

EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Greens want a world class education system that is inclusive, safe, healthy and supportive. We believe that every school is a community in itself, and is also an essential part of the local community, and every school needs to be well resourced and maintained to ensure it meets students, teachers and families needs.

We know that our students are receiving a good education, with great teachers, but the Greens believe that academic outcomes should be improved, and that too many students fall between the cracks in our system. We also know that as our public education system grows year on year, we must both plan now for future school construction, and invest more in maintenance and upgrades for our older school buildings.

THAT'S WHY THE ACT GREENS WILL PROMOTE SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITIES, TO DELIVER A WORLD CLASS EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT IS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE, BY:

EDUCATION CONTINUUM

1. Accelerating the roll out of 15 hours a week of universal early childhood education for all 3 year olds in the ACT by the 2021 school year
2. Putting public education first and prioritising public primary and secondary school funding
3. Bringing the CIT back into the broader Education portfolio and maintaining at least 70% of VET funding through CIT

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

4. Committing to no school closures - making sure local communities have local schools
5. Meeting growing demand on ACT schools
6. Improving community use of school halls for public use with standard rates of hire

SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

7. Ensuring all indoor learning spaces are between 17 and 30 degrees at all times, appropriately ventilated, and smoke-free, with an audit of facilities and a \$30 million fund
8. Making it a right for children to have healthy learning environments, free from hazardous materials, and \$15 million to remove hazardous materials
9. Increasing nature play spaces and outdoor activities equipment for older schools with a \$3 million fund

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

10. Supporting a new way of testing students that can clearly show its value to all - teachers, parents, governments and most importantly - students
11. Undertaking a comprehensive review of the ACT Education Directorates "Bring Your Own Device", Google classrooms and remote learning policy
12. Continuing to work with teachers and resource schools to ensure the best possible class sizes and teacher-student ratios
13. Making sure every public school has a great school library, with fully qualified teacher-librarians and support staff wherever possible
14. Ensuring we have enough specialist schools offering innovative curriculum options in Canberra to meet the varied needs of ACT students.

MENTAL HEALTH

15. Supporting students with mental health and wellbeing
 - a. Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Program in primary schools
 - b. Mental Health Training for Parents and Carers, and Support Groups

CIVICS AND DEMOCRACY

16. Support students to attend School Strikes for Climate
17. Encourage the democratic participation of children and young people through a general principle in the Education Act 2004, and
18. Increase civics and democracy education in schools.

EDUCATION CONTINUUM

1. ACCELERATE THE ROLL OUT OF 15 HOURS A WEEK OF UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL 3 YEAR OLDS IN THE ACT BY THE 2021 SCHOOL YEAR

We all understand that the availability and affordability of childcare is key to women's workforce participation. The Commonwealth Government recognised this when it rolled out free childcare during the initial months of the COVID pandemic. Unfortunately it wasn't long lasting. Now, with free childcare no longer available, and early childhood educators the first to lose access to Jobkeeper, we have a sector in crisis. We note the disproportionate impacts of these decisions, given that women make up 96% of workers in early childhood education, and mothers likely being the ones who are uncertain about returning to work.

Whilst the current ACT Government has a plan for universal access for 3 year olds, their phase-in approach is currently only providing education for a small number of children. We also understand that the formula being used was not the one recommended by the Productivity Commission, thereby resulting in some centres not even participating in the trial.

That is why we will work with providers and use advice from the Productivity Commission to accelerate the roll out of 15 hours a week of universal early childhood education for all 3 year olds in the ACT by the 2021 school year.

This will enable more workforce participation for all parents of 3 year olds, which we know will help families, help children and help the local economy.

2. PUT PUBLIC EDUCATION FIRST AND PRIORITISE PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

The ACT Greens strongly believe that free, high-quality education promotes equality of opportunity, is a cornerstone of a healthy democracy and is fundamental to a prosperous and fair society, and as such we agree that the ACT Government must recognise that the primary obligation of government is public education, by prioritising the public education system.

The ACT Greens want a fully funded, public, secular education system to meet the needs of ACT students in all their diversity - and we want that funding based on a formula that supports equitable educational opportunities and that is allocated in a transparent, accountable and needs-based manner, such as those outlined in the original Gonski principles. We support the ongoing increase in funding to all ACT public schools in real terms.

3. BRING THE CIT BACK TO BEING PART OF THE BROADER EDUCATION PORTFOLIO AND MAINTAIN AT LEAST 70% OF VET FUNDING THROUGH CIT

The ACT Greens want improved transitions between early childhood, primary, secondary, college, tertiary and vocational education sectors, and greater coordination across those sectors. To achieve this, we must see learning as a lifelong process that is fostered in both formal and informal settings. The ACT Greens have been the loudest and strongest supporters of CIT, as a valued and essential publicly owned training and educational provider. In 2016, we secured a guarantee in the Parliamentary Agreement that at least 70% of VET funding in the ACT was delivered through CIT - and with more changes coming in the sector, driven by the Commonwealth, this is now more important than ever.

To ensure that providers of vocational and other future training needs in the ACT consider the changing labour market, gender equity and the development of new skills for a just transition to a green economy, we want the CIT being brought back as part of the broader Education portfolio, and support the need for the voice of the union to be heard on the Board.

We have also proposed a number of specific programs to support post-secondary training:

- as part of our [gender led recovery plan](#) we committed to developing specific programs to boost female enrolment and graduates in courses at CIT including IT, Engineering and related courses
- a new \$200,000pa [Skills, Apprenticeships and Research-Industry Partnerships Fund](#) to help industry deliver on a 10 year pathway to shift to world's best practice on climate-ready and environmentally-sustainable buildings
- support for housing and related trades industry workers to shift to a zero emissions future, and will require industry to support training in energy efficiency skills as outlined in our [Just Transition plan](#)

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

4. ENSURE LOCAL COMMUNITIES HAVE LOCAL SCHOOLS

The ACT Greens understand that communities that lost schools in 2006 as part of the 'towards 2020' policy program are understandably concerned about the future of their remaining school options. We understand that the extent of the reforms proposed in the 2006-07 Budget caught the community by surprise and created considerable distress that is still impacting the provision of education and communities today. That is why we will commit to no school closures over the next term of the Assembly.

5. MEET GROWING COMMUNITY DEMAND ON ACT SCHOOLS

The ACT Greens are aware of both population growth - particularly in some areas of Canberra, as well as a trend towards increased enrolments in the public school system in the ACT. These are putting pressure on our existing schools, and we need policies and investment to manage this. We also understand that considerable work has been undertaken by the government to develop sophisticated population projections, and we support the government's recent announcements to construct new schools and provide increased classroom space in existing areas of high demand.

The Greens would like a public and tangible plan for schools for all areas across Canberra, utilising the best possible demographic data available to plan for upgrades and new schools.

It is important that these facts are considered by the people and communities they affect - we believe that schools are a community asset, and planning should provide opportunities for direct consultation with parents, teachers and importantly - students wherever feasible. We will explore new legislation that will raise consultation on school construction to a new standard, and ensure that all education sectors have access to clear, open and transparent processes to secure land.

6. IMPROVE COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOL HALLS FOR PUBLIC USE WITH STANDARD RATES OF HIRE

We will work across government agencies and with the community to make more school facilities, such as halls, meeting spaces and sporting grounds available to the public wherever possible outside of normal school hours. We will set standard rates of hire for these facilities, to give the community greater certainty, and have these rates made publicly available instead of having to contact each school directly.

SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The ACT Greens understand that it is the responsibility of any good government to ensure the provision of high-quality, well-resourced and safe learning environments that are open to all students, and we are committed to seeing a safe, student-centred, healthy and high-quality school environment for all students, teachers and other staff.

7. ENSURE ALL INDOOR LEARNING SPACES ARE BETWEEN 17 AND 30 DEGREES AT ALL TIMES, APPROPRIATELY VENTILATED, AND SMOKE-FREE, WITH AN AUDIT OF FACILITIES AND A \$30 MILLION FUND

We understand that the threat posed by climate change makes it critical to provide temperature-controlled, ventilated and [smoke-free indoor learning spaces](#) for students and educators alike. The ACT Greens are committed to healthy and safe school environments for all students, teachers and other staff, and will ensure essential upgrades and maintenance as required.

Our plan will see an energy efficiency and leakage audit of ACT school facilities within a year, and \$30 million allocated for identified upgrades over 3 years.

8. MAKE IT A RIGHT FOR CHILDREN TO HAVE HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS, FREE FROM HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, AND \$15 MILLION TO REMOVE HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

The Greens recognise that many of our schools are tired, ageing and unfortunately - as for many buildings in the ACT, have some presence of asbestos and lead paint. Children as well as teaching staff in schools and early childhood education centres have the right to work and play without damaging hazardous and toxic materials and chemicals in their immediate environments. With both ageing schools, and a range of new buildings that are off-gassing, we know how important it is to ensure that all students and teaching staff are in safe, healthy environments.

That is why the Greens will enshrine the 'right to a healthy environment' into our Human Rights Act - to protect both Canberrans and our natural environment from unnecessary harm. Like the current right to education, an overarching legal right to a healthy environment simply places a responsibility on government services to consider these rights at every decision point.

While the ACT Government has undertaken a comprehensive audit of all schools asbestos issues, it has become clear that lead based paint, common in most buildings over 30 years old, needs more attention, awareness and ultimately removal. We agree that we must methodically and safely work through the backlog of rectification, and progressively remove these substances from our children's classrooms. The Greens will commit [\\$15 million to audit and accelerate the removal of hazardous materials from public schools](#).

We have called for reports on hazardous materials contamination in schools to be publicly available and accessible, so that parents and the wider community can have confidence that this situation is being rectified appropriately. We will work to make this information more publicly available using a web-based system.

9. INCREASE NATURE PLAY SPACES AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES EQUIPMENT FOR OLDER SCHOOLS WITH A \$3 MILLION FUND

The benefits of nature-based play are now well understood, and we are pleased to see an increase in this approach in our public parks and recreation areas. However, many of Canberra's older schools still only have rudimentary playgrounds, with limited spaces that encourage exploratory play. That is why we will provide \$3 million dollars in grants over the next four years for all schools to develop new and exciting play spaces that can be designed with children's natural play styles in mind. We expect that many of the materials for these nature play spaces can be sourced from the City Services tree stockpiles.

All ACT schools will be eligible to apply for these grants.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

10. SUPPORT A NEW WAY OF TESTING STUDENTS THAT CAN CLEARLY SHOW ITS VALUE TO ALL - TEACHERS, PARENTS, GOVERNMENTS AND MOST IMPORTANTLY - STUDENTS

While we recognise the value of standardised testing to better inform the interventions needed to improve academic outcomes over time, the ACT Greens believe that NAPLAN must be scrapped. We support the introduction of a new way of testing students that can clearly show its value to all - teachers, parents, governments and most importantly - students. We want to ensure that all students are supported to develop their potential, including those with culturally and socially diverse backgrounds, and students living with a physical or intellectual disability. To properly do this, we need a better measure of personalised and individual achievement, that can follow a child's journey through the education system and lead to increased support for pedagogical change when it's needed.

We believe that the ACT should work with other jurisdictions to establish a new national testing scheme if possible, but we should also be prepared to create our own if necessary.

11. UNDERTAKE A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE ACT EDUCATION DIRECTORATE'S "BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE", GOOGLE CLASSROOMS AND REMOTE LEARNING POLICY

The ACT Greens are strong supporters of innovation and active engagement with new technologies. But we also want programs, particularly those that impact our children and young people, to be based on evidence and regularly reviewed. That is why we will undertake a broad and public review of the impact of the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy, the provision of Chromebooks and the use of Google Suite in the classroom and at home.

We want to better understand how these digital technologies that the ACT Education Directorate has actively promoted and delivered, including Google Classroom, for the past five years in schools are working for students, staff and families. The review should assess the impacts of these technologies on student learning, attitude and behaviours as well as on teachers, schools and families. The coronavirus pandemic, which saw the rapid and responsive delivery of remote learning should also be considered in this review, as well as issues raised by [concerned community members](#).

12. CONTINUE TO WORK WITH TEACHERS AND RESOURCE SCHOOLS TO ENSURE THE BEST POSSIBLE CLASS SIZES AND TEACHER-STUDENT RATIOS

We know that unfortunately teaching is an undervalued profession that should be more highly respected. To develop a vibrant public education system, which attains world-class standards of excellence and is built on an evolving and research-based curriculum and pedagogy, we must continue to work with teachers and resource schools to ensure the best possible class sizes and teacher-student ratios that meet the needs of today and tomorrow. The Australian Education Union ACT has worked hard and effectively over the past four years to deliver small class sizes and good teacher ratios, but we must continue to train, recruit and retain all the required teaching staff to ensure that this continues.

13. MAKE SURE EVERY PUBLIC SCHOOL HAS A GREAT SCHOOL LIBRARY, WITH FULLY QUALIFIED TEACHER-LIBRARIANS AND SUPPORT STAFF WHEREVER POSSIBLE

Each school has different needs, but all schools should have the best possible range of accessible education and training programs, including literacy and numeracy, to offer new opportunities. The Greens believe that libraries are essential for all school students' learning and understanding of the world, and qualified librarians can be a vital support for all students to have equality of access to digital technology, increase their research skills, and to be supported to be kept safe and to understand the risks and benefits of cyber platforms, including social media platforms.

We will work with local universities, teachers, and local schools to develop a strategic plan to ensure every school and every school student has access to a dedicated library with a fully qualified teacher librarian, **starting with a minimum commitment to 25 new funded positions over the next term.**

14. ENSURING WE HAVE ENOUGH SPECIALIST SCHOOLS OFFERING INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM OPTIONS IN CANBERRA TO MEET THE VARIED NEEDS OF ACT STUDENTS

Across the world, and Australia, governments are grappling with the best way to support individualised teaching and learning. From full scale school autonomy to specialised class streams within existing mainstream education settings, there are differing results, and some clearly negative ones, such as leading teachers being called on to undertake more business administration roles and inconsistent applications of standard curriculum. There are also positive examples of this innovative approach being taken now in public schools, such as the “Big Picture” learning method being utilised in Melrose High School and the Canberra College, but they are limited in capacity to truly cater for each student’s personal learning style.

The ACT Greens want a review to identify gaps in our current government education offerings to allow a more strategic approach to more diverse educational approaches.

This review should explore issues such as whether there should be more government bilingual schools, whether International Baccalaureate should be offered in additional schools, and the feasibility of creating a new public school that provides alternative learning experiences to the conventional school program and which is available by choice to every family in the community at no extra cost. This review should seek the views of students, parents and educators and the broader community.

We understand that many schools are best placed to identify areas of specialisation that suit their school community most - such as demand for bilingual offerings in one specific language, using [flexischools](#), or [Big Picture](#) methods as described above. We would like this review to work with schools to clarify whether they already have such needs identified or even already on offer.

The Greens would also like this review to investigate flexischools, and explore a new dedicated standalone school, with self-directed learning, and person-centred (individualised) planning that offers some students the best possible chance at academic success. The ACT Government funded this approach, with the publicly funded alternative School Without Walls (SWOW) which operated from 1974 to 1997. SWOW was established to cater for educational needs that were not being met by the mainstream public education system in the Australian Capital Territory, and we believe that it is now time to seriously revisit this approach and explore what a SWOW-type learning environment could offer in the broader landscape of education in the ACT.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

15. SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

For young people in particular, providing early support to build resilience, coping strategies and mental health literacy is vital and can help prevent mental health issues manifesting later in life.

The Greens understand that we need to provide more accessible, affordable and engaging services, fill gaps in the system, and ensure our mental health services are equipped to provide early intervention.

We recently released our [mental health plan for young people](#), which included:

A. MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION PROGRAM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

This \$900,000 commitment over 4 years will provide funding to Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) to pilot a primary school mental health program. It will support 8-12 year old children to receive mental health education, increase mental health literacy around physical, emotional and social experiences, promote early intervention, and reduce stigma. It will provide schools with initial touch points for students to open conversations that would help students to build their sense of belonging and understand themselves and others.

B. MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR PARENTS AND CARERS, AND SUPPORT GROUPS

The Greens understand the importance of parents and carers being able to support children through their difficult and challenging periods.

- The Parents Mental Health Program will provide free seminars for parents and carers to provide advice and mental health training to support their young people. Delivered in school communities, the seminars will give parents knowledge and skills to help them understand the mental health challenges their young people are facing, skills to navigate the issues, and information on support services that are available.
- We will also provide funding for community organisations to deliver smaller parent peer support groups to assist parents and carers of young people with mental illness or disorder or at risk of developing a mental health concern. These peer support groups will help parents better connect with others who may be having similar experiences in their caring duties and may benefit from connecting and talking freely with others.

We will allocate \$1.9 million over 4 years for these two projects.

CIVICS AND DEMOCRACY

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 affect our future. 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.

As outlined in our [Youth Democracy Package](#), the Greens want to:

16. 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 to support student-led School Strike for Climate events. 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.

17. ENCOURAGING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH 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 insert a specific section into 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.

18. 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. However, this is up to each school and delivery of issues regarding the topic varies. 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.**