own IEOs, they are not employed through the Education Support Office.

4.87 At the time of fieldwork in early 2018, IEO allocation was a continuation of 2017 arrangements with the first of the annual allocation reviews (as described in the Draft Guidelines) to occur during 2018, ready for the 2019 school year.⁶⁴ The Aboriginal and

⁶³ During audit fieldwork the Education Directorate advertised for four IEOs, permanent full time.

⁶⁴ Amaroo was included as an IEO was returning from Maternity Leave.

Torres Strait Islander Education Section advised that school factors that influenced the allocation of IEOs in the past (at least since 2013) included:

- enrolment numbers;
- cultural safety in the school/school readiness;
- school need;
- student need;
- community need; and
- level of experience and skill set of IEOs.

Enrolment numbers

4.88 Table 4-9 shows 11 schools, based on current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment, ranked according to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It includes the schools' current allocation, if any, of IEO days per week.

Table 4-9 Eleven schools with highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across ACT public schools⁶⁵, excluding colleges

Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – highest to lowest	IEO support – days per week	Numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
Namadgi School	5	88
Kingsford Smith School	0	66
Caroline Chisholm School	5	61
Harrison School	5	46
Gold Creek School	0	44
Wanniassa School	5	42
Melba Copland Secondary School	5	40
Melrose High School	5	39
Amaroo School	3	37
Theodore Primary School	0	33
Ngunnawal Primary	5	33

Source: Audit Office analysis of Education Directorate data from February 2018 school census.

4.89 As can be seen from Table 4-9, those schools with the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students don't necessarily receive support through the allocation of an IEO. On the basis of numbers it would be expected that Kingsford Smith School, Gold Creek School and Theodore Primary School would be allocated IEOs.

⁶⁵ Colleges, Early Childhood Schools and Special Schools are not included.

- 4.90 Other factors used to allocate IEOs included: cultural safety in the school/school readiness; school need; student need; level, experience and skill set of IEOs; and community need. However, as the Education Directorate did not have documentation to support the current allocation of IEOs to schools the effect of these factors on current IEO allocation could not be assessed.
- 4.91 The current allocation of IEOs to ACT public schools does not reflect the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the schools. There was no documentation as to the contribution of other factors as the basis for allocation, including: cultural safety in the school/school readiness; school need; student need; and community. Reasons for allocating IEOs need to be documented.

Website information

- 4.92 The Education Directorate's website provides some information on IEOs and their role. While the website includes information on IEOs' general role it does not provide information on which schools have been allocated an IEO and the basis for their allocation. Providing this information is likely to contribute to a better understanding by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and it also increases transparency
- 4.93 Information on allocation of IEOs to schools, and the basis for the allocation, needs to be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community and placed on the Directorate's website. This would contribute to facilitating engagement through providing an understanding of the Directorate's decision-making; it also increases transparency.

RECOMMENDATION 10 ALLOCATION OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION OFFICERS TO SCHOOLS

The Education Directorate should place information on its website to inform families about the IEO support provided for students, including where this is available. This information should also be provided through other formats to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and community.

IEO support for schools in the Draft Guidelines

- 4.94 The Education Directorate's *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines* – January 2018 (Draft Guidelines) outline the criteria for IEO support for schools. While IEOs are not available to ACT Colleges, they are to be supported 'through career and transitions, and pastoral care to staff to assist [colleges] to build Cultural Integrity and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'.
- 4.95 The Draft Guidelines are still being developed and were introduced at the beginning of the '2018 school year with the understanding that this year would be a transition year and a period of review, evaluation and improvement of the Guidelines'.

4.96 Allocation of IEOs for schools, in the Draft Guidelines, under *Principles for distribution of IEO support to schools*, states that decisions will be based on the following considerations:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment numbers;
- Geographical coverage;
- School's commitment to Cultural Integrity; and
- Flexibility for community links, relationships, school need and cultural factors.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment numbers and geographical coverage

4.97 The Draft Guidelines state that:

the default allocation of IEOs will [be] three IEOs in each Network. This may be adjusted depending on student enrolment. In allocating IEO support, schools will be given either 'priority' or 'general' support. IEO's will provide priority support to select ACT public primary and secondary schools ...

Priority support

4.98 Priority schools will provide a home base for IEOs and an individual IEO is not expected to provide priority support to more than two schools. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section advised that priority schools are 'essentially the base school and types of support will vary depending on context and the stage of the cultural integrity journey a school is up to'. During audit fieldwork, and ongoing review of the Draft Guidelines, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section advised that 'priority' would most likely be changed to 'home' to avoid confusion; an IEO may have two home schools depending on the number of days spent at each; currently one IEO works across two schools, providing two days support in each.

General support

4.99 According to the Draft Guidelines, 'general support' will be provided by IEOs and by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section staff and will include:

- at least four visits from an IEO each school year (preferably one visit per school term);
- support and advice on building school Cultural Integrity;
- support to use the Cultural Integrity Toolkit;
- general guidance on:
 - engaging with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families; and
 - accessing professional learning programs to support teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives throughout the curriculum; and

- facilitating access to Education Support Office programs and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.⁶⁶

4.100 During audit fieldwork the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section advised that the number of schools that receive general support will be reduced.

Geographical coverage

4.101 The total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (as at February 2018) and current allocation of IEOs (total days per week per network) in the four Education Directorate networks is shown in Table 4-10. This shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Tuggeranong Network receive the most support from IEOs and those in South Weston Network the least.

4.102 The Education Directorate proposes to increase the number of IEOs from 10 to 12, advertising for new positions in early 2018.

Table 4-10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment and IEO days per week across the four Education Directorate networks

Network	Total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Total IEO days per week per network	Days per student
Belconnen	397	9	0.02
North Gungahlin	259	13	0.05
South Weston	444	5	0.01
Tuggeranong	554	19	0.03

Source: Audit Office analysis of Education Directorate February 2018 census data

4.103 The words ‘the default allocation of IEOs will [be] three IEOs in each Network’ in the *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines* – January 2018 are open to interpretation. Audit has assumed this means there will be three IEOs per network once there are 12 IEOs. This needs to be clarified and wording made clear in the guidelines.

School’s commitment to Cultural Integrity

4.104 As discussed at paragraph 2.40, the Cultural Integrity Continuum (the Continuum) is being introduced into schools in 2018 as part of the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative; each school is responsible for assessing their position on the Continuum. Additionally, according to the Draft Guidelines and in accordance with school based autonomy, ‘schools will identify their own priorities for building Cultural Integrity and allocate resources accordingly’.

⁶⁶ The Education Directorate advised that the programs and support include: Years 5 and 6 Leadership Day, careers events such as visiting the ACT Supreme Court, Scholarships, University taster days and other programs and events provided by external agencies and community organisations as they arise. ⁶⁶

- 4.105 While a ‘(s)chool’s commitment to Cultural Integrity’ is included as a consideration for decision making as to the allocation of IEOs there are no details included in the Draft Guidelines as to how this should be assessed or considered. It will be important to provide guidance as to what effect the ‘school’s commitment to Cultural Integrity’ has on whether or not they receive IEO support. Guidance is needed to avoid the risk that schools might rate themselves as lower than they actually are in order to receive, or continue to receive, support.

Flexibility for community links, relationships, school need and cultural factors

- 4.106 There is no information included in the Draft Guidelines as to what part ‘(f)lexibility for community links, relationships, school need and cultural factors’ play in determining allocation of IEOs.
- 4.107 The *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* need to be finalised and, in so doing, clarify ‘...what: ‘default allocation’; ‘adjustment’; ‘priority’ and ‘general’ support by IEOs means. Information is needed on: how schools are to assess each ‘School’s commitment to Cultural Integrity’; what IEOs will not be doing; how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Section will combine and apply information on ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment numbers’ and how to apply ‘Flexibility for community links, relationships, school need and cultural factors’ in the allocation of IEOs. It would be useful to: specify a target date for finalising, and subsequently updating, the Guidelines; outline how and when the use of the Draft Guidelines is to be monitored, and how these are to be evaluated and updated; and state how the role of IEOs might change, e.g. as the *Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools* initiative matures.

RECOMMENDATION 11 DRAFT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION OFFICER PROGRAM GUIDELINES – JANUARY 2018

The Education Directorate should review and finalise its *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* and, in so doing, provide greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the IEOs and outline how and when the Guidelines are to be monitored, evaluated and updated.

- 4.108 The *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* need to be supported by a succinct, easily readable summary document (say one page). The summary document needs to be shared widely via the website and also off-line.

RECOMMENDATION 12 SUMMARY DOCUMENT OF THE DRAFT GUIDELINES

The Education Directorate should produce a summary document from its *Draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Program Guidelines – January 2018* and share widely via the website and off-line.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS PUT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAKEHOLDERS DURING AUDIT FIELDWORK

List of questions posed by Mr Ben Mitchell, Coolamon Advisors, member of the audit team.

General questions

- 1) What do you think about the teachers' engagement with families and community?
- 2) What do you think about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers?
- 3) Are there examples of good engagement?
- 4) What do you like about schools' engagement?
- 5) What do you not like about schools' engagement?
- 6) Is it an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that their telephone numbers may change frequently?
- 7) Do families have access to the internet?
- 8) How do schools let the community know what is happening?
- 9) What is the school's biggest challenge?

Principals' questions

- 10) What is your next big step [for cultural integrity & engagement]?
- 11) What are your views on ACT Education's engagement?
- 12) Is the Education directorate making progress?
- 13) What is the Directorate's biggest challenge?
- 14) What is the main problem the Education Directorate is trying to solve?
- 15) What would successful engagement look like?
- 16) What recommendations are there for engagement?

Students' questions

- 17) What does your school do to support you when it comes to engaging with you?
- 18) What doesn't the school do to support you or how can they improve engaging with you?
- 19) Each student was given a few minutes to think and write down their answers. When all students had completed the task, Ben collected each of their answers written on their notes and asked for permission to read aloud each comment. Ben invited students to provide feedback by a show of thumbs up – to agree, thumbs down- to disagree or thumbs level for neither agree nor disagree.

Audit reports

Reports Published in 2017-18	
Report No. 06 – 2018	Physical Security
Report No. 05 – 2018	ACT clubs' community contributions
Report No. 04 – 2018	2016-17 Financial Audits – Computer Information Systems
Report No. 03 – 2018	Tender for the sale of Block 30 (formerly Block 20) Section 34 Dickson
Report No. 02 – 2018	ACT Government strategic and accountability indicators
Report No. 01 – 2018	Acceptance of Stormwater Assets
Report No. 11 – 2017	2016-17 Financial Audits – Financial Results and Audit Findings
Report No. 10 – 2017	2016-17 Financial Audits – Overview
Report No. 09 – 2017	Annual Report 2016-17
Report No. 08 – 2017	Selected ACT Government agencies' management of Public Art
Reports Published in 2016-17	
Report No. 07 – 2017	Public Housing Renewal Program
Report No. 06 – 2017	Mental Health Services – Transition from Acute Care
Report No. 05 – 2017	Maintenance of Selected Road Infrastructure Assets
Report No. 04 – 2017	Performance information in ACT public schools
Report No. 03 – 2017	2015-16 Financial Audits – Computer Information Systems
Report No. 02 – 2017	2016 ACT Election
Report No. 01 – 2017	WorkSafe ACT's management of its regulatory responsibilities for the demolition of loose-fill asbestos contaminated houses
Report No. 11 – 2016	2015-16 Financial Audits – Financial Results and Audit Findings
Report No. 10 – 2016	2015-16 Financial Audits – Audit Reports
Report No. 09 – 2016	Commissioner for International Engagement – Position Creation and Appointment Process
Report No. 08 – 2016	Annual Report 2015-16
Report No. 07 – 2016	Certain Land Development Agency Acquisitions
Reports Published in 2015-16	
Report No. 06 – 2016	Management and administration of credit cards by ACT Government entities
Report No. 05 – 2016	Initiation of the Light Rail Project
Report No. 04 – 2016	The management of the financial arrangements for the delivery of the Loose-fill Asbestos (Mr Fluffy) Insulation Eradication Scheme
Report No. 03 – 2016	ACT Policing Arrangement
Report No. 02 – 2016	Maintenance of Public Housing
Report No. 01 – 2016	Calvary Public Hospital Financial and Performance Reporting and Management
Report No. 10 – 2015	2014-15 Financial Audits
Report No. 09 – 2015	Public Transport: The Frequent Network
Report No. 08 – 2015	Annual Report 2014-15
Reports Published in 2015	
Report No. 07 – 2015	Sale of ACTTAB
Report No. 06 – 2015	Bulk Water Alliance
Report No. 05 – 2015	Integrity of Data in the Health Directorate

These and earlier reports can be obtained from the ACT Audit Offices's website at

<http://www.audit.act.gov.au>.