

Education and Training

# Starting School

A guide for parents

**ACT Public Schools** – *So much more to offer*



## Message from the Minister

I am pleased to present a new edition of *Starting School*, a publication designed to assist families with children starting preschool and kindergarten in ACT public schools.

We know how critically important it is for every child to get a good start in life with a quality education, and through ACT public schools the ACT Government is committed to ensuring every child can develop to their full potential.

International research consistently shows that high quality education in the early years has lasting benefits for a child's social, emotional and intellectual development.

That's why the ACT Government has increased our focus on this area of education over recent years, for example by reducing class sizes, and why we are continuing to invest in the early years of the ACT's children.

From this year we are introducing four new early childhood schools in Isabella Plains, Lyons, Narrabundah and Southern Cross (Scullin). This is a nation-leading approach to the early years of learning that will not only give children a great start to their education but also a range of services, including healthcare, family support and counselling to help parents and carers.

We are also continuing to invest more right across our school system. We are further reducing average class sizes from primary school through to Year 12, investing a record \$350 million in upgrading every ACT public school and to building new schools where they are most needed and working to ensure we continue to attract and retain the best teachers to our classrooms.

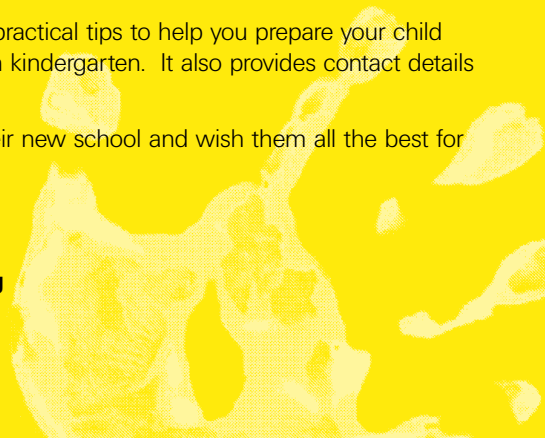
When your child starts at an ACT public school, you can be sure they will have access to the best public education system all the way through to Year 12.

National testing shows ACT public schools are providing students with the best education in Australia, while international testing shows our schools are performing among the best in the world.

This booklet provides useful advice and practical tips to help you prepare your child for preschool and for those first weeks in kindergarten. It also provides contact details should you require more information.

I would like to welcome your child to their new school and wish them all the best for their education.

**Andrew Barr MLA**  
**Minister for Education and Training**



## Starting School

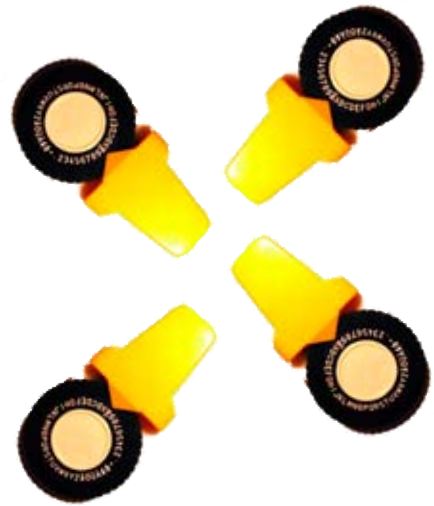
A guide for parents contains useful and important information for preparing your son or daughter as they embark on their formal schooling and for life at school in general. The booklet also contains a list of helpful web sites and contact numbers should you require further information.





## Contents

<b>Getting ready for school</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The first day at school</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Getting to school safely</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Road safety and walking</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>A healthy breakfast and lunch</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>School canteens</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Food allergies</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Tips for school lunches</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Enrolling in schools</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Attending School</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Voluntary contributions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Uniforms and colour code</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sun protection and preparing for hot days</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Head lice</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Student behaviour and school discipline procedures</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Policies and Guidelines</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ACT government schools</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Education for the 21st Century</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Evaluating your child's progress</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Additional assistance programs</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Term dates and events</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Contact details and web sites</b>	<b>11</b>



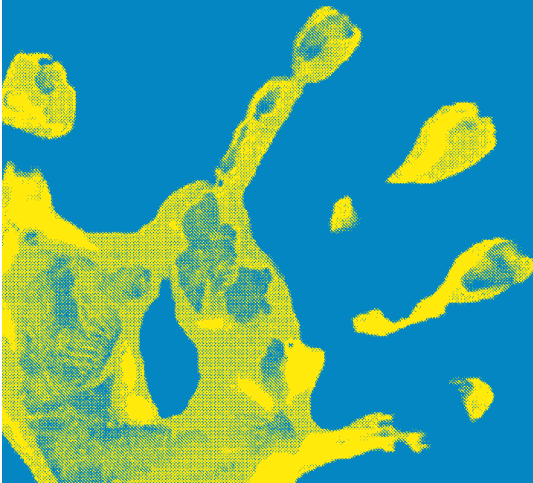
### Starting school

Starting school can be a stressful time for young children. Schools can sometimes be confronting places with lots of children of different ages and new routines to learn. Your son or daughter needs lots of support from you before they start school and especially in the first few weeks.

### Label Child's Belongings

Label all your child's belongings and check for special requirements such as a library bag and art shirt or smock. Encourage your child to dress themselves so they can manage things like taking jumpers or coats on and off at school.

Help them with going to the toilet by themselves and ensure they are able to make their needs known to the teacher. Accidents can happen so a change of underwear can help your school manage the accident with the least amount of fuss.



## ParentLink

Parentlink is an ACT Government service which provides a range of information to assist parents and carers with nurturing and supporting children. A range of Parent Guides are available from schools and the Parentlink website providing easy-to-read information on issues from birth through to teens.



## Getting ready for school

It is common for children, and their parents, to be a little anxious about starting school. To reduce any uncertainty it is helpful before starting school to familiarise your child with the school and their teacher and encourage them by focusing on the benefits of interesting new experiences and friendships. Consider developing a school day routine and practise getting ready for school. This routine will involve a set bedtime to ensure your child has enough sleep and a morning routine of getting dressed in the school uniform and packing their school bag.

School websites also provide information about specific programs and advice for parents. A complete listing of schools, with contact details and website addresses, is available from the Department's website.



## The first day of school

So that your child's first day is as enjoyable as possible ensure your family is prepared and allow time for your child to eat a balanced breakfast. Arrive at school well before the first class or activity so they have time to become settled. To help them to become secure, be positive and reassuring. Demonstrate your trust in the teacher and your enthusiasm about school and learning.

Once your child is settled into school, a short and reassuring goodbye encourages independence. Be sure you tell your son or daughter when you leave. Be guided by your child's teacher who will use a number of strategies so that the first day is as stress-free as possible for students.



## Getting to school safely

It is important that your child is at school before the starting time each day. A parent or carer also needs to collect children promptly at the end of the school day so that they do not become anxious. Before and after school care may be available at your school and you can discuss this with the school.

## Road safety and walking

Schools can be busy traffic environments as parents take children to school and pick them up at the end of the school day. Drivers need to ensure they abide by the traffic rules and car parking arrangements. Be aware of school buses and park on the same side of the road as the bus. Parking on the opposite side can be dangerous as children will be tempted to rush out from behind a bus to cross the road. Ensure that properly adjusted seatbelts are worn and be especially careful when reversing your vehicle.

As children become old enough to walk to school, parents need to consider the route to school and likely road crossings. Road safety needs to be taught to children and reinforced by parents setting a good example. Educate your child about not accepting gifts or lifts from someone they do not know.

Some schools organise a 'walking bus' where children walking to and from school can join a group of other school children and a responsible adult. The 'bus' picks up children along a designated route. Your school will have more information if you are interested.

## A healthy breakfast and lunch

It is vital that your child begins their day with a nutritious breakfast. Participation in school activities will burn up their energy and a hungry child will more easily lose concentration and become tired. Useful information for parents on how to provide a healthy breakfast is available from The Raising Children Network website. Specific dietary advice is also available from the Dietitians Association of Australia.



### Children at ages five and six – Dr John Irvine

'These kids still have their lovely imagination but their ego has settled and they're now keen to make others feel good. If you capitalise on their thirst to be told they're good then you can develop the most adorable kids.

Their behaviour can be reinforced even by abstract symbols of parental approval, such as stars or stamps and their behaviour can be shaped by consistently reinforcing behaviour you want and consistently punishing behaviour you don't. Because they believe in their world, things that shatter that faith hurt hard. If a dog is nasty to them or somebody hurts them then they can wear the scars for a long time.'

An excerpt from Who'd be a parent? The manual that should have come with the kids! **Dr John Irvine**

## School canteens

Healthy eating is encouraged in ACT public schools. School canteens promote and provide healthy food and beverages and limit the sale of foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt, such as cakes, chips or lollies. Schools welcome parents volunteering their time to assist with school canteens.



## Food allergies

It is vital to let the school know if your child is allergic to certain food groups such as nuts. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction to certain foods and many schools have adopted an 'allergy friendly' approach. These schools will not have nut products available from the canteen. As children sometimes like to share their lunches, their schools may also request parents to provide lunches free of nuts or nut products such as 'Nutella' and peanut butter.

### Tips for school lunches

- Organise food and drink according to the timetabled breaks and explain to your child that snack items are for the morning break and lunch items for the longer break.
- Let your child help prepare lunches and snacks.
- Pack food that is ready and easy to eat and not too messy. Pre-cut items such as oranges, celery and carrot are ideal.
- Use a lunch box that keeps food cool and ensure all items are clearly labelled.
- Ensure your child is able to open containers such as cans or plastic tubs.
- Try different types of breads, rolls or muffins for variety.
- Limit sweets, chips and treats.
- Water could be flavoured with a slice of lemon or orange.



## Enrolling in school

In the ACT it is compulsory for children aged from 6 to 15 years old to be enrolled at a school. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. Education in ACT public schools is free and no fees are chargeable. When enrolling your child you will need to provide evidence of your child's date of birth, such as a birth certificate, as well as your child's immunisation status and any medical conditions such as allergies. If there are any court orders in place affecting your child, you will need to provide the school with details and relevant documentation. If you would like further assistance with school enrolment please contact the school in your area or school operations on 6205 5428 or 6205 5429.

## Attending school

It is important for your child to attend school each day for their intellectual development and, in particular, their reading, writing and numeracy skills development, as well as their social, emotional and physical development. Playing with peers is important for a child's social and emotional development as they learn to get along with others and learn what is acceptable behaviour. In the early years of schooling children need opportunities to practise these skills, test new ideas and negotiate with other children. As parents know, there will be disagreements between children and friendships will be made and some will break up. The teacher will assist your child to deal with conflict and will appreciate being told of any circumstances you are aware of that may be affecting your child.

Your child will be excused from school if they are sick or have a temporary medical condition that prevents them from attending. Your child may also be excused from attending school by the principal if they have an infectious or contagious illness or an infestation of head lice. You must tell the school if your child will be away and if your child is absent provide a reasonable explanation for the absence, preferably in writing.

## Voluntary contributions

Public education is free. Schools may offer or facilitate some specific optional items, activities and services for which parents may be required to pay if they want their child to access them. Such activities and items could include: non-essential school camps and excursions, class photos, canteens, private tutoring and uniforms. Student support funds are maintained in all government schools to support the needs of students who might not otherwise be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities provided by their schools.



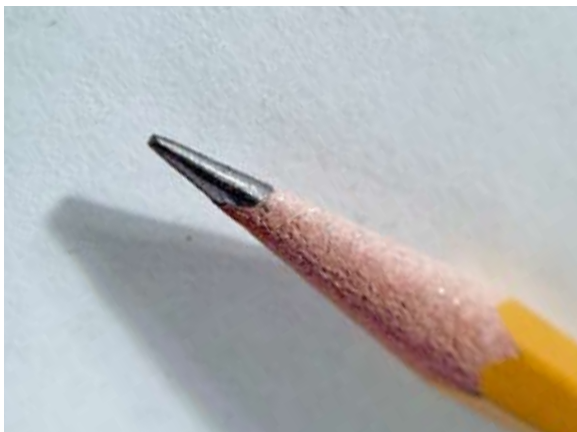
## Uniforms and colour code

The school uniform or colour code is determined by the school board. The school's dress code policy and guidelines are available from the school's handbook or website.

## Sun protection and preparing for hot days

Much of the damage to a child's skin occurs in childhood and adolescence from exposure to the sun. ACT public schools encourage children to play in shady areas and ask parents to ensure children wear appropriate clothing including a hat. Most schools will enforce a 'no hat, no play policy' and the regular use of broad spectrum water resistant SPF 30+ sunscreen on exposed skin when students are exposed to the sun.

Canberra can experience quite hot days in summer and schools will take steps on these days to ensure children do not get too hot and have access to water. Parents may also like to pack extra water bottles.



## Head lice

Head lice are a very common problem. Head lice are only found on the human head and are not found in furnishings or classroom carpets. If an outbreak of head lice does occur at school it can be annoying but not harmful to your child's health. However to avoid an outbreak across a class of students, schools will request parents to remove and treat children with evidence of head lice. A useful Head lice Fact Sheet on how to treat head lice is available from the ACT Health website.



**Children do best at school when their parents and teachers work together and support each other.**

## Student behaviour and school discipline procedures

Schools have a range of approaches to reinforce the good behaviour measures taught by parents. For students in the early years the focus will be on learning to work cooperatively with others and to follow instructions from the teacher. This will include learning to walk into class in an orderly way and to put their hand up to speak in class.

Teachers will outline the rules of the classroom to students and the consequences of not following teacher directions, being disruptive in class or behaviour that is likely to be harmful to others. If there has been a disruption to the class and student learning, the teacher will quickly take action and ensure students understand why certain actions are unacceptable.

## Policies and guidelines

The Department of Education and Training provides policy advice to ACT government schools. These are available from the Department website or from your school. Each school also has a range of policy guidelines providing advice on how the school is conducted. These are often found on the school's website or are available from the front office.

## ACT public schools

Each school has a school board as part of its governance structure to establish and monitor school strategic directions and policies. Typically school boards have three parent representatives nominated by the school's Parents and Citizens Association. Parents are encouraged to consider becoming a part of the association and schools welcome parents volunteering their time and skills to support the school. Schools regularly communicate with parents about school programs and activities through the school newsletter.

The ACT Department of Education and Training website <http://www.det.act.gov.au/> provides further information on ACT government schools, public education services and programs and contact details.

# Education for the 21st Century

The ACT Government has committed significant levels of funding to public schools in recent years to develop and extend a number of programs to ensure your child will have the best possible foundations for learning. This has included a renewal of school curriculum across all ACT schools so what is taught is relevant and important for children to know, understand and gain those skills which will equip them for lifelong learning in the 21st Century.

In recognition of the importance of the earliest years of a child's learning the ACT Government has established four new early childhood schools to open in 2009. The schools at Isabella Plains, Southern Cross (Scullin), Narrabundah and Lyons will provide integrated services for children aged 0-8 years, and their families and extend preschool hours.

In 2008 all preschools were amalgamated with their local primary school allowing teachers to share their expertise on early learning to better meet the needs of all young children.

All ACT public schools also maintain lower class sizes for students in the earliest years of primary school.

Your child will participate in a range of programs to develop their intellectual, emotional, social and physical skills to help them realise their potential. A typical school day will involve a variety of activities such as physical exercise, reading and writing tasks, learning about numbers, shapes and patterns, science and how things work, art and music activities, visiting the library and using information technologies.

Developing your child's literacy and numeracy skills will be a key focus across all learning areas as these skills are the essential platform for their future success.

The teacher will provide a range of lesson experiences to challenge and stimulate your child's learning while supporting them to meet their individual needs in becoming confident learners.

## Evaluating your child's progress

Effective teaching and learning requires a collaborative partnership between parents and teachers. Teachers will advise you of the progress your child is making and how you can assist them to follow up their class work at home.

Your child's teacher will assess how your child is progressing individually and also in relation to other children. Your school will provide written reports at least twice a year advising you of your child's progress. These reports will also indicate areas for further development.

Regular parent/teacher meetings occur throughout the school year so that you can discuss with the teacher your son's or daughter's achievement and progress. Parents may also choose to make an appointment with the class teacher during the school term.

**It is important that you show how excited you are about your child's learning by asking your child about their day. You could ask them what books they read, what words they know, or what songs and rhymes they have learnt.**





## Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)

In Kindergarten, the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) program, conducted at the beginning and end of the year, will assess your child's literacy and numeracy skills.

This test is also used by a number of countries and by individual schools across Australia. The program helps teachers to plan appropriate programs for students who are not achieving the expected standards. The first assessment will take place within the first month of school and there is no preparation necessary. Your child's school report to you will be based largely on the PIPS assessment.

## Additional assistance programs

Some children require additional support. The ACT Government provides support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those for whom English is their second language, and students with a disability.

Further advice on English as a Second Language support is available from your school. ACT government schools provide a range of support programs for students with a disability. If your child has special needs please make an appointment to talk with the principal as early as possible. The school can then help make arrangements for your child. Information is available from Student Services Directorate of the Department of Education and Training on 62057029 or the 'Services and Programs' section of the Department website.

Students with a disability may require additional programs from specialists in other areas. Therapy ACT is a free government service that provides a multidisciplinary therapy and support service for people with disabilities and delays in their development aged from birth to 65 years of age. Therapy and support services are available for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social work and psychology. For more information contact Therapy ACT.



## Term dates and events

Schools are closed for all public holidays including Canberra Day on 9 March 2009. New students start school on the Monday of Term 1, with all continuing students returning on Tuesday. Term dates for ACT schools for 2009 and 2010 are as follows:

### 2009

#### Term 1

Friday 30 January to Thursday 9 April

#### Term 2

Tuesday 28 April to Friday 3 July

#### Term 3

Monday 20 July to Friday 25 September

#### Term 4

Monday 12 October to Friday 18 December

### 2010

#### Term 1

Thursday 28 January to Friday 9 April

#### Term 2

Tuesday 27 April to Friday 2 July

#### Term 3

Monday 19 July to Friday 24 September

#### Term 4

Monday 11 October to Friday 17 December

# Contact details and web sites

## Helpful Phone Numbers

**ACT Department of Education & Training**  
6207 5111

**Canberra Connect**  
13 22 81 (6207 0494 TTY)

**Emergency – Police, Fire, Ambulance**  
000

**Calvary Public Hospital**  
6201 6111

**Carers ACT**  
6296 9900

**Canberra Hospital**  
6244 2222

**Canberra Preschool Society**  
6286 2527  
or email [canberrapreschools@bigpond.com](mailto:canberrapreschools@bigpond.com)

**Child Abuse Prevention Service**  
1800 688 009

**Citizens Advice Bureau ACT**  
6248 7988

**Crime Stoppers**  
1800 333 000 (8am-9pm)

**Domestic Violence Crisis Service**  
6280 0900 (6247 1657 TTY)

**Health First**  
6207 7777 (6207 7770 TTY)

**Kids Helpline**  
1800 551 800

**Lifeline**  
13 11 14

**Mental Health Crisis Team**  
1800 629 354

**ParentLink**  
6205 8800 (Mon-Fri 9am-9pm)

**Poisons Information Centre**  
13 11 26

**Police Assistance**  
13 14 44

## Helpful Web Sites

**ACT Department of Education and Training**  
[www.det.act.gov.au](http://www.det.act.gov.au)

**ACT Government**  
[www.act.gov.au](http://www.act.gov.au)

**Citizens Advice Bureau ACT**  
[www.citizensadvice.org.au](http://www.citizensadvice.org.au)

**Canberra Connect**  
[www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au](http://www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au)

**Canberra Preschool Society**  
[www.canberrapreschools.org](http://www.canberrapreschools.org)

**Parentlink**  
[www.parentlink.act.gov.au](http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au)

**Safe Schools**  
[www.bullyingnoway.com.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au)

**Schools**  
[www.det.act.gov.au](http://www.det.act.gov.au)

**Sun Smart**  
[www.sunsmart.com.au](http://www.sunsmart.com.au)



