

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Submission for: Inquiry into inner city public primary school enrolment capacity and redevelopment of Ultimo Public School

I'm very grateful that you'll be looking into Sydney's primary enrolment capacity with a focus on Ultimo's protracted redevelopment in particular. I've been involved in the redevelopment discussions for a number of years as a local resident and current Ultimo Public parent with a couple more kids to come through over the coming years. There's a strong, family-oriented community in Pymont and Ultimo which I've thankful to have been part of over the past five years or so. I hope that it will remain a viable option for families into the future which, of course, includes the availability of high class public education as a significant component.

It's that sense of community that's unfortunately been put to the test by the way the redevelopment project's been handled and I believe will continue to be so into the future with the direction we're currently heading in. As I'm sure you're aware, a strong feeling of resentment towards the Department of Education has built over of the course of the past few years while the redevelopment has been under debate both from the decisions that it's made and the way it's gone about working with the community to communicate them. Data points around costs and demographics have, although seldom substantiated, formed the basis for a number of the Department's arguments so I cannot over emphasise the importance to the community of your objective inquiry into both.

Systemically, the Department's actions have fallen short of its own code of conduct which promotes a value set including: being consistently honest, trustworthy, and accountable; being responsive; and, working collaboratively to reach common goals. The fact that the school and community was categorically assured that a demolition and rebuild on the current site was "off the table" while we're facing the very prospect is a case in point, but the history of the redevelopment is littered with other examples.

In December 2014, Adrian Piccoli announced the agreement for a new Ultimo/Pymont school to be built on the Fig/Wattle site (agreeing to pay \$74m) to accommodate 1000 students "responding to needs of [the] growing population" and deliver quality public education. The project management's site (<http://ultimopyrmontps.com.au/about-the-project/>) at that time reiterated the message:

The new school will accommodate 1,000 students ... to meet the educational needs and demands for school assets for the future ... generated by: urban development and additional new housing which is driving population growth and projected increases in student enrolments and demand for additional teaching spaces and facilities over the next five years and beyond (to at least 2031) within City of Sydney; and limited capacity of existing primary school assets to accommodate projected increases in student enrolments and population growth.

The purchase of the Fig/Wattle site and the development on it was agreed to be necessary to meet the needs of education and assets, and apparently funds were allocated to do so.

However, the cost of remediation of the site was deemed too high to proceed. An assertion which many found hard to reconcile with the agreed educational need but, further, that the Department had failed to substantiate the costs for remediation (which went far beyond the recommended level of the Project Manager's team), and apparently was made without any soil samples being taken. Pulling the plug on an entire project which is deemed by all as an education need, based on a single rough quote suggests there was more at play in the decision than that issue alone. I would also challenge the legitimacy of a single commercial quote (however *finger-to-the-wind*) where both common sense and the Department's Statement of Business Ethics ("encourage competition while seeking value for money") would require a larger number.

Fast forward to the present and almost all of this has changed. The community's been told that the demographic estimates have changed and, despite current and planned developments in areas such as the Bays Precinct and Darling Harbour, the projected requirements have apparently gone down. We've been told that there's a ~\$40m fixed budget to redevelop the school but when pressed on how much of this is being (in many's opinion) wasted on a throw-away school in Wentworth Park, consulting fees, etc, the was that there was no budget and with "projects like these you just keep spending until it's finished" (or words to that effect). Remediation requirements for the current site have yet to have been assessed to my knowledge. The perception is that we've gone from financial cost of higher-than-recommended standards for remediation being the be-all-and-end-all to both being a seemingly secondary concern. The department continues to spend across multiple designs, consultants, workshops, evaluations, etc etc. and the contamination of the proposed site for the interim school should apparently be of little concern as the site will be "covered with artificial grass". And, by definition, these double standards mean there can be no *standard* that we're all working towards and this leads to fear of an over-budget, under-delivered project that will be a source of division, not pride, in the community.

I see this inquiry as an opportunity to be the reset button that this project desperately needs pushed. To introduce transparency, hold the Department to account, and ultimately deliver a school that represents value for money for taxpayers, has the capacity to provide quality public education to inner city residents well into the future, and truly is the point of pride for the community that we're aiming for. I would question the example we'd be setting to the child for whom this is all about if we fail to do this.