



Celebrating School Communities

Council is co-ordinating a week of celebrating our school communities. We have lots of fun ideas, so make sure your school is part of it!

What's it all about?

Council members have declared May 17 - 24 to be the Week of School Community here in the ACT. It is a chance to demonstrate and celebrate the role that parents and the wider community play in our schools. It is also a great opportunity to get more parents and carers through the doors and engaging in what happens in your school. If nothing else, it is a chance for parents, students and teachers to have fun together!

We are encouraging all P&Cs and their schools to be part of the week by staging an event. Have a look at our ideas on page 4 to help you come up with something that will work in your school. Note that the week is not about fundraising, but building community ties.

Council can offer advice and will compile a list of all the school events across the ACT, as well as hosting an ACT-wide event of our own. We will also make sure there is plenty of publicity for everything happening that week to highlight the role we all play in making our schools successful.

Why do it?

Research has shown time and time again that family involvement in school improves student achievement: better grades, attendance, attitude and behaviour. Parents and communities benefit

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With Autumn coming, how about holding a pumpkin painting competition in your school community?

Photo courtesy Asif Ali www.flickr.com/photos/asifali1985/5112711353

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From the President



Viv Pearce

Education has certainly been in the headlines since our last edition of ParentACTion.

Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne has made three moves which are of concern to Council. Firstly, he plans to convert a quarter of all public schools to “independent public schools” by 2017, despite a lack of evidence that the type of administrative autonomy he proposes actually improves outcomes. We are concerned that the plan could, by creating a two-tiered public system, reinforce existing inequity rather than address it.

Secondly there has been a watering down of commitments to the ‘Gonski’ funding model for schools, a model borne of a rigorous process, incorporating the view of many stakeholders, including Council. We strongly support the findings of the Gonski panel and the need for significant additional funds for our schools.

Finally, Minister Pyne has begun a review of the National Curriculum. We are disappointed by the lack of political balance and curriculum expertise in the choice of the review panel members.

We need Council to be vigilant. A strong advocacy for public education will be needed to remind politicians that proper funding for schools is an economic imperative not something on a wish list.

Currently there are four ‘Gonski vans’ travelling the nation, building support for a full commitment to Gonski in the May budget. They arrive in Canberra on March 18 for breakfast at Richardson Primary before heading to parliament house. I urge you to get out in support of this campaign. There are petitions to sign at igivegonski.com.au and needtosucceedalliance.com

We all know how important the role of parents and the community is in our schools, so let’s celebrate this relationship! We are asking all P&Cs

to join us in celebrating a Week of School Communities from May 17 to 24. Read more on our front page and page 4. What will your P&C do?

Our work in helping canteens to remain financially viable continues to gain momentum (details on the back page). Several schools now have the online ordering system running and cheaper prices via NSWBuy are on their way. If your school isn’t yet on board, contact our office soon! These projects are part of the ACT Government’s Fresh Tastes initiative to create a healthy food and drink culture in primary schools (see page 8).

Council is here to help school P&C associations to function effectively. Our training workshops in March are a must for committee members. Come and find out more about your role on the P&C and how to make it work for everyone (see page 3).

We also take our role as advocates for parents seriously. Our work continues this year in representing your views on numerous groups and committees, having a say on government policies as they are being drafted, and in bringing parents’ concerns to government representatives. If you have system-wide concerns that are not being addressed adequately at your school, ask your school’s Council delegate to bring the issue to a meeting. Often such issues affect other schools and Council is a forum for agreeing on a common course of action.

Recently, Council has been consulted in the drafting of the Education Directorate’s new policy on Gifted and Talented education which is now available on the Directorate’s website.

Lastly, Council had the great honour of winning the Award for Excellence in the ACT Chief Minister’s Inclusion Awards at the end of last year (see page 10). It is wonderful to have Council’s great work as an advocate for parents of children with a disability recognised in this way. Thanks to everyone who has given so much to this area over the years. ●

Need help running the P&C?

Our workshops are here for you!

Each year we run a series of workshops to help P&C members make the most of their roles and improve the way your association runs. The sessions are free and refreshments are provided.

Effective P&C workshop

This workshop will help P&C members get to grips with their role. It covers ways to improve how your association works, recruiting volunteers and the P&C as an employer. New school parents, new P&C members and existing P&C officers should find this program of great benefit.

The workshop is divided into five 30 minute modules, each focusing on a different aspect of running your P&C. Participants are welcome to attend for any of the individual modules if they wish. There is time in each module for questions.

This workshop will be run twice:

Thursday March 20, 6:30 – 9pm

Headley Beare Centre for Teaching & Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

Module 1: 6:30 – 7:00

Module 2: 7:00 – 7:30

Module 3: 7:30 – 8:00

Module 4: 8:00 – 8:30

Module 5: 8:30 – 9:00

Saturday March 22, 2 – 4:30pm

Sports House, 100 Maitland St, Hackett.

Module 1: 2:00 – 2:30

Module 2: 2:30 – 3:00

Module 3: 3:00 – 3:30

Module 4: 3:30 – 4:00

Module 5: 4:00 – 4:30

Module 1: The basics.

We look at the parent-school partnership, the role of your P&C and what the P&C Council does.

Module 2: Recruiting, promotion, fundraising.

We provide ideas about how to recruit support, communicate with parents and raise funds.

Module 3: Your role on the team.

Time to look at the detail of the roles and

responsibilities of your P&C executive (president, secretary, treasurer, subcommittee chairs).

Module 4: All things paperwork.

We will cover keeping accurate records, running useful meetings, and collecting and using feedback from your P&C events.

Module 5: Raising voices.

We look at expanding your P&C to operate as an employer, handling concerns in the school system and raising your voice in the community.

Treasurers' workshop

This is a great opportunity for new and current P&C treasurers to ask questions about any aspect of their role and tasks. Experienced P&C treasurers and the P&C Council's accountant will be there to provide information, answer questions and discuss concerns about P&C finances, record keeping, annual reporting, audits, insurance, handling monies, affiliation fees, taxation status, staff employment, fund-raising, reporting by sub-committees and so on.

Thursday March 27, 7:00 – 8:30pm

Headley Beare Centre for Teaching & Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

Insurance workshop

This workshop focuses on the insurance package available for P&C Associations and how to complete the paperwork. We recommend all treasurers and presidents attend as it will help you avoid errors, including over-payments. You can also ask questions of the brokers' representatives.

Topics include valuing property, risk assessment and management, council insurance policy cover, liability limits, excesses, completing declaration forms, online submissions and paying invoices.

Thursday April 3, 7:00 – 8:30pm

Headley Beare Centre for Teaching & Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

To book your attendance call 6241 5759 or email contact@actparents.org.au •

Celebrating School Communities

Continued from front page

too, feeling connected and together building a safer, stronger community. This is a relationship worth celebrating!

Community events make it easier for parents to become involved, help them to feel like they belong and erode barriers between parents and teachers. Experience has shown that simply socialising builds goodwill between the school and parents, and fosters a greater respect.

This is important because research shows that parents' attitudes to teachers and schooling have a great influence on their child's attitudes and hence their success. In small practical ways, it helps teachers too. For example, if a teacher needs to contact a parent about a disagreeable incident, parents are more likely to respond constructively if they have met and chatted to the teacher and share an understanding.

Some ideas

Consider these ideas for great community events:

- a bake-off
- food/wine/cheese tasting (maybe a local supplier can help)
- a community dinner where everyone brings a plate, or breakfast served by the students
- parents and friends sports carnival
- board-games night, movie or trivia night
- run a competition — perhaps a drawing or photography competition
- host a community bike ride starting and ending at your school
- community scavenger hunt
- break a world record together (see box)
- plant some trees
- bury a time capsule
- school sing-along or family dance evening
- family science night at the school.

“In my local schools there are choirs, a circus program, drumming group, robotics program; and a local parent runs a unicycle club! Just imagine the fun if these activities were extended to the wider school community!”

Feeling Daunted? Keep it simple!

There are simple ways to create great events by leveraging off existing programs and community groups. Viv Pearce, Council's president notes: “In just the public schools around me there are choirs, bands, a circus program, drumming group, and robotics program! And a local parent runs a unicycle club! Just imagine the fun if these activities were extended to the wider school community.”

Things to consider:

- **Move an event** which you regularly run (art show, walk-a-thon, trivia night) to be included in this week.
- **Extend a fun school activity to parents.** If your school has a drumming group, science club or choir which the kids love, chances are that parents will love it too! Children also like to share what they are doing at school with their parents.
- **Tap into parent expertise.** Perhaps a local parent runs craft classes, or is involved with an orienteering club and could get these events happening on a bigger scale at the school. Many clubs and community groups love the chance to show what they do and recruit new members.



A community sports carnival could be great way to bring people together. Parents versus teachers or students versus parents. Who would win?

Photo courtesy www.flickr.com/photos/ryry9379/3475641965

How to break a world record

If your school is keen to try setting a world record, you have two options: choose an existing record to beat, or come up with your own world-record worthy achievement to set a new record. Either way, start your quest at www.guinnessworldrecords.com where you can search existing records for one you think you can beat, or submit an application for a new record.

Our quick search uncovered a few records which your school might find beatable. How about the largest gathering of plush toys (6,540 toys)? Or the most people simultaneously folding t-shirts (302), applying lipstick (1002), whistling (672) or bobbing for apples (357)?

If you are coming up with a brand new record to set, you will need to outline your idea and submit an application to Guinness World Records. The process is free, but it can take up to six weeks to find out if your idea has been accepted (this can be fast-tracked for a fee). Guinness will then send you all the information you need for your attempt. An acceptable record must be: measurable (fastest, longest, heaviest, most); based on a single variable (eg. not the longest fastest item, only the fastest or the longest); verifiable; and, breakable.

Perhaps your school community can muster the most people standing on one leg at once. Even if you can't, you are bound to have a lot of fun!

- **Leverage local community groups.** Contact the local martial arts club, dance class or sports group to see if they would like to do a demonstration for the school and get parents involved. **Local scout groups**, in particular, are a great source of community fun, expertise and equipment. You could contact your local scout troupe to see if leaders there are willing to come and run a fun activity for the community. The P&C could support their efforts with some catering for the masses.

Getting Started

Get the School Communities Week on the agenda of your next P&C meeting and brainstorm ideas for an event which would get your community together and interacting around the school. Once you know what you are doing, please let the Council office know. If you need help, give us a call. •

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Growing healthy young minds – KidsMatter in the ACT

Claire Miller of KidsMatter explains how an in-school program is improving the lives of young children. Because mental health really matters.

Mental health and wellbeing is vital for learning and life. Children who are mentally healthy are better learners, benefit from life experiences, and have stronger relationships with family members, school staff and their peers.

The good news is that most Australian children experience good mental health. Parents, families and schools can also take concrete, positive steps to help enhance children's mental health, wellbeing and learning outcomes.

KidsMatter Primary is a mental health and wellbeing initiative for Australian primary schools. It aims to contribute to:

- improving the mental health of children
- reducing mental health problems amongst children
- achieving greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties and their families.

KidsMatter provides proven methods, tools and support to help schools, parents and carers, health services, and the wider community to nurture happy, balanced kids.

This national initiative has been adopted by more than 1700 schools around Australia, and nearly half of all primary schools in the ACT are implementing KidsMatter.

KidsMatter was developed collaboratively by the Principals Australia Institute, the Australian Psychological Society and beyondblue, with funding from the Australian Government.

A wide range of free resources that families, schools and health professionals can use to enhance and support children's mental health and wellbeing are available on the KidsMatter website:

www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/information-sheets

Parents interested in finding out how their child's school can be involved with KidsMatter Primary can contact KidsMatter Primary ACT at Claire.miller@act.gov.au or phone 6207 9706. ●



New ACT Dyslexia support

At the end of last year, popular author Jackie French launched Dyslexia SPELD ACT (DSA), a new support group for children with specific learning difficulties and their parents. Louise Dalglish Smith describes the help they can provide.

DSA is a not-for-profit organisation which provides information and services to people with specific learning disabilities (SPELD) their parents, teachers and all those who work with them. SPELD, of which the most common is dyslexia, is estimated to affect up to 20% of the population, creating a barrier to effective learning.

DSA works to increase community awareness of SPELD and lobby authorities on behalf of members. They also provide professional development programs and publications so that members have access to the latest evidence-based teaching strategies for dealing with learning difficulties.

There are currently sister SPELD organisations operating in most other Australian states, but until now there been no such group in the ACT.

Clinical Director of DSA, Jo Whithear, has been part of an ACT Education and Training Directorate taskforce examining how to teach children with learning difficulties. "It is clear that when parents receive a diagnosis for their child of a specific learning disability here in the ACT, such as dyslexia or other learning difficulties, it is often a confronting and daunting experience," explained Ms Whithear.

"We hope that through the successful delivery of our services, students with specific learning difficulties, particularly dyslexia, and their families will have the opportunity and support to reach their full potential and have access to professional advocacy, support and resources." •



Author Jackie French reads to primary school children during the launch of DSA — ACT's own dyslexia support organisation.

iPads for kids struggling with literacy

The ACT Education directorate is running a **free parent workshop** to explore the many ways iPads can support children who are struggling with **reading, writing** and **being organised** with school work.

When: Tuesday 8th April 2014

Where: Hedley Beare Centre for Teaching and Learning, 51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

Time: 4.00 - 5.30pm

Presenter: Greg O'Connor (Spectronics)

RSVP: julie.ireland@act.gov.au by April 4

For further information phone: 6207 2331

Fresh Tastes for schools

The ACT Government's new Fresh Tastes initiative aims to create a healthy food and drink culture in ACT schools. The phasing out of sugary drinks from schools, widely reported in the media, is one part of the plan.

The program, launched at Palmerston Primary School by Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, in February has six 'action areas'. Schools, in consultation with their communities, will set their own goals and decide in which areas to be active each year.

"The idea is to make healthy food and drink a stronger emphasis at school" said Katy at the launch. "This is an exciting program which supports classroom learning about good nutrition and growing, cooking and selling healthy food and drink in ACT schools. Fresh Tastes also provides optional and practical information for parents to help with packing healthy choices into lunch boxes," the Chief Minister said.

Palmerston primary was chosen for the launch because of their whole-school approach to healthy choices. Growing and caring for their extensive school garden is an integral part of the curriculum and is extended to a healthy cooking program using the produce. The produce is also used in the school's canteen, newly named the 'Palm Café'. Students and parents have also had input into healthy choices for the canteen menu.

Classroom teacher Rachel Levinson is proud of the program, which she works hard to maintain. In school holidays, parents help with watering and sales of vegetables every Friday morning fund the garden project.

The six Fresh Tastes action areas, in which schools are encouraged to work, are outlined below.

Healthy food and drink guidelines

Schools are encouraged to align with the ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy, which includes the phase-out of sales of sugary drinks. Only drinks designated "red" under the traffic-



Palmerston Primary School year 3 and 4 students show ACT Chief Minister around their school vegetable garden at the launch of Fresh Tastes

light system are affected, so flavoured milks and small-serves of pure fruit juice are still permitted. On offer for schools working in this area are two water-bottle refill stations along with a reusable water bottle for every student.

Classroom learning

This action area is about equipping teachers to deliver nutrition education so that activities and experiences about food health and nutrition are embedded in classroom learning. There will be professional development for teachers and schools will receive a set of Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program teaching resources.

Food for sale

This activity is all about switching canteen menus to healthier options. Menu assessment, advisory services and Council's canteen support projects (see story on back page) are integral. The whole school community can also receive training on the traffic light system of assessing the nutritional value of food and drinks.

Green grants

Growing food

Initiatives in this area will support schools to begin, expand or maintain a school garden, promising gardening supplies and advice as well as family workshops.

Cooking food

Teacher training, advice, kitchen starter packs and trade discounts on cooking equipment are on offer to help schools integrate cooking into their programs, aiming to provide practical experience in preparing and sampling healthy foods.

Food from home

Families are encouraged to pack healthy school lunch-boxes with discounts for families on fruit and vegetables at partner businesses and training in the traffic light system of assessing foods.

Speak to your principal about which action areas you would like your school to work on. ●



Fresh food from the Palmerston Primary's garden got everyone who attended the launch munching.

If your school and P&C have environmental or health projects planned, there are grants available to help.

The Teachers Environment Fund assists public schools in their long-term sustainability through grants for water and energy saving projects, composting, recycling, biodiversity projects, tree planting, and other environmental programs. See www.teachersenvirofund.com.au for details. Applications close April 11.

Keep Australia Beautiful and Coca-Cola Foundation Community Recycling Grants offer financial assistance for local communities to improve drink bottle recycling. Schools can apply with the key criteria being the involvement or education of the wider community. Apply from April 14 to June 13. See www.kab.org.au/beverage-container-recycling-grants/.

The Junior Landcare Garden Grants provide funds for activities such as bush tucker gardens, vegetable gardens, composting and green waste recycling, waterwise and carbon gardening activities, and for the purchase of children's gardening equipment. Details are still to be announced but there are likely to be three rounds, with the first opening in April. Check the website for details. www.juniorlandcare.com.au/grants-2/coles-grant.

The SITA Community Grants may also be of interest. They provide payments of up to \$5,000 for projects that have a positive impact on local communities. Public schools and not-for-profit preschools/kindergartens are eligible to apply. Round two opens in June. For more information, see www.sitacommunitygrants.com.au/apply.

There are grants of up to \$15,000 for innovative projects to create a healthier weight profile in children, including improving eating habits and increasing physical activity. Details on the Health Promotion Innovation Fund is available from www.health.act.gov.au with applications due by June 20.

Council awarded

Council's long and dedicated work as an advocate for parents of students with a disability was recognised at the end of last year.

In December, Council was awarded the overall Award for Excellence in the ACT Chief Minister's Inclusions Awards which recognise businesses, organisations and individuals which have excelled in encouraging, welcoming and supporting people with a disability. Council also took out the Education and Training section of the awards.



Council President Viv Pearce and Council Executive Member Donna Reed proudly accepted the awards on behalf of Council.

“We are thrilled and proud to have Council’s efforts to raise disability awareness recognised with these awards,” said Council President Viv Pearce.

“This is wonderful recognition for all of our dedicated volunteers who have given so much to this area over the years.”

The judges’ comments noted that “Council has proactively developed a range of initiatives that show great innovation and provide disability awareness and inclusion in a variety of ways”. The panel agreed that Council “excelled at improving the educational experience of not only students with disability, but all students.”

Council’s work in the area has included lobbying for and developing extra training for bus drivers. In consultation with parents and a trainer, a package highlighting disability awareness was developed and is now delivered to new bus drivers in the ACT.

The comprehensive guide to disability resources in the ACT *Who can help?* which Council researched, collated and printed was also influential in the win. The guide was produced with funding from the Federal Government in response to parents’ concerns and frustrations about how information on disability services was fragmented and hard to find.

Council collaborated with the Education and Training Directorate and Disability ACT to ensure the booklet was delivered to every child with a disability currently in school.

“The resources guide has been so popular that we had to have a second print run in its first year,” said Ms Pearce.

The judging panel also noted Council’s commitment to making disability and accessibility a focus when planning school activities and Council’s input into the Everyone, Everyday teaching resource, a program which develops understanding and awareness of disability from Kindergarten to year six, and featured in the previous edition of ParentACTION.

In addition, Council has worked on a number of committees to lobby and advocate for greater understanding and improved services; providing an effective voice for parents of children with a disability.

About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the representative body for Parent & Citizen Associations in the ACT.

We represent over 60,000 parents and carers in 85 ACT public schools.

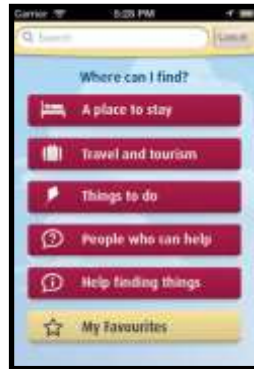
About our magazine

ParentACTion is a free journal published four times a year. Distribution: 600 copies - the ACT Legislative Assembly, ACT Government School Boards and P&Cs, public education organisations and interstate parent associations.

Contributions, advertising and feedback are always being sought. Contributions can be emailed directly to the Editor, Janelle Kennard, at jkennard@actparents.org.au. Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.

Others recognised in the awards included

- Deaf Advocacy, Sport and Recreation
- Museum of Australian Democracy
- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- The Belconnen Arts Centre
- Mr Ian Trehwella
- Mr Huy Nguyen
- Miss Ruth Faragher (ACT school student)
- Wheelout in the Capital: a basketball competition which featured in the Centenary of Canberra's Weekend on Wheels program.
- Nican: a Smartphone App which allows people with disabilities to easily locate sports, recreation, tourist and arts venues with inclusive facilities.



“This award highlights our success in lobbying for and supporting parents,” said Ms Pearce. “If parents have issues which have not been solved at a school-level, we encourage them to bring these issues to Council through their delegate.”

Copies of the *Who can help?* resource booklet are available from Council's office.



Council would like to thank our dedicated volunteers who have worked passionately on inclusion. •

Our Executive

President:	Viv Pearce
Vice President:	John Haydon
Secretary:	Cecilia Shlegel
Assist. Secretary:	Amanda Richard
Treasurer:	Hugh Boulter
Committee:	Graeme Evans, Donna Reed, Joan Kellett, Matt Williams, Jo Lewis, Karen McLaughlin, Kim Fritsche, Harriet Adams.

Life members

Ian Morgan, Pam Cahir, Graeme Evans, Joan Kellett, Richard Scherer, Trevor Cobbold, Grant Battersby.

Contact us

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Office hours: 9.30am - 2.30pm Monday to Friday
Closed public holidays and school holidays

Boost your canteen

Keeping canteens financially viable while serving healthy food is a challenge for many schools. Luckily, Council is here to help.

The last few years have been tough for many school canteens. Of our 85 government schools, 19 have closed their canteens and another 16 have been outsourced. Healthier foods - more time consuming to prepare and with often smaller profits - have put on some of the pressure.

Council has been working hard on a number of projects to support canteens in providing healthy food while saving time and money and increasing sales. The following four services are available to P&C-managed school canteens.

Flexischools is an automated ordering system. Parents submit food orders online and canteens receive easy-to-use printouts of what to make that day. This saves time in the canteen, increases sales and provides great financial data to help you more effectively manage your food business. Council has negotiated an excellent contract with just 2.25% commission on sales and a small fee (25c) payable by parents for each order. Until June 30, Council is paying the setup fee of \$350 per school. To get started or for a demonstration, call Rob Miliken on 0413360763.

NSWBuy is a government procurement agent. Council is now signed up which means all member P&Cs can buy produce at government prices. In addition, there are volume bonuses —

combining the buying power of ACT school canteens — meaning you could save up to 25%. Final details will be available soon as individual school gateways are finalised.

The **Healthy Kids Association** replaces the former ACT Canteens Association. They offer canteen support and advice, training, fact sheets, menu and recipe assessments, nutritional advice and an informative magazine for members. Council has paid the fees so that all ACT school canteens are now members of this organisation. Call them on (02)9876 1300 or email info@healthy-kids.com.au to register your membership and start taking advantage of their services.

Nutrition Australia offer a **menu review** service which many ACT school canteens have already taken advantage of. The service assesses which of your menu items are 'green', 'amber' and 'red' foods. Council has decided to fund additional reviews so that all ACT schools can benefit from this excellent service.

The projects were launched as part of the ACT Government's Fresh Tastes program (see page 8).

To find out more call Council or visit us online. *Council gratefully acknowledges that these projects are funded by a \$200,000 ACT Government grant.* •

Dates to remember

20 March Effective P&C workshop

7.30pm - 9.00pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

22 March Effective P&C workshop (repeated)

2:00pm - 4.30pm
Sports House
100 Maitland Street, Hackett.

25 March Council Hot Topics/General Meeting

6:45pm - 9:30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

27 March Treasurers' workshop

7.00pm - 8:30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

3 April Insurance workshop

7.00pm - 8:30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

17-24 May Week of School Community

27 May Council General Meeting

6:45pm - 9:30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling