

**Country:** Australia

**Theme:** Electoral Literacy in Formal Education

**Title of The Best Practice / Case Study:** The Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) National Electoral Education Centre (NEEC)

**Area of Coverage:** 90 000 school age children a year.

**Period of implementation:** 2001 - present (ongoing program)

**Background:** AEC education programs support young Australians to develop a deep and lasting appreciation of the important role that voting plays in a democracy. The AEC'S approach to education aligns with the Australian Civics and Citizenship Curriculum, encompassing the development of knowledge, understanding and skills required for civic participation. Located in the Senate Wing of Old Parliament House in Canberra, the AEC operates the National Electoral Education Centre (NEEC) which provides a fun and interactive way for school age children to learn about Australia's electoral system. In addition, the NEEC provides free educational resources and programs for teachers and students.

**Brief Description of Best Practice:** The NEEC opened in the Senate wing of Old Parliament House in 2001. The purpose-built education facility was funded through a Federation Fund grant. Prior to this, the centre was operated from a school in Lyons, ACT. Similar centres operated in Melbourne from 1991 and Adelaide from 1998, however both ceased operating in 2009. The NEEC provides facilitated education sessions to over 90 000 visitors per year, mostly upper primary students but also secondary students and adult groups. The program runs for 90 minutes and comprises-

a multi-media presentation on the history of democracy and elections in Australia in a purpose-built theatre - an interactive activity area; and a first-hand experience voting in an election or referendum scenario and participating as a polling official in the count of votes. Schools can choose from a number of sessions focused either on the House of Representatives, the Senate, or the referendum process. All programs are conducted by an Electoral Educator and provide curriculum links to units on democracy, civics and citizenship, and courses in Australian History, Politics and Legal Studies. Since relocating to Old Parliament House the NEEC has operated at near maximum capacity, currently accommodating up to 18 program sessions per day. The Centre operates from 8.00am to 6.00pm Monday to Friday throughout the school year. During the peak periods of school terms 2 and 3, not all school groups wishing to make a booking can be accommodated. The following table outlines the number of sessions conducted and total number of visitors between 2010 and 2015.

Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Sessions	2463	2529	2600	2542	2592
Total	87245	87717	90400	87065	90982

Visitors In the 2014-15 financial year, 2321 primary schools and 264 secondary schools visited the centre. The NEEC is one of

four Canberra education venues which qualify schools to receive the government Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) subsidy for their excursion. The connections to the Civics and Citizenship Curriculum and the PACER program also ensure that schools will continue to visit the NEEC. Visitor numbers and satisfaction ratings are high with recent numbers indicating approximately 97 per cent satisfaction.

**Challenges :** The AEC has successfully operated the NEEC for 14 years without major change to the educational content or facilities since it was set up in 2001. With the evolution of technology, the NEEC faces the challenge of meeting the expectations of children in the modern world. The AEC faces the challenge of obtaining funding to assist with the renewal of the centre. The centre is currently at maximum capacity. Without renovations, the centre cannot cater to more students. Again, the AEC faces a final challenge to obtain funding to expand the capacity of the centre.

**Outcome:** The NEEC successfully delivers electoral education to over 90 000 school age children a year.