

**Submission
No 30**

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

Organisation: City of Parramatta Council

Date Received: 11 February 2022



CITY OF PARRAMATTA

The Director
Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Your Reference	N/A
Our Reference	F2021/03005
Contact	Caitlin Carpenter
Telephone	
Email	

10 February 2022,

Dear Director,

RE: Parliamentary Inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales.

City of Parramatta Council officers have prepared the attached submission in response to the Inquiry. Please note that this is a Council Officer submission and has not been endorsed by City of Parramatta Council.

If you have any queries regarding this submission, please contact Caitlin Carpenter, Senior Project Officer City Strategy on _____ or email _____

Yours sincerely,

Nicole Carnegie
Group Manager City Strategy

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**CITY OF PARRAMATTA COUNCIL - OFFICER SUBMISSION:
Inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City of Parramatta Council officers thank the NSW Parliament for the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales. Council officers have provided comments in the following themes, broadly aligning to the Terms of Reference, within the submission:

1. Adequacy of plans by the NSW Government to deliver educational facilities for every NSW public school student
2. Adequacy of investment in new or upgraded infrastructure at existing NSW public schools and in new school projects
3. The role of local community organisations and groups in responding to the lack of or shortage of educational facilities at any NSW public school
4. Adequacy of demographic planning for anticipated school enrolments and planning for new schools and increased enrolments in Western Sydney
5. Delays in converting new school announcements into site identification and school construction
6. School Design that promotes health and safety
7. Other matters

Council officers request that the findings and recommendations, as further detailed in this submission, are applied in order to guide the planning of the school infrastructure pipeline.

A key element of Council officer's response to the Inquiry is the need for a more transparent, collaborative, and strategic process of education infrastructure planning and delivery, considering matters such as forecast population needs, place-based and district level planning, the role of schools as community infrastructure, and the impact of design on health and wellbeing.

Council officers welcomes further opportunities to meet with NSW Parliament Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education and discuss the matters identified in this submission.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Adequacy of plans by the NSW Government to deliver educational facilities for every NSW public school student

In its current form, the NSW Government appears to utilise a mostly reactionary approach to the planning and delivery of schools, with a lack of consideration for the needs of future growth areas within or between adjoining Local Government Areas (LGAs). This is observed in brownfield areas where there is gradual population growth for infill areas, but also redevelopment of former industrial/non-residential areas. These areas are often transformed into high density residential and mixed-use precincts, resulting in a significant and concentrated population increase within a targeted area.

Council commends the establishment of the Transport Working Group, involving key stakeholders such as Transport for NSW, Sydney Metro and Councils. These fortnightly meetings have provided a forum to present upcoming projects, with a specific focus on identifying and resolving transport related matters to improve long term outcomes. Currently, these working groups are the main touchpoint with SINSW on their project pipeline. Expansion of working groups for key areas like community outcomes and open space would be a valuable to increase information sharing and collaboration.

Case Study 1: Marsden High School

Melrose Park industrial precinct is currently going through a rezoning process that is anticipated to deliver up to 11,000 additional dwellings, and an increase in population that would generate demand for a new high school and up to two primary schools. SINSW have been made aware of the development occurring at this precinct yet have relocated the existing Marsden High School site to Meadowbank, which is located immediately north of the precinct. To address the significant demand for educational facilities generated by the population growth in Melrose Park, City of Parramatta Council instigated the delivery of a new school site within the precinct, despite Marsden High School site being well placed to accommodate this high future demand.

Council recommends that the NSW Government develops and shares a long-term pipeline of SINSW's strategic priorities which would allow greater scope to consider a range of options, collaboration opportunities and place-based planning to result in best possible outcomes for educational facilities in NSW.

2. Adequacy of investment in new or upgraded infrastructure at existing NSW public schools and in new school projects

The lack of infrastructure contributions from SINSW is a persistent issue facing local governments. As student capacities are increasing, the demand for open space and recreational facilities outside school sites are also increasing. It would be reasonable that this nexus should be offset through stronger requirements for shared community use of school facilities outside learning hours.

Schools could provide social value to the community and provide a means to reduce open space shortages through operating as public spaces for sport, recreation, and leisure outside of their regular hours of operation as a school. Often new or upgraded projects do not consider this outcome and are often too difficult to retrofit once a school is established.

Appropriate investment required to meet educational needs appears to be insufficient. There are unclear lines of responsibility within the agency, often leading to misinformation, delayed and inconsistent communication being provided to Council. There is also a lack of flexibility from SINSW when considering new school design and the local context within which proposed new schools are located. This leads to delayed decision-making and compromises the ability to reach agreements on the planning and design of new school infrastructure.

There is a perceived hesitancy to deliver required facilities, such as appropriate staff parking, for new school infrastructure due to increased costs of construction, despite the necessity. SINSW relies on Council to increase parking availability or implements parking restriction on public parking spaces for the purposes of school use.

Case study 2: Wentworth Point Public School

SINSW are investing heavily in the delivery of a new high school within Wentworth Point that will go some way to addressing a significant shortfall in secondary school places within the area. However, the State Significant Development Application that has been lodged to deliver the asset does not demonstrate consideration of the immediate context of the site and the impacts on existing development approvals. Instead, the Application relies upon the provision of facilities and infrastructure (including playing fields, a new road and car parking) that have not been approved or formally lodged as part of any planning process.

Active transport options provide a safety benefit, encourage walking and cycling, improve health, reduces the need for car parking, helps ease traffic congestion on local roads, and are generally welcomed by the local community. Our organisation is committed to delivering on active transport as outlined in City of Parramatta's Parramatta Bike Plan, Parramatta CBD Pedestrian Strategy and Parramatta Ways Walking Strategy. Satisfaction rates with promoting sustainable transport options, and cycleway provision, consistently rate lower than other services and options in the City of Parramatta Community Satisfaction Survey, demonstrating that the community desire for active transport options are strong. Council is generally unable to fund these works until many years after the school is completed. It is recommended that DoE allocates more funding for activate transport connections near schools at the early stages of planning.

3. The role of local community organisations and groups in responding to the lack of or shortage of educational facilities at any NSW public school

The cumulative loss of green open play space (see Section 6) and court space in new and upgraded schools over the last decade has resulted in an increasing reliance upon finite local government facilities, including Council owned and managed sportsgrounds, public open spaces, and recreation facilities. Currently, 10% of all formal bookings of City of Parramatta's sportsgrounds are held by schools.

This is exacerbating the already significant pressures on Council open spaces and ongoing maintenance to meet the growing demand facilitated by higher housing densities, with the majority of our sportsgrounds currently operating at or above capacity. Loss of open space needs to be given higher consideration as a design constraint and should aim for no net loss to also future proof school sites for future enrolment capacity increases.

4. Adequacy of demographic planning for anticipated school enrolments and planning for new schools and increased enrolments in Western Sydney

Planning for the anticipated increase in population and school-aged children in City of Parramatta, particularly around the identified growth areas could be improved. Demographic and enrolment planning appears to be inadequate, especially in brownfield sites in City of Parramatta, where burgeoning student populations result in reliance on demountables, and therefore loss of open space, in order to provide education.

Case Study 3: Carlingford West Public School

Currently Carlingford West Public School is the most overpopulated primary school in NSW, where approximately 50 demountables have been used to meet increasing demand. Meanwhile schools such as Pendle Hill High School are largely under capacity and underutilised.

Case study 4: Wentworth Point Public School

Wentworth Point Public School was opened in January 2018, however within two years (in February 2020),

five demountables were established on the student's green play space, with another installed early in the following year.

As a leading Council in Western Sydney with an active relationship with SINSW, we encourage SINSW to strengthen and expand consultation and communication with key agencies prior to the business case announcement. Council also encourages SINSW to evaluate demographic and enrolment planning forecasting processes to ensure their accuracy and reliability.

5. Delays in converting new school announcements into site identification and school construction

It is acknowledged that the planning and delivery of new school infrastructure is a lengthy and complicated task. However, there have been significant delays delivering certain assets on the ground following their announcements.

Case Study 5: Rydalmere Education Precinct

In November 2018 the State Government announced plans for an 1,800-student capacity K-12 public school on the site of the former Macquarie Boys' High School in Rydalmere. This school was anticipated to be completed in 2021 year following the announcement, however the project is not yet nearing commencement of re-development.

Delays have also been experienced when negotiating shared-use agreements between Council and SINSW. This is occasionally due to a lack of flexibility from SINSW in considering and accepting variations to their standard requirements, such as playground fencing.

6. School Design that promotes health and safety

Green open space including natural turf and canopy cover have crucial environmental, economic, and social benefits, including improved health and wellbeing of students and staff. A concerning increase in green open space loss in schools has been observed over the past decades. This is occurring in mostly two ways; through placement of demountables on turfed areas, and through insufficient site sizes resulting in a built form dominant design with limited relationship to the natural environment.

Through an internal aerial mapping and measurement study of the 41 public primary and secondary schools in City of Parramatta from 2009 to 2021, Council Officers have determined a loss of 16% of green open space, within a 95% confidence. Furthermore, Council Officers observed an increase from 117, to 255 demountable classrooms within the same time period. Lastly, it was found that potentially 14 schools needed additional open space to meet the Department of Education's minimum requirement of ten square metre open space per student.

The assurance of sufficient, design and connection with the natural environment should be prioritised as land scarcity, and delivery of vertical schools, become more common place.

Schools should be designed with active transport methods as the key transport method. School traffic is an increasing issue that affects local roads and productivity. Given that many students live locally, schools are often not being designed to promote active transport such as walking, bike usage and buses. A major opportunity exists to improve provisions of supporting infrastructure that would increase uptake of active transport methods amongst the school population.

Case Study 6: Bayanami Public School

At the time of constructing Banyami Public School (then O'Connell Street Public School) Council recommended: *It is considered that the proposed 20 racks are insufficient for a school population of 1000 and*

staff of over 60 students - The Parramatta LEP and DCP do not set cycle parking rates for educational establishments. However, guidance can be taken from other states and local government controls. A common rule for primary schools is 1 rack per 5 students in Year 4 and above. This would equate to 85 racks based upon a school population of 1000. The school provided 20 racks (capable of accommodating 40 bicycles) as it was considered adequate for the number of staff and students on the site and consistent with Thompson Stanbury Associates' experience of other educational facilities. However, this failed to consider the local context and from satellite imagery and observation these racks are often over capacity and not meeting the current needs of students.

7. Other matters

One of SINSW's core aims is to "make schools the centre of local communities". Council concurs that schools are not just educational and provide unique opportunities to function as wider community hubs through the provision of shared use facilities. City of Parramatta's Community Infrastructure Strategy has further identified potential schools for shared use arrangements and facilities.

However, issues such as child safety and asset security prevent shared facilities with local governments, as these conflict with operational realities and community needs. This is evident as throughout 128 NSW Local Government Areas and 1,600 NSW public schools, only three publicly known joint use projects have been successfully delivered.

To realise the goal of making schools the heart of a community, a more holistic and pragmatic approach is required, with less reliance on activations like Share Our Space that have limited demonstrable impact. Furthermore, the regular turn-over of staff at SINSW has caused disruptions in identifying and progressing shared priorities and shared use arrangements, and the ability for a productive, working partnership to evolve between agencies.

Communication between Council and SINSW could be further advanced to enable better information sharing and ensure that both parties are aware of proposals with implications for the educational needs of the community. Improvements on the planning for school delivery, and consistency in delivery of the shared use model could reduce potential duplication of public facilities and embodies a greater connection with the local community. These improvements in communication and planning would also increase opportunities to address funding issues experienced by both parties, particularly as local governments are unable to leverage developer contributions for open space and recreation facilities on DoE land, limiting the ability to produce joint-use facilities.