



ACT election round-up

Maclaren Wall, Council's Policy Officer, explains what our schools can expect from the new ACT Government and how Council will continue to be involved.

Another ACT election has come and gone. At first glance it appears as if nothing much has changed. Labor will continue to govern with the support of the Greens, leaving the Liberals in opposition as they have been for the past 15 years. But what impact will this have on public education in Canberra?

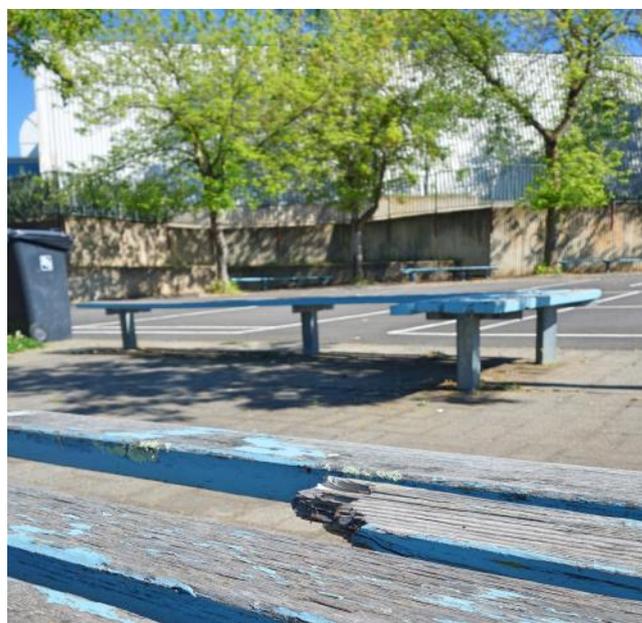
Over the past year or so Council has been lobbying each major party. We've met with their candidates and pushed our five election priorities: support for every student, safe school roads, strong parent bodies, better facilities and co-ordinated management.

Council's main election event, our education forum, was a great success. It enabled Council to clarify the various positions of each party. Parents and community members were given an opportunity to ask their own questions directly to the candidates.

Utilising all information available to us, Council's election work group scored the response of each major party to our five priorities and issued our own Education Report Card.

There were a number of policies that stood out. The Liberals' infrastructure commitment was

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Despite the best efforts of Principals and Boards, many public school buildings need attention, making this an election priority for Council. All major parties responded with promises for significant spending, which we eagerly anticipate.

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From the President



John Haydon

As modern Australians we can easily assume that things always get better, societies become more tolerant, people have increasing access to material goods and entertainment. But a longer view of history than just the post-World War II years and a focus on regions other than the developed world (poor blighted North Korea right now for example) shows this not to be the case.

There is always the possibility of 'black swan' events, named after the European view that all swans were white and no one expected to find black ones. The 2008 financial crisis and the collapse of the Soviet Union are examples.

What can we do to help our children survive and prosper in such an uncertain world? Every parent will have their own ideas but adding to their formal schooling with other activities seems to me to be worthwhile. I know some parents who take the money they save by using our excellent and largely free public schools and commit that to outside-of-school classes in music, gymnastics and myriads of other activities.

Overseas travel might not be available to all but is much more reachable for many parents than used to be the case, and gives children a wonderful experience of other cultures, languages and places.

Possibly the most important thing we can do is ensure our children have meaningful contact and exchange with a wide variety of people, both adults and children, from different backgrounds and walks of life. Attending school of course goes a long way towards achieving this aim.

There is certainly a dazzling array of opportunities available to extend our children. Outward Bound's adventure programs are one

example. You can read a parent's perspective of this program on page eight.

We are not able to predict the future, but we have to plan for it, so we extrapolate from current trends assuming they will continue. The rapid growth of machine learning capabilities will likely lead to massive changes in the world of work, with middle management jobs in particular disappearing, along with much of what are currently regarded as skilled jobs. If this does indeed occur, it is another reason to make sure your children's 'education' is as broad and all-encompassing as possible.

Part of preparing our children for the real world is teaching them to navigate the virtual 'online' world. The Education Directorate has been working with the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner to develop programs and resources with online safety in mind and have kindly provided an update for parents on page four.

Finally, as Council's AGM (Annual General Meeting) approaches, I'd like to pay a special tribute to the 12 members of Council's executive who generously give of their time to support public schools. I urge all parents to join us for our AGM on November 24 and to consider joining the Council team in representing the interests of Canberra public school parents.

I also want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the thousands of ACT parents and carers who support their school P&C by giving their energy and resources to building a stronger public school community. ●

ACT election round-up

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significant as was their promise for flashing warning lights near every school. Council was impressed with the Greens' \$20 million promise of individual traffic management plans for every ACT government school. Council also got each party to agree to an enquiry into the problems around school autonomy.

At the end of the day, Labor won the election fairly convincingly, though they will again need the support of the Greens. It remains to be seen whether any of the Greens' education policies will be adopted by the Labor/Greens coalition (the Greens' focus seems to be on housing, political integrity and public transport). So what should we expect to see in the coming years?

First of all, more school psychologists with funding for an additional 20 around Canberra. A range of scholarships will be introduced for teachers to obtain advanced post-graduate qualifications in science, technology, engineering, maths and languages.

P&Cs should keep their eyes out for over \$1.5 million in promised grants to schools and parent groups for projects that will enhance parental engagement.

There will be an extension of the active streets pilot, looking at ways to address traffic issues and road safety around schools. Twenty Canberra schools will also see 'lollipop people' patrol their road crossings.

School facilities should continue to improve with an extra \$40 million or so to the school infrastructure upgrade budget. Money has been devoted to a new school in Molonglo and the expansion of others in Gungahlin.

All secondary students will also receive a tablet for use at school. While the details around the policy are yet to be confirmed, Labor have been mindful of the preference of many parents for chromebooks and other devices that include a keyboard.

Election promises are always welcome, but

they're just a start. Our schools need continued infrastructure upgrades to remain inspirational centres of learning. In a complicated and increasingly convoluted regulatory environment, P&Cs require additional backroom support so they can continue the important work that they do.

Over the past few years the ACT has witnessed the largest percentage increase in student numbers compared to the rest of the nation and we need to start planning for the future today.

There is a high degree of inequality in our schools. The gap between the educational outcomes of low socio-economic students and students with well-educated parents is huge. This disparity is simply not getting any better.

In the face of the bungled "cage" incident last year, the unique challenges of students with a disability and their carers cannot be ignored any longer.

As the election-induced excitement and energy recedes, Council will work hard to ensure our public school system gets the attention it deserves. ●

How was your year on the P&C?

Thanks for volunteering your time to your P&C in 2016.

How did it go?

We'd love to learn more about your experiences via our member survey:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/YourPC2016

Keeping safe online

Online safety is a huge concern for many parents. The Education Directorate have provided this update on what schools do to keep your kids safe, and what you can do at home.

Our Canberra Public Schools are committed to providing state-of-the-art technology and digital learning opportunities for students, which are safe and secure.

Students need to practice their communication and information gathering skills within a secure environment while still accessing information required for learning in today's world. So whether it's working with the internet or communicating by mobile devices, children should feel safe and not be exposed to inappropriate material.

The SchoolsNET network provides students with reliable high speed wireless internet access, which is filtered for age-appropriate access. This being said, the most valuable step we can take to keep children safe is through the partnership of our schools and parent community. It is this partnership and collective responsibility that will help to prepare young people by bringing a greater understanding and awareness of safe online behaviours.

The ACT Education Directorate has partnered with the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner to provide an enriching digital program aimed to educate public school students to be safe online. The program includes a range of virtual classroom events, such as:

- 'Cyberbullying'
- 'Being a good bystander'
- 'Making good choices online'
- 'Communicating online'
- 'Secret security business'
- 'The internet and the law'

Cybersafety tips for parents and families

Parents and carers can help their children make smart choices about what they find online. To help your children protect themselves you can do the following.



The Directorate has developed social media posts with the ACT Human Rights Commission and ACT Policing specifically designed to raise the awareness of cybersafety among school-aged kids.

- Spend time online with your children and check out sites together.
- Help your children use the Internet as an effective research tool.
- Learn what young people learn — you need to know about chatting, blogging, message boards, YouTube and social networking.
- Make your child aware of stranger danger, particularly in chat rooms.
- Talk to your children about their online experiences, both good and bad.
- Teach your children about dealing with disturbing material and quitting sites.
- Teach your children that information on the web is not always reliable.
- Encourage children to treat others on the net the same way they would in real life.
- Know the best ways of avoiding spam and using filters, labels and safe zones.
- Encourage your children to be careful about giving out personal details on the internet.

Supervision tips at home

- Place your home computer in a public area of your home, perhaps in the room the family spends most time in and not in the child's bedroom.
- Talk through internet use with your child and set some boundaries for computer use —

maybe the time of day they are allowed on the internet, how long they spend online, and what happens if they don't follow the guidelines.

- Supervise your child when they are working online and remind them about sticking to the agreed guidelines.
- Let your child know you are around when they are working online with some occasional "shoulder-surfing".
- Stay informed about who your child is communicating with online. Always supervise them when in chatrooms and never allow them to meet up with new online friends without your knowledge.
- Most of all, encourage your child to participate in different activities like sports, dancing, even playing outside – and not to be always on the computer, texting or using other communication technology.

Protecting personal information

Parents and carers can do a lot to protect their children from inappropriate online material and their personal information.

- Download free internet content filters to protect your family online.
- Delete cookies on a regular basis.
- Select usernames and passwords carefully. Consider the personal information you may be disclosing in a username or email and make sure your password is not something anybody could guess.
- Avoid scams that can be sent via email, social networking and SMS. Check the SCAMwatch website (www.scamwatch.gov.au) for more on scams and how to avoid them.
- Ensure your home computer is protected from viruses and spyware.
- Ensure your firewall is active and install some parent control software.

More information on protecting personal information can be found on the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner's website: www.esafety.gov.au.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group. Bullying is repeated behaviour by an individual or group with the intent to harm.

Some tips for parents on cyberbullying from the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner include the following.

- Talk to your child about cyberbullying before it happens. Work out strategies to address cyberbullying that you are both comfortable with, so your child knows what to expect if they do report concerns to you or another trusted adult.
- Help your child to develop the skills they need to interact safely and respectfully online. Guide their online activities and help them learn to communicate appropriately with friends and family.
- Encourage children to treat others on the net the same way they would in real life.
- Advise your child not to respond to any negative messages and to report any negative messages they receive to you or another trusted adult.
- Reassure your child that you won't block their access to the internet if they report concerns about cyberbullying. Help them to stay connected online and offline to supportive family and friends.
- Help your child to block anyone who sends offensive content. Most social networking services allow users to block and report someone who is behaving badly.

You can seek professional support or report cyberbullying incidents through the [Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner](#) and if you do suspect your child is involved in anything potentially unsafe online, please contact your child's school. ●

Daniel Bray, Program Manager, Digital Transformation, ACT Education Directorate.

Welcoming new parents to the P&C

Mandy Weidmann, known as Australia's 'Fundraising Whisperer', shares her tips for welcoming new parents to the school — and hopefully your P&C.

We recently had a question from a member of our Facebook community asking about setting up a P&C booth at school open days. This is a great way to connect with new members of the school community and there was a lot of discussion about ways to make new families feel welcome.

The ideas which were discussed are relevant to school open days and orientation days as well as the 'First Day'.

There are many and varied reasons that parents will choose your school. As a parent association you need to bear in mind that one of these reasons could potentially be their first impressions of your community. Your association, and the way you present yourself, is of course the visible representative and can influence perceptions greatly.

No matter what form your First Day takes, your committee should most definitely have a presence there. It would appear that there are a lot of parent associations that are taking advantage of this opportunity.

From written information packs to 'meet and greet' sessions, take every chance you get to spruik the advantages of getting involved in the P&C. This will improve your chances of expanding your volunteer army. New families are often keen to get involved but don't want to feel pressured into volunteering, so above all else, be welcoming and understanding.

Give your visitors the low down on recent projects that you've raised money for and any future projects that will benefit their kids. Offer simple ways for them to be involved without feeling like they're making a lifetime commitment.

If your parent association runs the uniform shop, tuckshop or even the swimming club, have information about them all the available: uniform

shop opening hours, tuckshop days (and a menu!), swimming club season dates, costs for joining and list any volunteering opportunities. If you're super organised and already have your fundraising plan for the coming year, have this available too, and outline small ways that people can help.

Other ideas were as follows.

- Give some background about your school and association. A one-pager with the essential information is a great idea (see editor's note below). There is often a lot of 'presumed knowledge', and it's good to get back to basics. A good start to this is asking first year families what they wish they had known when they started.
- Give a summary of why the school has a parent group and your aims/goals.
- Information about how parents can stay up-to-date with activities – newsletters, facebook page, emails.
- Supply contact details for key committee members.
- Include details of upcoming events.
- Include an invitation to your official school welcome morning tea/BBQ.
- Have the school principal introduce parent association members and the president making a short speech about what they do, ways to support them and regular events or activities.
- Have a photo board from past events and if possible, purchases that the P&C has contributed to.
- Include a tea bag and a kit kat in your welcome pack to encourage parents to stop and have a break while they read through the information you've given them.

Make Pinterest your best friend!

Pinterest is *loaded* with cute and (best of all) easy to make ideas for 'welcome' gifts. Below are some of our favourites.

- If you're putting a 'show bag' together for

your open day, how about including a small bottle of bubble mixture with a tag attached saying 'We're BUBBLING with excitement for you to join our school', or a pencil with a 'You're just "write" for our school' tag attached or even a pack of microwave popcorn with a note saying 'Thanks for POPPING in! See you on the first day of school'.

- At your P&C stall on open day, have a big bowl of mints with a sign saying 'Thank you for your commit-'mint', involve-'mint' or encourage-'mint' in your child's education. Here's a little something for your enjoy-'mint'.
- You could also have a jar of 'parent wishes'. Give parents a piece of paper for them to write down what their wish is for their child for the coming year and put it in the jar. This information could be invaluable not only for the P&C, but the for teachers and staff as well.

Remember to be fun, be memorable, and happy fundraising! •

A recovering lawyer and mum of five, Mandy Weidmann is Australia's 'Fundraising Whisperer' – publisher of the Fundraising Directory and author of the Practical Fundraising Handbook for School and Club Volunteers. Mandy believes that volunteers shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel and is passionate about providing resources to make fundraising easier and more fun! Her website, email tips and Facebook community are a great place to find fundraising ideas and resources. See www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au.

Editor's note: Council has a template for creating a simple brochure outlining what your P&C does, how parents can help and what the benefits are – perfect for promoting your P&C to new families. See www.actparents.org.au/index.php/item/248.

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Bound for adventure

One way to get the most out of life is to look upon it as an adventure, and Outward Bound Australia is certainly an adventure, writes parent Karen Hughes.

Recently we welcomed home our fourth child from Outward Bound. As the students began to disembark there was joy, relief, happiness, tears, a sense of achievement, pats on the back, kisses, hugs, smiles, chatter and a whole lot more. Parents were craning their necks to see which bus their children are on and students are peering through tinted bus windows trying to pick their parents out in the crowd.

I was nearly knocked over by some very excited siblings who just couldn't contain themselves as they ran to meet their older sibling on the bus. It was beautiful to see how excited they actually were. There is a real sense of appreciation and love from parents to their teenage children and teenage children to their parents (who usually at this age are 'too cool' to show affection to their parents in front of their peers).

Each and every time I have waited for the Outward Bound bus I have experienced the same wonderful scene. Without ever having been on Outward Bound myself, but from listening to our children on their return, I believe every minute of the experience is well worthwhile, from the organisation and packing, to the many challenges they faced (good and not so good).

My highlight each time is the car ride home and the following 24 hours when our children talked non-stop. Through their chatter I could sense a genuine appreciation for what they have in life. They came home wanting to eat healthier and help more. One of our children even wanted to do his own washing. Sorry to say that novelty quickly wore off! Whilst after a while they slipped back into old habits I can still see from time to time evidence that they haven't forgotten things they learnt.

For nine days they had been challenged – they had to live with and tolerate others, they had lived without family and home comforts, they had to

pitch in and take their turn, they had to deal with difficult situations on their own, without our input. What they gained from doing all this and surviving was a real sense of achievement.

When people think of school success the first thing that comes to mind is often 'Academics'. As a parent of four children, for me, the practical experiences that our children take part in at school are just as important. The success of such experiences can't be measured in grades and marks. The success can, however, be seen in other ways, such as the way they mature and develop as a result of these learning experiences.

When I asked each of our kids just the other day what they remembered about Outward Bound they came up with comments such as - "I enjoyed it", "loved the rafting", "learnt how to tie really good knots", "learnt to tolerate others", "it was better than being at school", "... didn't have to have a shower for nine days", "... left my toothbrush at home", "loved being outside", "it was fun", "... never knew how good apples and oranges and fruit cake could taste", "taught me to be more independent and appreciate 'Mum' and all the things she does for me", "learnt how to cook", "had to navigate the group each day so we didn't get lost".

Looking back I think Outward Bound for our children has been one of the best and most valuable experiences they have had in their time at their school.

The teachers, leaders and the Outward Bound crew do an amazing job organising such large expeditions and making this wonderful learning experience so real and so possible. It takes a lot of work and dedication to get it all up and running so well. We as parents and our children have truly appreciated their efforts. ●

Karen's children attended Outward Bound Australia programs through their school. Outward Bound Australia, is an independent, not-for-profit outdoor education organisation providing challenging experiences. See www.outwardbound.org.au.

Home-style canteen food without cooking

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hamburger patties under the BetterBites brand.

The products are designed and tested by qualified nutritionists to make sure they meet the Green or Amber criteria of the National Guidelines. At the moment there are three products.

- Burger patties (box of 22 for \$38.50) which are made from lean beef mince with a delicate blend of fresh vegetables, garlic and herbs, and free from gluten, egg, soy and dairy. They are classified Green.
- Handcrafted sausage rolls (box of 18 for \$34.20) with beef, pork, fresh vegetables, garlic and herbs in flaky reduced-fat puff pastry. These are classified Amber
- Spinach and ricotta rolls (box of 18 for \$34.20) which are made with 28% real spinach, combined with ricotta, feta, onion

and garlic to give maximum flavour, and all wrapped up in puff pastry and sprinkled with poppy seeds. They are vegetarian and rated Amber.

We were lucky enough to try these products too, and they really are yum, especially the spinach and ricotta rolls. The kids will love them!

More good news — all proceeds from the sale of Betterbites products go toward local nutrition education programs. Find out more, or order now, from www.betterbites.org.au. They deliver to any ACT address (free for orders over \$100). •

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At our P&C...

Creating and promoting healthy canteen foods, without going out of business, remains a challenge for many P&Cs. We caught up with a couple of school canteens to hear about their journeys.

“It’s a work in progress” is how Kaleen Primary School Canteen Assistant, Kate Rowntree, describes her canteen’s transition to a healthier menu. For starters, the hot dogs, chips and hash-browns have gone.

“We used to sell five or six trays of hash-browns at recess” says Kate. “It is cold for a lot of the school year and the kids like to have hot food. So we have replaced the hash-browns with healthier hot snacks.”

Apparently, small cups of cheesy pasta or spaghetti bolognese are popular replacements. At just \$1 each, they sell by the potful. Bags of popcorn and cups of fruit salad also sell out every



A new name, signage and images at Ainslie gives the canteen a happy friendly facelift and promotes healthy foods.

day, and the canteen team are experimenting with soups too.

The healthier food does take longer for staff to prepare, Kate concedes. “We are now dependant on volunteers. If they were to leave it would leave a big hole. In the past, we’d been able to manage without any volunteers.”

So how is the canteen’s bottom line coping with the transition?

“The younger kids don’t miss the old menu items at all,” says Kate, “Our sales went down a bit at first. The older kids were in the habit of buying, say, hot dogs, but we are grateful for the support of parents — the new foods are now selling well.”

“We are now making a profit. Originally our P&C elected to review the canteen on a term by term basis but at the end of term two decided to definitely continuing trading three days a week



Fruit salad cups are popular counter food at both Kaleen and Ainslie school canteens.

for the rest of the year.”

“We received a \$2000 grant from Council to help transition our canteen. We have been using some of the new appliances we bought — popcorn maker, blender, slow cooker — to provide the new range of hot menu items.”

Ainslie School was also one of 34 canteens to benefit from Council’s canteen grants last year. Libby Bailey from Ainslie P&C explained how the money was used there: “This grant gave us the opportunity to add some welcoming elements to our canteen after it had been renovated.”

“We designed and printed some great thank you certificates for our year six students, in recognition of their volunteering. It goes without saying that volunteers are the backbone of many activates at schools. So our new certificates aimed at recognising those who volunteer at the canteen and have been welcomed by all.”

“We had a parent, who is a professional photographer, take some great photos of the students engaged in activities around healthy food and with the grant we had these made into large canvases and have hung them up in the canteen area. New signage for the canteen’s new name was also made with the grant. A few dads have helped hang all this up which has given our canteen entry a happy friendly facelift.”

Access to our largest garden was always an issue for the oldest students. The grant has made it easy for students to have access to the garden at break times. This has given rise to more interest in the garden, has given students another area to ‘hang out’ as well as highlighted to the students that healthy fresh food can be easy to grow!

“All these small elements have made a significant difference to our canteen and our aim of encouraging, role modelling and give our students access to healthy food.”

Council is pleased to have been able to provide the grants to canteens last year as part of a larger grant to Council from the ACT Government. ●

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 86 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.

Our Executive

President:	John Haydon
Vice Presidents:	Amanda Bichard, Vivienne Pearce
Secretary:	Cecilia Shlegel
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Life members

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

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:	Maclaren Wall
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

Oct 30 **World Teachers' Day celebrated in Australia**

Nov 10 **Audit training for treasurers**
7.00pm - 9.00pm
100 Maitland Street Hackett

Nov 22 **Council Annual General Meeting**
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

Dec 17 **Council office closed for school break**
- Jan 22

Feb 28 **Council General Meeting**
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

Home-style canteen food without cooking

Council has long been lobbying for more help for time-strapped canteens in providing healthier foods. Some new players have stepped up to the challenge, supplying healthier options your canteen – and customers – will love.

Nutri-Ys meals

Nutri-Ys food services, run by the YMCA of Canberra, are now providing tasty, 'Green' meals for ACT canteens. The home-style meals are designed to boost vegetable intake and are made from fresh ingredients without additives or preservatives – just what you might like to cook in your own canteen, but may not have the time!

The meals are made in YMCA's kitchens, packaged in single serves, frozen, and delivered to your canteen. They can be heated in the sealed packaging so they are a quick and easy way to add home-style meals to your menu. All are classified as Green on the food traffic-light system.

Best of all, they are really tasty (one lucky Council staff member got to try them!), tasting much more like home-cooked meals than processed frozen food. There is a tasty, but mild, curry of vegetables with chicken or beef curry, served on rice, a lovely lasagne and a macaroni cheese full of added vegetables.

The meals are a great way to add variety to your canteen menu without extra work, or would be great as a "special of the day". They cost \$3.50



BetterBites spinach and ricotta rolls (top) and Nutri-Y's lasagne are tasty, healthy and easy for canteens to serve.

(delivery included) and the serves are generous and satisfying. To order, register for an account at www.canberra.ymca.org.au/Nutri-Ys.

Better bites

Also stepping in to help canteens provide better food for students is Nutrition Australia, through their new selection of healthier rolls and

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