

**Submission
No 40**

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

Organisation: Concord High School P&C Association

Date Received: 11 February 2022

**NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE
CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL P&C ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION
11 FEBRUARY, 2022**

The NSW State Government's Department of Education's vision is to provide Australia's best education system and one of the finest in the world.

Substandard school buildings and grounds can negatively affect the health of children and adults in schools. Researchers have found that exposure to mold, poor ventilation, uncomfortable temperatures, inadequate lighting, overcrowding, and excessive noise all have potential to harm students and teacher health, contribute to absenteeism, and reduce cognitive abilities - all of which affect academic achievement.

M. Filaardo, J. Vincent & K. Sullivan (2019)
[How crumbling school facilities perpetuate inequality 100\(8\), 27 - 31](#)

Concord High School P&C Association agrees with the [2021 findings of the NSW Auditor General](#) which concluded that School Infrastructure is ineffective when it comes to planning to ensure there are adequate facilities for public schools that meet the present needs of teachers and students, let alone those anticipated for the future.

ITEM 1 (b) the adequacy of plans by the NSW Government to deliver educational facilities for every NSW public school student

1. In 2019, the NSW Department of Education reported in its Annual Report that \$1,030,000 was spent on a new High School at Olympic Park. In 2020, this figure rose to \$2,698,000. This school, long promised to reduce the catchment for Concord High School, has still not eventuated. Where did this money go?
2. Concord High School P&C has been asking for a plan to accommodate the overcrowded, underfunded school for three years. It wasn't until the [Member for Drummoyne made representation in Parliament](#) and met with the Minister for Education that we were advised our school would receive a masterplan.
3. We've been advised by School Infrastructure and the school that Concord High School is approved for a school upgrade. No one can tell us what this means.
4. No one can tell us the scope, deliverables and timeline for the masterplan or how it is different to a school upgrade. The only item we have been told will happen is that a

masterplan will go to the NSW Treasury in June/July 2022 and may or may not be approved.

5. Concord High School is one of the top 20 overcrowded schools in NSW, 50% above capacity - the school has capacity for 800-900 students yet it accommodates over 1,300 students. This type of student population increase does not happen overnight.
6. Concord High School has 18 demountables, including toilet demountables. The demountables are thoughtlessly placed and are now taking up space on the school oval.
7. Only recently has Asset Management installed concrete walkways around the demountables. The installation has been less than successful for a number of reasons:
 - The walkways are only wide enough for one person which means many students and teachers still have to walk in the dirt and mud
 - The walkways are not accessible for people in wheelchairs
 - The walkways around the demountable classrooms do not drain properly
 - When there is heavy rain, the water pools up and creates a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and the surrounding area becomes extremely muddy and slippery.
 - We have been told that the flooding problem can be fixed however the work will not be done because demountable classrooms are not considered permanent buildings even though many of them have been in the school for a long time.
8. There is an outdoor space located behind the basketball courts currently unavailable to students. It is covered in a huge mound of dirt which has been positioned there to cover hazardous asbestos. In a school that is overcrowded with limited choices for students at break times, we do not understand why this area hasn't been cleaned up and prepared as an additional seating area for students.
9. At Concord High School, for one of the core compulsory subjects there are 4 permanent classrooms to accommodate 1,300 students. At any one time there are 16 classes being delivered for this subject. Asset Management continues to add demountables to the school. However, even with 12 demountable classrooms at the school there are still not enough classrooms to deliver lessons for this core subject.

There are classes being delivered in the thoroughfares of the school.

The measures the NSW Department of education publish about student to classroom ratios are meaningless. Can an English class be delivered effectively in a Woodwork classroom, or vice versa?



Classroom set up in an open thoroughfare at Concord High School

10. Sadly, the only improvements our Year 12 2022 students will have seen during their time at Concord High School will be an upgraded oval and additional seating that fills the seating gap shortfall. They will only be able to enjoy this for two terms of their entire time at Concord High School. It's beyond belief the only reason these improvements were promised is as a result of a [newspaper piece in the Inner West Courier](#) that exposed asbestos in the school's oval and incorrect information provided by the NSW Department of Education

11. With full knowledge the female students were 16 toilets short and the students were short outdoor seating by 50%, the school and School Infrastructure spent \$250,000 to prioritise and deliver a school canteen upgrade so the canteen could have a commercial kitchen.

Meanwhile, we became aware in December 2021 of WHS issues and facility shortfalls for other areas in the school, mostly in the school's Hospitality and Food Tech teaching precincts.

This is infuriating because there is no rational basis for a commercial kitchen that is not accessible to the students and used only by an external service provider.

We know for certain the Hospitality students would be thrilled to have the same upgrade the canteen had. However they are working around persistent WHS issues including the absence of steam extractors, food prep under exposed beams that collect dust and are not cleaned by cleaners, as well as mold growing in cupboards.

The canteen upgrade should have been a low priority.

Improvement Suggestions

- Data should be gathered from all school stakeholders through observations, focus groups with students, teachers, parents and community, interview, action research and surveys and action plans should be developed in consultation with the community, (T. Cumming & C. Draper Rodriguez, *School Success for At - Risk Students*, 2019)

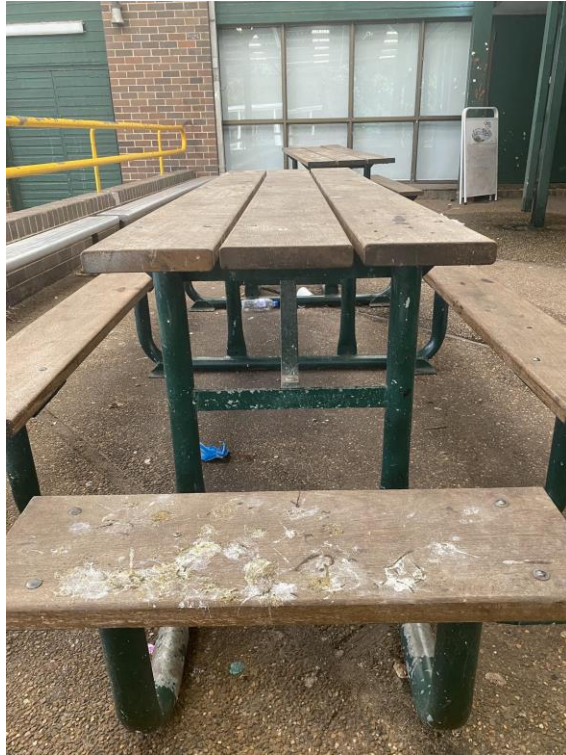
- Acknowledge that if schools are designed for at-risk students, the at-risk students will be accommodated and other students will feel welcome and cared for in the school environment
- That every single NSW public school has a masterplan with a list of funded, prioritised improvements based on data and community consultation. And that the masterplan is visible to the public.
- At a minimum, the Asset Management Plan for the school should be publicly available and a specific role in the Department of Education held to account if it is inadequate, unresponsive to the school's needs, and unfulfilled.

ITEM 1 (c) the adequacy of investment in new or upgraded infrastructure at existing NSW public schools and in new school projects, including: (i) management, (ii) planning, (iii) design, (iv) construction, (v) maintenance, and (vi) budgeting and expenditure of new projects

1. In April 2021 the P&C discovered a lack of clarity in the communication process between the school and Asset Management. We were unsure who was responsible for understanding and accommodating student population increases.

This resulted in the unearthing of a series of deeply disturbing amenity deficiencies at Concord High School. These deficiencies can only be described as child neglect. Here they are.

- a. The school was short 50% outdoor seating for students and many of the seats that are available are unsafe.
 - i. Imagine more than 600 Concord High School students have had to sit on the cold concrete ground in Winter or stand up while eating for years now, every day they're at school
 - ii. Almost 1 year after discovering the outdoor seating shortfall the students of Concord High School started back day 1 term 1 2022 with even less seats
 - iii. Some parents told us their children avoid eating at Concord High School because the outdoor furniture is covered in hardened bird poo, impossible to wipe off it's been there so long



iv. And the condition of the majority of the remaining furniture is unsafe





- b. Our female students were short 16 toilets and toilets were left unclean and unsafe.
- i. We received concerned parent feedback after asking their children about the state of the toilets at Concord High School, here are anonymised parent verbatims from the month of May 2021
“My daughter said there are only 5 useable cubicles across the whole school for junior girls most of the day... The reason she’s not going to the toilet is that it takes too long – the line-up takes most of lunch!”
“I asked my son and his friend about the toilets and both said both of them and their friends will avoid going. The floor is gross and sticky and smells. They said most doors don’t close properly and that many are missing toilet seats. Explains why he is busting by the time he gets home.”
 - ii. We are aware of many students who do not eat or drink at school to avoid the toilets. We are concerned about the physical and mental health implications that result - including dehydration and urinary tract infections to name just two medical conditions and cognitive impact from lack of food and water to learn and perform in class.
 - iii. It took 2 full terms for Asset Management to source demountable toilets to fill the shortfall. When we saw them we discovered the facilities were suited to the height of Primary School students, and disturbingly the school seemed to be unaware of the impracticality of the demountable toilets. We were told by the school the demountable toilets were “just beautiful” when in fact they are barely fit for purpose.
 - iv. The graffiti we’ve seen in the female demountable toilets is distressing and has not been removed since we first saw it in May 2021. Where is the duty of care?



- v. Some teachers told us for years student Tell Them From Me surveys highlighted enormous student dissatisfaction with the toilets, and nothing was done to address this. Where's the duty of care?
- vi. We are truly frightened about the mental health implications and generational damage of the demountable toilet blocks at the school
- vii. We're in a state of disbelief there's no plan to replace the demountable toilets
- viii. On a November 2021 toilet tour of the school, the P&C discovered there are 4 toilets that are locked and not accessible to students at recess and lunch. No one could tell us if these toilets were included in the number of toilets Asset Management used to determine the school was 16 toilets short

- ix. Doors fall off toilet cubicles and are repaired over and over. These are original 1980s materials being fixed over and over as the Department of Education's policy is that schools are maintained to original condition.



- x. We've received a \$150,000 Community Building Program grant from the NSW State government to upgrade existing toilets, however the sentiment of our community is that we, parent volunteers with limited time, should not have to apply for a grant to receive funds to upgrade toilets as this is a State government WHS responsibility. We've also been told by Asset Management \$150,000 will only allow a small block of 4 toilets to be upgraded and it could take a full year based on their current workload.
- c. Our students were short 1 bubbler, and we're not sure if that includes these broken bubblers.



- d. Concord High School has only one toilet that is wheelchair accessible. It is located on the 2nd floor of one of the building blocks and we have been told that the lift to

access the toilet does not work. This means students in wheelchairs must circumnavigate the school to access a toilet.

- e. The Access Code for Buildings Sanitary and other facilities F2.4, states that each bank of toilets must have an *accessible unisex sanitary compartment*. Concord High School does not have an accessible sanitary facility in it's main social hub of the school. This is in serious breach of:
 - i. Child Safe Standards, no. 4: *Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account*. [Children's Guardian Amendment \(Child Safe Scheme\) Act 2021 \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)
 - ii. Disability Standards for Education 2005, 5.2: [Disability Standards for Education 2005 \(legislation.gov.au\)](#), students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.
 - iii. Australian (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010, F2.4: [Disability \(Access to Premises — Buildings\) Standards 2010 \(legislation.gov.au\)](#)
2. Non-Government schools can seek capital funding from both the Federal and State Governments. [The NSW Building Grants Assistance Scheme](#) will provide \$500 million in committed project funding between 2019/20 and 2022/23 to the State's non-government schools.

The Federal Government expended approximately \$206 million during the same period on capital funding in NSW non-government schools.

Public schools can only access State funding. The Principals of public schools are not at liberty to lobby Federal, State and local government members, unlike their counterparts in non-government schools.

3. Ten community groups use Concord High School as a resource and to feel a sense of place and belonging. We question the condition of the deteriorating amenities meeting the needs of the community groups when they're barely meeting the needs of our students. We note the School Excellence Framework states for sustaining and growing a school: *Use of school facilities by the local community delivers benefits to students*. Concord High School is below par.

Improvement Suggestions

- We asked how Asset Management arrived at our students being 16 toilets and 50% outdoor seating short. We were advised this is an Asset Management calculation. Apparently there is a linear meterage calculation of urinals for male students. This is inconsistent with WHS legislation. Facility provisions for students must be based on WHS legislation, not Asset Management policy.
- That every public school's Finance Committee meeting minutes are made publicly available, and that there must be an independent P&C or community representative ion that committee to participate in financial decisions about the school.
- That the maintenance schedule for every public school be made publicly available

- For major projects at a NSW public school, a formal process to seek and include student community including P&C feedback is created, in keeping with the legislated *Child Safe Standards*.
- For major projects at a NSW public school, a project scope, deliverables and timeline is made public - that's not a big ask!

ITEM1 (d) the role of local community organizations and groups in responding to the lack of or shortage of educational facilities at any NSW public school especially in areas of high growth and in proposed new suburbs

1. Concord High School P&C finds it incredibly difficult to recruit volunteers. This is because many in our community see the issues at Concord High School to be incredibly challenging and time consuming. They want to part of it.
2. Uncovering and ensuring these types of structural issues are fixed is beyond the role of a P&C. Doing this takes time away from delivering events that create strong, thriving, vibrant connections in our community.
3. Out of sheer frustration with the lack of investment in school facilities, the P&C commissioned architects Gardner Wetherill to create a blueprint to update teaching precincts at the school so we can enlist the support of our state and federal MPs to secure funding. This is not our job!
4. When there is no plan for a school, it makes it very challenging for the P&C to secure funds through grant writing or fundraising to deliver improved facilities. We recently secured \$20,000 to purchase a modular outdoor alfresco BBQ. We were shocked after receiving this grant that the school then said it didn't have enough money to install the BBQ and secure it.
5. Additionally, many grant providers are dismissive because they believe public schools receive adequate funding from State and Federal Government. We also compete with other community organisations who have the staff resources to write competitive funding applications.
6. Writing grants is time consuming. We should not have to write grants for basic amenities the NSW government should be providing. Non-government schools can use their paid staff to apply for grants e.g Community Building Partnership Grants, the Federal Government's Block Grants, Club Grants and Local Government Grants. Government schools are not eligible to apply directly and must rely on P&C parent volunteers. Regardless of grant eligibility, Government schools would not have the staff resources to allow them to do so anyway due to underfunding.

Remember, the latest data which is from 2019 and is OLD shows us that Concord High School is underfunded by the Federal Government's own SRS definition by \$1,200 per student. Across 1,300 students that's a funding shortfall of \$1.6m.

7. We are aware of families who have moved home so they could be in the catchment area of a public high school that provided better facilities than Concord High School.

Improvement Suggestions

- Every school must provide anonymous exit interviews that are aggregated to protect people's identities
- Stop the ridiculous waste! Communities and schools should not have to invest time in grant applications, governments should not waste funds administering entire departments to administer these grants - just give public schools adequate funding!
- Speaking of waste, there needs to be a review of the effectiveness of the [National School Resourcing Board](#) and why it consistently agrees for State governments to underfund NSW government schools. Surely there will be enough evidence in this Inquiry to uncover that
 - There is **NOT** public confidence in the funding model
 - States, territories and other approved authorities **DO NOT** meet their obligations under the Act

ITEM 1 (e) the adequacy of demographic planning for anticipated school enrolments

1. There has been no consultation between the City of Canada Bay Council and the State government. As far as we are aware, the Council continues to approve high density residential buildings - Council does not advise the State government about population forecasts and the State government does not seek this information from Council to inform planning for Concord High School.
2. Canada Bay Council's Mayor told the P&C that schools are the responsibility of the NSW state government, not local governments. To help us the Mayor suggested his photographer take a picture of us and our children with him amongst the demountables. We were deeply disappointed and said no as we believe collaboration is the best way forward.
3. In December 2021, a Councillor at the City of Canada Bay Council identified the inadequate facilities at Concord High School in servicing public high school education for youth in Council's area and raised a motion, which was passed, that Council support Concord High School.
4. No one can tell us what the projected student population will be at Concord High School over the next 1 - 10 years. [The NSW Auditor-General reported in 2017](#) that student population in NSW Government school's will increase by 21% in the next 15 years, with 80% of that growth occurring in metropolitan Sydney.

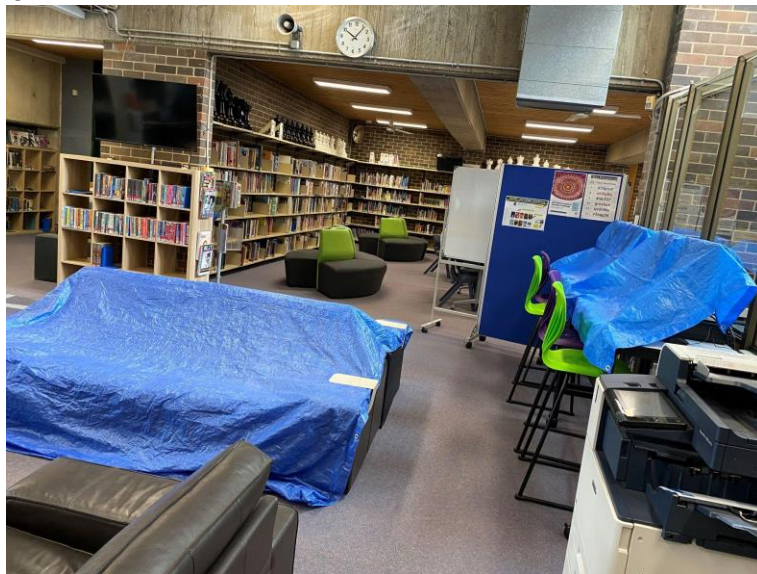
Based on these figures, we anticipate the diabolical situation the school is currently in will only worsen as the demands on the aging and over capacity facilities increases exponentially.

Improvement Suggestions

- Formal processes are designed and implemented for local and state government collaboration to help forecast future population growth

ITEM 1(h) school design that promotes health and safety

1. The P&C highlighted to the Principal in early 2020 that there were possums in the School Library roof, leaving feces and urine covering furniture, equipment and teacher and student work. Two years on this issue continues to persist. That's two years of the teachers and cleaners having to clean this up and students losing their homework and assignments.



2. Ongoing structural problems in the school library. The roof leaks every time it is raining. The leaks are now spreading to other parts of the library. The original leak area has been a problem for more than 10 years.
3. We have further reports of widespread leaking across multiple common areas of the school including a water leak from a light fitting in the TAS store room which has not been fixed despite prior reports.
4. Classes are being taught in a number of common areas and thoroughfares in the school. Students have expressed frustration by the level of noise in these areas, and difficulties they have in engaging in school work. Some makeshift classrooms (notably common 7) are filled with hard metal surfaces and flooring, exacerbating hazardous reverberation. We are deeply concerned by reports that noise levels are “unbearable”, such environments are not only detrimental to learning, but there are risks to hearing for students and teachers who access these spaces.
5. We've heard teachers use sticky tape to secure a gap in the wall so that cockroaches don't come through and lay eggs in the staffroom and classrooms.

6. We have been informed that there are widespread problems with pests, including cockroaches, rats, possums and mice in and around staff rooms and teaching spaces, daily clearing is required.
7. The Math teachers' staff room has no window. No window means no ventilation. Not a Covid Safe Start to 2022.
8. We've had a number of reports that more than 50% of the permanent teaching precincts at the school are not air conditioned. On days where the temperature is above 30°C, heat gets trapped and teachers and students feel faint. The heating and air conditioning in some demountables does not work.
9. We have been informed about a serious safety concern regarding a screen winch in the school's theatrette. We were told that "someone might lose a finger".
10. We have been told for two years now that one of the paths at the school is a slip hazard and that two teachers had made compensation claims after slipping on this path. We were told in a P&C meeting there was a negotiation with Asset Management to replace the path with something safer in exchange for reducing the number of maintenance items to be delivered at the school.
11. We've had reports from parents that they have submitted their school safety concerns directly to NSW Safe Work as they are not comfortable providing the concerns directly to the school.
12. The school refuses to include a parent representative on the WHS committee, we believe WHS issues should be transparent and that we should work together as a community to understand and resolve safety concerns.
13. Concord High School applied for a Cooler Classrooms grant over 2 years ago and as at the date of submission the School Infrastructure website says this grant is "In Progress". Numerous attempts to find out the progress of this Grant have been unsuccessful. In fact, we've been told this is a large project to manage and it will take time.
14. We were annoyed when the school told us in a meeting the air conditioning was not working in one of the Admin staff's office. All they need to do is keep their office door open as the admin building where their office is would have to be one of the coolest spaces in the school. What about the teachers and students who feel like fainting!!!
15. The school's GA built a kitchen in the middle of the Math teaching precinct. No approval was sought from Asset Management and no one can tell us if the kitchen complies with Australian Building standards.

16. For years there have been dangerous tree roots and deep potholes on the street where the main entrance is to Concord High School. A Councillor at the City of Canada Bay Council made representation to Council and the road was fixed.
17. There are three shipping containers in the Senior Courtyard. We were told it is too costly to pay for document storage offsite, that's why the containers are cluttering spaces our children need to be active, social and reset during break time. The containers reduce the outdoor footprint even more for our growing number of students.
18. Safety of personal information becomes a challenge in a school that is overcrowded and still stores paper records of personal information. Schools must comply with Australian Privacy laws and responsibly store personal information and be able to tell people how their personal information is stored. We would be happy to discuss this further, conscious this is a public document and not wanting to disclose how and where personal information is stored at Concord High School. What we can say is it's deeply concerning and frightening.
19. We are concerned about the psychological impact of overcrowding, the difficulty for teachers to identify and respond to mental health concerns due to staff shortages and work demands, and the lack of psychological support at the school for students.
 - a. We currently have 1 psychologist for over 1,300 students which is considered inadequate by the following reports that all call for a ratio of 1 psychologist for 500 students:
 - i. Australian Psychological Society, June 2019 pg 30: [framework-delivery-school-psych-services-practice-guide.pdf \(psychology.org.au\)](https://www.psychology.org.au/resources/publications/PDF/framework-delivery-school-psych-services-practice-guide.pdf)
 - ii. 2020 Gallop Inquiry: [gallop_inquiry_fact_sheet.pdf \(nswtf.org.au\)](https://www.gallop.org.au/files/gallop_inquiry_fact_sheet.pdf)
 - iii. 2021 Federal Government's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Inquiry, recommendation no. 41: [MentalHealthandSuicidePrevention-FinalReport.pdf;fileType=application/pdf \(aph.gov.au\)](https://www.aph.gov.au/~/media/Committees_of_inquiry/Inquiries/MentalHealthandSuicidePrevention/FinalReport.pdf?fileType=application/pdf)
 - b. We are deeply concerned about the impact and generational damage, overcrowded school environments have on our children's mental health and wellbeing. In a meeting at Concord High School on the 31st May 2021, we asked Ms Pauline Kotselas, Leader of Psychology and Wellbeing Services and Ms Anne Reddie, Director of Child Wellbeing and Mental Health Services NSW Department of Education to provide information regarding the impact of overcrowding on students mental health, neither were able to offer a response.
 - c. We've established a Diversity and Inclusion Network SubCommittee to enable parents and carers to share resources and collaborate together to find solutions to support their child's wellbeing at the school.

Improvement Suggestions

- That every public school qualifies for air conditioning and school resources can be focussed on operational issues rather than time spent applying for grants then additional back of house resources in assessing these grants
- An independent review of how schools are chosen to receive capex

- [Disability Standards for Education 2005 \(legislation.gov.au\)](http://legislation.gov.au) 5.2: states that *the student is able to participate in the courses or programs provided by the educational institution, and use the facilities and services provided by it, on the same basis as a student without a disability*. We recommend that an architecturally designed calming space and/or support unit be created and facilitated in every school for students with sensory sensitivities and anxiety, and we stress that this space is appropriately and solely utilized for its specific therapeutic purpose.
- An independent review of the impact overcrowded environments have on students and teachers' mental health
- Additional psychologists and mental health programs to be implemented in all NSW schools in line with the recommended ratios and in response to needs of students experiencing mental health difficulties that arise from overwhelming and overcrowded environments.
- Safety issues are publically available, there is a role in the Department of Education accountable for maintaining WHS standards, and WHS issues are addressed as a priority so that teacher and student safety comes first

ITEM (i) any other related matters

1. We have observed upsetting comments on social media regarding overcrowding, inadequate, substandard and unsafe school facilities and infrastructure at Concord High
 - a. *"This has been a major issue since my daughter started there 10 years ago, as the years progressed the school got worse and worse and i was so thankful she finally finished before it became a disaster which it seems is now the case"*
2. *The Children's Guardian Amendment (Child Safe Scheme) Act 2021: [Children's Guardian Amendment \(Child Safe Scheme\) Act 2021 \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au) Child Safe Standards:*
 - i. *2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously*
 - ii. *3: Families and communities are informed and involved.*
 - b. We are concerned that decisions regarding the environment are being made without consultation with the students and their families. Lack of consultation results in a lack of understanding on how the students feel and interact within their learning environment.
 - c. We have been informed of parents who have reported serious mental health concerns relating to sensory difficulties but understand that behavior assessments are not being undertaken to detect why students are suffering from mental health difficulties. We are concerned that these issues relate directly to disturbing noise levels and overcrowding.
 - d. We believe that a lack of family and community consultation and investigation into behavior triggers by including the students voice, limits the school's ability to identify and respond to potential environmental hazards that cause mental health problems and emotional difficulties.

3. While we've uncovered a lot, we wonder what we still don't know and we are seriously worried about how the school will manage and respond to the changing environment in the future.
4. We are deeply concerned as we hear continuously that reports of safety concerns and structural damage at the school are being made by staff, and staff are not being listened to and issues not fixed. We are unaware of the maintenance processes that are in place, who is responsible and why are problems not being fixed. We would like representation on the school's WHS Committee as our children's health and safety needs are not being addressed. At a minimum, we would like to submit issues to the Committee and receive minutes.
5. What do schools with no P&C do? We are deeply concerned about the health and welfare of students in schools where students and parents have no voice.