

ParentACTion

The parent voice on public education

Term 1, 2015

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

How good is my school?

Council's Communications Officer, Janelle Kennard, looks into school league tables and finds they are built on shaky ground.

It is a sad fact, but true, that in Australia a student's background greatly influences how well they will do at school. Whether their parents went to university, work as professionals, or whether they live in a rural area or are indigenous, all help to predict a student's performance. And more so in Australia than in many other countries.

According to international testing, indigenous students are three and a half years of schooling behind well-off students, students from remote areas are three years behind, and poorer Australian students are about two and a half years behind their advantaged counterparts in reading, mathematics and science.

This means that when parents, or the media, examine the 2014 NAPLAN results of schools, now available on the government's *My School* website, some careful thought is needed. Test results give a one-day snapshot of the performance of students (or average performance of all students at a school, as published on *My School*). They can tell us where students are, but do not tell us where students have been, where they started, or how far they have come.

And because the playing field is not level – a student's background dictates their starting point – a school's results make no sense without knowing the background of their students.

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From the President



John Haydon

Hi. I'm delighted to be elected as Council President for 2015. The previous president, Viv Pearce, is an impossibly hard act to follow, but

fortunately remains on Council's executive as a media spokesperson and as Council's link to our affiliated national body.

Even those of you who are new to P&Cs are probably already aware of the great work they do raising funds for schools, and even more importantly building the school community. P&Cs link parents with other parents and school staff, run school community-building activities such as sausage sizzles and fetes, and contribute in the running of the school through regular meetings with the principal or deputy principal.

What does Council do? It represents the views of P&C members to government, specifically the ACT Education Minister and the ACT Education Directorate, in regular meetings. Council also provides press releases to the media on various schooling issues and the media often seek out members for comment on topical schooling matters. Council makes submissions to both ACT and Australian Government inquiries, executive members are on many different panels that deal with schooling issues, and Council has a comprehensive set of policy documents which are available for you on our website. I highly recommend perusing the website. Council also provides support for P&Cs by arranging insurance, providing advice on problems the P&C may have, and lobbying government as required plus giving training to various office holders (more on training on page 7). Council also lobbies at the national level through the Australian Council of State School Organisations.

We are fortunate in having a great executive team (listed on page 11), including two excellent vice-presidents, but there is always room for more and if you would like to contribute we would love to have you. The executive, like all active P&C

members, are volunteers who give their time and energy to make public schools a great place for their kids, in my case our year five daughter at Lyneham Primary School. We probably all have in mind, though, all kids in public schools and indeed the benefit to Australia of having good quality, free and secular (non-religious) schools that teach students from disadvantaged to highly advantaged backgrounds.

We are also fortunate in having three very capable part-time office staff about whom I can't speak highly enough.

So Council is not a one-person band, and that is my first reason for wanting to draw attention **away** from the role of president.

My second reason for drawing attention away from the president is that Council is a grass-roots organisation. It holds regular meetings with P&C delegates where topical schooling issues are on the agenda and other issues can be raised by delegates. The meetings are in fact open to all so please attend even if you have not been elected as a delegate for your P&C (see meeting dates on back page). Executive members have their own views on issues of course, but those views may not always coincide with approaches agreed and voted on at meetings. Executive members, including the president, are obliged to represent Council's view, not their own personal musings.

My third and perhaps selfish reason for drawing attention away from the role of president is that I am currently in Spain teaching English at a public high school (called an 'instituto' here). Not being a teacher by background, but a somewhat failed bureaucrat, this experience has only deepened my respect for teachers and the difficult role they perform. I will be back in Australia permanently in early June but until then can only contribute to Council via email and the occasional phone call.

I hope 2015 is a very successful year for you and your family, especially in the area of schooling. •

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Plan your 2015 fundraising

If you haven't already thought through your P&C fundraisers for the year, now is the time!

It is a good idea to plan out your fundraisers for the whole year. This way you can ensure a mix of activities and fundraiser types, spread the load over the year, and avoid clashes with known school events and busy times for school staff. It is also important to identify what you are fundraising for!

Mix it up

A good mix of fundraisers might look something like this:

- A major event (such as a fete, or family day).
- A product drive (such as cookbooks, biscuits, seeds, lunchboxes).
- Something for the kids (such as tea towels or calendars with children's art work – great in term three or four for Christmas).
- A community building event (such as a comedy night or trivia night).
- Mothers' and Fathers' Day stalls, student discos and raffles are extras in the calendar.
- Fundraisers that sit in the background.

Background fundraisers

'Background', or 'passive' fundraisers involve a benefit to your organisation when somebody purchases something or takes some other desired action (like test drives a certain car). These loyalty programs require a one-time sign-up, communicating the offer to your families, and the occasional reminder in your newsletter or via email. They are ongoing and can provide handy extra income and/or product vouchers to use as prizes. You can be involved with any number at the one time.

Many businesses offer such loyalty programs and make a donation to the school or P&C when parents make a purchase. Examples include name label suppliers (see their websites), and the Athlete's Foot shoe shop. Some P&Cs have developed relationships with local real estate agents and receive a percentage of the sales commission when a home is sold for a parent or someone referred through the school. The

Commonwealth Bank's school banking program provides the school with a contribution each time an account is opened or a deposit is made. The online holiday booking service Quickbeds.com gives your group between \$10 and \$50 for every booking made using a code unique to your group. There are more examples at the fundraising directory website (fundraisingdirectory.com.au).

When the reward for the school is for a purchase a parent would have made anyway, it really is a win-win situation. All of these fundraisers fall in the category of 'well it couldn't hurt', have the benefit of holding minimal risk, and are a handy addition to your fundraising plans.

What's it for?

The community is much more likely to support your fundraising events and efforts if you have a clear aim and can link the fundraiser with a much needed or appreciated purchase for the school. Businesses are more likely to donate prizes, and parents are more likely to promote the fundraiser and encourage others to purchase or participate, if there is a clear need or benefit.

Try to involve the whole parent community in decisions about funding priorities and work in with the school board's plans. It can also be a good idea to ask the school's Student Representative Council to identify funding priorities and needs.

Feed back on progress

Once you know what you are fundraising for, it's a great idea to keep the community up to date with how you are going. Remember to put a photograph of new purchases in the school newsletter so that people can see that their efforts were worthwhile.

If your goal is a bigger one, the 'fundraising thermometer' is a well-loved tool and a helpful way to keep everybody motivated towards the common goal. Instead of saying 'we have another

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How good is my school?

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Comparing schools with My School

The *My School* website carefully takes this into account when the 'similar schools' feature is used to compare the performance of one school with others. The website uses a complex measure of student advantage/disadvantage called the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) which was created specifically to enable fairer comparisons of different schools in Australia. A school's ICSEA score represents the influence of educational advantage at that school and takes into account both student-level factors (parents' occupation and education) and school-level factors (geographical location and the proportion of indigenous students).

The website will only compare schools with a similar ICSEA score, so comparing your school's average results on *My School* using their 'similar schools' feature is widely regarded as a valid comparison (although parents should still be mindful of factors which could affect the school's average results, such as a high proportion of special needs students, a small year-group and so on).

I rang the *My School* website parent information line and asked about compiling league tables of all ACT schools.

"We don't endorse that at all," the help-line attendant told me. "We use lots of methods and calculations to make valid comparisons only between schools where the kids have similar backgrounds."

"It's not fair, comparing schools with different backgrounds," he told me. "It just isn't fair."

Misleading league tables

This is, however, exactly what *The Canberra Times* does every March after NAPLAN data becomes available on *My School*. They compile and print a list of all schools ranked by average NAPLAN score, regardless of the schools having very different student populations. You can see how different the student populations are at a sample of ACT schools in Table 1.

According to ACARA, who run the *My School* website, "simple 'league tables' that rank and compare schools with very different student populations can be misleading."

So what we see when *The Canberra Times* publishes its annual league table of Canberra schools is largely a table of advantage and disadvantage. Indeed, last year the paper published, along-side the school league tables, a list of schools and their ISCEA score which, unsurprisingly, closely mirrored the list of test results.

Council regards the practice of publishing school league tables as extremely misleading, unfair and potentially demoralising to schools with high levels of disadvantage. Council urges parents look at them very sceptically, and appreciate the role which student background plays.

Public versus private

Public schools educate a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students. In fact, government schools have almost twice as many students from low income families as they have from high income families, while independent private schools have twice as many students from high income families as they have from low income families. Because of this, the average test results of public schools are, as you would expect, often lower than private schools.

Canberra Grammar regularly tops the ACT league tables, but this is to be expected, given the background of their student population, which is not at all typical of the ACT population. Canberra Grammar educates *no* students from the 'bottom quarter' of *My School's* scale of advantage, and a staggering 85% of students are from the most advantaged quarter of the community (Australian average is 25% of students in each quarter).

Richardson Primary School, which often appears towards the bottom of *The Canberra Times*' tables, has a very different student make-up (see Table 1). Half of their students are in the 'bottom quarter', on the *My School's* scale of advantage,

while only five percent of their students are in the most advantaged quarter.

So when *The Canberra Times* prints a headline such as last year's: *Independent schools a point or two above the pack in My School rankings*, they have missed the point completely. The difference in the results of independent schools is entirely accounted for by the background of their students.

In fact, several academic studies and careful analysis in the past year have shown that, once the difference in student backgrounds are taken into account, there are no significant differences between the results of independent and public schools in the ACT (and across Australia for most groups of students). That is to say, independent schools' higher average test results are entirely accounted for by the high-advantage students who attend the schools, bringing their advantage with them; rather than a property of the school environment or teaching approach.

"Our study shows that the often-presumed better results of private schools are a myth," says Trevor Cobbold, national convenor of the Save Our Schools group and former Productivity Commission economist.

"Public schools are the equal of private schools. Public, Catholic and independent schools with a similar socio-economic composition have very similar results in nearly all states and the ACT."

Council also believes that a mix of children from different social backgrounds is beneficial for all students, including for those from advantaged backgrounds, and leads to great social cohesion – an idea backed up by international studies.

Getting a clear picture

It's not as simple as public versus private, either. For example, it is clear from Table 1 that Garran Primary School (a public school), has a highly advantaged population, rather similar to Canberra Grammar's. It is, therefore, not meaningful to compare results at Garran with

School (ICSEA score) Canberra Grammar School (1212)	% students in each group of socio-educational advantage				
	Lower quarter	Middle quarters		Top quarter	
	0%	2%	12%	85%	
Garran Primary School (1199)	2%	3%	13%	81%	
Maribyrnong Primary School (1103)	8%	16%	27%	50%	
St Francis of Assisi Primary (1049)	14%	25%	34%	27%	
Caroline Chisholm School (1000)	27%	32%	26%	15%	
Richardson Primary School (935)	49%	29%	17%	5%	
Australian Average (1000)	25%	25%	25%	25%	

Table 1: Very different student populations. Shown is the distribution of students over four groups of socio-educational advantage at six ACT schools. Clearly, with such different populations, comparisons between the results of these schools would be invalid. (Data from myschool.edu.au)

many other ACT public schools. Conversely, Saint Francis of Assisi Primary School (a private Catholic school) has a population which is more evenly distributed across the categories of advantage and disadvantage (see Table 1) and so is most fairly compared to schools with a similar population, rather than being compared with the majority of other private schools.

All of this means that great care is needed when comparing schools and simple league table lists of schools by average test scores should be ignored.

So, if you are looking to compare your school with others this year, don't seek out a league table from the media – the picture will not be clear at all. The *My School* website does a better job, but ultimately it is worth considering why we, as parents, feel the need to compare schools, when the measure which counts most is right before us: our own child's progress, from wherever it is they started. •

Found this story useful?

We encourage you to share it with other parents. A one-page version, which may be photocopied and distributed, is inserted in this edition.

Help us end the publishing of league tables. Please write a letter to The Canberra Times to complain about this misleading practice. Help with writing your letter is available on our website.

After the AGM

The AGM is over and you find yourself on the P&C executive committee. So, now what? Here's a checklist to get you started.

Finding yourself the new P&C president, secretary or treasurer can be daunting. There are some official tasks to take care of as soon as possible, but also lots of resources to help you with your new role.

Ask your predecessor for a good handover. Hopefully, the out-going committee members will have a set of notes to help you with the role (if not, you might like to develop some during the year to make it easier for the next person!) You should make sure you have: a copy of the association's constitution, previous meeting minutes, financial records, and details such as the association's incorporation number, bank account details, contact for the auditor and any passwords (for accessing P&C email, website, the school photocopier for example).

□ Submit the Annual Return to the Office of Regulatory Services (ORS). As an incorporated association, the P&C has certain reporting obligations to the ACT Government (through ORS). Each year, an Annual Return must be completed, detailing the new committee elected at the AGM along with a financial summary from the previous year, as passed at your AGM. The Auditor who reviewed your financial records must sign this form and usually does so at the time of the audit. You can find the form via our website (under Forms).

□ Provide Council with the contact details of your new committee members using the Office Bearers Contact Form which we will send you (via mail plus email to the previous committee members). It is also available in the Forms section of our website.

☐ **Tell your school community** who your new P&C officers are and how to contact you, perhaps through the school newsletter.



☐ If your P&C is a registered charity, complete an Annual Information Statement for the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC). Do this online at www.acnc.gov.au within six months of the end of your financial year.

☐ Arrange for new officers to be signatories on the P&C's bank accounts. You will need to go into your bank to do this, taking a copy of the minutes of the AGM where the new officers are named. Previous signatories should be removed as they no longer have the authority to operate the association's funds.

☐ Attend Council's workshops to assist you with your new role (see opposite).

□ Check out the *Help for P&Cs* section of our website for a range of resources including a comprehensive set of information sheets (being extended and revised throughout term one), meeting agenda and minute templates, letters and brochures to help you promote your P&C, and much more.

Our office is also available for your email (contact@actparents.org.au) or phone enquiries (9:30am -to 2:30pm Monday to Friday), should you need further assistance. •

Our workshops are here to help!

Council's free workshops will help you with your role and get your P&C running well.

Effective P&C workshop Thursday March 19 at 6:30pm Repeated Saturday March 21 at 2pm

Covering ways to improve how your association works, recruiting volunteers, fundraising and the P&C as an employer, this workshop is for new P&C members and continuing officers alike. The workshop is divided into five 30-minute modules, each focusing on a different aspect, and you can attend for individual modules if you wish. Details are in the *Training* section of our website.

The whole afternoon was well run and very informative and helpful. I will look at applying some of the ideas ... in our own P&C.

- 2014 Participant, Effective P&C Workshop.

Treasurers' workshop Thursday March 26 at 7pm

Experienced treasurers and Council's accountant will be there to provide information and answers about P&C finances, record keeping, annual reporting, audits, insurance, handling monies, affiliation fees, taxation, staff employment, fundraising, reporting by sub-committees and more.

Insurance workshop Tuesday March 31 at 7pm

This workshop looks at the insurance package available for P&C associations through Council and how to complete the paperwork. We recommend all treasurers and presidents attend. Topics include valuing property, risk assessment and management, policy coverage, liability limits, excesses, completing declaration forms, online submissions and paying invoices.

To attend just email contact@actparents.org.au •

VET students: have you got your USI?

This year for the first time all students doing Vocational Education Training (VET) in schools must have a Unique Student Identifier (USI).

A USI is a reference number allocated to students and linked to a secure online record of all their training that can be accessed anytime and anywhere.

In the past it was not possible for students to get a complete record of their training enrolment and achievement history from one place; each training provider had to be contacted separately. The new system means that chasing up lost transcripts of certificates will be a thing of the past and preparing for a job interview will be a breeze, with all training courses and results ready to download and print. For students planning to do a VET course in school, or currently enrolled, it's important to register for an USI as soon as possible. Registering takes just a few minutes. Grab two forms of identification and head to usi.gov.au, select 'Create a USI' and follow the steps.

An USI is required for all Australian Apprenticeship, Traineeship, Certificate, Diploma and Skill Set courses. There is potential for the scheme to be extended to include schools and universities.

The Federal Government, who instituted the USI system, says that it will give a much clearer picture of how many students are in the VET system and provide information to understand and improve VET performance and help better meets students' needs in the future. ●

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Glenaeon School P&F raised \$5655 in 3 weeks

Strathmore Secondary College raised \$2000

Tarremah School P&F raised \$3200

(All schools used donated prizes)

Plan your 2015 fundraising

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\$5000 to raise before we can refurbish the canteen', a picture not only speaks a thousand words, but motivates us to make sure that red line is filled all the way to the top!

While the traditional thermometer is great, with a little imagination, you can take this concept and



make it a lot more fun! If you are raising money for tree planting, draw a bare tree on a poster and add the right number of leaves as you progress. When the tree is full of leaves, you have reached your goal. If you are raising money for a playground, get a big black and white picture made of the plan. As you raise more money towards it, colour it in. If you are raising money for the library, draw empty bookshelves on a poster and stick printed book covers on it as you raise more money. If the fundraising is for a classroom set of iPads, draw 30 rectangles and as you raise enough for each ipad, stick a printed cutout on each space. Everyone will know how far along you are towards reaching your goal.

You can see that the options are limitless. Get the kids involved in coming up with the ideas and creating your masterpiece. Then you can all have fun tracking your fundraising success. ●

Parts of this article were taken from Mandy Weidmann's fundraising tips. Mandy publishes the Fundraising Directory and wrote the Practical Fundraising Handbook. You can sign up for her very useful weekly fundraising tips at www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au.

Canteen best practice

A new investigation into ACT canteens is underway. Jo Gardner, from the Healthy Kids Association is currently working to identify the best business model or models for school canteens in the ACT.

The study will involve contacting schools across Canberra to discuss their current canteen operation, what works well, and what are the issues and impediments for the business.

The aim is to develop options of different business models for schools which are most likely to make the canteen viable and sustainable while meeting with the government's healthy food and drinks policies. The study will also identify food products and distribution channels which can improve cost effective access to healthier food products.

Some of the different possible business models include P&C-run canteens, outsourcing operations to a commercial supplier or even outsourcing food production to a neighbouring school's canteen.

Jo is happy to discuss the work and meet with school parent bodies, principals, canteen operators and other food suppliers. She can be contacted via jo@healthy-kids.com.au or by calling 0423 604 566. •

At our P&C...

In our regular column for sharing P&C experiences, Forest Primary School P&C explains more about their successful after school activities business.

Forrest Primary School P&C runs an extremely successful out-of-school-hours care business which provides a substantial financial donation to the school each year. In 2014 our P&C, in a partnership with the school, built two large playgrounds using business profits. We also financially supported other school strategic projects such as refurbishing the toilet amenities. This is on top of our P&C's other commitments from organising community events to running the canteen and uniform shop.

Our P&C relies on the support and partnership of the Forrest Primary Principal and school to run the out-of-school-hours care service. Around one third of the school's children attend or participate in the program, and we believe the service is essential for the Forrest school community and is an important reason why parents choose Forrest Primary School for their children.

The out-of-school-hours care service could not be as successful without its extremely caring and dedicated staff. Many of the staff attended Forrest Primary school themselves and some have been working for the P&C for over 10 years. The staff are the heart and soul of the service and everything the P&C does to support the school is underpinned by the efforts of these professionals.

One of the reasons the service is so popular is the excellent and varied 'activities' program. The usual structured and directed activities are offered to students such as martial arts, language and music; but we are seeing an overwhelming popularity for activities which are flexible and child-driven like our 'Beyond the Fence' program.

This activity allows children to have control over their play time and their play space, and provides them with a sense of ownership. They are fully submerged in every aspect of their play from planning what they want to achieve, to design



Having fun 'Beyond the Fence' at Forest Primary School's out of school hours program.

and implementation, to finally reviewing what they have achieved, what worked and what didn't. In the children's words they are having *fun* and they want to keep coming back time after time. (Read more about Beyond the Fence below.)

The Forrest out-of-school-hours care business will continue to be such an amazing success by continuing to grow our strong relationship with Forrest Primary School, encouraging and supporting the amazing staff, and continuing to offer a varied and diverse activity program that puts the child and their family at the forefront of the experience. We are lucky to have a wonderful school and community that supports our growing business which in turn supports every child who attends our school.

Forrest Primary School P&C

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Beyond the Fence

Beyond The Fence™ is an innovative program that is currently operated at Forrest Out Of School Hours Care (FOOSHC) by the service's Educational Leader, Kylie Keane, and advocate and consultant for children, Lisa Beattie. The program came about through discussions between Kylie and Lisa surrounding the play opportunities they remembered fondly as children that they identified as being few and far between for children in today's busy world. They both valued the opportunities for children to go outdoors, reconnect with nature, take risks, make choices for themselves, play and simply be, and recognised the importance of providing these opportunities within an out of school hours care service.

Beyond The FenceTM started in 2014 as a pilot Transforming Practice Initiative under the ACT Professional Support Co-ordinator and saw 30 children go Beyond The FenceTM to the natural space adjacent to the school one afternoon a week. The program flourished and by the end of 2014, officially out of its pilot stage, approximately 70 children had taken part and it was operating three afternoons a week.

The best thing, however, is the fact that the children themselves have shifted the original ideas and philosophy of the program. The children have, over the last year, built forts, dens and tree houses, climbed trees, excavated their 'creek', built and cooked on fire pits, engaged in leadership and team-based roles as well as enjoyed the solitude of the open outdoors. They have explored, experimented, hypothesised, taken risks, and developed resilience, problemsolving and self-regulation skills. They have challenged themselves, each other and the educators in the most rewarding of ways and pushed the limits of their former comfort zones all the while forming deep attachments to the space. Beyond The Fence™ truly values children as capable and competent individuals.

Kylie Keane, FOOSHC Educational Leader

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.

Contributions, advertising and feedback are always being sought: email the Editor, Janelle Kennard, at jkennard@actparents.org.au.

Distribution: 600 copies - the ACT Legislative Assembly, ACT Government School Boards and P&Cs, public education organisations and interstate parent associations.

Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.

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Dates to remember

19 March Effective P&C workshop

7:30 - 9:00pm Centre for Teaching and Learning 51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

21 March Effective P&C workshop (repeated)

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

24 March Council Hot Topics/General Meeting

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

26 March Treasurers' workshop

7:00 - 8:30pm Centre for Teaching and Learning 51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling. 31 March Insurance workshop

7:00 - 8:30pm Centre for Teaching and Learning 51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

2 April Canteen Working Group and

Stakeholders meeting

7:00 - 9:00pm Centre for Teaching and Learning 51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

26 May Council General Meeting

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

Help migrant and refugee parents

သင့်၏ကလေးကျောင်းပညာရေးအတွက် အထောက်အကူပြုနည်းလမ်းများ

Council has teamed up with Companion House – a community organisation assisting refugee families – to produce new resources for parents.

The information sheets are designed to help migrant families feel more comfortable in approaching schools, offering assistance and getting involved. They provide practical advice on how to support children at school as well as providing details of additional resources and contacts.

"Parents are partners in their child's education so it is important to build strong links between the home and school," said Viv Pearce, former Council President. "But for new parents, especially if English is not their first language, this can be difficult."

"These sheets are a step towards helping parents link with the school and that's good news for their child's education."

The information sheets are available in Arabic, Tamil and Burmese as well as the Burmese dialects of Karen and Mon. They can be found on the Companion House website (www.companionhouse.org.au, under 'information'). Council will also send copies to all schools during term one.

Schools and P&Cs are encouraged to copy the brochures and pass them on to migrant families.

Please help us to spread the word so that those who would benefit most get access to these new resources. •



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