

**Submission
No 1**

INQUIRY INTO PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Western Parkland Councils

Date Received: 3 December 2021

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3 December 2021

The Hon. Mark Latham, MLC
Committee Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education
Upper House Committees
Parliament of New South Wales

Sent by email: portfoliocommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Latham

Inquiry into the Planning and Delivery of School Infrastructure in New South Wales

We refer to the NSW Legislative Council's inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure.

This letter represents a joint submission on behalf of the eight Western Parkland Councils (WPC) that have partnered with the Australian and NSW Government to deliver the 20-year Western Sydney City Deal. The WPC comprise the local governments of Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly.

The following comments are provided in respect to the upcoming inquiry:

- The Western Parkland City is one of the fastest growing areas of Australia. Currently home to more than 1.1 million people, the Western Parkland City includes some of the fastest growing local government areas (LGAs) and is expected to grow by half a million people by 2036. Youth NSW states 32.9% of the NSW's young people live in Western Sydney. In the 2016 Census, there were 74,024 students attending secondary school and 64,559 students attending infants and primary schools in the Western Parkland City.
- 40% of Western Parkland City's households are couples with children, compared to 35% for Greater Sydney. Couples with children are expected to remain the dominant household type over the next 20 years. While detached dwelling houses remain popular in our region, affordability and changing demographics are seeing more families living in higher-density housing forms and in many thousands of secondary dwellings in backyards that are permitted without development consent (and so not part of a council's planning process). Additionally, the Local Housing Strategies developed by each LGA identified the future infrastructure requirements, such as schools to support housing supply and diversity. School infrastructure planning, and community infrastructure planning generally, has not yet responded to this change in how and where people live.
- The Department of Education (DET) established School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW) in 2017 to lead the delivery of the School Assets Strategic Plan and the 123 new projects announced in the 2017–18 Budget. This was considered a useful step towards a more systematic approach to the delivery of school infrastructure. Since then a number of new schools in the region have been delivered and existing schools have been upgraded, however further detailed consideration of needs within the Western Parkland City is required.



- The WPC is concerned about the anticipated shortfall of classrooms as identified in the Auditor-General's *Delivering School Infrastructure* report (2021) and what impact this may have on our region. The WPC believes that there is inadequate forecasting for growth. It is understood that the School Assets Strategic Plan only identifies priorities for one or two years into the future while funding limits are revised each year making it difficult to determine whether long-term demand for school infrastructure is being met. The WPC support the Auditor-General's recommendation for planning over a 10-year horizon. For example, in 2018, Wollondilly had a cohort of 4269 high school aged students and only 1 public high school and 1 private high school with a joint capacity of 2077. This includes a recent upgrade of Picton High school to cater for an additional 500 students. This means that some 2,000 students leave the Shire every day, attending at least 27 different high schools. This existing situation is far from ideal, and no commitments have been made for timing in Wilton where over 2000 homes are built or under construction and the State Government has already rezoned land for over 12,000+ lots and now a Town Centre.
- With 15,000 homes at Wilton, and 18,000 -30,000 homes proposed in Appin, this will see at least an additional 54,000 people in the Wollondilly area of Greater Macarthur. Schools must be planned now and sequenced according to growth so that the 2,000 deficit does not continue and grow. Schools are catalytic and attractors and should be considered as such by Government. Social health and wellbeing are absolute critical considerations for areas of Sydney which are already socially disadvantaged with expenditure and access to services. Currently, the draft Special Infrastructure Contribution (SIC) for Wilton proposes 2 new primary schools sites and land for a K-12 School, while the draft Greater Macarthur SIC proposes land for 3 primary schools and 1 high school in Wollondilly. No funding is provided for the school construction, nor is timing committed to. Using the NSW Education's calculations, there will need to be nearly double the number of primary and secondary schools in North Appin and Appin than what is 'forecast' to cater for student numbers.
- As part of the Western Sydney City Deal, the Greater Sydney Commission undertook significant analysis of the infrastructure needs of the region as presented in the 2020 Draft Place-based Infrastructure Compact (PIC) program for the State Government. The assessment for the Greater Penrith to Eastern Creek corridor found most existing schools in this area are already at or nearing capacity, as is the case for Fairfield. This area, along with the Macarthur area, is planned for substantial urban development over the next 20 years. Planning to increase capacity in existing schools will be as important as planning for new schools to manage emerging capacity constraints.
- Concerns relate also to the quality, the timing of land acquisition and delivery of school infrastructure. Western Sydney schools are often characterised by aging or inadequate buildings and facilities. The Greater Sydney Commission found 13% of schools in the Western Parkland City had temporary teaching spaces. For instance, in Penrith LGA in 2020, there were 33 government schools across the LGA (63%) using demountable classrooms, and a total of 158 demountable classrooms in use. Camden LGA has experienced issues between the timing of land acquisition and delivery of school infrastructure with schools such as at Gregory Hills.
- Western Sydney schools are also more vulnerable to urban heat. Poorly designed buildings mean greater reliance on air-conditioning for more days of the year while indoors, and the need for covered outdoor learning areas (COLA) for outdoor protection. The WPC seeks a commitment to the planting of more trees and provision of sufficient green space to assist in cooling within school grounds, as well as along nearby active transport routes used by young people.

- Access to digital infrastructure and equipment remains a significant issue for Western Sydney, and this existing stress was highlighted during the most recent COVID-19 stay at home order period. South Western Sydney has a significantly lower Australian Digital Inclusion Index score than Central Sydney across all domains (Access, Affordability and Digital Ability). In the last census, 14.8% of households didn't have access to the internet at home. The lowest percentages of home internet access overlaid our most vulnerable suburbs. In July 2021, 13 local schools in the Campbelltown area took part in a survey that indicated 61.5% of their students experience difficulties in accessing technology and digital devices. Home-schooling for many families simply wasn't possible where a single computer is shared across the family. Many school-aged children rely on the digital connectivity available at school to undertake their studies. This inequity must be addressed.
- The WPC is cognisant of the disparity in the quality, value and capacity of facilities between Government and non-Government schools. The WPC would like to see a mechanism that ensures public schools are afforded the same high-level of facilities, and therefore standard of education, as their private counterparts.
- In greenfield areas, the PIC process assumed that 30% of primary school aged students and 40% of secondary school aged students will be serviced by the non-Government school sector in line with current trends. However delays in planning and delivery of Government school infrastructure in greenfield sites, by default, favours the establishment of non-Government schools to fill the gap and exacerbates disparities within communities. For example, in Liverpool the current prevalence of private schools in the new growth area of Austral, due at least in part to only one existing primary school and no government High School. The impact includes affordability of higher cost of school education for families. As another example, In the North-West growth area of Schofields, St John Paul II Catholic College was established in 1996, while nearby The Ponds High School only opened in 2015. In the South-West, Oran Park Anglican College opened in 2012, while the nearby Oran Park High School opened in 2020. In the newer and more recently developing parts of Fairfield, non-Government schools including St Narsai Assyrian Christian College and Marion Catholic Primary School at Horsely Park, Irfan College at Cecil Park, Freeman Catholic College, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic College and John the Baptist Primary School at Bonnyrigg, St Hurmizd Assyrian Primary School at St Johns Park, Mary MacKillop Catholic College at Wakeley and Pal Buddhist School at Canley Vale have been constructed by local communities in some of the most complex and diverse parts of Sydney to cater for students not able to be appropriately accommodated in nearby Government schools. This tendency to rely on the non-Government sector in greenfield and brownfield areas to provide education facilities for new communities, puts financial pressure on families who would otherwise send their children to Government schools, if they were located nearby, and disadvantages those children who have to travel some distance to attend Government schools out of their area.
- Even more challenging, is the forecasting for local government areas used to underpin planning for schools and State Infrastructure. For example, over the past 12 months the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment forecasts were three fold below the expected actual approvals for Wollondilly Shire, and the short and medium term projections were lagging. In Fairfield, medium and higher density development, as well as secondary dwellings constructed in the last five years has seen serious overcrowding of 2-3 bedroom dwellings of up to 10-12 persons including 6 or more school aged children in areas where State population forecasts have not projected any changes. Longer term forecasts are likely to be significantly under, meaning there will be a serious undersupply of infrastructure from public agencies.
- Recent government school developments in urban release areas have demonstrated a propensity for school development to focus on design within the proposed site at the expense of providing adequate

supporting infrastructure surrounding the site, such as adequate on-site car parking. School infrastructure should consider those pieces of infrastructure outside the school's gates. The WPC seeks a network of local roads, public transport, and integrated walking and cycling paths that provide a safe, connected and efficient local network, providing access to schools, community facilities, physical activity and open spaces for our young people.

- The WPC is interested in shared access to, and the use of, school facilities outside of normal operating hours. This would have the added benefit of helping to integrate community activity and promote social connections. The WPC is interested in working with the NSW Department of Education/School Infrastructure NSW to identify early opportunities to share facilities, as well as other State Government partners to deliver facilities for young people and families.

If facilities are not planned across organisations, duplication can result. For instance, Jordon Springs features a large school hall adjacent to a large council-owned community facility.

Conversely, the potential for shared facilities (i.e. schools relying on council-owned facilities) is driving a push for smaller school properties in greenfield areas. In brownfield areas such as Fairfield, school numbers continue to grow with additional demountables constructed forcing more school activities to move to already overstretched Council community facilities, parks and sports fields. Councils are concerned that this makes schools less "future-proof" if needing to expand in the future. This same challenge is consistent with the provision of sports facilities and active open space. With the planning of new and renewing growth areas, and the changes to the ability to secure essential community infrastructure, it is critical that shared delivery models, co-use facilities and the like are carefully considered to ensure further social disadvantage does not continue in south western and western Sydney.

- Councils have frequently grappled with the issue of setting aside land for new schools in greenfield areas. Councils make a concerted effort to work with the Department of Education/School Infrastructure NSW in identifying suitable sites for new schools, if needed, and earmarking these sites by zoning the parcels accordingly. However, the experience of several councils is that the State Government have often been unable to confirm whether a school is needed in a given location. In other cases, the State Government has not yet advanced its school planning to a stage where they know the size and locational requirements of the new school, nor have a funding commitment in place to purchase the site. In practice, this often means that schools are not specially zoned or set aside. Without demand planning, a suitable zoning protocol, or acquisition commitment, market pressures often mean that "ideal" school sites (i.e. topography, access etc.) are developed for residential uses, forcing the State Government to seek out alternative, less-suitable sites.

The WPC seeks certainty around where new and expanded schools will be needed in new release areas and in growing brownfield areas such as Fairfield, ahead of the rezoning and master planning stage. The WPC also calls for a State Government policy position on how to plan for schools in new release and renewing areas, particularly in a way that ensures the most suitable sites for expansion are identified and serviced by supporting infrastructure.

- The WPC believes that State Government infrastructure planning should not relate only to primary and secondary school aged children. Infrastructure for pre-school aged children should be accommodated too.
- It is understood that planning for the capital investment in new schools and allocation of funding for refurbishment of existing schools is influenced significantly by the capacity and utilisation of existing assets. A deeper understanding needs to be developed regarding why some school assets are under-

utilised (i.e. have the capacity for more enrolments). There are generally always complex forces at play where under-utilisation exists. This has resulted in a lack of investment in some schools that service our most under-privileged communities.

- Moreover, in two of the most disadvantaged and diverse LGAs in NSW, Fairfield and Liverpool students have additional learning needs associated with the ongoing intake of substantial numbers of refugees and other immigrants from complex backgrounds and often unstable countries of origin.
- The WPC seek the Government's commitment to greater collaboration with councils on school planning and infrastructure development in both greenfield and brownfield growth areas. Early involvement and genuine engagement in future school planning is desired. Council can be a valuable stakeholder in this process and planning can be better integrated and The WPC supports the Auditor-General's recommendation for greater transparency around school infrastructure decision-making, and the sharing of data on forecast needs with councils. From the WPC's experience, the planning of future growth in student catchment and forecast is not well understood and the data is not shared. Therefore it is hard for Councils to have any real input and plan with DET on other related services that might support the school. There have been attempts to engage at shared and collocated spaces in design of schools, as an MoU has been established, but this has felt as more of a 'ticking the box' exercise so that the School Infrastructure Team could move on with delivery.

The Western Parkland Councils consent to this submission being published in full on the Committee's website, including our name and the names of our partner councils.

I trust this information is of assistance. The Western Parkland Councils look forward to ongoing collaboration with respect to school infrastructure in our fast-growing region.

If you have any questions about this matter, please contact Joanna Kubota, Executive Director

Yours sincerely

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Camden Council

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