

**Submission  
No 121**

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

**Name:** Ms Marnie Coates

**Date Received:** 5 July 2022

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Medowie is a rapidly growing regional town in Port Stephens with a projected population of 17,500 people by 2036. There are currently 1000 new dwellings approved and under construction in Medowie. The 2016 census showed that the medium age of people living in Medowie was 36 years. We are a community made up primarily of young families. This is evident by the current schools that exist in the town being two public primary schools with combined enrolments of around 1000 students, a private Christian K-12 college and a brand new, state of the art, Catholic High School.

However, Medowie does not have a public high school, despite being promised one for the last 40 years.

Medowie is a satellite community, surrounded by several smaller satellite suburbs. The teens of Medowie and these surrounding towns are currently required to travel to one of two public high schools in Raymond Terrace. The demographics of these suburbs are vastly different and, for children entering high school, the transition can be very challenging. In general, students from Medowie and surrounds experience a loss of connection to their community when entering high school.

Currently, more than 1000 children travel out of Medowie on buses each day to attend high school, some as far away as Newcastle. Additional students travel from towns further afield including Salt Ash, Karuah, Lemon Tree Passage, Fern Bay Tea Gardens and Hawks nest. These children spend up to 2 hours each day on buses getting to and from school and sometimes have long waits at either end of their school day. These children are missing out on extracurricular opportunities such as sports, social gatherings, part-time work and family time. It has a huge social, educational and psychological impact on our local teens.

In 1983, the Department of Education purchased a large parcel of land on Ferodale Rd, Medowie, adjacent to Wirreanda Public School. Since that time, various governments have promised to plan and build a much-needed Medowie public high school.

I joined the campaign for public education in Medowie in 2014, when my eldest child was 4 years old. I have just completed her highschool enrolment forms for next year. Many, many parents and community members had fought for a high school in Medowie prior to my involvement, however, I am only able to speak to what has occurred over the last 8 years since I have been involved. Action on a Medowie high school has included:

- 1983: Government purchases land for a high school
- 2007: Government working group develop plans for a high school
- 2011: Adrian Piccoli MP commits to making the project “shovel ready”
- 2014: The community appealed to Ryan Park, MP
- 5 February, 2015: The Newcastle Herald covered the high school story
- February 2015: Community members held market events, made banners, marched and signed petitions appealing for a local high school

- 17 February, 2015: Medowie High School made the Newcastle Herald's list of "Projects the Hunter needs now" and won the public vote for the project most needed by a 6% margin.
- February 2015: The Williamstown RAAF base expanded to include 250 more Defence personnel
- 25 February, 2015: The Newcastle Herald covered the high school story
- February 2015: Focused community working groups were established in the areas of survey development, media, population growth, students with a disability, bus safety, RAAF & airport expansion
- February 2015: Many, many emails sent to both the Minister and Shadow Minister for Education by various community members
- 4 March, 2015: The Newcastle Herald, Port Stephens Examiner and NBN news covered the high school story with a Labour Government funding commitment
- March 2015: The community appealed to Ken Jordan MP. His response was "*the current numbers do not justify a new school without closing one of the two Terrace high schools*"
- 14 March 2015: A community rally was held
- 16 March 2015: I was interviewed by ABC news who covered the story
- 2 September 2015: Adrian Piccoli MP rejects the need for a Medowie High School
- 10 December 2015: The Department of Education admits there's a need for 170 new schools due to population growth
- 16 February 2017: Kate Washington MP submits a Notice of Motion in Parliament on behalf of the people of Port Stephens urging Minister Stokes to immediately commit to planning and building a high school in Medowie
- 26 June 2020: The media covered Jodi McKay's support for a public high school
- 2 July 2020: News of the Area and Port Stephens Examiner covered the high school story
- 2020: Both Raymond Terrace high schools have exceeded their capacities and the government plans to expand those schools rather than build a new school in Medowie
- 11 February 2021: Kate Washington MP appeals to the Minister of Education in Parliament

The two high schools in Raymond Terrace are excellent schools, providing amazing educational opportunities to the children enrolled there. The enrolments at Hunter River High School and Irrawang High School have increased by 23% and 40% respectively over 5 years. Expanding these schools, and continuing to bus children there from far afield, is not a reasonable response to the shortage in capacity. Expanding the number of classrooms and teachers at these schools does not solve the problem, it merely creates new problems, by diluting the availability of resources and outdoor space available to the 1900 students currently enrolled in those schools. This is highly likely to negatively impact the educational outcomes for new and existing students.

Despite the significant efforts outlined above, there has been an issue with continuity of community involvement. Medowie has a large RAAF community and Defence members who are posted to Medowie will generally "post out" when their children reach high school age to seek out preferable senior education in other states. For this section of our community, a Medowie high school is unlikely to be realised in the short time that they are living in Medowie. For other

parents (like myself), the years of campaigning are a drain on family life and mental health, and generally, once our children reach high school age, we no longer have any fight left.

Please do not let our pleas continue to go unheard.