

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

**Name:** Ms Jenny Leong MP, Member for Newtown

**Date received:** 16 September 2016

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**JENNY LEONG MP**

**MEMBER FOR NEWTOWN**

**THE  
GREENS**

Ms Sharon Ohnesorge  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3  
NSW Parliament  
Macquarie St, Sydney, 2000  
By Email: [gpsc3@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gpsc3@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Friday 16 September 2016

Dear Ms Ohnesorge,

**Re: Enrolment Capacity in Public Primary Schools in Newtown Electorate**

I wish to make a submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 inquiry into Enrolment capacity in inner city public primary schools, in our capacity representing the Electorate of Newtown.

Newtown is the densest electorate in NSW, and overcrowding is a significant problem in our public schools. With the plans by UrbanGrowth to significantly increase density in coming years, it is of critical importance that schools are expanded, and that new schools are built to meet increasing demand. Already, schools in the Newtown electorate are overstretched.

The Newtown electorate shares a boundary with the Balmain electorate, where Ultimo Public School is located. Schools within our electorate face similar pressures to those within the Balmain electorate. Parents in our electorate share similar concerns to parents living in the Electorate of Balmain.

We understand that the terms of reference of this Inquiry relate primarily to Ultimo Public School, however we have observed that one of the terms allows for “any other related matters”. We believe that issues of capacity and overcrowding in inner city schools should be investigated as part of this Inquiry.

To determine the primary issues within the Newtown electorate, we conducted a survey of parents to ask them about their experiences of inner city schools. 80 people completed the survey. They described their experiences of overcrowding at Alexandria Park Community School, Australia Street Infants School, Bourke Street Public School,



Camdenville Public School, Newtown North Public School, Newtown Public School, Stanmore Public School, Taverners Hill Infants School and Wilkins Public School.

### **Existing overcrowding**

Parents living in the Newtown electorate can attest to the cramped conditions in our public schools. In the survey conducted by our office, parents told us that schools are resorting to “no running” rules in playgrounds, staggered lunch times, large class sizes, and duplicate school assemblies because there is no hall big enough to accommodate the whole school at once.

Organised sports have been limited, as demountable classrooms have been placed on the sports ovals. Specialist rooms have been converted to general classrooms out of necessity.

Quotes from parents illustrate the extent of overcrowding:

*“Playground restrictions. Specialist rooms used as classrooms. 30 kids squeezed into spaces the size of my living room (in a terrace house).”*

*“Preschool kids can only attend staggered days rather than full week so parents have to find alternative care the remaining days.”*

*“Reduced playground areas and staggered lunch times.”*

*“Limited play area for that amount of kids, classrooms too small / too hot/ students crammed in. One classroom an old library / bookroom - too small.”*

*“Less space for activity as demountable class rooms have been placed on the oval. The demountables are often over-heated making it impossible for the kids to focus on education.”*

*“Full enrolment, lots of composite classes, rostered time on play equipment, grassed area so worn it had to be replaced with AstroTurf.”*

*“Playground used on roster system. No running. Assembly split into junior and senior.”*

*“They have less options to play and have had to set up a roster system for the kids to play on equipment. There are very limited options for kids to participate in organised sports. When it rains kids are stuck in a small hall. There are no options to do a school assembly indoors for the full school so they have to separate them in to 2 segments.”*



*“Lunch time can be quite dangerous with such a small play area and quite a number of students. Our family has been lucky to be the last year where siblings had some priority.”*

*“Less outdoor space due to demountables.”*

*“Not enough play space in the primary school. Some of the high school buildings are in urgent need of repair and this has not been prioritised by the DET, meaning that earlier this year students couldn't use some parts of the school because of flooding - and there weren't enough alternative classrooms.”*

*“In Primary we did have no running rules for a while but they seem to have gone and the school is getting larger every year so I am sure we are heading that way. In Dulwich I just know the classes in year 7 are of a large size but don't hear much from the high schools with reference to this. Apart from Newtown cutting down the local intake area to accommodate both the stream and local area people as they were running out of space.”*

*“Staggered lunch times, no grassed areas so children go to local park with suitable supervision.”*

*“Staggered playground usage meaning friendship groups are separated. No ability for Aftercare to expand due to no space.”*

*“No running in the playground. Classrooms very full.”*

*“Large classes”*

*“K is a worry Classes getting large Stanmore can not really cope with a 5th let alone 6th kindergarten class.”*

*“Not enough playground space for students, no hall that fits all students at once. Assemblies have to be outside regardless of weather etc”*

*“Class sizes are too big and beyond the limits set in department of education guidelines.”*

*“It depends which year. The kindy class this year has about 30 kids in one classroom.”*

*“Demountables ad long queues for canteen/over-stretch of playgrounds”*

*“Ever-shrinking playgrounds are a problem, also large class sizes. The other problem is too many people are driving from out of area, which means too many cars around the school which is dangerous for young children crossing roads.”*

It is clear from the comments of parents in Newtown Electorate that overcrowding is a significant problem facing our public primary schools.



## **Need for additional public schools**

Some parents have told us that they have been refused enrolment at their local public school. Other parents have told us that they no longer fall into the catchment of the school closest to their home because the catchment boundaries have been drawn so tightly due to overcrowding – which means that their ‘local’ school is not the closest school to their home.

While this inquiry is looking specifically at primary schools, our high schools are similarly oversubscribed. We note that there are no comprehensive public high schools in the Electorate of Newtown.

We welcome the plan to build a new inner city high school on the site of the current Cleveland Street Intensive English High School. A comprehensive high school on that site will fill the severe need for a high school to service the north eastern corner of the Newtown electorate, and the north eastern part of the inner city.

We understand that the TAFE campus at West St, Petersham has been earmarked as a distance education school. Given the extreme pressure on schools nearby, it would seem more sensible for this facility to revert back to a public school (high school or primary). We note that before it was used as a TAFE campus, it housed the former Petersham Girls High School. While distance education is also an essential educational service, there is more flexibility around where distance education services can be based. The inner city is so pressed for land, and space for public schools is at such a premium, surely any additional capacity should be used to alleviate those pressures first.

## **Expected population increase**

UrbanGrowth NSW has projected that there will be an additional 26,000 people in the Central to Eveleigh corridor, and 70,000 in the Parramatta Rd corridor within the next 15-20 years. The City of Sydney Council believes that the population increase around Central to Eveleigh could be much greater – with up to 70,000 new residents. On either of these projections, it is clear that thousands more public school places will be needed. This must involve building new schools as well as increasing the capacity of additional schools.

We are aware that there are plans to convert some existing schools to high rise schools. It is of critical importance that these schools also have access to sufficient outdoor and open space to allow children to run, climb, play and participate in organised sports. It is



not sufficient to push these school children into neighbouring public parks; for example, the proposed new high school on Cleveland St must include enough open space to service the needs of the school. Prince Alfred Park, like most parks in the inner city, is already highly used by the community, and will be increasingly crowded as the population density increases.

In a high density city, open space is a precious and essential commodity. When people do not have backyards, public space must accommodate all the various outdoor activities that would otherwise take place in a private yard: barbeques and birthday parties, organised sport, passive recreation, growing vegetables, space for kids to dig in the dirt and climb trees, dog walking and a place for wildness and nature. Schools also need space for kids to play sport, and to play and exercise during their lunch breaks and after school.

## **Conclusion**

Public schools in the electorate of Newtown are already stretched to capacity. There is no way that the existing schools can accommodate the projected population increase in our area. To meet the current and future demand, it is imperative that existing schools are expanded and new schools are built. The community will need not just additional classrooms and teachers, but also additional open space for playing fields and playgrounds.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

**Jenny Leong MP, Member for Newtown**

