



Attracting a crowd

The committee is nearly there – your big event is coming together – but how will you attract a crowd? Here are some cost-effective ways to promote your fete, trivia night or gala event.

Pulling together a large community event for your school takes an inordinate amount of work, so you'll want thousands, rather than hundreds, to come. While your P&C probably has proven ways to inform parents at the school, getting the word out to the general public can be trickier. We've collected tried and tested ideas for you to consider, and some important regulations to note that your P&C might not have been aware of.

Social media

Even if your P&C does not have a social media page, it is the perfect tool for spreading the word. Simply ask parents at your school to share news of your event to their personal social media feeds. You'll need something easy to share and an attractive graphic containing the essential event details is ideal. You can easily create attractive layouts of simple text using free services such as [Canva](#) or [Easil](#), or combine free images from sites such as [Unsplash](#) or [Pixabay](#) with text using an App such as [Wordswag](#) or [Over](#). Once you have your image the school might email it to all families and ask them to consider sharing it. Personally ask people you know or who are involved with the event to share the image on social media. Just 10 or 20 people can have huge reach.

There are also Facebook groups where you can



With all the effort your committee has put into creating a fun event, you certainly want a lot of people to hear about it!

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From the President



Kirsty McGovern-Hooley

The *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* or ‘Gonski 2.0’ was commissioned by the Federal Government to improve school performance and student achievement. The government commissioned David Gonski and a panel of contributors to investigate and understand what are the most effective teaching and learning strategies and initiatives to invest in.

I commend Gonski for a report that delves deep into the structural inequities in Australian schools and highlights the complexity of driving real change in education.

The report paints a damning portrait of our current school performance, with declining student results on international tests across every socio-economic quintile, and every school sector (Public, Catholic and Independent schools). It acknowledges the ‘wide range of educational outcomes in the same classroom or school, with the most advanced students in a year typically five to six years ahead of the least advanced students’.

Gonski 2.0 calls for a complete overhaul to Australia’s current industrial school model – a ‘mass education to all children’ way of working where everyone is doing the same work, being measured and marked accordingly to whether the answer was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. It’s what my schooling looked like, with each year graded by specific learning outcomes that you either passed or failed. If you failed you continued anyway, with few opportunities to catch up. Gonski theorises that this model is one of the key drivers of Australia’s failing international performance.

Gonski breaks the report into three core priorities, with five sets of recommendations. Without being facetious, many of these recommendations are fairly standard in all

educational reviews, and I must admit to ‘review and reporting fatigue’. The usual suspects are all present and accounted for – parental engagement, transitions, high quality professional learning, community engagement and so on.

However, underpinning this are some very substantial changes that will mean education may look very different in the future. Let’s look at the report’s priorities one at a time.

Priority One: Deliver at least one year’s growth in learning for every student for every year.

This means moving from a grade-based curriculum to teaching practices that are tailored and personalised to the student’s needs. This would require a testing framework that diagnoses a student’s current level of knowledge, skill and understanding, identifying the next steps in learning and then measuring students individually against their own learning progression to see that they have achieved the next stage in their growth. This in effect breaks down the current ‘grade’ system in schools.

From a parent’s perspective this means fast learners will progress quickly, and slower learners won’t get left behind, but will have the time and space to develop at their own pace. Or will they face pressure to learn faster?

Does this mean some students may spend longer at school? Will classes be mixed in ages? How will parents understand progress?

Priority Two: Equip every child to be a creative, connected and engaged learner in a rapidly changing world.

The aim is to focus on teaching skills that help students adapt and take responsibility for their own learning. This is a significant shift away from previous practices, where students were not expected to “own” their individual learning outcome.

From a parent perspective, it might mean a student's learning goal is not for an 'A' on the test – the goal is to understand a subject or 'learn how to do multiplication'. Achievement will be measured very differently under this framework. This teaches students to identify what they need to know, then learn it and do it.

How do parents engage with this model of education? What does 'parental engagement' look like under this model?

Where will this leave standardised testing and NAPLAN? How will parents understand if student performance is 'good', 'average' or 'bad'? How do we know if our kids are 'keeping up' if they are only required to keep up with themselves?

Priority Three: Cultivate an adaptive, innovative and continuously improving education system.

This means driving a culture of continuous improvement, which might be supported by several initiatives, including a "national evidence institute" to share evidence based practices more widely; a "unique student identifier" to better track outcomes; and improving the teaching and school leadership professions with better workforce planning.

To succeed, this approach must include mechanisms to reduce the administration burden on teachers and schools, which means bringing in some 'big data' management systems to enable the tracking of performance and capture of student information.

From a parent perspective, bringing 'big data' into schools is a challenging prospect. How do we manage data privacy for our children? What will be collected and stored and for how long? Who will have access to this information? How will online records be accountable to parents and students? How will the substantial investment in IT infrastructure be funded?



The view for the future of education in Australian is to be student-centred and to teach students to identify what it is that they need to know. But will that suit all, or even most, students?

In summary, this report can't be wrapped up in a neat little branded package. It is reform that is based on a cultural shift in thinking and a fundamental change in perspective. It is about flipping the goal posts upside down. The goal for students becomes a journey of small steps, where the teaching and demonstration of capability and achievement are completed at each small step in their journey. Rote learning the answers to an infrequent test won't be enough.

Gonski 2.0 doesn't link school performance to funding in any way. There is no algorithm in this report that links increasing investment in education to increasing performance. Instead, the message is that education needs to change. Like most reviews, we need more information, and an implementation plan to consider. School is a new experience for students, so for them a different model of education isn't as painful to deal with as it is for those of us that have an education. It's time to let go of our baggage, and nostalgia, listen to the reviews, and encourage education to be bold and take action. ●

Attracting a crowd

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post about your event to a broad audience if you join, such as 'Canberra Notice Board Group', 'Garage Sales Canberra', 'Canberra Buy/Sell/freebies and Notice Board', 'Canberra and ACT Region Buy Swap Sell and Giveaway'. Pages with large followings, such as 'Canberra Mums' may also share your event if you ask nicely.

If your P&C runs a social media feed, build up to the event over time. Again, personally ask people – friends, P&C members, people running stalls at the fair – to share your posts. Facebook's recent algorithm change counts against pages run by businesses and groups like P&Cs, but if everyone gets behind crucial posts – like a great graphic advertising your event – it can make a difference. Facebook Ads or 'boosting' crucial posts can also be a cost effective way to promote your event. You can set the amount that you wish to spend (even \$20 can make a real impact), dates you want the 'sponsored post' to appear, and target your audience based on location, age and interests.

Flyers and posters – everywhere!

With a bit of foresight your Social Media graphic might also be a flyer for your event, or at least the beginning of one. Word processing programs also come with ready-made flyer templates which can look great if there's not a volunteer graphic-designer in your community. Talk to your school about printing these on the school photocopiers (black and white is much more in line with school budgets) or get them printed in large numbers at Officeworks or a print shop.

It will ensure a crowd and create a community feel if you can deliver flyers to local letter boxes. Several companies will deliver for a surprisingly low fee, or divide your suburb into smaller areas and ask parents to take a patch to deliver to.

Alternatively, talk to businesses that do regular mail-outs and ask if they will include your flyer. Research shows that customers respond to companies that support community causes, so make sure the businesses you contact know this.

If you're making a flyer, why not also print it out as some A3 size as posters? Put them up on local



Roadside signs are a great way to advertise your event, but do you know how this one fails to meet the regulations, and that wrongly placing signs is an offence?

noticeboards at shopping centres, community centres, clubs and gyms. Local shops may be happy to display your poster if you ask.

Also arrange for your flyer/poster to have a whole page of the school newsletter with a note asking parents to print it out and pin it on noticeboards at their own office, gym etc. That will multiply your message further!

Road-side signs

Your school's large street sign is the obvious place to start and most principals are happy to include P&C messages. To reach more motorists, you'll need more signs. Several Canberra printing and sign-writing companies print to flute-board to make the signs we're all familiar with along roadsides. A standard 600x900mm sign costs \$20-25 for black and white, and \$30-35 for colour, depending on how many you order. Think carefully about the following before you order.

Keep it simple. The sign must be readable as people drive past. That means simple fonts, large lettering and few words. 'Roma School Fair Saturday 8-2' might be all you need. Artwork can be nice but make sure the main details visitors

Following the rules

The ACT Government has a Code of Practice relating to Movable Signs (see the [Transport Canberra and City Services](#) website). It is an offence not to comply and city rangers can confiscate wrongly-placed signs. Schools and community groups may display a maximum of 20 movable signs for up to two weeks before the event. Signs may be an A-frame or the more familiar board mounted on stakes and must not exceed 900mm x 1200mm, including the frame/stakes. Include your P&C name as small print for identification. Your P&C must have public liability insurance of at least \$10 million to place road-side signs (which is easily covered by Council's P&C insurance package).

Signs must not be placed anywhere where they obstruct the path of pedestrians. They must be

at least 1.2m from the road curb, and **cannot** be placed:

- on roundabouts
- within 20 metres of traffic lights or the corner of an intersection
- on residential nature strips
- attached to bridges, trees, streets signs, light poles and so on – they must be free standing
- within special 'Designated Areas' (without permission from the National Capital Authority) that is, the Parliamentary Triangle and Canberra's 'main avenues and approaches' including Adelaide Avenue, Monaro Highway, Limestone Avenue – there is an extensive list in the Code of Practice.

will need are big and bold. Be careful with colour – it's more expensive and nothing is easier to read than simple black and white.

Think long term. If your event is likely to be annual, consider omitting the date and instead write 'this Saturday' and then erect them six days before the event. Alternatively, design them with the intention of pasting next year's date over the current one. You'll need a few layers of paper to properly block out the old date when the sign is backlit. A sheet of clear contact over the whole lot keeps them looking good and the rain out.

Get someone else to pay for it! Many P&Cs have been able to strike up partnerships with their local real-estate agents. Agents regularly print signage and may be willing to pay for yours in exchange for adding their branding.

Once you have your signs, attach one or two garden stakes. Zip-ties work well, or use screws with large washers to stop the fixtures tearing through the flute board. Work out where to place them. Marking this on a map will make it easier to divide up the job between a couple of people, and easier to collect afterwards. In dry weather take along some water to soften the ground so

you can drive the stakes in far enough to resist the wind! Think about where motorists in your area queue or pass daily, but make sure that you know and follow the rules for sign placement (see the box above). Be sure to collect your signs shortly after the event and store them for next time.

Making it news-worthy

If your event is linked to something newsworthy, the local Chronicle newspaper might be interested in a story which includes the details of the event. An occasion linked to a significant school birthday, with a unique offering or guest, or a world-record attempt, for example, might get them interested. You'll need to contact the paper a couple of weeks in advance for the story to get to readers before your event.

Online and On-air

You can list your event for free on the ActewAGL [community switch](#) which local radio stations use for community announcements. Event sites such as [Eventfinda.com.au](#) are also worth looking into, and [Traderoo](#) and [Gumtree](#) have sections for community events and fairs which are well worth using. Please [let us know](#) your favourite Canberra notice board or free advertising avenue! ●

Why I volunteer

We're so grateful to the wonderful people who give up their time to keep P&Cs and Council thriving. But why do they do it?

Jackie Floro

New Council Executive member & Harrison School's P&C President



The first P&C meeting I attended was because I was asked along by a friend. I had no idea what it was all about! Once I got involved in what the P&C was doing, it became a real stepping-stone to return to the workforce.

It's well worth being involved. You get a lot of insight from the principal about what's happening across the school, not just where my kids are. I've also got to know all the teachers, particularly from being involved with co-ordinating the fair, which is really useful.

There is also a lot of satisfaction in what we achieve. The fair I co-ordinated made \$22,000! And we've also been successful in getting changes to the way our carpark works and convinced the Education Directorate to put up funds for the changes.

To begin with, going to Council meetings seemed onerous, but once I got a feel for it, they became useful and interesting. Enough so that I thought I'd try a spot on the executive!

Council is taking a proactive and responsive approach to problems of violence and bullying. We believe that the solutions rely on the collective effort of us working together. So we need your help. We are currently collecting bullying case studies, which will provide the fundamentals for us to form strategies and best practices for all parties to handle and minimise

Andrew Bidwell

Council Vice-President & former P&C President at Florey Primary



I was involved in my P&C and was looking at our expenses. I wondered 'what do we get from Council – is the membership fee worth it?' So I went along to a Council meeting and asked a lot of questions! I was so impressed with the knowledgeable way in which Council staff and volunteers answered. Together with the services Council provided, the forums and presentations, and the all-round assistance given to me as a P&C president at the time – it was obviously worth it!

At Council I can present issues from my school and then get outcomes for the whole region. It is great to hear from other local schools and meet their P&C volunteers at Council meetings. It has inspired me to visit other P&Cs – go to their meetings, share ideas, and see how they operate. I'm working with our local high school P&C too. I get a glimpse of what is in the future for my kids.

At schools throughout the ACT, our celebrations and issues are common. I enjoy the level of the conversations I have at Council, but also the ability to impact schools for the whole of the ACT and represent my own school within that. I also get to see the challenges we have at my school within the context of other schools. It gives a new 'framing' to our issues – are they really a problem at all? For example, our carpark is difficult but not as bad as at other schools. ●

these occurrences in our schools. We will also hold a workshop on the issue in Term 4.

If your child has experienced any form of bullying or you have observed bullying at a school we would like to hear from you. Please complete a Case Study form which you can find on our website. ●

Help in case of Cyberbullying

The cyber-world is such a big part of our lives. Council Executive Jane Koitka looks at what parents and carers can do if cyberbullying rears its ugly head.

Online activities have changed the dynamics of parenting. Parents feel the added responsibility of teaching their children responsible and savvy ways of being online. The possibility of cyberbullying is particularly worrying.

Cyberbullying is the use of online and electronic communication to tease, humiliate and disparage. It can embarrass, deprecate and defame children and teens at a time when their need for peer acceptance is at a premium. It can happen to anyone at any time and without provocation.

Many children who experience cyberbullying won't tell you. They may be too embarrassed, afraid adult involvement will make the situation worse or afraid their digital privileges will be curtailed. The key is to nurture the positive aspects of social media, educate kids on the dangers of being online, and build their trust by understanding their needs and situation.

Always be alert to changes in your child's behavior. You know your child best and if you suspect anything unusual then it's important to talk and try to find out what's going on.

It can help for parents to understand the tactics which online bullies use. The '[Help for Parents](#)' page of our website has links to articles with details but, briefly, common tactics include:

- **Flame/Troll:** deliberately provoke arguments and rile others in online spaces
- **Exclude:** deliberately not invite teens to an online space, repeatedly delete comments
- **Outing:** make privately shared information public. Very hurtful in the case of sexuality.
- **Phishing:** trick someone to reveal personal information with lies and deceptive messages
- **Harassment:** repeatedly send hurtful personal messages often urging to harm themselves
- **Imping, Catfishing:** impersonate the victim online via false profiles and say embarrassing, lewd or mean things
- **Image abuse:** passing around humiliating photos of the victim without permission

Getting help

If you think your child is being cyberbullied or if you're looking for help to educate yourself and your child on responsible and safe use of the internet and social media, there are some very good resources to help.

ACT libraries

All of Canberra's public libraries are now 'eSafe spaces', where you can ask library staff for help and support about keeping safe online. The staff have been trained to assist children affected by cyberbullying and refer them to relevant resources and authorities.

eSafety office

The Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner has excellent parent resources and information about keeping your kids safe online and assessing your current knowledge and household online habits (www.esafety.gov.au). Their 'Rewrite Your Story' site empowers teens, with great videos to help start a conversation about cyberbullying. 'Young & eSafe' helps young people counter online hate with advice and resources developed by young people, including stories, short films and expert advice. The 'Image-based abuse portal' provides tangible support and advice to those who have had intimate images or videos shared without their consent. The Office is also well worth following on Facebook or Twitter for their tips, reminders and up to date advice on new Apps and issues.

Parent info sessions

P&Cs can host a 'thinkUknow' cybersafety session for parents at their school. This informative and practical program is run by the Australian Federal Police in conjunction with several tech firms. Book a session by trained presenters at www.thinkuknow.org.au.

The Internet and social media are important to young people and can add real value to their lives if we can just find ways of keeping them safe at the same time. ●

P&C reminders

As Term two flies by, there are a few essentials for P&Cs to attend to.

There are some important bills and payments which P&Cs should be aware of, as well as a few forms which you should have already completed.

Insurance

Insurance renewal questionnaires were sent directly to P&Cs from Civic Insurance in April. These must be completed accurately and comprehensively. So that your insurance is valid, P&Cs must disclose all operations and events, including accurate numbers of people to be covered by the policy. The questionnaire is due by June 1 at Civic Insurance who will then issue invoices for insurance based on your needs. Payment will be due June 30.

Workers compensation

If your P&C has paid employees, you should also have received a wages estimate form, due to be returned to Civic Insurance by June 1. Based on your estimate, you will be invoiced for workers compensation cover, with payment due June 30.

Council affiliation fees

Your annual membership fees with Council are due soon. Invoices have just been sent to treasurers, for payment by the end of June. There is no increase to fees this year. If you are wondering what you get from your Council membership, remember that we provide ACT P&Cs with advice, resources, training, and

publications, as well as events to connect you to other P&Cs. We also provide representation and advocacy with decision makers in ACT education. The benefits are fully expounded on our [website](#).

Have you completed these forms?

We know it can take some time for a new committee to settle in but please make sure your P&C has:

- completed Council's Office Bearers' form
- reported to government on last year's activities and finances and the outcomes of your AGM. P&Cs that are a registered charity need to complete an Annual Information Statement for the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) and also let Access Canberra know of any changes to your Public Officer. Other P&Cs must submit an Annual Return (AR form) to Access Canberra (which is now FREE as long as you do it by June 30).

Links to all these forms can be found on the '[Essential forms](#)' page of our website.

If you missed our free workshops, make sure you take a look at the helpful resources, information and templates for P&Cs on our website. We aim to make the job as easy as possible for P&C volunteers. Please contact us if you have any questions. ●

Robots help sick kids

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whose journeys with their own children identified the need for better everyday support for sick children in maintaining contact with their schools and learning.

"Parents and carers in this situation worry about their kid's education and struggle to pull together the academic and social connections they need to overcome isolation and falling behind," explained Ms Gilmour.

"Medical science is saving and prolonging the lives of sick kids and we must act now to give them real-time inclusion in their classes and connection with their friends and teachers, to have hope and build positive futures."

"The approach MissingSchool is pursuing is intended to combine the strengths of government, the private sector, and not for profits to demonstrate a solution that sees sick kids connected to their classrooms, everywhere in Australia, every day."

To help a seriously sick child connect to class today visit missingschool.org.au/telepresence. ●

At our P&C...

The P&C at Turner School have been placing *community and fun* at the centre of what they do and that's taken them from strength to strength.

One of the greatest difficulties facing P&Cs is a lack of volunteers, so when Council asked to talk to P&Cs about their volunteer woes, we were delighted to hear from Helen Bell, P&C President at Turner School, who asked if we also wanted to talk to P&Cs with lots of amazing volunteers.

"Yes!" we said. "How do you do it?"

"Five or six years ago, there was a feeling that the P&C was on its way out," Helen told us "but we've turned it around. We now have a group of people who really get something out of it and want to be there. We all have paid jobs, and juggle our P&C commitments, but we get enough back that we are happy to keep doing it."

The key? A change in focus from fundraising to fun.

"Fundraising is such a drag on the community, so we only do it to cover our expenses and where there are specific purposes in line with our priorities," explained Helen. "What we do now is build social connections between the school, parents and community, while having fun. That's our role, our mission at the school."

"There was some tension between the P&C and the Board and we sat down and thought about the P&C role. It seemed that social networking was the thing that the P&C could do well and add value to the community."

"It is actually a clear mission we have all taken on board and work towards," she said.

"We need to build opportunities for people to be involved. We have a diverse school community, so it is important that everyone gets the chance to meet each other. We have a lot of new families joining the school each year, particularly with embassies and ANU accommodation in our catchment. We create events that are tailored to the children and community. You can't expect people to come to help at a BBQ or work in a canteen as the only way of connecting to the school. You need to create opportunities for people to socialise."



The P&C's new aim – to build social connections while having fun – was certainly met by the Trivia Night.

"We also started up a Class Parent Contact Network," Helen said. "It is working really well. Each class representative keeps a list of parent contact details and they can then organise class-level things like playdates, pizza nights or flowers for a teacher with a new baby. They can have a more focused interaction with that group, rather than the P&C trying to be across all the details."

"We have 30 classes, with 30 class-reps, so we also have a parent who co-ordinates the Network as well as organising the big events. It takes a lot of the pressure off the President's job".

"The parent network organises a Big Afternoon Tea at the end of each semester. Families are invited to meet at the school playground, bringing a plate to share. We set up tables for each year group, so people can easily mingle with parents with kids of similar ages. Last time we also ran a plant sale, a sausage sizzle and one of the Year 1 girls had a jelly stall. About 250 came. It's not much work to run but is a lot of fun."

The P&C started to approach local businesses with a different mindset too.

"Instead of asking all the local businesses for donations for prizes and so on, we stepped back and looked for businesses who could benefit from the connection with the school, explains Helen. "Our focus is on building community partnerships so that both the school and the businesses benefit, rather than just fundraising. It is much more of a true sponsorship approach."

About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the peak body for Parents & Citizens (P&C) Associations in the ACT.

We represent over 60,000 parents and carers in 87 ACT public schools.

About our magazine

ParentACTion is a free journal published four times a year. It is available online, plus hardcopies are provided to all ACT public school P&Cs and school boards, the ACT Legislative Assembly, senior ACT Education Directorate staff, public education organisations, the media 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.

“A good example is our arrangement with Dickson Park Dental Surgery, who sponsor our fruit stall at the fete and our trivia night. They offer a dental package for Turner parents, which is promoted as part of the events. Another is the Rugby Union Club at Turner, which sponsored our trivia night and the pizza stall at the fete. We advertise the Club’s promotions and it has become a meeting place for Turner families.”

So what about P&C meetings? Do they get a good turn out for those?

“Our meetings are growing. We meet new people and it grows year on year,” said Helen.

“We have a great Secretary and she makes sure we keep our meetings to just one hour. We have an agenda and keep to it. We make sure people know what is going to be discussed, including what we need approval for, before the meeting by circulating the agenda. That way people know what will be discussed before they come. We talk about key topics in the lead up to the meeting, so that when we get there we know what we are doing and can easily come to a decision.”

There’s obviously a lot to be pleased about how the P&C is working, but when we asked Helen what she is most proud of, it’s not the growing sense of community or re-invigorated P&C.

“Our Fairtrade uniforms!” she said. “We’ve worked hard to find a suitable supplier who has now made school polo shirts for us using organic, Fairtrade-certified cotton. It’s really important as many school uniforms are made by children who don’t get to go to school. Using Fairtrade cotton helps to improve the lives of kids in developing countries, ensuring farmers and workers are paid a fair wage and that children aren’t forced to work in cotton mills and factories to make our uniforms. There was tremendous support among the school community for the Fairtrade uniforms. We took orders initially, but ordered extras so now we sell them each week. I’m happy to talk to other schools who want to go down this path” •

Editors’ note: Council’s online agenda templates include using notes/attachments to let people know about discussion topics before the meeting.

Our Executive

President:	Kirsty McGovern-Hooley
Vice President:	Andrew Bidwell, John Haydon
Secretary:	Cecilia Shlegel
Treasurer:	Crystal Cox
Committee:	Sharon Ding, Jackie Floro, Jane Koitka, Vivienne Pearce, Jayne Trustum, Bonnie Rappola

Life members

Grant Battersby, Pam Cahir, Trevor Cobbold, Graeme Evans, Ian Morgan, Richard Scherer, Vivienne Pearce

Contact us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

Maitland House
100 Maitland Street
Hackett ACT 2602

(02) 6241 5759
contact@actparents.org.au
www.actparents.org.au

Office staff

Executive Officer:	Terry Sanders
Policy Officer:	Veronica Elliott
Communications Officer:	Janelle Kennard
Executive Assistant:	Rachel McGrath

Office hours

9.30am - 2.30pm Monday to Friday.
Closed public holidays and school holidays.

Dates to remember

June 26 Council Hot Topics Meeting
including a visit from ACT
Education Minister Yvette Berry
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

June 28 P&C Constitution workshop
6.45pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

July 7-15 Council office closed for term break

Robots keep sick kids in touch

A group of Canberra Mums is helping seriously sick children across Australia stay connected with school by placing robots in their classrooms.

There are tens of thousands of sick kids in Australia who miss school often or for long periods due to their illness. According to Megan Gilmour, Chair of the Canberra-based charity 'MissingSchool', sick children can fall behind academically and experience isolation from their school communities.

"This leaves lifelong effects on productivity, and social and emotional wellbeing," she said.

MissingSchool looked for technological solutions. It is now running a pilot scheme to place telepresence robots in willing schools to demonstrate that continuous two-way connection is possible between seriously sick children and their classrooms when they are absent.

"Telepresence allows kids who are away from school to dial in and be seen and heard in their classrooms, move around, and learn from their teachers with their classmates. The pilot is intended to be a catalyst for long-term solutions for sick kids that integrates connection between hospital, home and school."

The Australian-first pilot is supported by a grant of up to \$600,000 over three years from St. George Foundation. The grant will help MissingSchool roll out at least 75 robots over three years to demonstrate cost effective and innovative ways to include sick kids in their regular schools.

"I pitched this idea to St. George Foundation from the Netherlands, while on a Churchill Fellowship in countries using similar solutions at



MissingSchool's Megan Gilmour, left, Hugh Dixon and Sarah Jones with the telepresence devices.

scale – I know that Australia can take this leap for sick kids," Megan said.

ACT Education Minister Yvette Berry agreed last year to a trial, making the ACT the first jurisdiction in the national pilot. Chief Minister Andrew Barr joined the announcement, affirming the ACT's push to strengthen inclusion and innovation in ACT schools and its leadership in school connectivity and digital transformation.

The pilot is now eight months in and has already placed robots in schools or for testing in most Australian states, with operational support from education departments in those jurisdictions.

MissingSchool is a volunteer not-for-profit established in 2012 by three Canberra mothers

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