

**Submission
No 117**

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

Organisation: Dee Why Public School P&C Rebuild Subcommittee

Date Received: 18 February 2022

Dee Why Public School P&C Rebuild Subcommittee's submission for NSW Parliament's *Inquiry into school infrastructure in New South Wales*

Dear Committee Members,

As representatives of the Dee Why Public School P&C Rebuild Subcommittee, we welcomed the findings of the Auditor General's *Delivering School Infrastructure* report as demonstrated in our feedback to that report. The report provided us with greater understanding as to how School Infrastructure NSW operates, which was not made clear in the year we had been attempting to communicate with them about their sudden decision to deprioritise a full rebuild of our school.

We also welcome this follow-up Inquiry, which will hopefully guide the adoption of the recommendations set out in the AG's report as a means to improve a system that does not yet wholly serve its stated purpose - to provide quality educational facilities to communities that most need them. To this end, we would like to share our school's disappointing experience with School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW).

In September 2020, after a year of intensive planning and consultation with representatives from SINSW, Dee Why Public School was unexpectedly and without reasonable explanation knocked back for a major rebuild. We were informed that there was "a change in the priority level for an upgrade" to the school and that the "approval process for this project will not proceed at this time". SINSW insist that they were in "early planning" only, despite being on the cusp of the project being finalised - SINSW had sought financial approval on the chosen design and the pending rebuild was announced in the school newsletter by our Principal Mark Chaffer. Even this discrepancy as to what stage the project was at was unclear.

Numerous attempts to gain further clarity from SINSW has provided no further insight, rather they claim all information covered is confidential "due to privacy reasons" and all participants involved in the planning process are covered by a non-disclosure agreement. This has left the parents and community of Dee Why Public School enraged and frustrated at the NSW government's lack of transparency and a lack of support for the children of Dee Why. So while we would like to be able to comment on the list of items in your Terms of Reference 1c, we are unable to do so as the process is protected under great secrecy.

The following announcement was published in the Dee Why Public School newsletter of 10 September 2020.

Dear Project Reference Group,

As you are aware, School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW) has been undertaking early planning in the Dee Why area. Early planning considers a number of factors including demographic trends, educational requirements, condition of existing schools in the catchment area, catchment boundaries, site sizes, transport links and partnership opportunities.

The results of this planning have demonstrated a change in the priority level for an upgrade to the Dee Why Public School, and as such the approval process for this project will not proceed at this time. SINSW will continue to assess the service needs in the Dee Why area, and it is possible this project may progress in the future if the need is identified in consideration of the above factors.

Thank you for the time and effort that has been put into this project to date and SINSW will be in touch in future if there are any updates on the Dee Why Project

Regards

School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW)

Level 8, 259 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000 | GPO Box 33, Sydney, NSW 2001

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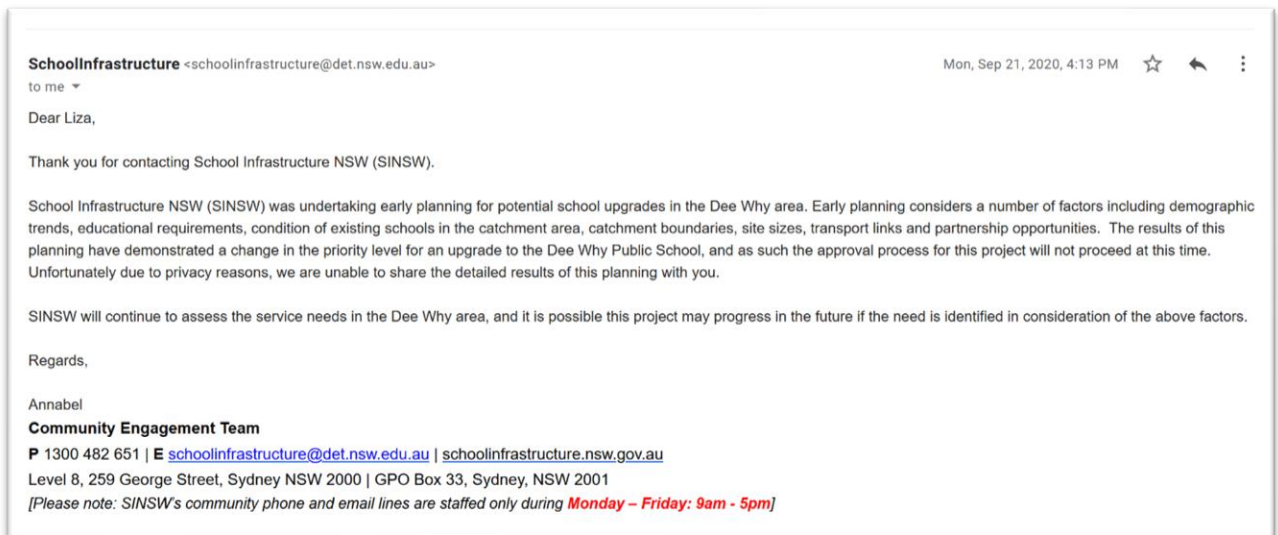
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I acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay my respect to Country.

Despite numerous attempts to gain further information about “the change in the priority level for an upgrade”, SINSW has stuck to the statement in the screenshot below, claiming that all information covered is confidential “due to privacy reasons” and all participants in the planning process are covered by a non-disclosure agreement. This begs the question, what needs to be legally secretive about public funds being spent on public education?



We appreciate our representative Mr Brad Hazzard's attempts to gain clarity about the decision from the then Minister for Education Sarah Mitchell, who, in her letter of 07 December 2021, did not address our main concern of a severe lack of play space and reiterated much of what SINSW stated above as well as highlight the money recently spent on Dee Why Public School, all of which was basic maintenance - roofs, carpets, toilets.

That our school is not being redeveloped compromises not only our children's education but their physical and emotional wellbeing as well. Since 2014 we have seen a 173% increase in student enrolments, putting enormous pressure on the existing school facilities, particularly play space, toilets and school hall. This is of great concern as Dee Why has and will see a steep increase in its population now that it is a designated strategic "mixed use centre supporting higher density living", according to the *Northern Beaches Towards 2040* report. The total population of Dee Why is expected to grow by 27% (6,573), including a further 237 primary aged kids, and see an additional 3,200 dwellings by 2041¹. Our lived reality is a clear example of what you stated in your media release - "The evidence is already clear that areas of high growth...suffer from poor planning".

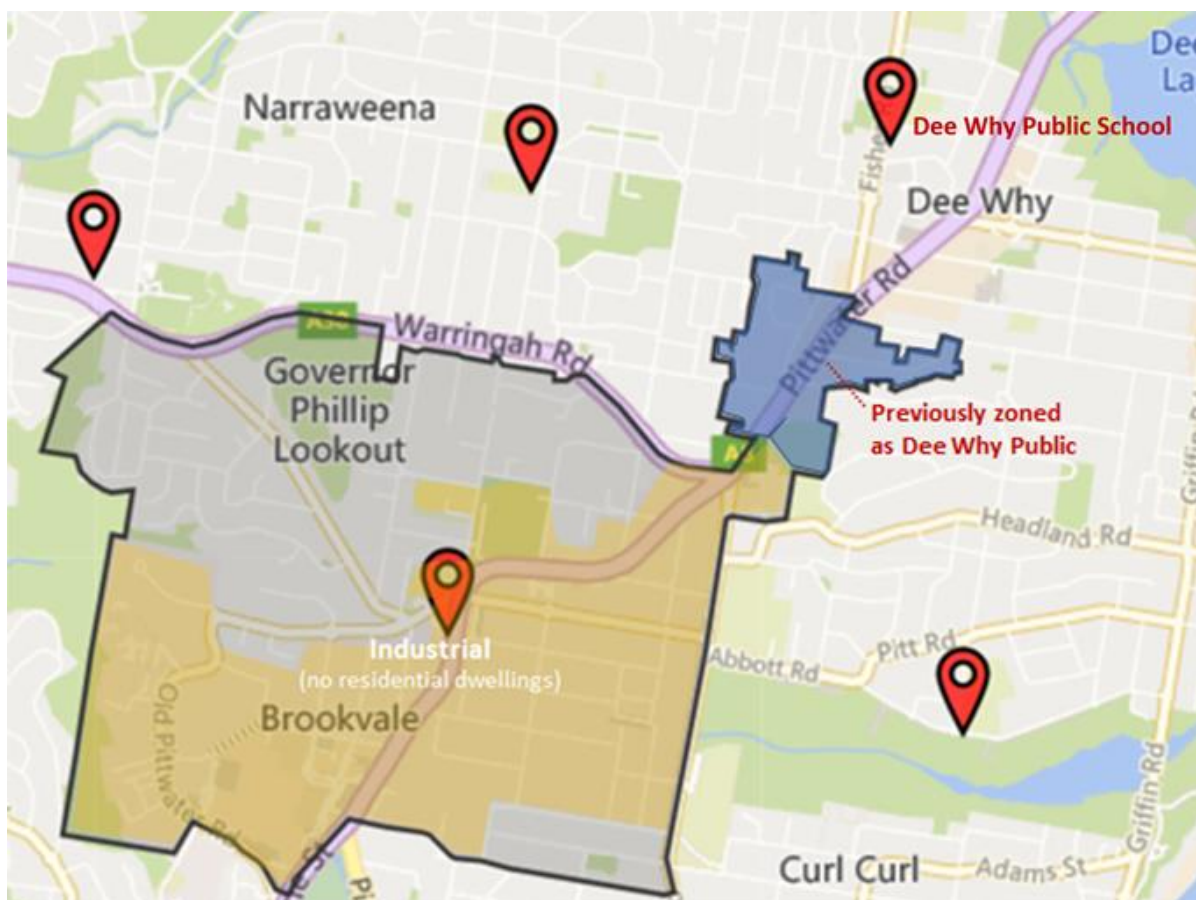
Forecast population, households and dwellings						
Dee Why	Forecast year					
Summary	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041
Population	22,709	24,583	26,358	27,956	29,540	31,156
Change in population (5yrs)	--	1,875	1,774	1,598	1,584	1,616
Average annual change	--	1.60%	1.40%	1.18%	1.11%	1.07%
Households	9,686	10,442	11,157	11,920	12,679	13,440
Average household size	2.34	2.35	2.35	2.34	2.32	2.31
Population in non private dwellings	85	85	85	85	85	85
Dwellings	10,093	10,927	11,727	12,527	13,327	14,127
Dwelling occupancy rate	95.97	95.56	95.14	95.15	95.14	95.14

The same report states that Dee Why is an area with "poor access to open space". Coming in at approximately 7.7 sqm of play space per student, Dee Why Public School has one of the lowest areas of play space in the Sydney

¹ <https://forecast.id.com.au/northern-beaches/population-households-dwellings?WebID=250&Year1=2021&Year2=2031&Year3=2041>

metropolitan area. This is down 17.6 sqm per student in 2016 due to the addition of eight demountable classrooms. This play space is significantly below the NSW Department of Education's recommended 10 sqm and experts' recommendations of 25 sqm of play space per student². The school's 584 students only have 1 netball court and one small artificial-turf soccer area. All this in an area where 83.7% of the population live in apartments or flats. The school is currently inadequate to meet the physical and wellbeing needs of its students.

SINSW's solution of diverting students to other schools by reducing the school's catchment area is an illogical, unsuitable option and will not adequately address the issues of inadequate play space in the long term, nor the unsatisfactory teaching environment, some classrooms are converted storage rooms, and reliance on demountable classrooms. It will force some Dee Why families living within blocks of Dee Why Public School to enrol in Brookvale, as seen below, tearing at the fabric of our community and force students to navigate 1.4km along Pittwater Rd, our local area's busiest road. Despite the boundary changes which come into effect in 2023, early enrolments indicate that Dee Why Public is on track for one of its largest Kindergarten intakes in 2022 placing great stress on our already overcrowded school.



This highlights the inadequacy of the NSW government to plan for adequate facilities for every NSW student, particularly in a low-income. Dee Why is a cultural hub which needs investment in the right resources and facilities to ensure every child can receive a high-quality education. 69% of current enrolments are from a non-English speaking background. This is in line with the fact Dee Why has the highest number of non-English speaking background residents (32.5%) in the Northern Beaches. It is vital that we support our lower socioeconomic community with every educational and wellbeing advantage possible. Dee Why is one of the lowest income areas in the Northern Beaches. Only 24.0% of Dee Why households earned a high income (\$2500 per week), the lowest percentage in the Northern Beaches, and 13.0% were low-income households, compared with 37.7% and 11.3% respectively for Northern

² Grunseit AC, O'Hara J, Drayton B, Learnihan V, Clark E, Klarenaar P, Engelen L. *Ecological study of playground space and physical activity among primary school children* BMJ 2020 Vol. 10 Issue 6. p.2 <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/6/e034586>

Beaches Council area. This is acknowledged by the *Northern Beaches Towards 2040* report when it states, “most of the LGA is relatively advantaged, with small pockets of disadvantage around Narraweena and Dee Why”.

While there have been significant rebuilds of the public schools at Manly Vale, Curl Curl North, Harbord and Mona Vale (in design phase) along with a significant upgrade to Brookvale, Dee Why Public School doesn't even have natural play surfaces or fixed playground equipment on site. The nearest playground is across a busy street, Fisher Rd, in an undeveloped lot owned by the Department of Education where students do not have access to water or toilets. Despite the immense potential of this land, which we understand Mr Hazzard helped to save from being sold, play on the site is limited to one lunchtime per week for years 3 and above due to the access issues - Year 5s and Year 6s play there Monday lunchtime and Year 3s and Year 4s play there Thursday lunchtime.

Considering these facts, under both the SINSW's Eagle Eye and SASP Filter criteria, Dee Why Public School is a viable candidate for a holistic rebuild, which SINSW unreservedly agreed with up until mid-2020. If not a complete rebuild then at the very least an investment in developing the Fisher Rd lot owned by the Department of Education with appropriate fixed play equipment, shade, toilets and running water with a footbridge over Fisher Rd so that students and staff can access it safely.

There is growing anger in our community driving us to work tirelessly to ensure that our children have the facilities to match the amazing community, teachers and staff we have at Dee Why Public School. If not addressed, we are likely to see the loss of great teachers and staff in the near future, adding to the issues.

Therefore, it is our subcommittee's opinion that election commitments should not factor into the criteria to determine the priority for SINSW's projects, as it does with the SASP Filter. SINSW needs to publicise its process - prioritisation, cost and decision making - to help keep it accountable as these are valuable tax dollars spent. We shudder to think of the money spent on the Dee Why project's development in the year leading up to its cancellation. SINSW needs to clearly and honestly communicate with schools as to why developed projects, such as ours, will not advance. The eight recommendations from the Auditor General's *Delivering school infrastructure* report should be adopted as best practice forthwith.

As it stands, SINSW is failing our community in meeting the Education Act 1990's stated mandate “to provide a context within which schools also have the opportunity to foster the physical...development of students”.

Thank you for conducting this inquiry and for receiving our submission.

All the best,

Stuart Herring
Chair, Dee Why Public School P&C Rebuild Subcommittee

Liza Blackstone
Secretary, Dee Why Public School P&C Rebuild Subcommittee