



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

MEDIA RELEASE

Upper House Education Committee delivers comprehensive report on school infrastructure in New South Wales

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

26 October 2022

The Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education has today delivered its report on the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales, entitled *'Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure'*. The committee's 20 findings and 30 recommendations were informed by four public hearings, and the committee's visits to numerous schools in north west and south west Sydney, as well as Gillieston Public School and Fern Bay Public School in the Hunter region.

The report's recommendations are aimed at improving the transparency of the planning process for school infrastructure – both new builds and upgrades to existing schools – with a particular focus on raising the quality of consultation with school communities. The report also recommends changes to the demographic planning currently used by School Infrastructure NSW, to ensure the construction of new schools keeps pace with surrounding developments, as well as improvements to the maintenance approach for existing schools. In the allocation of the school infrastructure budget this means:

- needs-based decisions rather than political pork barrelling;
- greater involvement of parents and school communities in the decision-making process;
- ensuring Voluntary Planning Agreements in new suburbs allocate quality land for new schools, in the community's interest, not that of the developer;
- ensuring school design follows pedagogy and the established evidence base for what works in classrooms (once built a certain way);
- limiting the use of demountables to no more than 50 per cent of classrooms in line with community expectations about the provision of purpose-built, permanent buildings for their children;
- continuing to develop innovative, rapid-response construction of new school buildings as population catchments expand quickly; and
- learning from the gross failures at Castle Hill High School to ensure the safety of staff, students and parents in the management of dangerous substances such as asbestos.

The Committee Chair, the Hon Mark Latham MLC stated, 'During this term of parliament, Portfolio Committee 3 – Education has conducted a thorough review of all aspects of NSW schools policy: school performance and measurement; the curriculum; parental rights; and most recently, teacher shortages and workforce issues.'

'Nothing matters more to the future of our State than the success of school education. The system hasn't been performing well and the Education committee has made scores of constructive recommendations for improvements to school outcomes, given the how important the physical infrastructure of a school is to a child's learning experience.' Mr Latham commented.

The second half of the inquiry saw the committee focus on Castle Hill High School, staff and students have been allowed to attend the school despite a positive asbestos test as early as 2016.

The Chair explained, 'It became abundantly clear to the committee that many in the Castle Hill High school community feel they have been unknowingly exposed to asbestos over a number of years, with some holding immense worry about their future, as well as the future of the children at the school. The situation at Castle Hill High School should not have happened and it is clear that certain actions of the former school executive, as well as the NSW Department of Education, have been a significant contributor to the very real mental distress being experienced.'

Information about the inquiry is available on the committee's website:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2836>

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For further information please contact Committee Chair, the Hon Mark Latham MLC, on 9230 3682