

**Submission  
No 10**

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

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**Date Received:** 31 January 2022

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# Submission to School Infrastructure Inquiry: High school places in Canada Bay

Personal submission by Charles Jago  
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*Canada Bay LGA needs a new public high school by as soon as possible, and by 2030 at the latest to meet increasing student demand. To be able to meet this deadline, the NSW Education Department must quickly identify and purchase a suitable site, before rezoned industrial sites are redeveloped as residential. Otherwise, the government may have no option but to compulsorily acquire a site.*

## Summary

With growing population pressure, many Canada Bay LGA residents face the dilemma of trying to find a public school for their high school age students.

Underfunded and overcrowded, Concord High School currently operates at more than 40% over capacity, with approximately 1,300 students attending a school built for 900. This submission draws upon a [statement of key concerns](#) about the school from members of the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) of the school. They have also provided [photos showing the current state of disrepair](#) of the school.

In the catchment of Concord High School, the percentage of students attending that school (their only local public high school) is far lower than the [NSW statewide average of 65% of students who attend public high schools](#). There are many anecdotal reports suggesting large unmet demand in this area, including a substantial number of would-be attendees of Concord High going to local Catholic high schools.

However, local population growth will add far greater demand. This submission presents recent data showing that the number of students in the Concord High catchment area will grow by nearly 2,000 students within 15 years. It shows that despite the new high school scheduled to open in Wentworth Point and a reported planned expansion of Concord High by 240 places by 2031, an additional secondary school must be built in Canada Bay LGA as soon as possible to meet the increasing demand for high school places. In 2036, even with a new high school larger than announced by the Education Department for Wentworth Point, Concord High School and the new high school recommended here may need to accommodate combined student numbers of up to 3,500.

This submission suggests that a future school site would most likely be found in Concord West. However, regardless of location, it recommends that land for a new high school be urgently purchased, as most sites of sufficient size are recently rezoned industrial sites currently being redeveloped as residential. It recommends that the Education Department and the NSW government improve planning processes for school and other infrastructure, and that their plans be publicly accessible. It also recommends that Concord High School receive additional funding to build modern, appropriate classrooms to house its existing cohort of students.

Planning for increased numbers of students is especially important because the NSW government is forcing a rapid increase in the housing density of Canada Bay LGA without ensuring additional high school places and other supporting infrastructure and services such as transport, medical and recreational areas.

Note: this submission is based on a Notice of Motion passed unanimously by Canada Bay Council on 28th September 2021. The numerical analysis has changed due to a report that Wentworth High School will have 1,000 places when it opens (expected 2024), rather than a possible 1,500.

## Review of catchment enrolment numbers

**Figure 1** shows the Concord High catchment and those of some surrounding high schools. The Concord High School catchment area is shown in light green, extending from Russell Lea and Chiswick in the east to Silverwater Road in the west, with a small overlap with the area for Granville Boys/Auburn Girls.

The catchment map does not apply to private schools. Two Catholic high schools exist within the Concord

High catchment: Domremy College and Rosebank College. They take up 36% of catchment enrolments although they draw some of their students from outside areas. It should be noted that Canada Bay has a comparatively high proportion of Catholic residents: 33.2%, 9% above the Sydney average of 24.2%. Another private independent school is situated within Canada Bay close to the catchment: the McDonald College, most of whose students come from across Greater Sydney. Additionally, there are several large independent high schools in adjacent areas especially Strathfield which draw a proportion of enrolments.

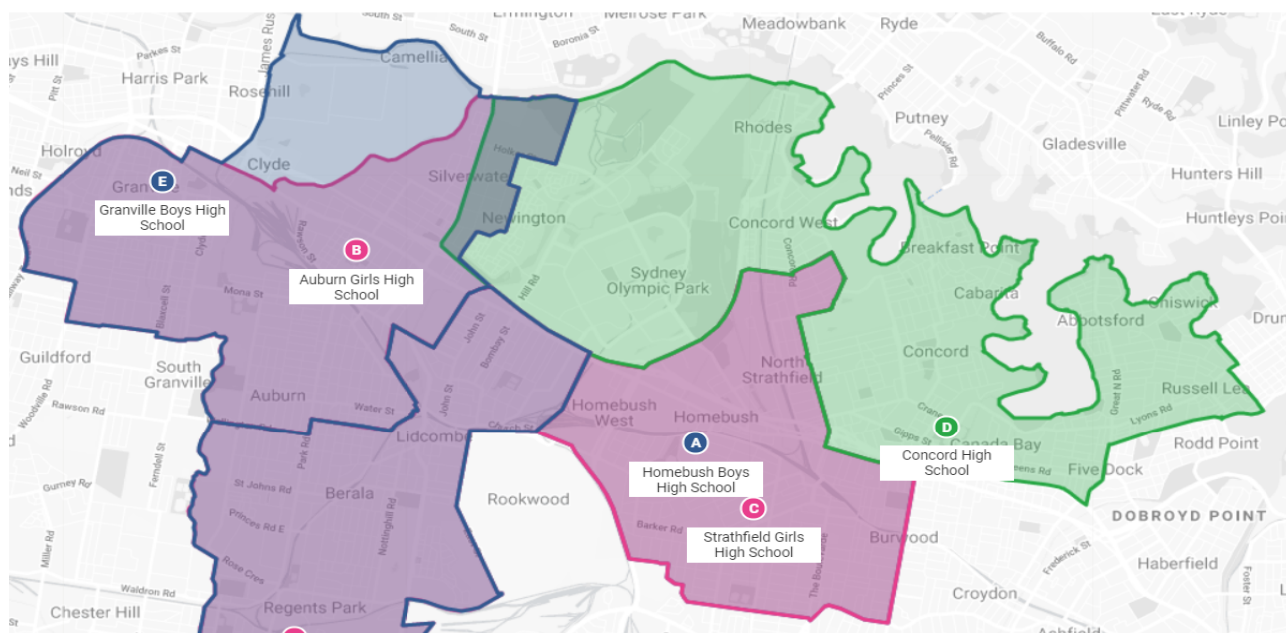


Figure 1: High school catchments

### Rapid population growth drives greater student numbers

Table 1 shows the overall population and number of students in the Concord High catchment area, using figures from [forecast.id.com.au](https://forecast.id.com.au) as of July 2021. The last line shows overall population and student numbers for given years in the catchment area, including forecasts.

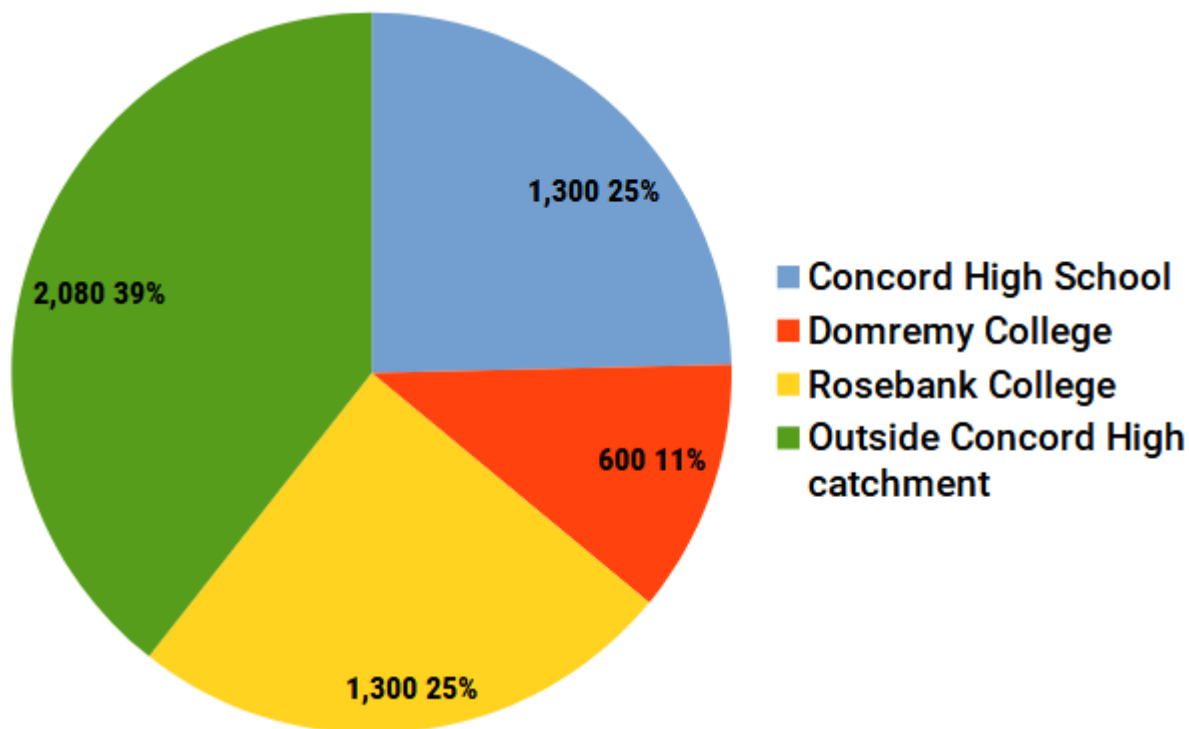
Year	Overall population				High school students			
	2021	2024	2031	2036	2021	2024	2031	2036
Part Canada Bay LGA	95,976	101,828	117,921	125,310	5,526	5,929	6,457	6,796
Part Parramatta LGA	29,189	38,881	56,196	61,046	1,035	1,381	1,848	2,059
<b>Totals</b>	<b>125,165</b>	<b>140,709</b>	<b>174,117</b>	<b>186,356</b>	<b>6,561</b>	<b>7,310</b>	<b>8,305</b>	<b>8,855</b>
Less North Strathfield-Strathfield	7,661	8,819	13,414	14,155	355	446	612	640
Less part Concord West	2,591	2,677	3,040	3,225	205	202	218	231
Less Drummoyne	13,383	13,760	13,907	13,995	721	766	753	753
<b>Final catchment totals</b>	<b>111,782</b>	<b>126,949</b>	<b>160,210</b>	<b>172,361</b>	<b>5,280</b>	<b>5,896</b>	<b>6,722</b>	<b>7,231</b>

Table 1: Feeder population & students in Concord High catchment area

### Student enrolment figures

The pie chart below (Figure 2) shows enrolments of all students living within the catchment of Concord High School. Out of a total of 5,280 students, 3,200 (61% of the catchment) attend local independent and public high schools, including the 1,300 students (25%) attending Concord High School. However, a significant proportion, 2,080 (39%) students attend schools outside the catchment because the three local high schools are already at capacity. Of course, a small number of local students attend other public high

schools, notably selective schools like Fort Street High.



**Fig 2: Enrolments of high school students living in Concord High catchment area**

### ***Many students are currently forced to attend schools outside their local area***

Anecdotal evidence indicates that many local families want the option of a local public high school for their students, but are discouraged by the lack of basic facilities, inadequate maintenance and understaffing. A long-standing issue of insufficient toilets for female students has recently been resolved with installation of 16 toilets in demountables, in addition to the existing 17 demountable classrooms.

Because of these long-standing problems, many parents and students want higher standard facilities and send their secondary age students elsewhere. These problems aren't the fault of the principal or the teachers: it's because the NSW Government doesn't provide sufficient funding.

The key problems currently affecting Concord High School include:

- Concord High School is already well beyond 40% capacity.
- Chronic underfunding, leading to poor maintenance and facilities, as well as understaffing (evidenced by a [one-day teacher strike on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021](#) on the grounds of "multiple unfilled teaching vacancies" – apparently a shortage of 17 teachers).

These problems cannot be solved without a substantially greater financial commitment by the NSW government. If families were offered a modern, well-staffed local high school, we could expect a large number of families who have not viewed Concord High as a suitable choice to reconsider. Reasons to reconsider include:

1. Not wanting or able to afford private school fees.
2. Wanting to remain connected to the local community.
3. Less stress in students commuting to school. Many could walk or cycle to school.
4. A belief in public education. Offering another high school and fixing Concord High's problems would mean that families with a belief in public education would have a strong option for acting in accordance with their views.

The question arises – how many more students would attend Concord High School if there was sufficient space, improved facilities for more students and the school was properly funded? The expectation that a substantial number of students would attend the school is supported by several facts:

- Compared to the 65% attendance at public schools across NSW, only 25% of local students attend Concord High. That means that over 70% of students are attending private schools (including both Catholic and independent schools), compared to the NSW average of 34% and a substantial proportion of local students attend schools outside the catchment.
- There are anecdotal reports that a substantial number of would-be attendees of Concord High are attending local Catholic high schools, because they have no other local alternative.

Given the above average Catholic population, it is not surprising that demand for public schooling in Canada Bay would stand below the NSW average. It is also reasonable to expect that relative local affluence would be consistent with some increase in private school attendance, although many poorer communities also have significant rates of private school enrolments. These factors together could reduce the expected attendance of local public high schools by 10% or even 15%. However, they do not explain attendance 40% below the state average.

Taking these factors into account, it is highly probable that at least 40% of existing students in the catchment area would attend Concord High if it met reasonable expectations, an increase of 15%, amounting to an additional 800 students or more. The unmet demand for local public high school education could well be more than that.

## **What about the new high school at Wentworth Point?**

Approved in 2018 and proceeding slowly, the new high school in Wentworth Point (“Sydney Olympic Park High School”) is now due to open in 2024 with an expected capacity of 1,000 students. Upon opening, it will absorb students from the western side of the Concord High catchment especially Wentworth Point, Sydney Olympic Park and Newington. In the medium term, it will absorb additional students from Sydney Olympic Park, with a much larger population by 2036.

However, Concord High School will still be crowded. As shown in the discussion below, population growth will continue to suck up the remaining capacity across the current catchment. The future need for capacity is so great that it can only be met with another high school in addition to Sydney Olympic Park High School.

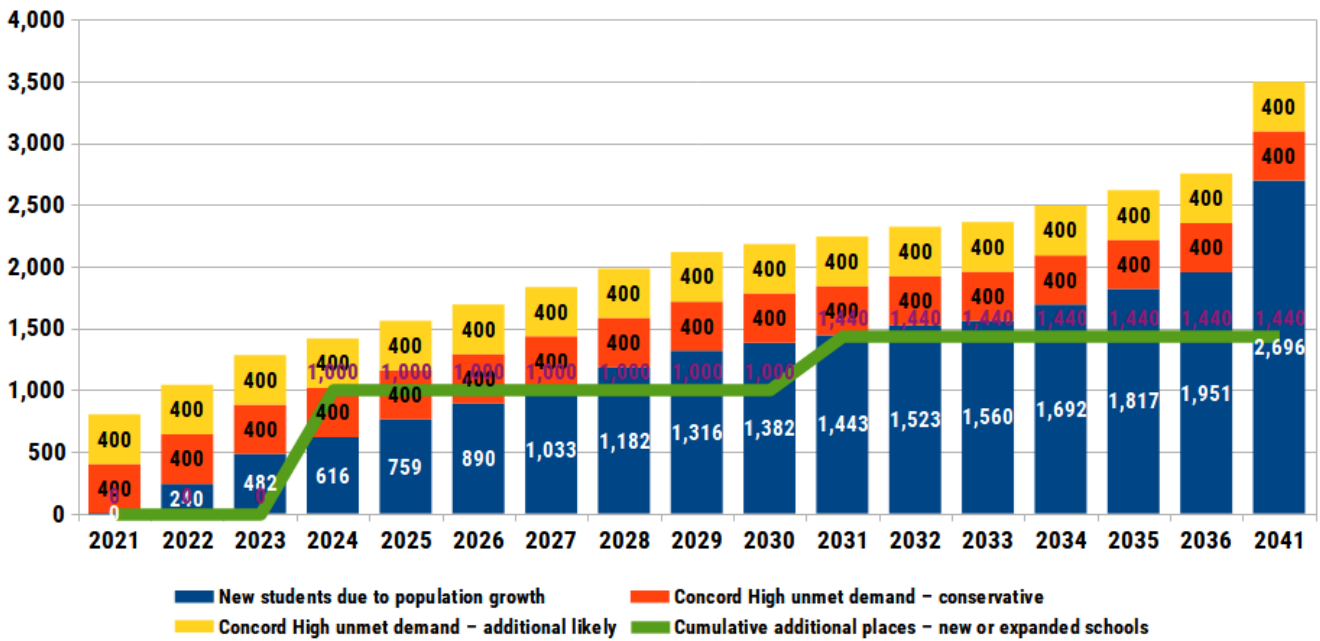
## **Future needs**

### **Anticipating unmet demand in the Concord High catchment**

Figure 3 illustrates the anticipated unmet demand for student places across the catchment for Concord High School over the next 20 years, compared to new places expected through extra capacity at Concord High and the new school at Wentworth Point. The graph includes the new school in Wentworth Point and assumes that the NSW Department of Education implements its plan to increase enrolments at Concord High from the current 1,300 up to 1,740 students by 2031. (This information was provided to Canada Bay Council in 2018 – see Appendix.) The green line shows the number of high school places available in the catchment. The stacked bar chart shows population growth (blue) and two levels of unmet demand in two tranches (red and yellow).

The first tranche of 400 students (shown in red) represents a conservative estimate of the number of students who would be extremely likely to respond to additional places at Concord High or another nearby public high school. The second tranche (shown in yellow) represents an additional 400 students who would be likely to respond to additional places at Concord High or another nearby public high school. Each of these tranches represents only 7.5% of students in the catchment based on 2021 figures. It is quite possible that unmet demand would be higher than modelled in Figure 3.

### Unmet demand for high school student places Data from forecast.id.com.au



**Figure 3: Unmet demand for high school student places**

Figure 3 demonstrates firstly that high school places do not even meet a conservatively estimated level of unmet demand. Secondly, even with a new high school opening in Wentworth Point in 2024 and an apparent expansion at Concord High by 2031, school capacity will not keep up with population growth from 2028 onwards.

The proportion of public school enrolments in the catchment including Concord and Wentworth Point (shown by the green line) would peak in 2030, still representing only 38% of all catchment students – far below the state average of 65%. Adding in the estimated additional demand – both conservative (red) and likely (yellow) would increase this to 50% – an entirely probable scenario still well below 65%.

### Implementation

In this section I consider a number of issues which arise in planning for future high school places. It assumes a planning horizon of at least 15 years which would be the minimum period, given that purchasing land and constructing a new high school can easily take 10 years. That means that any high school must anticipate demographic changes at least five years beyond their intended opening date, to allow time to prepare for further demand.

Concord High School opened in 1980, ten years after the government purchased the property, and the school in Wentworth Point is due to open in 2024, six years after being funded by the government in 2018. On that record, action on a second high school within Canada Bay LGA is now urgent.

Using a 15-year planning horizon, **Table 2** shows forecast numbers of high school students in 2036 shown by precincts across Canada Bay LGA and precincts of Parramatta LGA within the Concord High School catchment. Given the NSW statewide average of 65% of students who attend public high schools, I am recommending that the NSW Dept of Education should put in place contingency plans to respond to the possibility that up to 65% of students across the catchment may wish to attend a public high school. The Department should be prepared to respond with additional building plans before student demand rises or demographic forecasts show the need – a need that has been apparent within the Concord High School catchment but not addressed.

The new local high school must be planned with the capacity to grow for the additional educational need that we know is coming. This will also provide the flexibility to enable redeployment of students when Concord High School is redeveloped. The Education Department’s apparently planned capacity for

Concord High of 1,740 in 2030 (see Appendix) will require a substantial construction program which will be difficult with the currently crowded buildings and demountables.

Given the substantial increase in expected student numbers, and assuming an additional high school as shown above, two key questions arise:

1. As shown in **Figure 1**, the current catchment of Concord High School extends from Russell Lea all the way through to Silverwater Road. How should the catchment area for future students be updated to redistribute students across the current and future schools?
2. Where should another new high school be located?

**Table 2: High school student population numbers in 2036**

Precinct	All high school students	In current Concord & Wentworth Point catchment	Possible 2036 Concord & Concord West HS catchment
<b>City of Canada Bay</b>			
Abbottsford	415	415	415
Cabarita	113	113	113
Chiswick	148	148	148
Concord	1,313	1,313	1,313
Concord West	577	346	577
Drummoyne	753	0	0
Five Dock/ Canada Bay	1,044	1,044	1,044
Liberty Grove	134	134	134
Mortlake/ Breakfast Point	355	355	355
North Strathfield/ Strathfield	640		320
Rhodes	785	785	471
Russell Lea/ Rodd Point	519	519	519
<b>Canada Bay Sub-totals</b>	<b>6,796</b>	<b>5,172</b>	<b>5,409</b>
<b>Part Parramatta LGA</b>			
Sydney Olympic Park - Carter Street Precinct	837	837	837
Silverwater	196	196	196
Wentworth Point	586	586	586
Newington	440	440	440
<b>Part Parramatta LGA Sub-totals</b>	<b>2,059</b>	<b>2,059</b>	<b>2,059</b>

Data from Forecast.ID, valid as of July 2021

### **Catchment in Parramatta LGA**

With the forthcoming high school in Wentworth Point, this submission assumes that the current Concord High School catchment will be divided with a substantial proportion of it creating a new "Sydney Olympic Park High School" catchment covering its precincts within Parramatta LGA. For the moment, I assume a new catchment boundary will run through Homebush Bay. From Table 2, the number of high school students in the new catchment within the Parramatta LGA in 2036 will be 2,059. Assuming 65% of students from that area attend that new school, it would need a future capacity of around 1,340 students, significantly more than the publicly announced initial capacity of 1,000 students. More on this shortly.

### **Catchment in Canada Bay LGA**

Also from Table 2, the number of high school students forecast for the catchment within the Canada Bay LGA in 2036 will be 5,172. The distribution of students between Concord High and the new high school will depend on factors including location, relative land area and proposed facilities. However, these two

schools together should have contingency plans in place to grow to handle up to 3,360 students – again based on the 65% figure of public school high school students across NSW.

It is highly likely that any new high school in the area would cause the catchment boundaries to be redrawn. This submission does not have sufficient information to speculate on how that might play out, except to say that the boundary would likely grow to include some nearby suburbs, to take pressure off other stressed schools in neighbouring catchments. In all likelihood, Concord High and the new school would be asked to accommodate much more. Consequently, proper plans cannot be made without an understanding of future catchment boundary changes. I will return to this after considering location.

## **Location**

Consideration of location of a future high school in this submission can only be preliminary in nature. The New South Wales government has far greater resources for determining the best location. In particular, the Department of Education has access to detailed student numbers.

However, some important comments need to be made. First of all a new high school could be either on the eastern side of Canada Bay LGA (Five Dock through to Russell Lea) or alternatively on the western side – most likely in Concord West. From the information available to me, Concord West would be the most likely area for a new public high school.

Concord West has a significant number of sites previously zoned as industrial – primarily on the western side of the railway line – which are currently at a late stage of residential development planning, following recent rezoning. They are planned for redevelopment in the very near future, but construction has not yet begun, although this could change within days.

While individual sites may not be large enough for a complete high school, there are multiple sites in close proximity with access by rail and the local cycling network from North Strathfield through to Rhodes. They are close to the sporting facilities in Bressington Park and Powells Creek. In addition, the government could acquire nearby low-lying land which is unsuitable for development such as 7 Concord Avenue Concord West, as additional sporting space.

Once construction starts on these sites, the range of possible locations for a new high school will dramatically decrease.

## **Possible adjustments to catchments**

The possible adjustments in this section are not core to my recommendations as they clearly depend on other factors. I make these suggestions on the expectation that surrounding public high schools such as Homebush Boys, Strathfield Girls, Burwood Girls, Auburn Girls and Granville Boys will likely also be well over capacity and seeking to alleviate overcrowding.

Firstly, if a new high school is to be located in Concord West, then it would surely make sense that the catchment be expanded to include the portion of Concord West not currently included in it (estimated at 40% of the Concord West precinct as defined by forecast.id).

Secondly, given the imbalanced gender representation currently experienced at Concord High School (refer to the submission to the Inquiry by Canada Bay Council for more detail) it would make sense to include girls from the North Strathfield/ Strathfield precinct (also as defined by forecast.id).

Thirdly, given that the above analysis suggests a figure of 1,340 for Wentworth Point and an average of 1,860 each for Concord and Concord West high schools, it would make sense to reduce the size of the Concord and Concord West schools, while increasing the size of the Wentworth Point school student capacity and its catchment, by moving its boundary to include approximately 40% of Rhodes.

As shown in the final column of table 2, the effect of the above three adjustments would be to increase the potential number of high school students in the catchment to 5,409. Allowing for 65% of these to attend their local public high schools would give an attendance figure of up about 3,500, to be shared between Concord High and Concord West High schools.

## **Process observations**

The level of growth in high school student numbers and population in this area has been strongly driven by the NSW government. On the other hand, infrastructure to match the new development has been held



back. Infrastructure demonstrably required to meet objective demographic needs must not be constrained just by the desire of the government of the day to save money. The future of our children demands nothing less.

Unfortunately, the task of residents in holding the government to account to ensure proper educational infrastructure has been made more difficult because little of the planning considerations for new school infrastructure has been made public. This is unacceptable and has led to the current crisis where a school which takes ten years to complete is suddenly required within five years. Government must publish clear plans for future school infrastructure so that the community can engage with them.

Unfortunately, the same comment applies to other NSW government controlled infrastructure like rail, buses, hospitals and more. Meaningful plans for this infrastructure are not accessible to the public. In addition, the government financially constrains any extension of infrastructure, even when they have made commitments about the level of infrastructure needed to match new development. For example, the local train line is unable to meet present customer demand (assuming recovery from COVID), with no publicly available plans from the government on how train throughput will be addressed.

Rather than responding to this issue just within the field of education, the government should introduce more substantial reforms to ensure that ongoing planning processes within government are more timely and accessible to the public.

### **Recommendations**

1. Most urgently, the government must take steps to immediately acquire land for an additional high school. Failure to do so will reduce future options to the Education Department, likely leading to an unsatisfactory site purchased at an unacceptable price. Failure to act now may well force the government to compulsorily acquire a future site.
2. The current pressure on high school places in this area indicates that the Education Department has not kept up with the need for future planning of infrastructure. The government must ensure that it stays ahead of future education needs, not behind. Planning must include plans for new schools and expected construction options, with contingency planning for future levels of growth.
3. These plans must be publicly accessible.
4. The inadequate funding for Concord High School must be urgently remedied.

### **Parents have a right to expect a good public education for their children**

Public education is a right, not a privilege. Local residents should not be forced to send students to private schools to receive an adequate education.

Like other residents with families in this area, I believe that parents will want their children to be able to attend local public high schools with modern facilities and adequate staffing. That requires proper, increased funding of Concord High School and immediate action on an additional public high school in Canada Bay LGA.

## Appendix

TABLE 23 - DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ENROLMENT PROJECTIONS  
(SOURCE: DOE, 2018)

SCHOOL NAME	2017 ENROLMENTS	PROJECTED 2031 ENROLMENTS	SCHOOL SITE AREA (M2)
Abbotsford PS	639	600 (decrease 6%)	25,086
Concord HS	1137	1740 (increase 53%)	33,765
Concord PS	280	305 (increase 9%)	11,643
Concord West PS	382	485 (increase 27%)	13,662
Drummoyne PS	687	555 (decrease 19%)	9,291
Five Dock PS	412	580 (increase 41%)	17,860
Lucas Gardens School	32		7,466
Mortlake PS	380	505 (increase 33%)	15,711
Rivendell School	53		
Russell Lea PS	177	400 (increase 160%)	11,790
Strathfield North PS	599	630 (increase 5%)	15,526
Victoria Avenue PS	238	665 (increase 179%)	13,554