



**Reports of Standing and Special Committees on Bills
and Other Matters**

**Standing Committee on
Oversight of Government Operations
and Public Accounts**

***Report on the Review of the
2013 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada
to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on
Education in Nunavut
and
Safety of Schools and Childcare Facilities in Nunavut***

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Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting the report of the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts on its review of the 2013 *Reports of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on Education in Nunavut and Safety of Schools and Childcare Facilities in Nunavut*.

Mr. Speaker, as you will recall, the Auditor General's reports were tabled in the House on November 19, 2013. As with other reports presented to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut by the Auditor General, this report was subsequently considered by the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts which was established by way of motion on March 6, 2014.

The Standing Committee held its hearings on the Auditor General's reports from April 1 - 3, 2014. The hearings were open to the public and news media to observe. The hearings were televised live across Nunavut. Transcripts of the hearings are being made available for downloading from the Legislative Assembly's website.

Mr. Speaker, the presentation of these reports marked Mr. Michael Ferguson's second formal appearance before a Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. I would note, however, that this was not the first time that the Office of the Auditor General has reported to the Legislative Assembly on the Government of Nunavut's education system. In 2007, the Auditor General presented a report on the Financial Assistance for Nunavut Students Program.

Mr. Speaker, it was noted during our hearings that the Office of the Auditor General had initially begun a single comprehensive audit of education in Nunavut. However, during the initial phases of the audit, a number of observations raised concerns directly relating to the safety and security of educational facilities. Consequently, the Office of the Auditor General undertook an additional audit focusing specifically on safety and security issues, with an extended focus on childcare facilities as well as schools. The comprehensive audit resulted in two reports. The Standing Committee greatly appreciates the Auditor General's timely focus on issues relating to safety and security and in bringing those findings to the immediate attention of government officials in order that they could be addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the participation of witnesses from the Government of Nunavut's Department of Education and Department of Community and Government Services during our April hearings. As noted by staff from the Office of the Auditor General, departmental witnesses answered the majority of the questions posed by Members and provided a significant amount of additional information relating to Nunavut's educational system and the resources and procedures that are in place to ensure that schools and childcare facilities across Nunavut are safe and secure.

The Standing Committee was pleased to receive copies of the Department of Education's five-year work plans outlining its short-term, medium-term and long-term objectives to address the issues raised in the Auditor General's reports and looks forwards to regular updates on progress made towards achieving the stated objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to note further that the Auditor General's report will be of significant value during the Legislative Assembly's upcoming review of the *Education Act*. Nunavut's *Education Act* came into force on July 1, 2009. Section 202.1 provides that the Legislative Assembly shall review the provisions and operations of the Act. The Auditor General's reports not only provide important and informed insights but the deliberations during our April hearings allowed Members to gain additional perspectives on various issues that may be brought forward for consideration during the Legislative Assembly's detailed review of the *Education Act*.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on *Education in Nunavut* presented eight specific recommendations. These recommendations addressed the following thematic areas:

- Progress on implementing Nunavut's *Education Act*;
- Bilingual Education;
- Inclusive Education;
- Development of teaching resources; and
- Collecting, analyzing and reporting on information related to the government's progress in implementing the *Education Act*.

The Auditor General's report on *Safety in Schools and Childcare Facilities* also presented eight specific recommendations. These recommendations addressed the following thematic areas:

- Frequency of facility inspections;
- The lack of follow-up with respect to deficiencies identified in inspections;
- Procedures, guidelines and protocols to ensure safety in all facilities;
- Training of education and early childcare education staff; and
- Interdepartmental communication and cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee concurs with the recommendations of the Auditor General and notes that the government itself formally agreed with all of the Auditor General's recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, during the Committee's proceedings, Members raised many important issues and questions concerning the government's policies and practices relating to Nunavut's education system and a number of themes and issues emerged during the Standing Committee's review of the Auditor General's most recent reports to the Legislative Assembly.

As the House is aware, Nunavut's *Education Act*, which was passed in 2008 and came into force on July 1, 2009, lays out a number of specific requirements which, in many respects, determine how the education system is structured and delivered. Throughout the hearings, it was clear that several factors are contributing to delaying progress towards achieving the specified objectives by the legislated timelines.

Accordingly, the Standing Committee makes the following recommendations:

- 1. That the Government of Nunavut, as a whole and with the collaboration of its key departments and agencies, put a higher priority on developing strong and clear directives relating to the use of the Inuit language across Nunavut with specific focus on the writing system, terminology, and the role of dialects.**

During the Standing Committee's hearings, many issues relating to language were raised with respect to the Department of Education's overall success in implementing Nunavut's *Education Act*. From the historic impact of language of instruction regimes in the past, to the current variations in language abilities of students, as well as from region to region, to the widely divergent literacy skills and linguistic abilities of individuals within Nunavut's school system, and the struggles to develop Inuit language curriculum and resource materials for all grade levels, these factors and others pose significant challenges to delivering an education system consistently across the territory.

Members of the Standing Committee have expressed concern that the Department of Education's current activities to develop Inuit language materials and to deliver a standard level of language instruction are inconsistent across the territory. Having a solid foundation upon which to base Inuit language policies, including clear direction with respect to writing systems and the use of dialects, could provide much needed support for strengthening Inuit language use across Nunavut's schools. If this issue is not addressed as a priority, the Department of Education risks further delays in its ability to deliver a successful education system in accordance with the *Education Act*.

- 2. That the Department of Education, in response to the report and recommendations of the Auditor General, immediately establish its database to collect data on educators' training and language skill sets, analyze the data and prepare a report on the current status of its educators' training and language skill sets.**

During the Standing Committee's hearings, it was noted that in order to meet the required levels of language instruction, individuals with varying levels of language expertise and teaching experience are being employed to teach

across Nunavut's schools. In addition, it is not clear how the department assesses, evaluates and monitors the delivery of Inuit language instruction across schools.

The Standing Committee is of the view that establishing a baseline of educator training and language skills will allow for improved allocation of resources, personnel and training programs.

- 3. That the Government of Nunavut consider ways to ensure that graduates from Nunavut Arctic College's Nunavut Teacher Education Program remain committed to working as teachers in Nunavut following graduation.**

During the Standing Committee's hearings, testimony from the Deputy Minister of Education indicated that a significant number of individuals who are trained and qualified through the Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP) are hired by other government departments and agencies. This "poaching" of trained and certified Inuit teachers has long been an issue, but has never been formally addressed. While it is a testament to the excellent educational standards of the NTEP program that its graduates are highly sought after across government departments and agencies, this practice does little to advance the development of bilingual education.

Some suggested examples of ways to encourage teachers to remain committed to staying in teaching positions could include such measures as terms of service or conditions upon graduation, contractual agreements linked to financial and other supports or the provision of additional incentives.

- 4. That the Department of Education take immediate steps to determine the number of bilingual educators that will be need to be employed, in both the short-term and the long-term, in order to deliver bilingual education as required by the *Education Act*.**

During the Standing Committee's hearings, it was clear that a key factor in the department's ability to deliver bilingual education is the availability of bilingual educators. A number of studies and reports have highlighted the need for concentrated efforts to train and graduate bilingual teachers. It is not clear that sufficient success has been achieved in this area. A realistic estimate of how many bilingual educators will need to be employed to teach in Nunavut's schools will assist legislators in determining whether the bilingual education requirements contained in the current legislation are realistic and achievable.

- 5. That the Department of Education re-evaluate the policy of inclusive education, complete its cost analysis for developing and offering differentiated instruction training workshops for educators and be prepared to present its findings during the Legislative Assembly's review of the *Education Act*.**

During the course of its hearings, the Standing Committee focused on a number of critical areas that impact the successful delivery of education across Nunavut. Although policies and practices relating to inclusive education have been in place in Nunavut's education system since the creation of the territory, they were not entrenched within legislation until being included in Part 6 of the current *Education Act*. Similar to the requirements to deliver bilingual education, in order for inclusive education to be successful within Nunavut's education system, significant investments in training, resources and personnel will also be necessary in order to be able to realistically achieve the requirements established in the legislation.

The Legislative Assembly's upcoming review of the *Education Act* will be an opportunity to give full consideration to the costs, benefits and challenges posed by including inclusive education requirements within the legislation.

- 6. That the Department of Education ensure that its annual reports, as required under section 126 of the *Education Act*, are tabled in a timely manner and, further, that the Department of Education's annual reports specifically address progress on the implementation of the *Education Act*.**

The issue of the timely preparation and tabling of reports is an ongoing concern. Section 126 (1) of the *Education Act* provides that the Minister shall, within 12 months after the end of each school year, prepare a report on the education system in Nunavut. The 2009-2010 Annual Report on the education system in Nunavut was tabled on February 26, 2013. The 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 annual reports were tabled on September 13, 2013.

As noted by the Office of the Auditor General, timely reporting is important to ensure that problem areas be identified as soon as possible so that steps can be taken to address them sooner rather than later. Reviewing the department's annual reports in a timely manner will allow Members of the Legislative Assembly to monitor progress in all areas of the education system and to provide support to the department in its efforts.

- 7. That the Departments of Education and Community and Government Services continue to work together to establish a monitoring system to ensure that inspections and procedures necessary for the safety and security of schools and childcare facilities are conducted on a regular basis and that identified deficiencies are addressed in a timely manner.**

During the Standing Committee's hearings, Committee Members learned that many inspections of schools and childcare facilities had not been carried out on a timely basis and that even when deficiencies were identified, follow-up mechanisms did not ensure that they were addressed.

While it was recognized that a lack of qualified personnel and other capacity issues played a role in creating this situation, it was stressed that the safety of children and staff is of paramount importance, and any shortcomings in this area should be immediately flagged for attention. The Standing Committee acknowledges that immediate action was taken to address the situation when the Deputy Ministers of the Departments of Education and Community and Government Services were notified by the Office of the Auditor General prior to the tabling of the Auditor General's reports.

- 8. That the Department of Community and Government Services, through its Protection Services and Facilities Management divisions, and in conjunction with the Office of the Fire Marshall, work to strengthen systems and procedures, such as clearly establishing the necessary frequency of inspections, to ensure the safety and security of school and childcare facilities and to provide regular updates on efforts in this area.**

During the Standing Committee's hearings, it was noted that although requirements for safety and other inspections are established in legislation, the frequency of those inspections are not specifically prescribed. Further clarification of roles and responsibilities as well as clear direction on the processes to follow-up on addressing safety issues must be provided to all parties involved.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by noting that the Standing Committee, pursuant to Rule 91(5), formally requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Standing Committee be received by the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.