



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure](#))

**Members:**

**MR M PETERSSON (Chair)  
MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)  
MR P CAIN**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 18 MAY 2021**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr D Leary (Ph: 620 50124)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

## **WITNESSES**

<b>BRISBANE, MS KAMLA</b> , Acting Manager, Policy and Advocacy, Carers ACT ...	<b>14</b>
<b>ELLIOTT, MS VERONICA</b> , Policy Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations .....	<b>21</b>
<b>KELLY, MS LISA</b> , Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT .....	<b>14</b>
<b>KILLEN, MS GEMMA</b> , Senior Policy Officer, ACT Council of Social Service Inc .....	<b>9</b>
<b>RHEESE, MS STACY</b> , Team Leader, Policy, Advocacy for Inclusion.....	<b>1</b>
<b>WALLACE, MR CRAIG</b> , Head of Policy, ACT Council of Social Service Inc.....	<b>9</b>

## **Privilege statement**

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

All witnesses making submissions or giving evidence to committees of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT are protected by parliamentary privilege.

“Parliamentary privilege” means the special rights and immunities which belong to the Assembly, its committees and its members. These rights and immunities enable committees to operate effectively, and enable those involved in committee processes to do so without obstruction, or fear of prosecution.

Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, it may take evidence in-camera if requested. Confidential evidence will be recorded and kept securely. It is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly; but any decision to publish or present in-camera evidence will not be taken without consulting with the person who gave the evidence.

*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 1.28 pm.**

**RHEESE, MS STACY**, Team Leader, Policy, Advocacy for Inclusion

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the first public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion for its inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure. Before we go further, the committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make for life in the city and this region.

During the proceedings today we will hear evidence from the following organisations: Advocacy for Inclusion, ACTCOSS, Carers ACT and the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association. Before we start there are a few housekeeping matters that I wish to draw to everyone's attention. Please make sure all mobile phones are switched off or put into silent mode and, for non-pass holders, please ensure you have checked in, the Check In CBR App.

Witnesses, please speak one at a time and speak directly into the microphone to ensure an accurate Hansard transcription. The first time a witness speaks, please state your name and the capacity in which you appear. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed and published by Hansard. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When you take a question on notice it would be useful if you used the phrasing, "I will take that as a question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm later.

Please be aware that today's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege, which provides protection to witnesses but also obliges them to tell the truth. The provision of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter, and all participants today are reminded of this. Please ensure that you have read and understood the pink privilege statement in front of you, the pink sheet just to the side. If you could just confirm that you have had a chance to read it?

**Ms Rheese:** I have.

**THE CHAIR:** Perfect. I know that you were advised not to have an opening statement. I am just confirming you have not brought one?

**Ms Rheese:** I am sorry, I missed that if I was advised of it.

**THE CHAIR:** No, you were advised not to. I was just making sure you have not.

**Ms Rheese:** I have brought an opening statement.

**THE CHAIR:** You have brought one. Well, that being the case—opening statement—take it away.

**Ms Rheese:** Thank you. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. Advocacy for Inclusion, incorporating People with Disabilities ACT, is

a leading independent organisation providing advocacy services in the ACT. As a disabled people's organisation, the majority of our staff, board and members are people with disabilities, and our advocacy is informed by lived experience. AFI operates under a human rights framework. We uphold the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the CRPD.

AFI welcomes the opportunity to support strategic and considered approaches to the management of school infrastructure in the ACT. We recognise the opportunity provided through such management to achieve inclusive policy outcomes in education and the wider community. The management of ACT school infrastructure can have a significant impact on the educational experience and attainment of students with disability and, as a result, can also enormously impact later life outcomes and wellbeing. It can provide opportunity for educational achievement, higher learning, employment, socialisation, the creation of peer networks, community participation and the development of independence.

Conversely, school infrastructure can also be used to perpetuate the segregation of children and young people with disabilities, by putting in place limitations and barriers or by being used for separation and restriction. Repeatedly, we have seen the need for improved oversight and education to ensure provision and use of infrastructure is consistent with the principles of the Senior Practitioner Act, the Human Rights Act and the CRPD.

School infrastructure should be both designed and used to proactively support inclusion and to be accessible to all. It should create a solid foundation for children and young people to achieve the best possible educational, social and economic outcomes. Inclusive education is a fundamental human right recognised in article 24 of the CRPD. Article 24 provides that people with disability are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability and can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in general comment No 4, provides additional insight into what equates to inclusive education and differentiates this from both integration and segregation. Currently in the ACT, our education system provides segregated and integrated settings, including segregated schools and specialist units and classes within mainstream schools.

The CRPD committee has made it clear that the full realisation of inclusive education under article 24 is not compatible with sustaining two systems of education, a mainstream education system and a special segregated education system. Evidence exists to justify fully inclusive education for educational, social and economic reasons. The CRPD committee states that inclusive education is the primary means by which persons with disabilities can lift themselves out of poverty, obtain the means to participate fully in their communities and be safeguarded from exploitation, and that it is also the primary means through which to achieve inclusive societies.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has highlighted that many people consider that inclusive education is not well implemented in Australia, due in part to ambiguity on what constitutes inclusive education and how it is practised. As inclusion is a key principle of the

ACT's Future of Education strategy, AFI recommends that the ACT government formally adopts and commits to a definition of inclusion consistent with article 24 of the CRPD and the further explanatory statement in general comment No 4, in order to reduce ambiguity and support better outcomes for students with disability.

Committing to the principles of this definition of inclusion will reduce barriers to achieving fully inclusive education and the associated improved outcomes for all students. AFI notes that this recommendation aligns with Australia's obligations under the CRPD and supports initiatives in the Future of Education strategy to strengthen inclusion. Adopting such a definition also provides a clear framework for future planning which would have significant implications for the management of school infrastructure.

Additionally, AFI recommends that all ACT school infrastructure is built to be as accessible as possible and in line with universal design principles. This will reduce the need for retrofitting and reduce the layers and difficulties faced by students and their parents and carers in negotiating and implementing individual adjustments. Using universal design principles is also very likely to benefit students whose disabilities currently go unidentified or unaddressed. Designing with a focus on accessibility and inclusion also has the additional benefit of increasing accessibility to staff, parents, carers and other people entering a school, whose individual accessibility requirements a school may not necessarily be resourced to respond to.

We would like to emphasise focus on not only physical accessibility but also in providing suitable sensory environments and design which enhance wellbeing. School infrastructure should also be co-designed with people with lived experience and expertise of disability and access to ensure it is appropriate and fit for purpose. The management of school infrastructure can provide opportunities to greatly improve life outcomes for children and young people with disability. Significant inclusion and access reform can begin in classrooms.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I will lead off with some questions and then we can make our way down the line. In your submission there is something that I find quite startling. Advocacy for Inclusion is aware of historical and recent instances of ACT school infrastructure being utilised in restrictive practices and seclusion to restrict and prevent access. Can you expand on what those instances were?

**Ms Rheese:** A couple have been in the media that I am sure you are aware of. Historically, we had situations like the cage that was used. Recently we have had an ACAT case which highlighted that a parent attended a school and found their child with a disability locked and alone in a classroom. That is seclusion and restriction, obviously.

In terms of other restrictive or seclusive practices, we are hearing from parents of children with disability that their children are separated from their classmates or in other ways segregated from classmates. I have heard of an instance where a child was basically put in a trampoline. You know how they now come with a fenced-in bits?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Rheese:** While the other children were participating in a PE class, a child was put in a trampoline and had the meshing zipped up so that they could not leave there.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Rheese:** It is instances like that where children are separated or equipment or infrastructure is being used basically to seclude and isolate them from others.

**THE CHAIR:** With the trampoline, was that a recent case?

**Ms Rheese:** That is not a recent case, no.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you know how old the students were?

**Ms Rheese:** For that one?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Rheese:** I believe primary school age.

**THE CHAIR:** Primary school age. Another point that I wanted to just touch on very quickly is that you have called for the definition of inclusion to be updated consistent with article 4. Do you happen to know the current definition of inclusion that ACT Education operates with?

**Ms Rheese:** There are some dot points provided in the Future of Education strategy which do not really seem to have a definite definition, as such, of what inclusion means. There are examples given of what it is. I would not say that is moving in the same direction as what inclusion is under article 24 and it does not provide that clarity of exactly what a fully inclusive environment would look like in future.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That is very helpful.

**MR DAVIS:** I am curious to dive a little bit deeper into the recommendation around inclusion consistent with article 24 and general comment No 4. I am aware, as I am sure you are, of a few school campuses in the ACT which are specifically and only for students with a disability. In the spirit of inclusion, what is your organisation's position on those schools and those school environments and what position do you have around the benefits or detriments to the young person being away from all mainstream schooling environments?

**Ms Rheese:** Consistent with the CRPD, we would view those as segregated environments because those students are kept separate from the wider community. In terms of how resourcing and support is set up in the schools, earlier in my submission I refer to statistics nationally showing that one in three students in segregated or specialist schools needs more support than they are actually provided with. So there is certainly room for improvement in how much support is provided in those.

In terms of fully inclusive education, the concern with a segregated environment is that young people are kept separated from the same aged peers and the same aged

activities that they would be doing in the wider community. Things like social development, developing independence and being provided with similar opportunities to other students are very restricted in a segregated environment. In terms of the later life outcomes of young people with disability and the benefits that fully inclusive education has been shown to provide, we can really see that they do much better in terms of that social engagement, developing independence and having further education and employment opportunities in future as well.

**MR DAVIS:** You mentioned in your answer to the chair's previous question that you have met and spoken with a number of parents of young people. I can assume from that that parents are a big part of the conversation the organisation has around these schools and it is parents who have chosen these schools for their child. What do you understand to be the reason that parents have chosen these, as you have put it, segregated school environments over more mainstream classroom environments? I trust these parents make these decisions always because they want what is best for their kids and, for whatever reason, they have determined that a mainstream school environment is not. Can you elaborate on your understanding of that?

**Ms Rheese:** Firstly, I would like to clarify that Advocacy for Inclusion has a focus on the rights of the individual. If it is a child with disability then we are focusing on the rights of the child and the parents' rights come secondary to the child's. In terms of parents making the best choice for their children, I think at the moment, while we have segregated systems and mainstream systems, it is a false choice for parents. As long as resourcing and funding are separated between those two systems, can a parent really go to a mainstream school and have the full knowledge that their child with disability is going to receive the best support and resourcing as possible, as opposed to a segregated specialist school?

The concern is that, while the resourcing is split between the two, we cannot actually give parents a true choice of engaging with mainstream schools where they may not actually provide the best possible support that they can. Certainly, some parents are choosing segregated schools because they feel their child will not be welcomed or will not be supported in mainstream schools.

**MR DAVIS:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** On that train of thought, have you had this sort of feedback from parents?

**Ms Rheese:** We have certainly heard about parents who have interviewed at different schools and who have said that there was no welcoming environment at all. We have been told that one of the issues that they encounter is gatekeeping in education. Schools may make it clear that they cannot provide the support that the child needs or they might indicate that it is not going to be a welcome environment for that child. We have also had stories about mainstream schools where parents said that they were welcomed from the beginning and the school was doing everything it possibly could to support the child.

**MR CAIN:** Would you have the same view about, for example, keeping a child at home? Obviously, that means they do not have to travel and maybe they receive their education through some home education package from a parent or carer. Would you



have the same concerns in that situation?

**Ms Rheese:** Certainly in terms of social development, connecting with peers and engaging with similar opportunities that another child of the same age would have, there would be concerns that a child who is being educated at home might not have similar opportunities in terms of developing independence for that individual. We see many young people with disability move into guardianship or stay with parents. They are often dependent on their parents later in life. I would say there is less opportunity for a child who is educated at home to be developing that sort of independence in future.

**MR DAVIS:** You were speaking about very different experiences of families at two very different school campuses. One was doing everything it possibly could within its power to include a student, as opposed to gatekeeping, if I could use that word. What do you understand to be the reason for such a stark difference between two ACT public schools?

**Ms Rheese:** I am not sure that I can speak on behalf of the schools themselves and whether some are proactively trying to be more inclusive than others. That could come down to the leadership of the schools, but I would be guessing that.

**MR DAVIS:** That is fair enough. Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** Regarding your comment or statement that the rights of the child is your focus and your No 1 priority, what if a child actually chooses to be in a school that has a particular focus on assisting disabled students, or even at home?

**Ms Rheese:** I would again be looking at whether the child has the choice of a fully inclusive education, whether we have achieved that already and whether that is able to come into the decision-making at that stage. Is it also an option to have a fully inclusive education in the ACT, and are they fully informed and choosing instead to have a specialist school education?

**MR CAIN:** Do you have a suggestion on how you could actually administer such an approach?

**Ms Rheese:** In terms of transitioning to fully inclusive education, do you mean?

**MR CAIN:** In terms of ensuring that the child has reached their own decision for their own reasons.

**Ms Rheese:** In terms of—

**MR CAIN:** Whether they choose to go to a standard school or a specialist school or even to be educated at home.

**Ms Rheese:** Advocacy for Inclusion very much supports the idea of supported decision-making for people with disability. So it could be a matter of working with a child, using supported decision-making principles, to understand how they have been informed of their choice and the reasons for making a decision.

**MR CAIN:** How does a student child connected to you, I guess, become a client where you have that relationship, because you are not necessarily there for every single student with disability, I am assuming?

**Ms Rheese:** Of course not; we do not have capacity to be. Usually, we would have referrals coming through parents. Occasionally, we would have contact from a school, identifying a child who might need some advocacy support. We certainly work with any age range, but the most common pathway would be a parent coming to us and saying that the child needs further assistance or advocacy.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of the modern design standards that new schools can be built to, are they up to scratch or is there still more to be done with the new design builds?

**Ms Rheese:** If modern school infrastructure is going to be built to the silver level minimum accessibility standards that the ACT government has just committed future housing to be built to then that is certainly a step forward in terms of accessibility. It can go higher than that. That is based, I believe, on the liveable housing design guidelines for Australia. There is gold-level accessibility. I would also be encouraging you to look into the universal design principles. They are similar to accessibility, but they are actually about a reformed design-thinking process of trying to make everything as accessible, usable and easy for anyone of any ability and any age range to be able to use. The silver-level accessibility standards are basically about making the infrastructure more easily adaptable. So it is not necessarily already building it to a standard that will meet individual accessibility needs, but it is improving the flexibility of infrastructure to be later adapted to individual needs.

**THE CHAIR:** The most recent school builds in the ACT are not at that silver level?

**Ms Rheese:** I could not say whether they are meeting those or not. It has certainly been a step forward for the government to agree to push for minimum accessibility standards in the national construction code. Previously, that was a voluntary thing that people could meet. Potentially, there may be some infrastructure meeting accessibility standards, but there was no requirement for it previously.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful.

**MR CAIN:** If Ms Rheese wants to send us information based on today's experience, I am sure that is open to her. Is that right?

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to repeat the question? Can you ask Ms Rheese?

**MR CAIN:** If she wants to add to her current submission, that is something that the committee will happily receive?

**THE CHAIR:** That is a fair point. If, following our conversation today, there is more that you feel you want to contribute, we are more than happy to hear it.

**MR CAIN:** Even if you would like to provide your opening statement to us.

**Ms Rheese:** Absolutely. If there is anything further that I can send through to assist you as well, please let me know.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. Ms Rheese, thank you very much for appearing today. We are now out of time.

**Ms Rheese:** Thank you very much.

**Short suspension.**

**KILLEN, MS GEMMA**, Senior Policy Officer, ACT Council of Social Service Inc  
**WALLACE, MR CRAIG**, Head of Policy, ACT Council of Social Service Inc

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome our new witnesses. Please be aware that today's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege, which provides protection to witnesses but also obliges them to tell the truth. The provision of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter and all participants today are reminded of this. Please ensure that you have read and understood the pink privilege statement in front of you, and if you could just confirm for the record that you have read and acknowledged it?

**Mr Wallace:** I can confirm for the record.

**Ms Killen:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have an opening statement?

**Mr Wallace:** ACTCOSS thanks the standing committee for this opportunity to appear before the inquiry into school infrastructure. I can make a short opening statement and then my colleague Gemma and I can answer questions.

ACTCOSS advocates for social justice in the ACT. We are the peak body for community organisations and for people experiencing disadvantage. Our evidence to this inquiry focuses on two areas: schools as centres of community life for children, parents and the broader public; and accessibility and inclusion in ACT schools. We also endorse the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations' call for a centralised approach to the management of infrastructure and maintenance that will deliver an equitable outcome across ACT schools.

The ACT government holds inclusive education as a priority within its future of education strategy. We believe that this inquiry and the actions pertaining from it represent an opportunity to put this priority into practice. We are guided in our submission by the definition of inclusive education as offered by Imagine More, as an education setting where all children are physically present and participating in the same classroom, in the same playground and at the same time as all children in the school community.

Segregation is not inclusive education and it is not consistent with the convention on the rights of people with a disability that the ACT has signed up to as a human rights jurisdiction. The ACT does have a number of segregated education settings. We have two primary schools and two high schools, though there is minimal evidence over time to suggest that this model is successful.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education this year released a road map for achieving inclusive education in Australia. They have set targets for no new enrolments of students entering the first year of primary school in a segregated setting, either in a special school or in a special unit within mainstream schools, by 2023. We know that students with disabilities should, can and deserve to be wholly included, physically, socially and academically, within mainstream schools in the ACT. The evidence shows that students with disabilities educated in general education environments outperform their peers who have been educated in segregated settings.

For that to happen, ACTCOSS believes that one of the things that need to happen is having a focus on improving and upgrading school classrooms, playgrounds, toilets, ingress and egress so that they meet standards of disability access to provide access for students and parents and teachers with a range of disabilities. In terms of evidence based on this, ACTCOSS thinks that a territory-wide stocktake of accessible school infrastructure would be welcome, and I note that the previous evidence from Ms Rheese touched on these issues.

However, one of the sources that we actually do have comes from the fact that schools serve as polling places. Prior to every election, Elections ACT assesses each of its polling places for accessibility, using a tool developed by the commission and based on the accessibility standards. These provide an accessibility rating for each location of full access—that is, access without any assistance—assisted access or no access at all.

Late last week, after the submission was made, the AEC came back to us with some information and we thought that it might be useful to share this with the committee. I understand that it is publicly available from a trawl through the AEC website, but a consolidation is useful. There were 86 polling places in the ACT at the last election. Sixty-two of these were schools. That is around 72 per cent of that total. None of these were listed as accessible without assistance; they all came back as assisted access. If a voter cannot access the public area of a school for half an hour to cast a ballot without assistance in Canberra, how likely is it that a child with a disability will complete years of concurrent education there?

Finally on this point, inclusive education settings are not just about physical accessibility and bricks and mortar. They are also about spaces to encourage mental and emotional self-regulation that are supportive and that do not provide for restrictive practices, bars or containment. We support Carers ACT's call for welcoming and gentle spaces for those who have sensory issues.

The other area—and I suspect I am getting to time—that we wanted to highlight was the importance of schools to us as community infrastructure, especially in communities which have fraying or non-existent growing spaces. Schools are also community meeting places, sporting grounds and places that offer green space. It is important that, wherever possible, we open and expand this resource for the wider ACT population, especially as the city becomes denser and higher.

However, schools are actually being fenced away from the community. We recognise that this is not a simple issue. There are competing imperatives around protecting buildings and also making them available to the community. However, we would take the view that these imperatives are not always in conflict. A busy out-of-hours presence on school grounds may mean that schools are less likely to be vandalised and targeted.

In conclusion, we urge the committee to prioritise inclusivity and accessibility and the ongoing maintenance of school facilities, as well as planning for future infrastructure needs so that everyone can partake in one of our community's most valuable resources and we also prioritise schools as community infrastructure. That concludes

my opening statement. Ms Killen and I are happy to take questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I will lead off with questions and we will make our way down. Those figures from the AEC are quite startling—62 schools and none of them fully accessible. Are you aware of any schools in the ACT that would be considered fully accessible, maybe not by the AEC measure, but by some other measure?

**Mr Wallace:** I will lead on that, but Gemma might like to add to it. Some of the newer schools would certainly meet the minimum standards under the national construction code. However, if you ask people with a disability, they might say to you that the minimum standards are not always applied in ways that represent best practice and mean that a person can actually use them. For instance, it is possible to build a tactile feature next to a parking egress point—in other words, the tactile feature is like a lip next to a parking bay—and to do so in a way that might technically tick off the standards but in reality makes it difficult to use.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned that often things get built to the minimum standard. Is there a higher or better standard that you think we should be building to?

**Mr Wallace:** I certainly think that we should be looking at the gold standard and taking account of best practice interstate and internationally in these areas, ensuring that we have an idea of what that is and that we are consulting with people with lived experience in the process of design. One of the key calls that ACTCOSS have made over time is that we actually have more people with disabilities and older Canberrans, when it comes to other parts of the city infrastructure, involved in doing that design.

**THE CHAIR:** One of the things that I hear frequently when I am out and about talking to my constituents is that in their local schools there is not the space for community organisations to operate and provide their services. Do your members have similar experiences?

**Ms Killen:** It is not something that we specifically consulted on, but when we spoke to the P&C council, they did bring that up. We have spoken to YouthCO in the past and they have talked about the lack of infrastructure for outreach and inreach programs that they would like to run in schools.

**Mr Wallace:** If I may add to that, Chair: groups just cannot find meeting spaces. I hear a lot of reports around the Calwell area that it is really hard to find meeting spaces and to use schools as meeting places. Also, in newer suburbs like Coombs and Wright in the Molonglo Valley, you have got a really nice school out there, but effectively it is the only piece of community kit that is available and it is locked up after hours.

**MR DAVIS:** I am interested in exploring the question of segregated schools a little bit more. You mentioned that there are two primary schools and two high schools in the ACT that you are aware of that operate under what you describe as the segregated model. I am sure you would agree when I say that they exist in part because there is a demand, particularly from parents, I understand. What would you say to those parents who have chosen those school environments for their young person who may find that some of the evidence you have presented today conflicts with the view that they have

taken which has led them to choose that school environment?

**Mr Wallace:** I might lead off on this one, but I am happy, Gemma, if you want to add. I would say a couple of things. The four is actually relatively high for a jurisdiction our size, so it points to a systemic issue. I would also say to those parents, “Wouldn’t it be great if we could find a mainstream environment where your child was fully supported, where there were no barriers, where the access was good and the supports were right to enable you to participate,” particularly given that we have a national investment in a national disability insurance scheme to ensure that people have the supports that they need outside of an education setting to participate. We now need education settings to step up. I would also invite people to consider whether we would think that it was okay that other groups of children in the community should be sent into different and segregated environments simply because they have an inherent personal characteristic.

**Ms Killen:** It might also be useful, again, to hear from lived experience in terms of presenting to people that might be making this choice. I think one of the reasons that parents might choose segregated settings is that they imagine there are smaller classrooms and more dedicated teacher time. But, again, the research tells us that in mainstream settings there is actually more focus on students, that there is more time between the teacher and the student in individual contexts and that students benefit from that. There is just higher quality teaching in mainstream settings than there is in segregated settings. So I think that going back to the evidence and emphasising lived experience voices would be helpful in that regard.

**MR DAVIS:** I imagine your organisation has had some conversations over the years with parents who have chosen a segregated school environment for their child. Would that be fair to say?

**Ms Killen:** I think so.

**Mr Wallace:** Yes.

**MR DAVIS:** In your experience, can you think of any parent who would not have preferred to have chosen a mainstream school if they were assured that the same resources and provisions would be available for their student?

**Mr Wallace:** I might lead off on this one. I can think of examples which go to people being concerned about perceptions of safety, bullying and abuse. Unfortunately, what the evidence tells us is that—I am happy to provide evidence and table that to the committee after the hearing—students with disabilities are not safer in segregated environments either in terms of violence, sexual abuse—I would call it rape—or other forms of safety; that, actually, it is being in an open setting that is proximate to the community and to other children and families that keeps people safe. Where we have had those kinds of conversations, where it has been, “Well, it’s a level playing field. We’ve got all the supports in place. I still don’t feel comfortable sending my child there,” it tends to be a perception that “my child would simply not be safe in this environment”. Well, the problem is the environment; the problem is not the child.

**MR DAVIS:** I have one last supplementary on that, if that is okay. In the majority of

schools, these mainstream schools, are you aware of a consistency of approach in terms of how students with a disability are treated across the board or is this on a case-by-case, school-by-school basis? Simply put: is the choice simply between a mainstream school and a segregated school or is there great variability amongst the mainstream schooling options for a student with a disability?

**Mr Wallace:** There are gradations. However, a lot of them are segregation by another name. Just because you are physically attached to a school, if you are at a segregated unit where all of the lessons are conducted separately and the only time that you meet with other children is at playtime, you are effectively in a segregated setting.

**MR DAVIS:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** I really appreciate the points you have made about, for example, the AEC wanting the community to use schools and perhaps not always making the places suitable for access. It certainly touches on point j in our terms of reference to look into the accessibility of school facilities by local communities, whether government or not. I would certainly welcome further submissions from you on your reporting of views by the AEC. I have been to meetings with Neighbourhood Watch groups and the P&Cs in schools. I think part of the intention of this inquiry is to encourage the executive branch to make schools more available to as many community groups as possible, which certainly touches on your accessibility issues.

Having heard now for the second time about segregation versus inclusive mainstream teaching environments, it is not just the student with a disability that is impacted by this; it is the mainstream, the students without disabilities, who are basically being invited to show their acceptance of someone who has not quite got all of the abilities that they have. I can see an argument for both communities, if I can put it that way—both the disabled student community and the non-disabled student community—to encourage an inclusive approach. I just leave that for your contemplation.

**THE CHAIR:** As there are no further questions, thank you for appearing. I do not think that you took it on notice, but we await the further information you plan to send through.

**Short suspension.**



**BRISBANE, MS KAMLA**, Acting Manager, Policy and Advocacy, Carers ACT  
**KELLY, MS LISA**, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for being here, Ms Kelly and Ms Brisbane, on behalf of Carers ACT. Please be aware that today's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege, which not only provides protection to witnesses but also obliges them to tell the truth. The provision of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter. All participants today are reminded of this. Please ensure that you have read and understood the pink privilege statement. Could you confirm that you have done so?

**Ms Kelly:** I have.

**Ms Brisbane:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have an opening statement?

**Ms Kelly:** I can make an opening statement, if you like; we can go to questions, if you like. I do not mind either way.

**THE CHAIR:** Our fate is in your hands; what would you prefer?

**Ms Kelly:** Let us go to questions. The opening statement will probably be a summary of the submission, anyway, so I am happy to go to questions, if that suits.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. I will lead off with the questions. In your submission you say that you would like to see the concept of accessibility expanded from a ramp and stairs to include the impact of the school environment on mental health.

**Ms Kelly:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** How can the ACT Education Directorate do that?

**Ms Kelly:** We think that accessibility in schools is about having an inclusive environment that makes the health and wellbeing, welcomeness and friendliness of a school accessible to everybody, whether that be a student that has a mental health condition, a student that has a sensory disorder, a parent with a mental health condition or a sensory disorder or, more traditionally, students or parents with physical disabilities in some way, shape or form.

Too often, when we talk about accessibility, we talk about it in terms of ramps, we talk about it in terms of doorframes and we talk about it in terms of wheelchairs or walkers. We do not consider psychosocial disability; we do not consider the size of classrooms, the number of students, the echo sound that happens in concrete where there is no grass and no trees, and there is no relief, having regard to the structure that we have put into a school.

The directorate needs to address it by not just looking at mental health as something that needs a student response and that we are responding to when there is an escalation in a student, but by looking at our responsibility as a directorate and as a school to create an environment that is conducive to learning and to being a place

where people want to be. What we see more often than not is that young people with mental health conditions stop attending school because the school is not inclusive and accessible for them.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any design standards that you think outline those central elements or is there guidance somewhere to create those spaces?

**Ms Brisbane:** Through the disability community, in our conversations, we have heard about the South Australian government and the Victorian government doing some work in that space. That has been informed—I had to dig a bit to find out—by some consultations with students, teachers and parents in 2016, particularly with respect to the South Australian government. They seem to have done quite a bit of work in that space and are talking about sensory spaces. They are talking about those kinds of issues—lighting, acoustics and busyness of spaces. That is where those guidelines spoke to what we were talking about.

**Ms Kelly:** The universal design principles should be applied and applicable to schools as much as they are to any other space. It is about that idea around how the environment is conducive to wellness, to social integration, to personalisation and to cultural appropriateness. Also, comfort and body fit are really important. I do not think we have seen a lot of evidence of the universal design principles being applied to new buildings in schools, and certainly not being retrospectively applied to old buildings.

We work in an old school building. We work at what was Holt primary school. That building is an interesting space; it echoes, it is cold, it is not particularly warm and welcoming, and it used to have five-year-olds running around in it.

**Ms Brisbane:** It is also not very private.

**Ms Kelly:** No.

**Ms Brisbane:** Everything echoes all the way up the hallway. These are the kinds of things—when you are de-escalating, you do not need every classroom hearing those conversations.

**Ms Kelly:** It is about those universal thoughts around how the student experiences this environment, how the student interacts in this environment and this space, and how we make that a more pleasant experience for everybody involved. The South Australian stuff was really useful for us to look at, and to look at how that has evolved; but, fundamentally, the universal design principles sit underneath that.

**Ms Brisbane:** That is what they reference, yes.

**MR DAVIS:** We are building schools at a rate of knots in the ACT. I am curious about how much, to this point, your organisation—or other organisations you are aware of that represent those who need care or those who provide care—have been consulted through the development of those plans. Has there been an effort made by the directorate to reach out to you and engage with you?

**Ms Kelly:** Never. I could expand on that, if you like.

**MR DAVIS:** I would be happy if you did.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we all want to hear that.

**MR CAIN:** Never is never, I thought.

**Ms Kelly:** Not at all.

**MR DAVIS:** I would love to hear more.

**Ms Kelly:** We are not consulted. We are not involved. We are part of a disability education reference group, but even in that space the talk about disability is often about special schools. It is about Woden and it is about Black Mountain. It is not often about how we build an inclusive school in a new school space and environment. Even the newer schools that have been opened are already not particularly disability conducive or friendly. We are not getting consulted and we are not getting asked. I am not aware of disability groups that are, either. The architects are involved and I am not sure who else, but certainly not us. It would be useful to be involved, though.

**MR DAVIS:** To be super specific, that is quite startling to me. In the schools that have been developed in the last, let us say, five years, you are not aware of any peak advocacy group or organisations representing people with lived experience that have been informing how those schools are built, how they are laid out and their infrastructure?

**Ms Kelly:** I have been CEO at Carers ACT for 4½ years. I have been at Carers ACT for five years. In my tenure we have not been asked to provide any input into school design.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned that these newer builds have issues. Can you expand on what some of those issues are?

**Ms Kelly:** With some of the bigger schools in particular, the big super schools in particular, the distance for people, in terms of walking distance and space distance, is not necessarily conducive, particularly to physical disabilities and particularly for those that do not require wheelchairs but have fatigue aspects to them. The ability to get from one classroom to another at speed is not always there. Those are the things that make people and children with disability stand out from their friends and make them not want to attend.

Some of them are also designed on that idea, particularly the colleges, around, “Let’s have adult learning environments and spaces,” but often people with mental health are not able to manage that much flexibility in structure and flexibility in space, and they tend to get lost in the vastness of the space that is being used in those designs and in those spaces.

We have had some examples of sensory gardens being put into schools, both new ones and retrospectively, but they are not accessible. So they have been put in a part

of the school that you have to have permission to use. I say, “Actually, if a child needs a sensory space, they are not capable in that moment of asking for permission to use it.” Good idea—poor layout design. Again we are using this idea that accessibility is around whether somebody can get through doorways, and whether we have got rid of stairs. We are not thinking about anything outside a wheelchair, to some degree.

**MR DAVIS:** You used the phrase super schools.

**Ms Kelly:** Yes.

**MR DAVIS:** To meet the objectives of your organisation, and a lot of the things that you have pointed out in your recommendations, are you confident that, with the right resourcing and the right plans, super schools can accommodate those who need and those who provide care? Alternatively, should the ACT be considering more schools that are smaller?

**Ms Kelly:** I have a concern that super schools lose children with higher degrees of vulnerability. Having regard to the size of those schools and the number of students at those schools, it becomes very easy to be lost and not seen in the space. To have that sort of personalisation component of universal design you need to be seen, and you need to be valued as a part of the community that you are in. When you are one of a thousand versus one of 200, it is really hard, even for those schools, to make the adjustments that are needed to suit that one child or that one family.

It is really intimidating for parents with mental health issues in particular to interact in a school where there are a thousand kids, lots of teachers and lots of noise in the space. So they are not coming into the school. We know that kids have better outcomes at school when their parents are actively engaged in their education in the school community.

I do not have any hard evidence to point to today, but we certainly know about and hear from carers that their children struggle more at those super schools. We struggle as an agency to engage in those super schools more, too, than we do in the smaller schools. Young carers were part of our submission, because they are also students in schools, and we would find it harder to set up a young carer group in those larger schools, because they are big. Where do you even start? Who is the right teacher and how do they know who their students are?

**MR CAIN:** A lot of what you have outlined would be to the benefit, in my opinion, of the non-disabled school community, frankly.

**Ms Kelly:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Obviously, a person with a disability has a greater challenge, and that is your particular focus. I am disappointed that you are not consulted on the design side of things, and that is something that the committee might focus on during this inquiry. What about a child who feels, having regard to their own circumstances or situation, that they would prefer to be in a segregated school or even to be schooled at home?

**Ms Kelly:** What is the question?

**MR CAIN:** Do you have a view on where a child who is a client of yours has expressed a desire to be within a segregated school or even to be educated at home?

**Ms Kelly:** I will try and answer that by breaking down our client group, because I think the answer is slightly different for different parts of our client group. A lot of our young carers would prefer to be schooled at home, and we would in most cases oppose that as a standard position, because we believe very strongly that the social interaction that young people get at school and the relief and the respite they get at school are fundamental. Being a young carer is challenging enough to start with; to become fully isolated at home and be consumed by that caring role 24 hours a day will have a significant impact on that young person and on their ability to reach their goals in the future, particularly if they are caring for a parent as well, because to be successful at home-schooling you need a parent that will enforce the structure and the rigor that need to go with home-schooling. That would be my answer, if we are thinking about that group of students.

Where we are thinking about segregation into smaller, specialised schools, carers of children with fairly significant cognitive disability will often express to us that they prefer their children to be in schools that are specifically designed to meet the need of their child—that they have experienced in the past a fair degree of harassment and bullying that may happen to their child.

The stories that I hear from carers will be things like, “My child shouldn’t be the guinea pig for better inclusion in the community,” and “They shouldn’t be sacrificed so that other kids are taught how to be more inclusive.” There is a school of carers very strongly in support of segregated schooling. Mostly, that is with children that have quite significant cognitive disabilities and require very modified education programs.

For the children that sit a bit further up the scale, most of our carers in that group would say that they prefer their children to be seen to be included in mainstream schooling, but for that to work, there needs to be inclusive practice. There needs to be a school philosophy about acting on bullying and on actively encouraging inclusivity of difference, rather than exclusivity of difference.

There is concern sometimes that the teaching aids that are allocated to people with disability are used in more general classroom behaviour management and that that specialisation is not given. That just isolates and further delays the progress of the students. It is a bit of a mixed answer to that question because there will not be one solution.

What we need to be doing in terms of having inclusive community is allowing for choice and control—having options for people that will fit and meet the needs of their circumstances, but in ways that keep them connected to community. If all of us looked back on our schooling now, for some of us it was possibly a little more recently than for others, but when I look back, a long time ago—

**MR DAVIS:** I think she’s talking about us.

**THE CHAIR:** You are the youngest here.

**Ms Kelly:** Yes, he is the youngster! It is that experience of community that sticks with us about school. It is the friends that we made; it is the way we were treated that sets the foundation of expectation for the rest of our lives, to some degree.

**MR CAIN:** For the record, I was a student 20 years ago.

**THE CHAIR:** Still a student of life.

**MR DAVIS:** One of the things you mentioned that I found quite startling was the number of young carers who would prefer the home-schooling option if it were available to them. Do you think it would be fair to say that, for those young carers, that feels a forced choice, based on their responsibility as a carer, rather than necessarily the appeal of home-schooling? If so, I am interested in exploring instances where you have run young carers programs in schools—you mentioned they were easier to do in smaller schools than in bigger schools—where the organisation has been able to provide alternative pathways or help the young carer to explore their options and perhaps even stay in a school environment.

**Ms Kelly:** For the young carers who really struggle to stay at school, there is a combination of factors that lead them home. If they are caring for a parent with a mental health condition and there is an erratic-ness to that condition, that means their engagement in school becomes so erratic that they cannot keep the connections well and they are often getting into trouble, because they are behind, the teacher is not sure why they have not been at school, or there are questions about their attendance. It becomes easier to just stop attending.

Where the schools do not make good concession for carers, that is the other problem. I remember a young carer I worked with a number of years ago who talked about the fact that he went to school every day, but his ability to learn was really compromised because every time he heard an ambulance go by, he thought that his mother was dead. Half of his brain—in fact probably more than half of his brain—was actually at home for the day. When schools brought in rules saying, “You can’t have mobile phones,” kids cannot monitor. They cannot ring and they do not know what is going on, so it becomes easier not to go.

With respect to another student at a school that we intervened with, his mother has a heart condition. We purchased her a product that was connected to her watch. Basically, it sent a signal to a mobile phone if her heart was starting to react, because that would lead to her fainting. The signal for that was getting sent to her son’s mobile phone. He had to hand in his mobile phone to a locker every morning at school. For the seven or eight hours that he was at school, he could not monitor his mum. While he was there, he was not participating in learning. It is often about having to make those adjustments that become too hard for kids and they just stop going.

The other one is around the fact that kids will often experience stigma and discrimination about the condition of their parent. That makes school become a place that is not safe. If there are lots of conversation about mental health or disability in negative ways, it is an unsafe environment. They are often the reasons. It is not

necessarily about being forced home, but it just becomes easier to stay at home.

We often go in and work with schools about how we can make concessions. For the young boy with the phone, we got the school to agree that a teacher carried the phone around, so that if it did activate and it did buzz, somebody was aware that that had happened, and they were able to go and notify him and get help to mum, because that was the most important part of that system. There are often ways around it; it is just that we often have to go in and advocate for those ways around it, rather than the schools themselves.

What I would really love to see about carers in schools is that it is identified on school enrolments. The school enrolment form asks, “Are you a carer?” Yet we do not then proactively do anything about that. We do not, as a systemic response, talk to kids as they start in school, and they have marked that off on their enrolment form, about “What does that mean for you? What does that look like for you and how do we make the concessions or the inclusions that we need to make, to make school safe and accessible for you?” We wait until they stop attending; by that stage, it is too late.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Kelly and Ms Brisbane, thank you for appearing today. Unfortunately, we are out of time. The committee would like to thank Carers ACT for making a submission.

**Ms Kelly:** Thanks for having us.

**ELLIOTT, MS VERONICA**, Policy Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome. Please be aware that today's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege, which provides protection to witnesses, and obliges them to tell the truth. The provision of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter, and all participants today are reminded of this. Please ensure that you have read and understood the pink privilege statement that is in front of you, and confirm for the record that you understand it.

**Ms Elliott:** I have. We are the peak body for P&Cs representing public school parents and carers across public schools. We thank the committee for this inquiry and for the opportunity to appear this afternoon. Our submission is based on both feedback from individual P&Cs and collated feedback from members over the last few years. We recognise that school principals work hard to accommodate growing student numbers and do their best to maintain schools with what they have.

Council strongly believes that a quality educational experience needs a foundation of safe, accessible and comfortable public school infrastructure. Our school infrastructure allows our schools to be inspiring, welcoming places, where students can shine.

However, we find that a significant amount of work is needed to ensure that public school infrastructure can support quality educational experiences into the future. Council considers that this work requires an investment in our infrastructure that does not take money away from teaching and learning, and the supports that go behind teaching and learning.

Our concerns about school infrastructure begin with the overall management and planning of school maintenance and growth. These important community assets require a clear and equitable framework to manage and oversee the maintenance of school infrastructure and facilities, in addition to a centralised team of property professionals to assist schools to meet their needs.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Elliott. I will lead off with questions. How would school communities like to be engaged by ACT Education when it comes to planning infrastructure?

**Ms Elliott:** At the moment planning happens very much at a school level between the directorate and the school, and school leadership. What we are seeing now is that P&Cs and parents and carers are asking for a bit more information about how that is happening in the planning phase, rather than the decision phase. People are finding out year to year what the plan is for next year in their school, and they are asking what the long-term plan is, I guess.

**THE CHAIR:** Would the existing structures of P&Cs be an appropriate way for the ACT Education Directorate to engage with school communities?

**Ms Elliott:** Yes.



**MR DAVIS:** In individual schools, where you are saying that planning decisions are being made on a year-by-year basis, do you believe that there is a systemic reason why that is the case or is this the nature of the decentralised schools model? Does it vary depending on school leadership, the active parents and the P&C or school board at the time? Do we have a consistent problem in all of our schools with this lack of forward planning or is it a bit more case by case?

**Ms Elliott:** Council knows that there is some forward planning that does occur at the directorate level, and that is based on demographic modelling. I think they purchased that off ANU. How that translates to school-by-school level, I cannot particularly say. We do not have any evidence around that.

We do know that, whilst there might be an overall plan for a period of time, that is based on modelling. Schools are planning more around what the enrolment numbers are looking like and how many classes they might have for that period. That is why, potentially, you are getting a 12-month cycle. Even though there are some projections, they seem to be—

**MR CAIN:** With this annual planning approach, it does involve the local P&C—or does it?

**Ms Elliott:** It does not involve—

**MR CAIN:** It does not. My next question was: does it also involve the ACT P&C? Obviously, the answer would be no.

**Ms Elliott:** No, not routinely.

**MR CAIN:** It just involves the department and principals?

**Ms Elliott:** The school leadership, yes.

**MR DAVIS:** My question goes particularly to the situation that led us to this inquiry—the management of hazardous materials in schools. Quite specifically, is the council confident that they have been consulted with to an adequate degree to this point on the plan to manage hazardous material in schools?

**Ms Elliott:** We can say that council is confident with the level of information that we have seen recently coming from the Education Directorate. I know that there were sessions last week where parents could drop in and talk to experts about hazardous materials in schools, and that they were located throughout the ACT. We have received a briefing around hazardous materials and the way that is managed. We have seen some key changes around how information is communicated to the school communities, which is really important.

**MR DAVIS:** Has council had any conversations with the Catholic Education office, the independent schools association or other peak groups representing their schools on hazardous material across their schools? I am sure that it is not just public schools that are dealing with this issue.

**Ms Elliott:** No, we have not. We have not had those conversations. It has not been raised with us by any of our members. Usually, those kinds of questions would arise from their membership directly to their peak bodies.

**MR DAVIS:** I am trying to find, perhaps, a silver lining to the cloud. How, as an organisation, as a council, have you found membership of parents in their individual P&Cs and active membership of the council more broadly as a result of this issue? It has piqued the interest of a lot of parents. Has that meant that they have been engaged in your organisation more broadly regarding their child's education or has this become the linchpin for other parents to engage?

**Ms Elliott:** Do you mean in terms of the hazardous materials?

**MR DAVIS:** That is right.

**Ms Elliott:** It would very much depend school by school, depending on the circumstances of each school and what their experiences were around hazardous materials. For some communities, it has been a topical issue which has increased participation with council—for others, not so much. It remains something that people are concerned about.

**MR CAIN:** We touched on this; recommendation 4 is one that stood out for me. We have canvassed hazardous materials with you, and that is obviously a high-priority issue. You are recommending a centralised team of property professionals. What is your understanding of the current approach? What is the mechanism for a new school design to appear and then be built? What is your understanding of that process?

**Ms Elliott:** I could not give you an understanding of the process around new school design. I can talk to you a bit about the basis for recommendation 4, which was around the fact that school principals are responsible for maintenance within their school community. Council considers them to be educational experts and leaders in their field, in teaching and learning. Does that include an understanding of property and property maintenance, when you might routinely do some maintenance or when you might need to completely renovate a bathroom?

**MR CAIN:** Hence your recommendation 4.

**Ms Elliott:** Hence recommendation 4. We think that there is a need to have some collaborative advice, some good-quality advice, around that to support principals so that they are not making decisions that are outside their area of expertise.

**MR CAIN:** More broadly, what is your understanding of the rules of engagement between the education department and P&Cs, with the peak body?

**Ms Elliott:** In terms of—

**MR CAIN:** Why are you there, from their point of view?

**Ms Elliott:** We provide advice to government; we represent the voice of parents and carers across public schools. Sometimes we are another avenue for information to get

back through to the Education Directorate.

**MR CAIN:** What are you actually consulted on, as a—

**Ms Elliott:** We can be consulted on a range of things, not just within education but sometimes outside education, on education-related matters—for instance, transport issues, and different sorts of things. We do consultations around inclusive education and we participate in various committees—that kind of thing.

**MR CAIN:** Are there any gaps, from your point of view, where you are not consulted? Maybe this feeds into your recommendations.

**Ms Elliott:** Yes, it really feeds into the recommendations, in terms of different levels of thinking and building some confidence within the community around planning not only for capacity but also around maintenance.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you expand on recommendation 9, which reads:

Council urges the Education Directorate to remove all libraries and specialist facilities from all school capacity calculations.

Do you have some background as to why you made that recommendation?

**Ms Elliott:** Yes. One of the things that we see around libraries and specialist facilities like a dance room, an art room or a music room is that with school growth and increases in school enrolment numbers, those rooms are often converted back into classrooms. A couple of years ago, we were successful in having some of those specialist facilities removed from the school capacity calculation. That means those spaces can no longer be returned to being a classroom. They are highly valued spaces from a P&C and parent and carer point of view; they are part of what people see as a quality education.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned that, with some of those spaces, you had success in getting them returned—

**Ms Elliott:** There were about 17 schools which were put on a list, and those rooms were removed from capacity calculations. I do not have the list with me; sorry.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you provide that?

**Ms Elliott:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** That would be wonderful. I am assuming that, if you had success with some, you did not have success with others. How many schools were there where you were not successful in having those spaces reclassified?

**Ms Elliott:** Our understanding is that there are 89 schools at the moment, so it involved 17 out of 89.

**THE CHAIR:** In all of those schools, those spaces are often used for non-specialist—

**Ms Elliott:** They are counted towards the capacity calculation of the school. I cannot explain how the calculation works because I do not have the full detail.

**THE CHAIR:** That makes two of us; don't worry.

**MR CAIN:** Obviously, your preference is for those to be excluded from that calculation, which means that, where there is extra need, we have a dedicated classroom rather than losing a specialist space.

**Ms Elliott:** That is correct.

**MR CAIN:** Would you say that, across the board, P&Cs in the ACT are broadly supportive of that?

**Ms Elliott:** I can confidently say that.

**MR DAVIS:** I want to go to recommendation 11, which reads:

Council recommends that demountable classrooms are only used for temporary increases in student capacity.

This committee had some interesting testimony during the estimates process earlier in the year. We heard about varying degrees of demountable classrooms being used in our schools—from some that are well below the standard that their school community would accept, to others that are the leaders in their field and that some would argue are more sustainable and comfortable learning and teaching spaces than some physically permanent structures. Could you elaborate a little bit on that recommendation? How much nuance is there in the council's position on what a demountable classroom looks like? In fact, is the point of that recommendation actually around a certain standard of teaching and learning environment?

**Ms Elliott:** It is important to acknowledge that demountable classrooms do vary in their structure and comfort factor, noting that some of them are quite modern and are probably well air-conditioned—temperature and climate controlled. Some of the newer ones certainly look very nice.

Recommendation 11 really goes to the crux of the issue in terms of school capacity, which is that adding on demountable classrooms is a good measure to adjust for temporary increases in student numbers for a couple of years—maybe two. When you look at some of the growth, and particularly growth in the inner north, you are seeing quite a sustained level of growth over a period of time.

Adding demountable classrooms often does not add additional facilities within a school. Let us talk about some random numbers. If you have a school of 600 and you are adding another four or five classrooms, there are not necessarily any extra bathrooms that go with that and there is no additional library space. The issue around demountables is that they do take up a certain amount of space on the school block. That has implications usually for green space or playgrounds.

**MR CAIN:** Demountables, from your experience, are not usually butted up against an existing infrastructure; they are put out into an open area, and there is no longer an open area, once they are—

**Ms Elliott:** What we have seen and heard is that they are located in an area that once was allocated to outdoor space, which we envisage students would otherwise have been occupying at recess and lunch times.

**THE CHAIR:** There being no further questions, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Ms Elliott, for appearing today, as well as for the submission from the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, I would also like to thank ACTCOSS, Carers ACT and Advocacy for Inclusion for their time this afternoon. The secretary will provide all witnesses with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing, when it is available, to check for accuracy. If any witnesses have taken any questions on notice today, could you please liaise with the committee secretary to provide answers. The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 2.56 pm.**