

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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Partially  
Confidential

The current school site (0.54ha) is valued at \$49M. When the current school was rebuilt (13 years ago), the Department stated that it could not accommodate more than 300 children. In recent years, the department reduced the catchment and banned international students, but the numbers continued to grow. Treasury foreshadows an additional 16,000 residences in the Bays Precinct. Residential development in Darling Harbour will bring 4,000 new residents to the potential catchment.

The Government and the City of Sydney agreed on the sale of the depot site to the Department for \$74M in December 2014, and announced that the school would be built there. This discounted price took account of remediation (\$19M), and the inclusion of a childcare centre, after school/vacation care facilities, sporting and other facilities to be shared after school hours with the communities (8M).

Council estimated the cost of remediation (to EPA standards) at \$9.5M. The department's consultants proposed 3 different estimates: 25M (basic); \$31M (the amount recommended by the consultants); \$54M (the department's estimate based on a standard deemed unnecessary by the consultants). Independent expert, \_\_\_\_\_, Manager of the Barangaroo Reserve Sandstone Landscape, estimates full removal of contaminants at \$20-30M. After the election, the government cited the cost of decontamination when it reneged on its undertaking to purchase the depot site. Having found lead contamination on the Wentworth Park site of the pop-up school, the department proposes to decontaminate the site to the normal standards set by the EPA, not its own exceptionally high standards.

Initially, advised by Murat Dizdar (Department of Education) that the current school site could not support future growth, the Working Group looked at many sites including 21 Harris Street, 100 Harris Street and 63 Harris Street before unanimously recommending the Council-owned Wattle/Fig Street depot (1.5ha) as the only site capable of supporting the future growth anticipated by the Bays Precinct development.

Since the Government declined to purchase the depot site, several alternative proposals for public/private use of the depot site have been proposed, supported by independent experts:

- Pyrmont Action Inc (Great Idea submitted to Urban Growth) – Excavate the sandstone for use in restoring heritage buildings; construct a two-level public car park for commuters to the CBD and patrons of the Fish Market; construct school on top of the carpark.
- Ron Powell, former Principal Architect, Schools and Manager of the Stone Conservation Program – Excavate sandstone; build car park, school and childcare centre on top; build a land bridge across Wattle Street to Wentworth Park; include sporting facilities; construct commercial/residential buildings elsewhere on the site

The reasons the alternative sites were dismissed by the Government:

The site was recommended by the Inner City Schools Working Party (reported by the department's consultant) on the basis that:

- It is the best fit as part of a long-term solution to meet the needs of the growing region, comfortably accommodating the current target of 1000 students for Ultimo /Pyrmont;
- It is the only location with sufficient area for this number of students with flexible learning environments on the site including play spaces, as well as retaining the option of using Wentworth Park;
- It can also accommodate provision of much-needed community amenities in the area;
- Construction can be undertaken without disruption to operations of the existing school site.

Most of the alternative sites were deemed to be too small. Only the depot site was deemed large enough to meet future demand. The main reason cited for the government rejecting the depot site was the cost of decontamination to the extremely high standard (much higher than EPA), which was not recommended by its own consultants. The department has since decided only to remediate the site of the temporary school to the EPA standard.

Despite options which would reduce or offset the costs of decontamination, and the verbal undertaking by the Lord Mayor that Council could renegotiate the purchase price, the government refuses to reconsider its decision.

The costs of rehousing Ultimo Public School in Wentworth Park while the school is rebuilt: The department has refused to release any costings on the basis that they are commercial-in-confidence. What is known is the following:

- Two designs have been developed, requiring negotiation with the City of Sydney, Property NSW and the Board of the Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Trust;
- Contamination reports have been commissioned;
- Decontamination of the lead and any other pollutants will have to be undertaken before construction proceeds;
- There are costs associated with leasing the area for the school;
- Relocating the school with all learning resources, furniture etc will be costly;
- The department has agreed to restore the park, including improvements to some of the area (eg better fencing), after the school has finished using it. There will be costs to demolish the temporary school and implement the improvements agreed to.

Costs other than dollar costs:

- Most of the children attending Ultimo School live in apartments with no backyards. The classrooms will be 27% smaller than the current school classrooms; younger children will have a very small area built over polluted soil on which to play. Today Year 1–6 children are permitted to play in Wentworth Park for 40 minutes 3 times per week. With many more students in the rebuilt school, time for free play will be further reduced. The open space will be further reduced in the proposed highrise school, with 800 children on a 0.54ha site. This represents a health risk for the children.

- Studies show that children who do more physical exercise perform better in their academic work. There will be little chance of the children getting a basic quota of exercise in the proposed temporary school, or in the new highrise school.
- Some children will be distressed, and possibly damaged, when their valued school is demolished within plain sight of the temporary school.

The impact of the Bays Precinct development on future enrolment capacity in the inner city: Treasury has forecast an additional 16,000 residences in the Bays Precinct. This represents at least an additional 32,000 residents, not to mention workers, in Pyrmont, Glebe, Rozelle, White Bay, and Balmain. To our knowledge there are no plans for new schools or extensions to schools in the Bays Precinct itself, or nearby.

To conclude, the government should really consider looking into the depot site and not disturb the current school site. The children enjoy the school and its facilities and are heartbroken to see their current site being demolished in the future. The relocation should wait till a proper and well thought decision is made by the government. The government should also consider that the maximum revenue earned is by the city of Sydney due to so much sale of land in the area and influx of people moving into the city. These families shouldn't be deprived of having basic necessity of proper schooling.