

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

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Date received: 19 September 2016

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INQUIRY INTO INNER CITY PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT CAPACITY AND REDEVELOPMENT OF ULTIMO PUBLIC SCHOOL

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Date submitted: 18 September 2016

Standing Committee 3: Museums and Galleries Terms of reference f) Any other related matters

Background:

I am a resident in this community. I am also an experienced educator and have worked with children for over 30 years. During this time, I have managed and participated in both professional and community-based activities. My experiences include forming relationships to further the development of skills, knowledge and understanding in a range of subject-specific areas; and to develop deep learning and understanding by encouraging students to identify and participate within their local and wider community.

Issues of concern:

- The safety of students, staff (Department of Education employees), and other related visitors and workers.

It is unacceptable to persist with the current situation of students not having access to sufficient space, within the boundaries and safety of their own school.

There is an increased risk to student safety outside the school setting, which is recognised in the need for schools to comply with stringent policies for school excursions (let alone incursions). This is exacerbated with variations to conditions such as weather, local activity of the area due to events or use.

Wentworth Park is an area of mixed use with a dynamic range and number of people including many who are homeless. This in itself decreases the predictability of situations involving travel and use of the land surrounding the current and proposed school sites.

- The proposal to create multistory buildings may impact the accessibility for students and families who have particular mobility issues. This may limit equality of opportunity. Reliance on lifts is not always possible and there is disruption to rooming schedules if there are any mechanical issues. There may also be an argument for safety concerns.
- The type of space provided by each setting affects the range and quality of learning opportunities and experiences.

This issue impacts on both teachers and students. Quality teaching and learning relies on both flexible and static spaces. There have been suggestions of using open classrooms to foster group learning. And this is a positive mode of learning that also enables greater numbers of students to be located in the same space. However, it is important that the “flexibility in learning” is derived from having options to choose from rather than it being a metaphor for dealing with building

and space constraints. Learning outcomes are best achieved by supporting the different learning styles and preferences of the students.

Currently run programs for before and after school care may be negatively affected if there is not equal or greater provision for these activities. In particular, this area is experiencing great (over) development. With that, will come a greater demand for services to support the increase in population, in particular, age. Any predictions that the Department of Education has made may not sufficiently identify the recent changes to demand.

- It is a common understanding that a school provides a pivotal role in a community from education to the students in the day, to local uses such as community colleges and weekend classes. A school provides experiences that may be profound in the development of individual endeavors and relationships not only for the students but also for all who use this setting.

It is most unsatisfactory for students in the immediate future, to have at least 50% of their primary school career based in temporary classrooms. In particular, it is greatly disconcerting that a viable and more desirable option is not being implemented. This option being, to maintain the current location for the next three or more years of construction whilst the originally proposed City of Sydney site (located at Wentworth Park Light Rail/Wattle Street/Jones Street), is designed and developed.

I understand that the State Government has identified higher than anticipated costs attributed to the remediation of this site, however, an analysis of the costs and benefits of alternative choices have not been publicly presented by this government. There are also, the non-monetary but also valued, gains of establishing a key institution in this locality.

The preference for the suggested City of Sydney site will “future-proof” the provision of public education in this locality. The size of the suggested site will surpass all possibilities for facilities in relation to any new designs for the current site.

- The City of Sydney site is an opportunity to create a “flagship” for public education. This suggested new location is rich in possibilities in the development of partnerships from a range of institutions and industries. A public forum will be fruitful in expanding this concept. This site is within the educational precinct of major tertiary institutions and TAFE, design and communication industries. It is within the proposed “Food Precinct” of the city and this speaks to developing programs of learning that engage students in food production and innovation. This may include collaborations to enable a community garden fostering health and wellbeing for the students and others, or indigenous and multicultural understandings through food.

Concluding remarks:

- It is in the public interest, that the government returns to the decision to utilise the available City of Sydney site, for a range of educational, economic and social factors and desired outcomes.

- The development of the City of Sydney site will provide a stable learning environment for the cohorts of students attending the school until the City of Sydney site is developed. Following development of the City of Sydney site, there will be a stable learning environment for the

cohorts of students attending the school beyond the current 10 -15 year refurbishment/upgrade turnaround that is the history and probable future of this site.

- It is well established in the public setting, that there is an on-going pressure in the government to further develop public lands and assets. The opposition to this situation is being expressed daily. It would be considered a travesty to forego the future security and stability of public education in this locality. A new primary school on the City of Sydney site will be an enduring testament to the foresight and ability of a government to undertake decisions for the greater good.

Thank you for accepting this submission.

Respectfully

Kiri Valsamis

18 September 2016