

# **Towards 2020**

Submission from

**ALFRED DEAKIN HIGH SCHOOL PARENTS AND CITIZENS  
ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED  
and  
PARENT MEMBERS OF THE ALFRED DEAKIN HIGH SCHOOL BOARD**

## **Executive Summary**

There are no compelling educational or social reasons to amalgamate Alfred Deakin High School and The Woden School. Any forced financial savings from the proposed amalgamation are outweighed by inferior educational outcomes for both special needs students and mainstream students.

Interaction between the schools already occurs in a number of ways. Further joint programs for special needs students can be implemented without formal amalgamation, but not with a substantial reduction in administrative resources.

The financial details of the proposed amalgamation would seriously compromise the ability of the new entity to successfully strengthen the program for gifted and talented students, as envisaged in 'Towards 2020'.

Alfred Deakin High School is one of the most successful high schools in the ACT. It should retain its present identity and be strengthened by committing extra resources to enhance its teaching capability, its physical appearance and its amenities, so that it can become a real competitor with the richer private sector high schools.

## **Introduction**

In the 'Towards 2020' proposal ("towards2020 renewing our schools" 20pps. Publication 06/0617, ACT Department of Education and Training, June 2006) the amalgamation of Alfred Deakin High School (ADHS) and The Woden School (TWS) was proposed :

"The two schools will continue to operate on their current sites with Alfred Deakin continuing to offer vibrant and responsive secondary education. The curriculum at Alfred Deakin will be strengthened, in particular the programs for gifted and talented students.

This is a new and exciting proposal for students with a disability. The proposal will provide access to quality programs and facilities for all students at both school sites. It will build on the inclusive nature of schools and allow for additional opportunities for students with special needs. This arrangement will begin its transition in 2008."

This submission discusses the educational, financial and social implications of the proposed amalgamation.

## The Data

The stated enrolment and capacity data for the two schools in the published proposal (page 12) were

	2006 enrolment	2010 projected enrolment	Capacity	% of students in priority enrolment area attending the school
ADHS	800	740	817	76
TWS	62	54	Not stated	Not stated

On page 13 the projected enrolment for “Alfred Deakin 7-10 (with the Woden School)” was 764. This is inconsistent with the total of 794 in the above table.

It should be noted that

1. The ADHS enrolment in 2006 is 817, not 800.
2. For the past several years ADHS has consistently been oversubscribed for year 7 enrolments and has been able to enroll over 200 new students each year. There is no reason to believe that this won't continue for the next four years, so the ADHS projected enrolment should be between 800 and its capacity, 817.
3. The percentage of students from the priority area for ADHS is the second highest (after Telopea Secondary) for high schools in the southern half of Canberra.
4. There will be 80 students at TWS in 2007, which is the opposite of the trend assumed in stating a 2010 projection of 54.

## Maintaining Separate Sites

The Towards 2020 document states that there will continue to be two sites. The ADHS community supports this because

1. We believe that there would not be the capacity to add special needs students to the ADHS site without a substantial reduction in mainstream students; the enrolment trends for ADHS suggest that such a reduction will not occur unless forced.
2. Parents of students at TWS choose that school environment for their children due to social and educational requirements; the students would not cope with a mainstream high school environment, and TWS offers specialized staff and facilities.
3. Converting ADHS to be suitable for 50 or more special needs students would be a multi-million dollar expenditure which would use a substantial part of the envisaged Towards 2020 savings, whilst a suitable facility up the road was mothballed or sold.

## Educational Outcomes

The proposal clearly proposes educational advantages as the main reason for an amalgamation. It fails, however, to describe how amalgamation will produce such advantages with two separate campuses.

There is already substantial interaction between the schools. Some students from ADHS

- are included in TWS's Hospitality Program
- undertake competencies towards a certificate in Working with People with Disabilities at TWS, using The Canberra College as a Registered Training Organisation.

Some students from TWS

- do work experience in the ADHS Canteen
- are negotiating integration into select and appropriate classes at ADHS.

These links can be further developed

- Sharing of Resources/Facilities
  - access to specialist spaces and equipment – for example in Hospitality, Gym, Horticulture Area
  - Bus transport
  - ADHS canteen
- Curriculum Links
  - Indigenous education programs
  - Work experience programs
  - Mentoring programs
  - Excursion and camping opportunities
- Professional development between staff, including special teachers' assistants.

All the existing and proposed collaboration between ADHS and TWS can occur without formal amalgamation.

## **Administrative 'Savings'**

A detailed tabulation of proposed administrative savings was discovered on the Towards 2020 website at

*[http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/pdf/Savings\\_school\\_2004\\_05.pdf](http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/pdf/Savings_school_2004_05.pdf)*

after the initial proposal was distributed. This document reveals that the real reason for the proposed amalgamation is savings in the administrative area. A saving of 96 site points was identified, worth \$382,476 in 2005-06 dollars. (Site points are used to 'purchase' principals, deputy principals, executive teachers, admin officers and building service officers).

We believe that several factors would impinge on the success of such an amalgamated model

1. Management of special needs students is highly specialized and cannot effectively be done in conjunction with management of mainstream students. The administrative positions at TWS, whilst having similar names to those at ADHS, are carried out in quite different ways with different sets of duties. We anticipate that submissions from TWS will expand on this point.
2. Physical separation means that a manager located at one site responsible for activities on two sites cannot quickly respond to situations on the other site.
3. There could be substantial setting up costs to link the two sites as a single administrative entity.

In the event of an amalgamation with enforced administrative savings, either

- (a) Each site would have to manage with less administrative staff, leading to greater pressure on these staff and a higher administrative load on teachers, resulting in poorer educational outcomes for the students; or
- (b) The special nature of requirements of TWS students would mean the major administrative cuts would have to be mostly borne by ADHS, forcing redirection of teaching positions into administration, resulting in higher class sizes and less subject choices, i.e. poorer educational outcomes for the mainstream students.

Either way, the existing collaboration between ADHS and TWS would be threatened and there definitely would not be sufficient resources to develop further links.

One of the Towards 2020 proposals was that “curriculum at Alfred Deakin will be strengthened, in particular the programs for gifted and talented students.” It is very difficult to see how this can be achieved if substantial administrative resources are removed or have to be redirected into the special needs students at the TWS site.

## **What’s in a Name?**

ADHS has established a strong reputation for quality education. It consistently achieves its capacity enrolment, attracts a high percentage of eligible students from its priority area and ‘out of area’ students from many other areas in southern Canberra. The name ‘Alfred Deakin High School’ has become recognized as indicating quality education. The ADHS community is strongly opposed to any change of name if an amalgamation were to proceed.

## **Making ADHS Better, Not Worse**

ADHS is one of the most successful high schools in the ACT in recent years. If the Government is serious about improving ACT schools, why would it want to mess with one of the jewels in its crown? Relatively small administrative ‘savings’ could substantially weaken a strong school.

Rather than enforcing administrative ‘savings’ the ACT government should be considering committing extra resources, saved from closing other schools, to ADHS to make it a real competitor with the richer private schools in the ACT. Some items that should be considered are

1. Properly resource the proposed strengthening of programs for gifted and talented students.
2. A major renovation of the school buildings, most of which are now 40 years old. This should include internal painting and carpeting, and a total refit of all wet areas incorporating modern water-saving practices.
3. An irrigation system, incorporating the use of grey water.
4. Complete upgrade of the school canteen, which has not been upgraded for 40 years.
5. A prominent attractive front entrance, to create an immediate favourable impression to visitors and prospective students.
6. Provision of a dedicated bus bay to enhance bus access to the school.
7. Upgrading of sporting facilities, in particular upgrading the tennis courts and basketball courts to modern multi-sport courts with suitable playing surfaces.

## **Conclusion**

There are no educational advantages, and many potential educational disadvantages, in the proposed amalgamation of ADHS and TWS as detailed in the Towards 2020 proposal and the associated list of anticipated administrative savings from the departmental website. Implementing the proposal will also have social disadvantages; it will threaten existing collaboration between mainstream and special needs students, and make enhancement of the collaboration impossible.

ADHS has a strong reputation and is one of the best high schools in the ACT. Rather than making it part of an inappropriate amalgamation, the government should be committing extra resources to enhance its teaching capability, physical appearance and amenities to make it even better.

Warren Müller  
President ADHS P&C  
(on behalf of the P&C members and the parent members of the ADHS Board)