

**INQUIRY INTO ENROLMENT CAPACITY IN INNER CITY
PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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To: The Inquiry into Enrolment capacity in inner city public primary schools: a submission.

The lack of attention to Social Infrastructure in general (Health, Education, Sport, Culture and Community facilities) in planning Urban Consolidation in and around the City of Sydney has been evident to residents of Pyrmont since the earliest days of the City West Redevelopment Project. The original plans assumed that few families would choose to live in the inner city. As in other major cities when inner city renewal and urban consolidation has taken place, this proved not to be the case. City West Planners might have learned from experience elsewhere, but it is even less understandable that the same error has been repeated subsequently in Barangaroo, Darling Harbour and Central Park and unless Urban Growth and the Greater Sydney Commission manage to acquire actual powers, or the State Government imposes requirements regarding DA's, the failures of the past appear likely to be repeated around the Bays Precinct and along the Central to Eveleigh corridor.

The Ultimo Public Primary School has been the subject of particular concern in Pyrmont, and has provided an almost farcical spectacle as initial plans to close the school altogether were abandoned, then the inability of the current school to cater for the numbers of children requiring places became apparent (most of Ultimo now falls outside the catchment area covered by the school as places are taken up by children from Pyrmont), the COSC Depot site (semi derelict for at least 20 years) was identified as ideal for providing a state of the art combined school/community resource for Ultimo/Pyrmont and the inner West, plans went through an extensive consultation process, but were then abandoned for reasons that are still not clear. It is clear that the State and COSC failed to agree on a price for the sale of the site. This so far as the Ultimo Pyrmont community was concerned is unforgivable. Canada Bay Council solved a similar problem by requiring a peppercorn rent while retaining ownership of the site. The level of pollution at the site was cited as another factor, but there is no evidence that the level of pollution at this site is different from pollution levels elsewhere in this old, heavily industrialised precinct. There is also no evidence that any adequate assessment has been carried out of the actual level of pollution. The current intention of the State Government is apparently to relocate the school to demountables, somewhere on Wentworth Park while the current school is demolished and a new high rise school is put up in its place. This building, it is claimed, will cater for current needs, but it is clear that more young people who work in the city are moving with their families to inner city living. It is also clear that the major demographic in Pyrmont (ages 20-39) are deciding when they have children to live in the city close to their work rather moving to the suburbs. A recent survey of child care provision in Pyrmont showed that all places have been fully taken up over the past 4 years, and that for every place there are more than 3 families (families, not children) on the waiting list. The situation in Ultimo appears to be even worse.

The figures do not presumably show the size of the problem, just that the problem exists; all families in need of child care would put themselves on a waiting list where there are, in the case of Pymont,

530 families already waiting for a total of 175 places of which only a third at most become available each year. In Ultimo, 300 are on the waiting list for 60 places in one child care centre, where again, presumably, a third of those places at most actually become available each year. The situation regarding enrolment in public primary schools in Ultimo Pymont and in the inner city generally will increase, possibly exponentially, if the inner city proves to be a place worth living in.

Sydney is a late comer in world terms to urban renewal and urban consolidation. Sydney has had and will continue to have for some years to come an extraordinary opportunity to get these developments right in terms of social infrastructure and social engineering. Both the COSC and the State Government emphasise the value they place on building a socially inclusive community, but the prerequisites for such inclusivity, or even 'livability' so far have not been a part of the development equation. The formation of this Committee of Inquiry suggests that at least the existence of the problem regarding educational provision at primary level is being recognised. There is no doubt that solutions can and must be found, but unless this inquiry can focus attention on the problems in Pymont, Ultimo, i.e. within the CBD itself, hope for an inclusive community in the CBD are unlikely to be realised. and the assumptions of those who misjudged the demographics of Urban Renewal in the City West may prove to have been a self fulfilling prophesy.

I wish the Inquiry every success, and would suggest in conclusion that this Committee might recommend that enrollment capacity for secondary education should also now be urgently reviewed, and indeed that all aspects of the provision of Social Infrastructure need to be reviewed urgently.

Keith Johnson

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