

Submission
No 133

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

7TH September 2022

To Whom This May Concern,

CASTLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL ASBESTOS ISSUE

My three kids have all attended Castle Hill High School (CHHS) between the years 2012 and 2022. My youngest is doing the HSC this year. Thus, I have come to know many parents and students over the ten years our family has been attending CHHS.

Both parents, students and teachers have been suffering great distress over the asbestos issue and there has been a lack of information generally. The first parents heard about asbestos was in 2020 when we were assured by the then Principal, Mrs Vicki Brewer, that asbestos was found and remediated. At that stage, we had no cause for concern as per the Principals reassuring email. I have kept copies of all the school correspondence on the issue of asbestos.

Fast forward to May/June 2022 when media reports came out suggesting that the asbestos problem at Castle Hill High School was indeed worse than we were told. The Hansard Record tells the real story of what happened at CHHS but unfortunately, most parents/students are unaware of the Hansard Record. Those that are aware of The Hansard Record, are naturally extremely concerned. Also, if you don't get many parent/student submissions to this inquiry, it is not due to a lack of concern, but simply that people were not made aware of it by the school.

As per the Hansard Record, the allegations are asbestos dust has been present at CHHS for many years and that there may have been a potential cover up by the school including a delayed response to fixing the problem. In addition, there are lots of questions such as why School infrastructure NSW did not find the problem with their regular inspections even if CHHS did not report the issue. This constitutes a double failure and is tantamount to reckless endangerment of students/staff if allegations are proven correct.

Overall, information and therefore clarity has been difficult to come by. This issue is of paramount importance given the sheer size of CHHS and the many thousands of students/staff who have been impacted. The bureaucratic nature of Department of Education & Communities (DoE) is of concern in terms of their speed at doing things along with their wall of silence on this issue. My understanding is that years ago teachers complained about asbestos dust falling to the Teachers Federation and Department of Education and nothing was done.

My husband and I have put our 3 kid's names on the asbestos register as per the new Principals, Ms Georgina Fleming, letter suggested. The concern is Mesothelioma can take many decades to appear because I had an aunt pass away from it. CHHS is 60 next year and obviously a school of that age has asbestos, but it would seem that CHHS asbestos has degraded rather badly if asbestos dust has entered classrooms. How this asbestos situation has all unfolded is inconceivable and a further independent investigation is warranted as the Hon Ray Williams MP suggested on TV. My suggestion, is to call for a Royal Commission because if this can happen at the largest high school in the state, it can happen anywhere.

After the late May/June media reports, I put the issue of Asbestos on the P&C agenda for July and I was the first parent to bring up asbestos at P&C. I have copies of the minutes from the July P&C meeting. I didn't say much at the July meeting other than my question of

have the students/teachers been exposed. Two other parents spoke up at the P&C that night because they knew about the Hansard Record (I didn't until that night). Unfortunately, the majority of parents don't know about the Hansard Record, and thus don't know the complete truth. After that night, a group of concerned parents formed and began collaborating. Our decision was to ask at the August P&C meeting if P&C would form a sub-committee called the Asbestos Committee (more on that later on).

I also put asbestos on the August agenda for our P&C Meeting. At that meeting, the school brought in Joanne Marshall (Director, Education Leadership Hills District) and Michelle Johns (Director School Infrastructure) along with Haysam (Principal Occupational Hygienist Red OHMS).to assure those of us speaking up that all was well. Curiously our guest speakers were not advertised to the whole school, thus keeping many parents/students in the dark. Note that these guest speakers did not talk about the years 2016-2020 because apparently, they are not able to due to their own internal investigation. We were not able to speak directly to these guests on the zoom meeting, but were given email addresses to send our questions to.

At the August P&C meeting (minutes won't be available until just before the next meeting in September). I requested a parent Asbestos Sub-Committee be formed but that request was denied. Given that the goal of P&Cs is to work in productive partnership with the Principal and school community to promote interests of the school, facilitate its development and improvement and to achieve the best possible outcome for students, I am still astounded by the response from P&C – a no to the formation of this Asbestos Committee. This effectively cut off our group from directly communicating in the school newsletter with other concerned parents as just one example. There is certainly a wall of silence on this issue. Parents are only being drip fed exactly what the DoE legal department want us to know via the Principal, Ms Georgina Fleming.

I understand remediation works have been undertaken, however, I remain concerned with the known blue, brown and white asbestos identified across the school. Some of which is classified in the school's asbestos register as high priority. Overall there are 91 points of identified asbestos noted at CHHS plus areas of "presumed asbestos". Of major concern is the fact that the 2020 Asbestos Register and the 2021 Asbestos Register were both listed on the School Infrastructure website – however these have now been removed. In addition, it has come to my attention that a new Asbestos Register has appeared on the School Infrastructure website dated 16 June 2022 – which still identifies asbestos across the school in levels from a low to high priority.

It is my understanding that the Hon Mr Ray Williams MP received a letter from the Education Minister dated 30 May 2022, which stated that *"there is no current evidence to indicate the presence of asbestos contamination at the school"*. However, one month later on 28 June 2022, staff, parents/carers were provided with a Works Notification for asbestos removal in Blocks A, E and LL. We do not have the test results which prompted this remediation work, nor have we seen any clearance certificates from any remediation work done in June 2022 or at any other time for the school.

It is my recommendation that an independent hygienist assessment report needs to be undertaken without delay to assure parents, students and staff that the levels of asbestos within the school are safe.

The anxiety and stress that parents, students and staff are experiencing is profound. Staff, parents and students have a reasonable fear that they or their child may face future health issues or indeed a shortened life span as a result of this debacle. It beggars belief that in this day and age we are still getting exposures to asbestos. It is totally unacceptable that so many people at CHHS have been exposed to degraded deadly asbestos.

There are so many unanswered questions. As such, I am currently drafting a letter to the Education Minister with a list of our questions. Below please find the list of questions. Please note this list is still in draft form and has not yet been sent to The Minister, Hon Sarah Mitchell. This list is in no particular order of importance.

1. Have CHHS students/staff been exposed to asbestos and for how long? What is the estimated level of asbestos exposure?
2. A letter to parents from the new 2022 CHHS Principal, Ms Georgina Fleming, dated 1st June 2022 suggests parents put their child's name on the Asbestos Exposure Register if they are concerned. Please confirm were all children/staff exposed to asbestos? What are the dates of exposures? Parents cannot make informed decisions without specific information.
3. At what point/year did the asbestos begin to degrade and turn into deadly asbestos dust/fibres? Surely, School Infrastructure NSW have this information if they were conducting regular audits/examinations.
4. Please detail how regular the asbestos audits were conducted by School Infrastructure NSW? What is the exact date asbestos was found at CHHS? What is the exact date asbestos at CHHS was first reported to DoE?
5. The DoE should provide funds to install special air purifiers designed to remove asbestos in all classrooms as a matter of urgency. We understand Aeris (Via Westbal) can provide such purifiers. What is the lead time for the installation of such purifiers?
6. Air particulate monitoring can also be provided by Aeris for every classroom with reporting controlled at a central hub in the school. CHHS should have this installed as another layer of protection. What is the lead time for the installation of such monitors?
7. Please advise if the size of the asbestos fibres are respirable? Please provide a list of all types of airborne asbestos found at CHHS and the specific location of each of the asbestos types and levels. For each finding please provide a date, level and location using reference to a map.
8. Please provide a map of where the asbestos was found and what type of asbestos was found and where.
9. What was the source of friable asbestos (ie. flooring, roofing materials, walls etc)?
10. We have copies of all school correspondence regarding asbestos but it only dates back to 6.5.20. According to the Hansard Record, there a delay in reporting asbestos that was first found in 2016 –please detail why?
11. The allegation in the Hansard Record is the previous and now retired school Principal, Ms Vicki Brewer, did not report the asbestos findings. Why then did other school executives/staff/teachers not inform DoE or why did School Infrastructure NSW not find it and report it? Please advise if you received direct correspondence from CHHS executive /teachers/staff about the issue?

12. Given the 2016 finding of asbestos, what did the DoE and CHHS do between the years 2016-2020 to ensure the site was safe from asbestos?
13. Given the asbestos was known to exist in at least 2016, where was the asbestos in 2017, 2018, 2019? Specifically, has there been asbestos in any classrooms, corridors, storerooms, library or any other area where students have access? Was there any air monitoring done in this period?
14. How long until the DoE investigation finishes and when will the outcome be made available to P&C, the school community and the public?
15. Who is involved in the DoE investigation? Please provide names and position held by those investigating.
16. When are past students/staff and parents going to be notified of the asbestos contamination? Not all past students/staff would have seen recent media reports. What about school volunteers, non-English speaking parents and past students from overseas?
17. What support and information is being provided to those now outside the CHHS community but who may have been previous students/staff?
18. What support and guidance is being provided to students/staff and parents in relation to counselling due to the asbestos findings?
19. Can you please advise the name/s of the occupational hygienist by name/company who remediated Castle Hill High School including their license number?
20. Was the occupational hygienist the same person who measured asbestos levels at the school from 2020 onwards?
21. Please provide copies of the hygienist reports and the levels of asbestos found at the school.
22. We would like a clearance certificate for each and every room including the name of the company who provided it and whether they are independent or not? Are the independent hygienists engaged to do other work for the DoE and other Government Departments on an ongoing basis? What is the approximation of the fees they derive from Government work?
23. Please also detail what asbestos management plans were put in place and what clearance tests were conducted and by whom.
24. Was any base line testing of the asbestos undertaken prior to remediation? If so, please provide the report.
25. NSW DoE Infrastructure has communicated (letter dated 1/8/22 from Community Engagement Team) that a staffroom and an adjoining storeroom contained asbestos in December 2021-January 2022. Please provide the hygienist report for this finding. What asbestos was found in this space and adjoining areas? Was the storeroom

accessed by students? Given the particles were identified via air monitoring were they circulating freely prior to December 2021 despite assurances from the hygienist that the areas are safe for occupation in 2020? What action was taken to detect the fibres circulating prior to renovations? Why has the air monitoring failed to pick up the asbestos prior to December 2021?

26. Our understanding is there are more than 91 places in the high school that asbestos was found. Please explain why air monitoring is only being conducted in some locations and not everywhere? Please also confirm the exact locations of these air monitoring devices?
27. Please supply the full results of all monitoring and sampling for the past 10 years as per the School Infrastructure NSW? Include what type of testing was undertaken, methodology/results/recommendations/dates and samples taken including the locations asbestos was found and what results were found and to whom was it reported Please provide a copy of all CHHS air monitoring reports between January 2020 and August 2022. How often are these air monitors maintained and calibrated?
28. The Hansard Record details some areas of the school had asbestos encapsulated, please advise what areas? Was the whole entire school examined and encapsulated accordingly? Exactly what is involved exactly in encapsulation?
29. What plans are going to be put in place to ensure that this does not happen again at other schools?
30. Please detail who are the legal advisors to The Department of Education (DoE) on this matter?
31. Please detail what compensation arrangements are in place for all former and current students/staff whose health may have been adversely impacted by asbestos
32. Our understanding is Safe Work NSW have been informed. When can we expect to have access to their findings?
33. Can you guarantee there will be no further exposure?
34. In percentage terms, what is the level of confidence that there is no remaining friable asbestos at CHHS?
35. We understand that some textbooks were disposed of. Why did this occur? What is the chance that asbestos was brought home in school bags via these textbooks?
36. Have library books been impacted by asbestos and if so, what has been done?
37. School uniforms and clothing may have contained asbestos fibres. What is the chance of asbestos fibres transferring to cars/homes?
38. Do school carpets need to be removed? If not, why? If carpets were removed, please advise in which buildings and the date the removal took place. What were the air monitoring readings preceding, during and after removal?

39. Is the DoE planning on running a CHHS school briefing/assembly to address school parents, teachers, students and concerned community members?

Yours faithfully,