

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

Name: Ms Patricia Johnson

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**Inquiry into inner city public primary school enrolment capacity
and redevelopment of Ultimo Public School**

I am an Ultimo resident living close to Ultimo Public School. While I do not have children/grandchildren who attend, the school is very much part of local life and its future is of concern to the whole community. Thank you for creating this opportunity to comment.

Background

- Data from the Bureau of Statistics show that Pyrmont-Ultimo is now Australia's most densely populated suburb, with 15,000 residents per square kilometre in June 2014.
- Every Australian child has a right to an education, yet the Department of Education is failing miserably to plan adequately for the educational needs of children whose families are moving into the increasing number of apartments being built in the Inner-City.
- Its history of reversals and contradictions in respect of Ultimo Public School began in late 2013, when NSW Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli announced that Ultimo/Pyrmont would have a larger public school to cater for expanding future needs. The City of Sydney's vacant Wattle Street depot would be the site for a 1000- student primary school with after school hours care, to open in January 2017.
- In November 2014, the NSW Education Department stated that negotiations with the City to purchase the site had failed, and an alternative was being sought, despite pressure from the UPS' Project Reference Group and local communities to resume discussions with the City.
- In December, three months prior to state elections on 28-03-2015, the Department accepted a new, lower offer from the City and confirmed that the 1000 student school (plus a City of Sydney kindergarten) would be built on the Wattle Street site, opening in January 2018.
- But in mid-2016, shortly after NSW elections, the Department announced that The Wattle Street site was contaminated. Decontamination costs would be too high for the purchase to be considered. and an alternative site would be sought.
- Although discussions with the City about decontamination costs and standards continued, the Department immediately proposed, as an alternative solution, building a multi-storey school for up to 600/700 students on the current UPS site, with temporary relocation of the students during the demolition and construction stages of the new school.
- In June, 2015 an urgent public meeting resolved unanimously "(that) the Education Department and City of Sydney should reopen negotiations and for an independent survey of the Fig /Wattle Street site be undertaken..." , but the Department re-confirmed that the project would go ahead, and engaged a Public Relations consultancy, McLachlan Lister (ML) to "sell" the concept to the wider community.
- In March this year, ML confirmed that, as widely rumoured, demountable accommodation would be erected in Wentworth Park to house current UPS students for the three years until the new school is ready. (2020)

Terms of Reference

(a) The total costs of the project to date including consulting fees

As no costs or estimates for any part of the project have ever been made public, it is only possible to suggest that they must obviously include fees for consultancy, including

- (b) - Work on alternative sites for the new school
(background research, selection of Wattle Street depot site, consultancy work on this site)
- Work/research on alternative sites for the temporary school
 - Work on/for the temporary school including designs, community meetings and publicity
 - Work on new high-rise school (current site) including design brief and engaging design team -
 - Work on preparations for use of Wentworth Park
 - Contamination assessment at the Wattle Street depot, Wentworth Park and the current school site
 - Employment of environmental consultant.

(b) The estimated costs of the alternative sites for a new Ultimo Public School

Of alternative sites considered initially, only the Wattle St depot was considered large enough to meet future needs, and is the only instance where cost has been mentioned publicly.

(1)- in a statement by the Lord Mayor (June 2015) that

...”in June 2014... agreement (on the sale of the Wattle St site) was reached after ...Council agreed to sell the land to the Department **for \$74 million**, a price that is well below the market value at \$100 million, and includes an additional \$8.5 million discount for remediation costs as well as \$8 million for a new childcare facility.”

and

(2)- in an announcement published on the NSW Education website, stating that

“.....the cost of removing and disposing of all contaminated soil and groundwater from the Wattle and Fig St Site could exceed \$53 Million (so that) ...**the full redevelopment cost of a new Ultimo/Pymont School on the Wattle and Fig St sites could exceed \$177 M...**compared to the option of **redeveloping the existing Ultimo/Pymont site at a cost of up to \$42M.**”

(c)The reasons the alternative sites were dismissed by the Government

The few other sites considered initially were thought too small to meet future student needs. The Wattle St depot was then initially selected, but then rejected, by Government, allegedly because of the excessive cost of decontamination to higher than the EPA standard (against consultants' recommendations), although it has said it will remediate the site of the temporary school only to that standard.

It is widely believed that while cost may be part of the reason for rejecting the Wattle St site, there are other underlying issues including ongoing discord between the Government and the City of Sydney.

It is further recognised that the City appears to have made reasonable efforts to pursue negotiations and to mitigate cost issues by proposing that a carpark be built in the lower ground space that would result from full excavation of contaminated material.

(c) Costs of rehousing Ultimo Public School in Wentworth Park while the school is rebuilt

are also impossible to estimate but must include

(1) *tangible costs*

- all consultancy fees
- construction and materials of the demountables,
- their removal, and then park restoration, after three years
- cleaning up contamination on the site (lead, plus?)

and

(2) *intangible costs*

- temporary loss of public space in Wentworth Park

- impact on the City of Sydney key walking route No6: Ultimo-Glebe-Forrest Lodge ,which represented a considerable public investment in 2014
- an inferior learning environment for three years at a critical stage in children's education

(d) impact of the Bay Precinct development on future enrolment capacity in the Inner City

Local primary schools are already “bursting at the seams’, with long waiting lists. Some parents are even relocating to regional areas because they cannot find school places for their children. Although exact numbers are clearly impossible to predict, it is obvious that current and projected residential developments will bring more families with children to this part of Inner Sydney, including the Bays Precinct Urban Transformation project, with over 15,000 (est.) new homes, Darling Harbour, the “New Life”/Tabcorp redevelopment, Central Park (final stage) and others.

Yet in its zeal to (over) build apartments, the Government appears to be making no allowance for inevitable growth in student numbers. nor for providing adequate education facilities to cater for them.

(e) Any other related matters

This is just another tale of Government deceit, poor planning and complete indifference to the community's, and especially children's, needs.

Large amounts of time and money have been grossly squandered and public confidence has been shattered. Exiling the current generation of UPS students for three years in a park, will disrupt their education and compromise their future. The Government's so-called “solution,” a multi-storey building on the current site that will provide a maximum of 700 places, instead of the 1000 necessary and initially promised, is no solution at all.

I would also like to comment on the structure of this Inquiry (title and Terms of Reference)

I feel there is inconsistency between

1. the stated title, which prioritises “ *inner city public primary school enrolment capacity*’ followed by “*redevelopment of Ultimo Public School* “- (as an example?) - and
2. the Terms of Reference, of which four focus exclusively on Ultimo Public School and just one on “*enrolment capacity*” in the local area (Bays Precinct) while NONE addresses the stated principal subject of (general)“ *inner city public primary school enrolment capacity*”.

Further, three of the four questions devoted to Ultimo Public School invite discussion of costs which have never been made public, so I feel they are unlikely to elicit much useful information.

Conclusion

I join our local community in demanding that the Government immediately

- return to negotiation with the City of Sydney
- reach a binding agreement for purchasing the Wattle St. depot site
- remediate it to EPA standards
- build a school to cater for at least 1000 students
- include child-care and community facilities (mandatory)
- include a basement commercial carpark (desirable but optional)

This solution would obviously enable students to stay their current educational environment while a new school is built on the Wattle Street site

Thank you.