



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the ACT Auditor General's report No 6 of 2021:
Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools](#))

Members:

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)
MS N LAWDER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 15 MARCH 2022

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr D Monk (Ph: 620 50129)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

WITNESSES

BOWDEN, MR MATTHEW, Senior Director, Performance Audit, ACT Audit Office **1**

HARRIS, MR MICHAEL, ACT Auditor-General, ACT Audit Office **1**

STANTON, MR BRETT, Assistant Auditor-General, Performance Audit, ACT Audit Office **1**

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 1.31 pm.

HARRIS, MR MICHAEL, ACT Auditor-General, ACT Audit Office

STANTON, MR BRETT, Assistant Auditor-General, Performance Audit, ACT Audit Office

BOWDEN, MR MATTHEW, Senior Director, Performance Audit, ACT Audit Office

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the first public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion inquiry into the Auditor-General's report into teaching quality. Before we go further, the committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect the continuing culture and contribution that they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed and published by Hansard. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used the words, "I will take that as a question on notice."

Today we welcome the Auditor-General and his officials. Please confirm that you have read the privilege statement and that you understand its implications.

Mr Harris: I have read the privilege statement and I understand it.

Mr Stanton: I have read the statement and I understand it.

Mr Bowden: I read the statement and I understand it.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement, or should we go to questions?

Mr Harris: Going straight to questions might be the best approach.

THE CHAIR: I will lead off. Could you expand on the section of your report that details the distribution of experienced teachers across ACT schools? What schools have the lowest number of experienced teachers and what schools have the highest?

Mr Harris: I will pass to Matt Bowden for the detail, although I will make a couple of comments before I do so. The distribution of better performing teachers is one of the areas in the report where we highlight what we see as some deficiencies. There seems to be not the best distribution of experienced teachers across the school system, and there would appear to be a number of reasons for that.

One of them is the way in which the transfer system operates, and the other is probably the way in which new teachers are brought into the system, and there is probably a link between the two. They are the areas, particularly in the conclusion

section of the report—which is at the very beginning of the report—where we highlight those deficiencies. I might pass to Matt, and get him to fill in some of that detail.

Mr Bowden: We talked about the proportion of “experienced teacher 2” classroom teachers—teachers that have in excess of seven years of experience in the public school system. The information on that is contained in chapter 5 of the report. Figure 5.51 shows the distribution of experienced teachers to classroom teachers in ACT public schools. That definition is from the Education Directorate’s enterprise agreement, which defines the number of years of service to get to that level of experience.

Mr Harris: That table is on page 126 of the report, just for reference.

Mr Bowden: The report identifies, at paragraph 5.19, that, on the whole, the ACT public school system has 61 per cent of its workforce of approximately 3,500 teachers that are at the experienced teacher 2 level. While there is some variation around that percentage, the report did note that 26 ACT public schools have a workforce that is made up of more than 70 per cent experienced teacher 2 teachers. So 26 schools have more than roughly 10 per cent of that average. You would expect some sort of variation, obviously, in individual school populations. Then 22 schools have a workforce made up of less than 50 per cent of experienced teacher 2 classroom teachers.

While the report did not specifically identify individual schools in that Education Directorate data, it did highlight that there was some variation around the proportion of schools that had a lower proportion of experienced teachers also being schools that had a lower ICSEA rating—that is, a lower level of socio-economic advantage in that school.

In figure 5.1 of that chart, the orange shade on the right shows that a significant proportion of those schools are schools with a lower ICSEA rating. The information on that is contained in 5.22 of the report, which shows that there are examples with comparatively low ICSEA values that have a higher proportion of experienced teacher 2 staff, but it was noted that eight of the schools with the lowest ICSEA ratings in the ACT were also among the schools with the lowest proportion of experienced teacher 2 staff.

THE CHAIR: Could you expand on that further? Were there any other characteristics—or maybe geographical locations—that defined the distribution of those experienced teachers?

Mr Bowden: Not particularly. As part of our analysis of this data, we did not find that there was a particular relationship between geographic dispersion and the level of experienced teacher 2 staff in that school. But, that said, 5.22 shows that eight of those schools with lower proportions of experienced teacher 2 staff also had a lower ICSEA rating. That was the relationship that we were able to find in the data. Beyond that, we did not find a particularly strong relationship on that front. That was the point that we have made in the report.

THE CHAIR: I was hoping you could expand on how the transfer system works currently and how that might be exacerbating the distribution of teachers.

Mr Bowden: With the transfer system, essentially, when teachers are brought on, they are brought into the school for a period of up to five years, initially. They are posted to a school. For example, if you are a new teacher fresh out of university, you apply to the Education Directorate and principals make that selection of the staff that they want in their particular school. The posting to that school is for a period of five years. At the end of that five years, teachers are, essentially, placed into the transfer round. The report does say that there are some variations to that. For example, teachers can self-select to go into the transfer round before those five years for professional reasons, or at that five-year point a principal can essentially withdraw a teacher from that transfer round. So those teachers are not available for placement elsewhere in the public school system.

Mr Harris: Essentially, there are two factors at play that self-select here. The transfer system is not a system that is controlled or mandated by the directorate. Both principals and teachers have choices in relation to transfer. A principal can exclude a teacher from a transfer round if they choose to do so—experienced or otherwise, it makes no difference. Equally, as I understand it—correct me if I am wrong, Matt—unless a teacher asks to be transferred to a particular school, they will not be transferred.

Mr Bowden: Yes.

Mr Harris: With those two choices together, there are obvious ways in which the transfer system does not necessarily equate to an evening-out of skills and experience across the school network, for a variety of reasons.

Mr Bowden: Yes. Certainly, at the time that we did the work, the schools identified where they have available posts, essentially, and the teachers identify that they would like to be considered for a series of preferences. If that match is not made, the teacher essentially remains at their existing school. So if there was a school that, using our earlier analysis, could benefit from their substantial experience but that teacher has not identified a preference for being posted to that school, that teacher will not be posted to that school.

Mr Harris: One of the points to be made there is that whilst we did not necessarily find any direct evidence that people were deliberately perverting the system, or gaming the system, it is clearly very difficult for the Education Directorate, off its own bat, to direct and determine where it wants its workforce to be for the best outcomes as far as teaching quality is concerned, and for equity reasons.

Mr Bowden: The report notes an example that we found in our audit, where one teacher had been extended for 20 years in the one school. Principals, over time, have essentially kept that particular teacher in the school and excluded them from a number of transfer rounds over the years.

MS LAWDER: I understand what you mean about equity and putting teachers where the need may well exist, but how likely is this to happen? It seems as if there are not

many areas of the public service where you send people, whether they want to go or not.

Mr Harris: Fair question. All we are trying to point out here is that, at least from the point of view of the data—and bear in mind that we are looking at teaching quality here, and the relationship between teaching quality and student outcomes—the evidence and the research tell you that the more that a student is exposed to a teacher of better quality, the better the outcome. And the more often they are exposed to those teachers—in other words, year after year—there is a cumulative effect in terms of the outcome for the student.

The data seems to suggest that there is an inequity or an inequality in the system, in terms of the distribution of high-quality teachers and the ICSEA rating, as Matt said. So you have a large proportion of inexperienced teachers in a lot of schools with low socio-economic ratings. If you wanted to get a more even outcome across the system, you would do something about a better distribution of the quality teachers across the system and, of course, also improve the quality of all teachers in the system. What we are trying to do here is to use the data to highlight where a deficiency might be and suggest that, in terms of student outcomes and teacher quality, there might be a better way of doing it. But you are right; mandating those things is not common.

Mr Bowden: The other point, just to reinforce Michael's point, is that the research also shows that it follows that the earlier you get those opportunities to have highly experienced teachers in a kid's educational journey—for example, in those early years, or primary school years—the better the outcome. You want that lift in student educational outcomes as early as possible in a student's education. For example, one of the things that we noted in the report, at section 5.32, was that ACT public high schools, on the whole, had a workforce comprising 60.8 per cent of experienced teacher 2 staff, while the colleges, which comprise the last two years of a student's educational journey, have an experienced teacher 2 staff distribution of 76.1 per cent. Our research, in the introduction to the report, shows that, in order to get that lift in student educational outcomes, you want that stream of high-performing teachers over those three years to give that cumulative effect that teaching quality can bring.

Mr Harris: It simply reinforces the point that lifting the quality overall is the name of the game here, not just better distribution of the proportion of high-quality teachers we have at the present time. The other parts of the report are trying to focus on areas where you might be able to lift the average quality right across the board, rather than concentrating on the large number of good teachers we already have.

THE CHAIR: Is there a stated reason why we have transfer rounds at all?

Mr Bowden: I believe it is a feature in the enterprise agreement. I believe the point there is essentially about encouraging mobility across the ACT public school system. I believe that is the stated reason in the enterprise agreement, which covers that off.

MS LAWDER: Looking at your recommendation for the evaluation of school improvement documentation, I note you have said that some of the Education Directorate's responses to the system school review reports have not included reference to how prior year recommendations have been implemented. I am not sure

whether you know the answer to this question. They may not have included a reference to prior year recommendations in that year's report but do they collect them anywhere and report on them? Do you understand what I mean?

Mr Bowden: Are you talking about recommendations of the previous external review?

MS LAWDER: The prior year's recommendations. I am looking at page 65, paragraph 3.44. It says:

However, the Education Directorate's responses to the *System School Review Reports* have not included reference to how prior year recommendations have been implemented.

My question is: is it that they are not included in that report or are they not included anywhere—are they not tracked anywhere at all?

Mr Bowden: Certainly, the evidence that we were given at the time did not show that follow-up to the previous years' recommendations. The example for that one was that there was one year of reviews done. The report says it was the 2019 report. Later in that paragraph it says that in the next year the 2020 report had very similar responses. Perhaps you could understand that to mean that there were ongoing actions over those years—larger programs at work—but there was no reflection in terms of the progress that had been made from that first year, if it was a larger program of work.

MS LAWDER: Another area of documentation in the same chapter is about the annual action plans that schools are required to publish. Your audit showed that only two of the six schools considered the action plans, and only three published action plans. I am presuming you feel that this was a consistent figure across all schools or represents similar figures, or do you think it is an anomaly?

Mr Bowden: In the scope of the audit we looked at a selection of six schools. Obviously, at that point we did not look more broadly across all 88 schools in the public school system. But, in terms of the process that we observed around the education support office's analysis and review of the school action plans, there certainly would be scope for those action plans not to be published on a school's website. It could be that the school has an action plan and has not published it. Obviously, that limits its value in terms of transparency and what actions the school leadership will be doing in the year ahead to lift student educational outcomes.

Mr Harris: Because we are sampling, it is a question of probabilities. The sample size is enough for us to be able to make some suggestions as to probability. What Matt is saying is that, given what we found, in terms of the numbers that were not reporting, there is a fair probability that that is a reasonable reflection across a fair number of schools.

MS LAWDER: Who is the key audience for an action plan? Is it the Education Directorate, parents, or the principal and other teachers? Who is the audience for these action plans?

Mr Bowden: The plan encapsulates the actions of the school community, so really it is a communication to all of those groups, those stakeholders, that you identified to show that this is what the school is committing to—the particular activities, the particular improvement outcomes that are being aimed at by that school community. I think you outlined all of the correct stakeholders that are the intended audience.

MS LAWDER: Who has said that these action plans are required? Was it the Education Directorate?

Mr Bowden: Yes, so—

MS LAWDER: The Education Directorate should, in turn, be following up perhaps and asking schools where their action plans are.

Mr Bowden: Yes, that is right. Those school action plans are a requirement under the Education Directorate’s people, performance and practice policy. Along with annual action plans, that requires school improvement plans and annual impact reports. So all of those should be reviewed and published to demonstrate what improvements the school has made.

Mr Harris: The point we are trying to highlight here is that at the high level of policy framework there are a set of requirements which are designed to provide a public accountability in terms of performance and improvement. What is actually happening on the ground is that there does not appear to be sufficient compliance with that policy framework, at the coalface.

MS LAWDER: There is a bit of a disconnect.

Mr Harris: The high-level policy says A, B, C and D. On the ground, people cannot look at what A, B, C and D actually mean; and, more importantly, what difference it has made.

MS LAWDER: Okay. At 3.57 it says:

Education Support Office executives advised that school action plans are an important input to planning and delivery ...

But if it is not reported and there is that disconnect between the two levels, obviously, there is much more work that needs to be done to make sure that they align.

Mr Harris: That leads into that other part of the report, which talks about an apparent lack of awareness at various levels, both in the school environment and in the directorate environment, about who actually does what, and what support programs are available, what assistance is available and who I can turn to, to get advice and help on this, that or something else.

We do not go into the centralisation-decentralisation question in the report, but there is this ongoing—“tension” is not the right word—dialogue about school autonomy on the one hand, and the central coordination, planning and assistance on the other hand. Things move on that spectrum between centralisation and decentralisation, depending

upon various settings. There is clearly an importance to school autonomy so that principals and teachers can deal with their community and get on with the job in relation to that community; but, on the other hand, there are efficiencies to be gained from the central provision of some services and support programs.

The support systems that are centrally available sometimes do not seem to be well understood in schools. And even sometimes in the centrally provided arrangements, there does not seem to be quite enough definition of the roles and responsibilities for the central people. We do not pretend to have the answers, and nor should we, to where that boundary lies. That is a proper discussion between the community and the directorate, clearly. All we are trying to do here is highlight the fact that there seems to be this misunderstanding, and if that could be clarified in some way, there might be better outcomes.

MS LAWDER: Is it a misunderstanding, a lack of understanding, or both?

Mr Harris: That is a good question. Matt, what do you think?

Mr Bowden: That answer probably differs depending on which stakeholders you are talking about. It could be a lack of understanding, for example, when we talk to teachers at particular schools. They might not be aware what the school improvement plan or the annual action plan is. But the principal would have, obviously, a very clear understanding of it, and they would be communicating those messages to their teaching staff. From the education support office angle, it might be a misunderstanding at that point because as the policy is set, you would expect it to be rolled out across the schools. Perhaps, as you identify, there is a misalignment happening. So in that sector it might be more of a misunderstanding.

THE CHAIR: What support is provided to new educators, and how consistently is it provided?

Mr Bowden: There is a raft of supports available for new educators. That is in chapter 4 of our report.

THE CHAIR: We are having some technical issues.

Mr Stanton: I am happy to have a go, if you like. I apologise; I have been dipping in and out of the connection here. I think we were talking about the new educators support program.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Stanton: That is from paragraph 4.79 onwards in the report. New educators are defined as those teachers newly started in the workforce from that first, second and third year. That is a technical term defined under the enterprise agreement. There is supposed to be a program of support activities for the new educator. That is detailed from about 4.88 onwards.

There is supposed to be a five-day centralised induction for new educators. Then, over the next few years, new educators are supposed to be given time to undertake

professional development activities that are specific and targeted towards their needs as new educators. It is called the new educator support program, but we certainly identified shortcomings in its application. There were criticisms of the five-day induction program—fairly consistent feedback in relation to that. But then as the new educator goes on in their career, in the first few years, it was more about the time that is available for the new educator to access time away from the classroom to undertake particular professional development activities.

THE CHAIR: Why is there a problem accessing time for these new educators?

Mr Bowden: Am I back on again?

Mr Harris: Yes, you are back.

Mr Bowden: Sincere apologies, Chair. Remote access was dropping out. I take it Brett just went through the supports that are available and your question was about troubles with accessing time. Sometimes it is about timetabling issues—in terms of time with, say, a mentor teacher, whether those times line up nicely, so that teachers can get time with each other.

The report also said that if teachers are away there is sometimes an inability to make those times match up. Also, if other teachers are away, sometimes that release time is unavailable due to a lack of, say, relief teachers to fill in for teachers. For example, a teacher who is attending off-site training needs to be replaced. A lack of availability of relief teachers was identified in the course of our audit.

Mr Harris: There was a reticence on the part of all teachers. They do not want to take time for their own personal development if that means they are putting their colleagues under additional stress because of a lack of suitable relief teachers being available, or an inability to get them at a time that suits everybody, even if they are available. So there is a variety of factors here. It is not just that they cannot do it; it is just that sometimes they do not want to.

THE CHAIR: Who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that new educators get the support that they are entitled to?

Mr Bowden: As the entitlements for new educators are covered under the enterprise agreement, principals are kept responsible for, essentially, administering those enterprise agreement entitlements at a school level. There is a document—I believe it is an implementation plan—that is signed off each year. It is a document that is, I believe, signed off between the principal and the staff, saying, “We have met the requirements of the enterprise agreement.” That is not just for new educators but for all entitlements that apply to school-based teaching staff at that particular school.

MS LAWDER: I am unsure how it works in the school if many of your teachers want to go to extra training or support and it requires relief teaching. I guess that the budget for the relief teachers comes out of that single school’s budget; is that correct?

Mr Bowden: I believe that is correct. Something that was identified as an impediment was the cost of having to pay the wages of the staff attending the training as well as

getting those relief teachers in. That is correct.

MS LAWDER: I want to go to almost the opposite end of the spectrum. The chair's question was about new teachers. My question is about the highly accomplished or lead teachers. I am reading some of the information that says there may be some lack of interest from teachers in gaining that certification. It could be the cost, the workload, and the lack of perceived benefits. There could be other responsibilities—maybe additional administrative responsibilities—as opposed to face-to-face teaching responsibilities, and teachers were not necessarily always keen to do that. I think it said in the report that a principal interviewed advised you of this. Again, do you feel this is representative across the entire system—highly accomplished or lead teachers' certification not being viewed as that attractive for teachers?

Mr Harris: Yes, I think so. It would appear that the main benefit of going through the process of this qualification is additional money. That is certainly true; there is an additional salary point attached to having that status. I think the more important point in the review—and Matt can expand on this—is that having gone through that, the question seems to be: what then? How do these experienced and capable teachers contribute? Where is the higher level role that they might undertake, particularly in terms of sharing experience with other teachers, for example? We seem to allow, encourage or suggest that teachers get this qualification but then the system does not seem to do anything with them and allow them to contribute back into the system. I think that is the key point that the report is attempting to make.

Mr Bowden: Yes, absolutely. It covers two of the points. The teaching standards reflect that these teachers are highly accomplished or lead-level teachers, which demonstrates their experience against the teaching standards. As Michael said, there is a small allowance, but there is no role in the enterprise agreement, position statements or anything like that which shows what these teachers will be used for. We did meet with some of those highly accomplished and lead teachers, and they are used in varying ways in the particular school community. Our report makes some suggestions about the contribution that these teachers could make to school improvement and lifting student educational outcomes across the system.

MS LAWDER: Is it a logical pathway? Do you have to have a highly qualified, lead teacher qualification to progress to principal, for example?

Mr Bowden: No, it is not a prerequisite for anything. You do not have to be a highly accomplished or lead teacher to become a school leader or executive, for example. So it is simply a—

Mr Harris: It is a discretionary choice, is it not, Matt?

Mr Bowden: Yes. The teacher has to want to go through the process. They have to submit an application and have themselves assessed and observed. There is quite a bit of work that they have to go through to get that certification. But, no, it is not a prerequisite for anything other than the benefits directly associated with being identified as a highly accomplished and lead teacher.

Mr Harris: And there is a heap of work involved too, isn't there?

Mr Bowden: Yes, it is a couple of years of work. As you identified there, one of the impediments that teachers identified to pursuing the qualification is that it is quite a bit of work, and they are doing that on top of a busy teaching job. Those were some things that were identified, in doing the work, as impediments to increasing the number of highly accomplished and lead teachers.

Mr Harris: And that is done in the teacher's own time, as I understand it.

Mr Bowden: That is correct, yes. That said, though, the teachers that did make that achievement reflected that going through that exercise, in and of itself, was a positive benefit to their professional development, because it made them reflect on their own teaching practice because they had to demonstrate that highly accomplished and lead-level practice to their peers. So the teachers who got through it said that it was a valuable process, nonetheless.

MS LAWDER: Do you have the figures, or should we ask the directorate about the number or percentage of teachers who have this qualification, including a gender breakdown?

Mr Bowden: The directorate would have the gender breakdown. I think we quoted it in the report. It was a small number. I think it was approximately 30 to 40 teachers across ACT public schools. Certainly, the Education Directorate would be able to confirm the exact number in schools.

Mr Stanton: Paragraph 3.112 acknowledged that at the time of the audit report, 32.9 per cent of public schools had at least one school leader or teacher with a highly accomplished or lead teacher qualification.

Mr Bowden: That was the number I was trying to remember. Of the 88-odd schools, 32.9 per cent had at least one. Some had multiple.

THE CHAIR: Could someone expand on the teacher performance management process and how often this is utilised?

Mr Harris: The evidence suggests not very often, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Why is that?

Mr Harris: I think that is a question best directed to the directorate. Matt can provide a bit more detail but, as I understand it, we have only had one reported teacher go through that performance management process in recent times. Out of a workforce of in excess of 4,000, that seems to us to be a very low number.

Mr Bowden: Page 140 of the report actually includes some of the reflections from principals about the performance management process. Paragraph 5.83, for example, reflected on comments from deputy principals and school executives. That is essentially the cohort of supervising teachers that supervise classroom teachers at the school elite level C level, and are responsible for the daily management of teachers. They advise that they felt that escalating underperformance concerns and matters of

teaching quality beyond school-based management to the people in the performance branch—HR, within the Education Directorate—was more effort than it was worth.

A school leader consulted as part of the audit stated, “We would do anything to skirt around the edges. We will wait five years and move them on in the transfer round. This happens. There are underperforming people in the system we all know about because they are constantly moved on.” That was a reflection of one of the school leaders that we spoke with in the audit. And there are similar comments on that page.

Mr Harris: But if you go back to the earlier questions about the distribution of teachers across schools, one of the comments was that principals and teachers have an ability to not engage in the transfer system if they choose to do so. But if you then have a system that is not adequately performance managing staff who require it, and waiting for the transfer system to move the problem somewhere else, then you are potentially exacerbating a set of circumstances that concentrates good teachers in some places and poorly performing or underperforming teachers in other places. And that does not seem to us to be a very good system.

THE CHAIR: If a teacher is identified for performance management, can they be transferred in the middle of that process?

Mr Bowden: Not if they are formally identified under the performance management process of the enterprise agreement. If you are on underperformance procedures, you cannot be transferred to another school.

Mr Harris: That would seem to be another incentive not to formally engage in the process of performance management.

THE CHAIR: Indeed.

Mr Harris: It is important here to make the point that all principals have a hard job. They have a lot to do. There is a lot to manage in a school—even a small school, let alone a big one. Support systems may need to be put in place to help them do this performance management—and, make no mistake, performance management is not an easy task, by any stretch of the imagination; it sometimes involves some pretty direct conversations that are very hard to do. Nobody likes doing them; even people that do them frequently do not like doing them because they are not easy conversations. So we are not trying to throw darts at people here for not doing something. We are trying to suggest that there should be better systems in place to help people do what is an important task in terms of its relationship to teaching quality.

MS LAWDER: With respect to performance management, did you look at anything like exit rates of newish teachers? Is it possible that someone might be as blunt as to say, “You are not cut out to be a teacher and you should go and do something else”?

Mr Harris: Matt can give you a bit more detail, but the level of resignation is interesting. There is a higher level of resignation by younger teachers from the teaching profession—right across the country, not just in the ACT. The ACT figures, as I understand them, are not dissimilar to the national figures. Matt quoted a statistic earlier on, where, by the time you get to about seven years, that is the time when you

are getting to your peak performance. You have a lot of experience. That is when teachers are really experienced and know their stuff.

The research and the statistics across the country say that there are a very large number of teachers who leave at five years or before. So we are investing a lot of money in recruitment and training, but we are not keeping them until they get to their optimum training or experience position. Because of the low numbers that go through the performance management system, if there are quiet conversations being had between people who say, “You are just not cut out for this position,” we would not know about that. But the formal numbers suggest that teachers are leaving the workforce by their own decision, for one reason or another. We did not go to that in this report.

Mr Bowden: There is some data on page 132 of the report which goes to Michael’s point. Figure 5.2 shows the period between 2014 and 2020. The blue column charts teachers that resigned in their first seven years of service versus the orange bars, which are eight years of experience and beyond. They are just resignations; they are not retirements or other types of separations. So, yes, there is a significant number of teachers not getting to that seven-year point.

Mr Harris: That adds another dimension to the teaching workforce, because, if we have such a large turnover at the younger age, our teaching workforce is simply ageing at a much faster rate than is desirable, acceptable or manageable in the long term.

MS LAWDER: My question is about page 104, professional learning communities, and teachers expressing some disappointment that these were not coordinated more broadly across different schools. Do you know whether that may happen in other states or territories?

Mr Bowden: Our research did not look to the practice of other jurisdictions around the use of professional learning communities. We focused on what the practice was in schools. That said, the research that the Education Directorate used for implementing professional learning communities is based on international academic evidence, where other jurisdictions use it.

MS LAWDER: It also mentioned that the evaluation mechanisms were highly variable because there is no formal requirement or guidance provided by the education support office. Your recommendation was that there should be more guidance provided and support focused on increasing understanding and consistency of the quality and impact of professional learning communities. Does that apply solely within the school, or if there happen to be professional learning communities across two or more schools, does it apply there, as well?

Mr Bowden: Where we saw professional learning communities most often was at the school level. That is where a vast majority of the professional learning efforts for classroom-based teachers was focused. While we did not specifically look at broader professional learning communities across schools or different cohorts, you could certainly apply the need for good evaluation mechanisms to any professional learning community because, by that, you know what improvements you are supposed to

implement. It is very much a cyclical process. You learn what works. You try it. If it does not work, you look at what adjustments you need to make next time.

Mr Harris: Paragraph 4.56 also highlights the point we made earlier on that there does not always seem to be a lot of awareness at the school level of what might be available at the central level through the education support office, which means that schools will frequently do their own thing. Often what they do is very good, but they can save themselves a lot of time and effort if they simply ask the question of the central office: do you have something available that could do this? There does not seem to be that positive interaction before they do their own thing. Is that fair, Matt?

Mr Bowden: That is a fair point, yes.

MS LAWDER: Following on from the professional learning communities is the Teacher Quality Institute. I guess I should not joke about the card that recently came out from the Teacher Quality Institute with the spelling mistake on it.

THE CHAIR: You have to laugh, anyway.

MS LAWDER: Is this another example? If teachers have to do the 20 hours of professional development annually, would what we talked about earlier, whether it is for a new teacher or an advanced leader teacher, count as professional development, or are they separate hours of professional development?

Mr Bowden: Within that 20 hours there is a requirement to do at least 10 hours of TQI accredited training and 10 hours of teacher identified training. So that professional learning community involvement could certainly meet the conditions of teacher identified professional learning. We found examples in schools where teachers were exceeding those 20 hours. It is a minimum standard that has to be met. If that professional learning community had been through the TQI accrediting process, though, that could be identified as accredited learning. So, essentially, this comes from a different bucket. Teachers need to meet at least 10 hours from each of those, but certainly the guidance that we received during the audit from the Teacher Quality Institute confirmed that that professional learning could easily be identified as teacher identified professional learning.

MS LAWDER: A really rough example is an hour per teacher per week of the school year. Do they do this in their own time, or do they get time off during school hours to undertake this professional development?

Mr Bowden: Is your question about professional learning communities or more generally about professional learning?

MS LAWDER: More generally; the 20 hours of professional development annually.

Mr Bowden: We certainly found opportunities where schools were doing it within school time. For example, there are the few days before school starts when teachers are attending on site. Some of the principals that we talked to actually went to the effort to make that training TQI accredited so that it would cover off those hours first thing in the year and teachers in those schools would not have to go through that

process later. They could focus more on teacher identified learning. So, yes, there was certainly a lot of scope where schools, because they know it is a requirement, could cover that within school time. But there are also plenty of opportunities where teachers are doing those in their own time.

THE CHAIR: We will wrap it up there. On behalf of the committee, thank you, Auditor-General, and all of your officials for making time to appear today. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing, when it is available. I do not think witnesses have taken any questions on notice today. Thank you, everybody. The hearing is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 2.31 pm.