

YOUTH DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Greens believe in empowering the next generation to be involved in the decisions that will impact them.

We also believe that in a healthy democracy, young people should be supported to be engaged and active public citizens.

For too long Government policy has excluded the next generation from decisions that will impact them. Nowhere is this more clear than the climate emergency. No one under 40 years old has even lived in a year with global average temperatures below those of last century.

The Greens believe that the views and interests of children and young people must be given the same weight when it comes to the decisions that effect our future. The Federal Government's 'gas fired recovery' plan brings this injustice into stark focus - it focuses on the short term, rather than envisioning and building a better world for our children and young people and their children.

Students can see this. They aren't stupid. They are learning about climate change - learning about the science and about the solutions, and demanding that Governments take action.

Yet when children and young people take action to speak out in politics, their voices are minimised and their judgement questioned. Meanwhile, people like the Prime Minister, are essentially telling concerned students to butt out. He tells them to stay out of politics, stay at school, and everything will be fine. This is hard to swallow when the Government's approach to climate change is so obviously out of step with what the science demands, and when many of their pronouncements are patently false.

The children and young people of today will inherit the world of tomorrow. It's up to us to leave them with a healthy, resilient environment. But even more, it's up to us to empower them to have a real voice in the future of our society, and to listen to what they are saying.

The school strike movement is an expression of the concerns of children and young people about their world, and it is one the ACT Greens fully support. The ACT Greens have long supported students in the ACT to attend School Strike for Climate events, but we want to go further.

The ACT Education Act already recognises that education provides a foundation for a democratic society and has among its general principles “promoting children’s optimism for the future”. **The Greens believe that our education system should give more opportunities for students to be involved in our democracy. Children and young people must be given a voice so this generation is able to be involved in shaping their future and can be optimistic about their opportunities.**

THAT’S WHY THE ACT GREENS WILL BUILD A BETTER NORMAL BY SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO ENGAGE IN DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION, BY:

1. Supporting students to attend School Strikes for Climate
2. Encouraging the democratic participation of children and young people as a general principle in the *Education Act 2004*
3. Increasing civics and democracy education in schools
4. Recognising the separate rights of children and young people in the *Human Rights Act 2004*
5. Advocating for change to federal legislation to allow for 16 and 17 year olds to choose to vote.

1. ESTABLISHING AN ONGOING POLICY THAT ENDORSES THE RIGHT OF STUDENTS TO STRIKE FROM SCHOOL

The ACT Assembly and ACT Government made a declaration that we are in a state of “climate emergency”, and declared its support for the ACT Strike for Climate in 2019. The Assembly declared its support for students and residents that chose to support the event and the Greens would like to give effect to an ongoing policy of support for such events.

The ACT Greens will establish an ongoing ACT Education policy that ensures that the Minister for Education endorses each student-led School Strike for Climate event. This will mean that students will not be penalised or stopped from attending rallies and events, but will still need approval from their parents or carers, with parental supervision encouraged. This policy will also enable teachers to support students to attend such events.

The [ACT Education Directorate has had this policy in place](#) for individual events, but it is not ongoing, and approval could be revoked with a change in government.

2. ENCOURAGING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS A GENERAL PRINCIPLE IN THE EDUCATION ACT 2004

The general principles of the Education Act are set out in the values framework under which all education policy and activity is undertaken in the ACT. The Act already recognises that education provides a foundation for our democratic society, and that children and young people being empowered through education is important for promoting optimism for their future.

The Greens will synthesise these two core ideas and include a specific section of the Education Act to state that “education should provide all students with an understanding of, and ability to participate in, civil society and democratic processes”.

This will provide a clear principles-based framework for the school system to facilitate children and young people engaging with the processes of democracy, including through strikes and protest.

3. INCREASING CIVICS AND DEMOCRACY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

We want every student in Canberra to recognise the democratic rights and obligations that our society has to offer, and to be active participants in civil society. We want all students to be provided with an opportunity to learn about what used to be called “civics” - to empower them regardless of their political persuasion or personal beliefs to be engaged in the decisions that affect their lives today and tomorrow.

The national curriculum doesn’t include any compulsory education on our modern democratic and electoral systems.

Ideally the Greens would like every school student who graduates from school in the ACT to broadly understand the ACT electoral system. We want to increase the opportunities for ACT school students to better understand the ACT and federal democratic and electoral systems. The Greens want to increase funding to support Elections ACT and the ACT Legislative Assembly education offices to support teachers to offer increased civics and democracy education for ACT school students.

4. RECOGNISING THE SEPARATE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT 2004

The *Human Rights Act 2004* recognises the rights of children only in relation to the rights of families.

While family rights are important and support children to be safe and supported in a way that is appropriate for their age and recognising their particular needs, it is time to fully recognise the rights of children and young people.

The Greens will amend the Human Rights Act to recognise the rights of children and young people, including the right to participate in our democracy. The Greens will also refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a source of those rights.

5. ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE TO FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO ALLOW FOR 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS TO CHOOSE TO VOTE

[The Greens have consistently argued](#) for the voluntary voting to be an option for young people aged 16 and 17.

16 and 17 year olds can legally work full-time. If they are working, they pay taxes. They can drive a car, have sex and make medical decisions about their bodies. They can join the Army, Navy or Air Force. They can sign a lease, or join a political party – yet they can't vote.

If young people wish to take part in our democracy, they should have that option. We should give them a chance to have their say where it counts most – at the ballot box.

Sadly, there are a number of things holding us back from allowing this to happen. Aside from the reluctance of the old parties, there is another legal issue. A federal law, the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1998, specifically states that voters in Territory elections must be eligible to vote in federal elections, and the federal electoral legislation says that voters must be at least 18. Until one or both of these laws are changed at the federal level the ACT Assembly can't give young people the vote.

The Greens believe that the ACT should have the same rights as the States to make laws about voting eligibility. That's why we will continue to advocate for the Commonwealth Government to amend the Self Government Act to allow the ACT Assembly to determine who can vote in ACT elections.