

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

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I attended an extraordinary meeting of the Ultimo School P & C in 2015. At that time, the (politically cynical) announcement of the Government's about-face on its pre-election promises had been made. The Minister for Education, despite having fronted the media to make the announcement pre-election, declined to attend this meeting to face the justifiably-upset school parents. On a side note, I wrote to the Minister for Education, and never received the courtesy of any reply whatsoever.

At this meeting, the main justification for the Department of Education and Government refusing to uphold the promises to build the new school for Ultimo and Pyrmont on the Fig/Wattle Street site, was that the total cost* would be 1/3 of the annual capital works budget of \$500m for the entire public school system in NSW.

*Assuming for present purposes that the Government's estimate of the total costs was justified, reasonable and made in good faith, which to be frank, is far from certain.

I was beyond dismayed that instead of Government officials and the Education Minister considering whether the capital works budget for the entire state needed to be looked at urgently, and supplemented, the clearly-inadequate budget was held up as the justification for refusing to follow through on much-publicised, politically expedient promises made before the election to build a new public school in an area of Sydney which is desperate for one.

It is clear that this Government does not prioritise education funding in the same way as, say, \$1b allocated for works to sporting stadiums in Sydney (which no tax payer asked for, or is in fact needed) or the \$18b WestConnex project in Sydney, or a myriad of other projects which objectively are a waste of taxpayers' money.

The Department's own modelling shows that, if the current school is demolished and rebuilt, it will again reach capacity as early as 2030. That is 13 years away, and probably less by the time the proposed works are completed. This type of short-term thinking is mind-boggling-stupid. If the Fig/Wattle Street site, the only site which the Department originally identified as being suitable to accommodate the expanding population in the Ultimo/Pyrmont area, is not immediately purchased by the State Government, it will be lost forever. No doubt to developers who will build more units, putting ever more strain on public education at Ultimo school.

The ABC reported in June 2016 that the NSW Government would end the financial year with a \$3.4b surplus. The Government is meant to serve the people, it is not a corporation. A surplus does not indicate economic competence. The time to act, to prioritise education, and properly fund the resources needed to educate our children, is now.