

# **Australian Education Union ACT Branch**

## ***Beyond Rhetoric:***

### **AEU submission in response to**

### ***Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools***

*The ACT Government's focus on the need to consolidate schools has been supported by the AEU in the past on the basis that any changes are managed through a transparent, consultative program and are based on educational needs. (Clive Haggart 2006)*

October 2006

## **Acknowledgements**

The ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union would like to thank Mr Mark Eyles, a former Principal in the ACT school system, for his research and extensive consultation with school principals, school board chairs and other stakeholders and his work in drafting this submission. It would also like to thank Ms Robin Ballantyne, and members of the subcommittee of the AEU sub-branch Executive she chaired, for their consideration of and input to the submission and its recommendations. The contribution of members of the ACT school system and other community stakeholders is also gratefully acknowledged.

## ***Beyond Rhetoric***

### **Australian Education Union ACT Branch submission in response to *Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools***

*The ACT Government's focus on the need to consolidate schools has been supported by the AEU in the past on the basis that any changes are managed through a transparent, consultative program and are based on educational needs. (Clive Haggart 2006)*

#### **Executive Summary**

The AEU supports many of the broad educational goals articulated in the ACT Government's *Towards 2020* paper, including the need for equitable access; for improved support for student transition between levels of schooling; for stronger partnerships between education providers and between education and industry; and for teachers to share expertise and resources. It also supports the need to respond to the changing demographic profile of ACT communities—but it argues that such response should be based on well-founded educational objectives and not on short-term demographic or economic pressures.

The AEU notes that the process of school closure, amalgamation and change is occurring in the context of other wider change processes that impact on the work of schools and of teachers. It is not possible to consider the implications of the *Towards 2020* recommendations separately to questions of school resourcing, system support and educational direction setting.

The AEU strongly supports parental involvement in setting new directions for public schools at the local and territory level, however the AEU does not support the concepts of “choice” and “diversity” for its own sake. The goal of any educational change—including school closure—should be to develop, communicate and implement excellence.

The AEU questions the implication that diversity will automatically result in the provision of high quality learning environments and opportunities or produce public schools of a quality unequalled in the country (ACT Government 2006). Even with an increase in funding for school infrastructure and maintenance there is still no guarantee of improved learning outcomes without clear educational vision, support for good pedagogy and adequate resourcing.

The decision by parents to choose alternative models of education delivery within the public system should be based on informed debate and the examination of evidence and successful practice. To date, the community has been required to participate in consultation on a region by region basis without access to the criteria, assumptions and data used by Treasury officials and consultants in advising the ACT Government on the direction of the recommended closures. The decision of the government to pursue a reduction in secondary school staffing has also had a negative impact on the public's perception of ACT public schooling.

The AEU is concerned that some of the rhetoric in *Towards 2020* does not have a foundation in evidence or in the practicalities of educational delivery—and some statements do not rise above unfounded assertion. It is also concerned that specific recommendations have been made hastily and without good historical knowledge of the ACT school system or of local conditions.

The AEU is pleased to be able to contribute to the process of public consultation associated with the *Towards 2020* proposal. It provides the following recommendations:

***Recommendation 1***

*Improved consultation with the community, with an extension of the current time frame, will give a greater opportunity to*

- *examine the strengths and weaknesses of current and alternative models and sites,*
- *collect and consider evidence of educational need;*
- *ensure that at-risk students are supported and catered for; and*
- *give an opportunity for closure and celebration where schools must shut.*

*The AEU calls for a moratorium on closures until 2008 to allow a transparent public enquiry to take place into our education system—unless a school community seeks an earlier outcome.*

***Recommendation 2***

*The willingness of the Canberra community to accept the loss of campuses will depend to a large extent on the credibility of the ACT Government's promise of improved educational outcomes and the provision of the resourcing necessary to manage the change.*

***Recommendation 3***

*The AEU does not support any school closures or changes to school configuration in the context of staffing cuts to the secondary sector and to the school- support and professional development services provided by the central office. It calls on the government to identify the resourcing that will be provided to help achieve the enhanced outcomes and increased integration outlined in *Towards 2020*.*

***Recommendation 4***

*The AEU calls on the ACT Government to recognise the significant contribution made by regional clusters to achieving many of the goals of the *Towards 2020* proposal, and to support the development and maintenance of collaborative school clusters in all regions*

***Recommendation 5***

*Research suggests that choice of school configuration should be based on genuine educational need identified in the local context rather than pure economic/demographic expediency.*

***Recommendation 6***

*The AEU does not believe that the high-level objectives articulated in the *Towards 2020* report are well aligned with the rationale for recommendations about specific sites:*

- *Justification for adoption of specific models in specific circumstance appears to be based on short-term funding expediency;*
- *The high-level objectives listed in Section 1 are invoked in regions where no closures or amalgamations will occur, but not used consistently in discussion about other regions;*
- *In many cases when the educational consequences are considered in detail, there is a mismatch between the educational rhetoric of the Towards 2020 report, and the changes that have actually been recommended; and*
- *Available research evidence to support specific models is often inconclusive or contradictory; and*
- *Inadequate attention is given to the relative importance of good teaching, rather than school configuration, in achieving strong student outcomes.*

### **Recommendation 7**

*The AEU supports the closure of declining schools where it confirms to some key principles:*

- *the need to avoid unnecessary destabilisation of schools;*
- *the need for informed, well-managed consultation; and*
- *the need for an improved educational outcome for the students concerned.*

*The AEU does not consider that these conditions have been met in the Towards 2020 process.*

*The AEU recommends that Towards 2020 be reviewed so that:*

- *It has a genuine educational focus underpinned by rigorous educational understandings and practices;*
- *It is geared towards the further educational development of all ACT public sector students and of the school system itself; and.*

*Further educational development focuses on sustained, quality evidence-based professional development of teaching staff.*

### **Recommendation 8**

*The AEU considers that Towards 2020 is significantly flawed by:*

- *Lack of educational credibility and focus,*
- *Lack of published criteria, limiting contestability and debate,*
- *Flawed and inconsistent financial and physical data to support decision making; and*
- *Limited consultative processes to enable appropriate community involvement in the proposals.*

*The AEU argues that the ACT Government has failed to comply with the ACT Education Act (2004) by:*

- *failing to focus on the educational impact of the proposed changes on students and on the provision of quality educational opportunities; and*

- *failing to provide relevant information in a timely and accessible way to enable maximum community participation and debate.*

*The AEU calls on the ACT Government to comply with the ACT Education Act 2004 and to better manage community debate by providing the criteria and data it has used to support closure or amalgamation of targeted schools.*

### **Recommendation 9**

*The AEU recommends that:*

- (a) *If the Towards 2020 process has used ACTAP data to identify any school for closure or amalgamation:*
  - *It must be reviewed to make certain that data such as t-score results and value-added graphing have been appropriately interpreted;*
  - *It must take into account the socio-economic situation and intellectual capacity of any specific cohort—not disadvantaging a group or school because of relative poverty, cultural background and specific learning difficulties; and*
- (b) *An analysis of a school’s ACTAP data should not rely on a single school year and should look at a range of years identifying learning trends, using school and system-level means.*
- (c) *If financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools:*
  - *Costs be counted only once in determining average costs per student.*
  - *Only funds received by a school from ACT Government sources be used to identify average costs per student—and not sources such as P&C donations and Australian Government grants.*
- (d) *If financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools:*
  - *Depreciation of plant and equipment should not be included in the total costs per student; and*
  - *If it is to be included it must be restricted to initial plant costs and/or calculated using a indexed average process over three years.*
- (e) *If financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools, education and corporate support costs should not be included in the assessment of per student costs of a school.*
- (f) *If building condition and suitability are to be criteria for closure that the ACT Government publishes a condition and suitability report on all preschools, schools and colleges before any school closures*
- (g) *Despite the impact of Towards 2020, the ACT Government act immediately to refurbish all ACT Government High Schools to bring them to a standard suited to contemporary education.*
- (h) *‘Excess’ capacity of all ACT preschools, schools and colleges be*
  - *reassessed to ensure agreed accuracy;*
  - *identified as a low level criterion for closure and amalgamation, only to be involved in conjunction with other more significant educational and financial*

*criterion.*

- (i) *The ACT Government needs to reassess the application of criteria relating to in-area and out-of-area enrolments to ensure that conclusions drawn are transparent, consistent, free of any bias, and suitable for use in community debate.*

### **Recommendation 10**

*The AEU recommends that early childhood schools be removed from Towards 2020 if they lack viability.*

### **Recommendation 11**

*The AEU recommends that:*

- *The ACT Government establishes a moratorium on school closures until 2008 to allow a transparent public enquiry to take place into our education system, unless a school community seeks an earlier outcome.*
- *This enquiry be conducted through a representative expert committee including principals, teachers, teachers, parents and community members.*
- *The enquiry also facilitate the following renewed school closure proposal timetable:*
  - *Any school board seeking closure in 2006 is be fully consulted and supported in such a decision and subsequent actions.*
  - *The ACT Government to identify criteria for closure in December 2006.*
  - *The ACT Government to review all educational, financial and physical data relating to schools during January 2007.*
  - *In Term 1 2007 a representative body including teachers and Principals to use the published criteria and renewed data to identify and publish a new set of proposals for closure and amalgamation.*
  - *The ACT Government, through the representative committee, to consult with the community in Terms 2 and 3.*
  - *At the end of Term 3 the proposals and any changes to be provided to the Minister to make final decisions and publish these at the beginning of Term 4 2007.*

## ***Beyond Rhetoric***

### **Australian Education Union ACT Branch submission in response to *Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools***

*The ACT Government's focus on the need to consolidate schools has been supported by the AEU in the past on the basis that any changes are managed through a transparent, consultative program and are based on educational needs. (Clive Haggart 2006)*

## **1 Articulating the educational goals for change**

The AEU supports many of the broad educational goals articulated in the ACT Government's *Towards 2020* paper, including:

- support for the development and maintenance of high quality learning environments;
- equity of access;
- recognition and support for innovation and for new models that can act as lighthouses for education delivery across the region;
- the need to respond to the changing demographic profile of ACT communities;
- the need to give schools the flexibility to use resources and structures to achieve the best outcomes;
- recognition of the central role that schools play in linking families and providing a common focus—particularly for new communities;
- improved articulation—‘seamless pathways’—for students between levels of schooling;
- opportunities for systems to work together;
- support for teachers to share expertise;
- strengthened partnerships with Canberra's universities, the Canberra Institute of Technology and industry; and
- the need to invest in upgrading and maintaining infrastructure.

The AEU strongly supports parental involvement in setting new directions for public schools at the local and territory level, however the AEU does not support the concepts of “choice” and “diversity” for its own sake. The goal of any educational change—including school closure—should be to develop, communicate and implement excellence.

The AEU questions the implication that diversity will automatically result in the provision of high quality learning environments and opportunities or produce public schools of a quality unequalled in the country (ACT Government 2006). Even if millions of dollars of building maintenance and new school development are combined with the greater diversity of school

configurations, there is still no guarantee of improved learning outcomes without clear educational vision, support for good pedagogy and adequate resourcing.

The decision by parents to choose alternative models of education delivery within the public system should be based on informed debate and the examination of evidence and successful practice. To date, the community has been required to participate in consultation on a region by region basis without access to the criteria, assumptions and data used by Treasury officials and consultants in advising the ACT Government on the direction of the recommended closures. The decision of the government to pursue a reduction in secondary school staffing has also had a negative impact on the public's perception of ACT public schooling.

The AEU is concerned that some of the rhetoric in *Towards 2020* does not have a foundation in evidence or in the practicalities of educational delivery—and some statements do not rise above unfounded assertion.

- For example, to justify the administration of a single school on two campuses, the report asserts that: 'one school with two campuses provides an opportunity to grow enrolments and offer rich learning experiences for all students (p 9)'. The *Towards 2020* report would have more credibility if it explicitly recognised the difficulty of managing education provision over two sites and meeting the needs and expectations of two school communities!

## **2 Context for this submission**

### **2.1 The wider context**

The AEU recognises that the *Towards 2020* process is occurring in the context of wider educational change and debate at the territory and national level. These include:

- implementation of class size reforms in the primary school;
- the December 2005 report on *Government Secondary Colleges in the Australian Capital Territory* (recommendations yet to be implemented);
- proposed cuts to resourcing for ACT public high schools in the context of the 2006 teacher wages claim;
- downsizing of the DET central office and abolition of many central office support functions to schools;
- the development of a new ACT framework for school curriculum;
- debate on a national curriculum and the imposition of federal standards for assessment, grading and curriculum;
- growing competition for students between government and private school systems;
- the Careers Advice Australia initiative to support improved transition for students to work and improve partnerships between schools and industry;
- changes to the relationship between employers and employees, including the nature of consultation and bargaining, as the result of federal industrial relations laws; and

- growing expectations by parents of quality, evidence and consultation in matters relating to school education.

## **2.2 The local context—taking a longer view**

### *Importance of local knowledge*

The *Towards 2020* report provides a useful overview of a diverse and dynamic community and school system, supplemented in school-by-school profiles available on the DET website. What is disappointing is the failure of the *Towards 2020* report to recognise the significant achievement of the ACT community and its teachers over the last 30 years in managing change and implementing a diverse range of excellent and innovative approaches to education delivery. The AEU has welcomed the influx of experienced and skilled teachers, principals, directors and system leaders from other states in recent years, but the government needs to ensure that advice on future directions strikes a balance between new ideas and the community’s sense of ‘what works’.

- The lack of this history may help to explain the adverse community reaction to specific proposals—such as the 7-12 school to replace the year 11-12 college in north Canberra; and
- The lack of local knowledge may help explain changes to feeder areas that will require students to cross major traffic arteries.

### *Recognising the social significance of school sites*

The *Towards 2020* report does not recognise the deeper social meaning that neighbourhood schools acquire for communities. Communities value the special relationship with staff that builds up over time, the friendship groups and sense of connection in being involved, and having needs met, by committed and professional staff and by the contribution of committed parents. Schools are often sites for a whole range of community activities, and many special memories are attached to a place where young people have matured and experienced important rites of passage.

- *Towards 2020* does acknowledge the role of the school in helping build and focus a community—but only in the proposal for Gungahlin, where no attempt is being made to close schools. This recognition is not articulated in any of the rest of the sections of the *Towards 2020* report.
- The historical and social significance of two rural schools—Hall and Tharwa—is also not acknowledged.

By allowing greater time for the consultation process, communities would have the opportunity for closure and celebration for closing schools. For many schools in the *Towards 2020* proposal, closure will come hard on the heels of the consultation process at the end of 2006.

### *Not everyone is mobile: recognising community diversity*

Finally, *Towards 2020* does not recognise the socio-economic and cultural diversity of Canberra’s suburbs. While this diversity may not be as marked as in larger metropolitan centers, many ACT families will not be catered for under the government’s proposed “diversity and

choice” approach. *Towards 2020* refers to the ‘choice’ exercised by families, who may access as many as 30 schools in one region. It presents an image of the ACT community as mobile, informed consumers of a smorgasbord of educational offerings. However, not all families have the ability or desire to exercise such choice.

- Families with low income are not highly mobile and cannot take up the offer of “choice”; those who are shift workers will also have difficulties ensuring that students are able to access new government schools when the local school closes;
- While children from low-income families have perhaps the most to gain from participation in pre-school education, these families are less likely to have the means to travel to new sites;
- The location of schools with appropriate facilities for language or disability support has often been a motivation in family settlement, and new sites may not meet family needs;
- Many communities will be separated from their new school sites by major traffic arteries;
- Rural students may need supported transition to the larger school environment; and
- With only one in two students currently accessing schooling outside their local Priority Enrolment Area (PEA), the number of families unwilling and unable to access a wider provision of schooling must be significant.

The Government should also take note of the experience of the Victorian school system under the Kennett government programme of school closures. Schools found that, following closures and amalgamations, many students identified as ‘at risk’ did not re-enrol in school. It is important that such students are identified and supported through the school closure process in the ACT, particularly at the secondary school level.

***Recommendation 1***

*Improved consultation with the community, with an extension of the current time frame, will give a greater opportunity to*

- *examine the strengths and weaknesses of current and alternative models and sites,*
- *collect and consider evidence of educational need;*
- *ensure that at-risk students are supported and catered for; and*
- *give an opportunity for closure and celebration where schools must shut.*

*The AEU calls for a moratorium on closures until 2008 to allow a transparent public enquiry to take place into our education system—unless a school community seeks an earlier outcome.*

### 3 Bridging the credibility gap: resource implications of *Towards 2020*

Not only the *Towards 2020* recommendations, but also the wider context of change will have an impact on the way in which the *Towards 2020* proposals are taken up and debated within the community—particularly amongst parents and teachers.

#### **Recommendation 2**

*The willingness of the Canberra community to accept the loss of campuses will depend to a large extent on the credibility of the ACT Government's promise of improved educational outcomes and the provision of the resourcing necessary to manage the change.*

Changes proposed in *Towards 2020* with significant resource implications include:

- A requirement for increased **collaboration and linkage** including:
  - ‘Strengthened partnerships’ with Canberra’s universities, the Canberra Institute of Technology, industry’ and the Chamber of Commerce (p 1, 3, 7);
  - ‘Systems [public and private] working together’ (p 2);
  - A ‘network of contemporary and innovative educational provision’ in regions (p 2, 4, 8, 10, 12);
  - The integration of education and health facilities as proposed for south Canberra (p 9);
  - ‘Co-curricular cultural, community and sporting activities’ (p 5); and
  - Integration with ‘Tuggeranong community activities in the arts’ for talented students (p 15);
- School **management and coordination across multiple sites**:
  - Pre-schools with primary schools;
  - Coordination of ‘multi campus arrangements’(p 13) and
  - Coordination of ‘teacher expertise, specialist teaching spaces and resources’ across two or three sites (p5);
- Enhanced **support for specific groups**:
  - Extension of mainstream education programmes to students with a disability through amalgamation of Alfred Deakin High School and the Woden School (p 13);
  - ‘Significant support...provided for students with special needs’ (p 3); and
  - ‘Extension of talented students’ (p 5);
- **Transition to new configurations** as needed in the P-10, middle school and 7-12 school proposals, including:
  - The promise of ‘explicit, systematic curriculum progression and support for the transition through the middle years’ (p 15); and
  - Cooperation across sectors to achieve ‘greater consistency in expectations’ (p 11).

- The need to monitor ‘interaction between a wide range of ages’ (p7); and
- The need to ‘change [the] way students and teachers interact during the middle years’ (p11);
- Professional development, support and time for teachers to implement **education with a changed focus**, including the need for:
  - A ‘focus on the specific developmental needs of young adolescent students’ (p 11) in the middle school model;
  - Enhanced IT in the curriculum;
  - A ‘stronger focus on VET options in years 9/10 at Calwell’ (p 15);
  - ‘More explicit curriculum’ (p 5);
  - Teaching to be ‘more strategically planned’ (p5);
  - Provision of ‘personalised learning programs’ (p 5); and
  - ‘Stronger pastoral care programmes’ (p 11);
- Finally but not least—students in closing schools to be ‘supported in their **transition** to other Government schools’ (p 15).

### ***Recommendation 3***

*The AEU does not support any school closures or changes to school configuration in the context of staffing cuts to the secondary sector and to the school- support and professional development services provided by the central office. It calls on the government to identify the resourcing that will be provided to help achieve the enhanced outcomes and increased integration outlined in Towards 2020.*

## **4 Educational issues in school change**

### **4.1 Smoothing transition between levels of schooling**

#### *Recognising the achievement of school clusters*

ACT teachers and school leaders have already experimented with a range of different models for delivery of education that meets the special needs of different age cohorts. There are also a number of regions in which the leadership provided by principals and leading teachers has resulted in vibrant clusters of schools coordinating education content, delivery and student transition from kindergarten to Year 10. The *Towards 2020* report argues that the move to the middle school model is necessary to achieve ‘consistency in pastoral care and in expectations and values from the start of preschool to the completion of the high school years’—without acknowledging the success of K-10 clusters in achieving this within traditional school configurations within a region.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*The AEU calls on the ACT Government to recognise the significant contribution made by regional clusters to achieving many of the goals of the Towards 2020 proposal, and to support the development and maintenance of collaborative school clusters in all regions.*

#### *Evidence to support new school configurations*

In many cases, the argument in *Towards 2020* for a new configuration (whether it is for a 7-12 school, for middle schooling, for multi-campus administration, or for the creation of early-childhood centres) appears to have grown from short term expediency (addressing a particular demographic context) rather than from community and educational need. Educational decisions based on political or economic expediency is not uncommon:

*Research has not provided definitive answers to the myriad of possible questions about grade span, but the questions have never gone away. They are questions which arise whenever school reform, increasing or declining enrollment, or financial considerations bring about a reorganization of existing schools, the building of new schools, or consolidation of districts (Paglin and Fager 1997).*

Mok and Flynn note that the ACT Government's response to its dilemma is similar to what has happened elsewhere in Australia.

*Changing the size of a student body by merging or closing smaller schools is one of the panaceas that policy makers put forward for enhancing educational outcomes and optimally utilising state resources. (Mok and Flynn 1999)*

It is important that new school configurations in the ACT are *sustainable and educationally sound in the longer term.*

- As the *Towards 2020* report itself notes, most schools go through periods of growth and decline, often reflecting the generational shift that occurs when suburbs are established, families are established, and then the population ages. It is not uncommon for these cycles to occur more than once, as the original residents retire and young families take their place.
- School leaders, supported by system resources, have also succeeded in 'turning around' declining schools.

There is no conclusive research that shows that one schooling structure is better than any other or more importantly that changes to year level configuration make significant changes to student learning outcomes (Howley 2002, Coladarci and Hancock 2003, McEntire 2005).

*...empirical research on [grade span or grade configuration] in the last decade has been very sparse. A few studies have attempted to gauge the influence of various grade configurations on academic achievement of students at the state level, but other reports are anecdotal or descriptive in nature and describe the perceived benefits and drawbacks of various grade configurations. (Renchler 2005)*

### **Recommendation 5**

*Research suggests that choice of school configuration should be based on genuine educational need identified in the local context rather than pure economic/demographic expediency.*

This is reflected in Renchler's (2005) warning that what is effective for one community or in one school situation might not work well for another.

The Victorian Department of Education in its recent document *Building Futures, Caring for our Young Children* (June 2006) strongly opposes varying school organisational structures asserting that the promotion of quality learning must be at the basis of any organisational change. Such decisions should take into account school-specific evidence and community demand.

*Most government schools in Victoria are organized around the Years P – 6 and 7-12 model. This represents the preferred organisational model for Victorian schools.*

*Schools will be able to recommend other organisational models in their Educational Rationale. Compelling evidence will need to be presented to demonstrate that a different model can best improve educational outcomes for the long-term advantage of students in that locality. Of particular importance will be local educational issues, community demand and how the different organisational model supports the achievement of improved educational outcomes. (Victorian Department of Education and Training 2006)*

Much of the research that is in existence on year level configurations has focused on the middle school concept and its desire to accommodate the educational and social needs of adolescents (Paglin and Fager 1997, Howley 2002, McEntire 2005).<sup>1</sup> The available research on middle schooling and its impact on student learning outcomes is quite varied.

- Some studies reveal that middle schooling can produce positive learning outcomes for students if it includes a focus on non-academic factors, *rather than just structural reform*.
- Attention to quality teaching and learning is more important than specific school structures or age groupings. In its 2005 study of middle schooling, the ACT Department of Education and Training identified the need to place quality teaching and learning ahead of responding to the specific needs of any group of students. This would require schools to 'ensure that good teaching and learning programs are in place for all students' before developing special programs and school structures to accommodate specific needs of groups such as adolescents, students in the early years, boys and Indigenous students.

There is considerable evidence that minimising transition points between preschool and year 12 does result in higher student learning outcomes as well as many other positive social and relationship outcomes (Howley 2005). Ken Stevenson's list of the ten educational trends shaping school planning and design predicts that the need to avoid transition points will cause school

---

<sup>1</sup> Such research is reflected in the ACT Department of Education and Training's study *Teaching and Learning in the Middle Years in the ACT* (ACT Dept Education and Training 2005). The report provides a valuable literature study but the research component relies on anecdote using participant perception rather than empirical processes to identify the benefits to students of middle schooling. Chadbourne (2001) also noted this reliance on anecdote in his review of research into middle schooling in Australia. He commented that the research tended to note the success of the schooling processes and not student outcomes with a tendency to use 'qualitative research, soft data, single cases, anecdotal and self report type evidence'.

grade configuration to change with more traditional groupings such as K to Year 6 and even K to Year 12 being reconsidered. The question for the ACT community to determine is which year groups can most effectively be combined, and how other education initiatives (such as school clusters) can help to smooth transition for students across existing divides.

Education decision-making must recognise that it is good teaching, rather than school configuration, that accounts for the greatest difference in student outcomes, and improvement to teaching needs to be at the heart of any genuine process of school reform.

- Research by Hattie (2003) shows that 50% of the learning outcomes of students are caused by the students themselves and what they bring to learning (including genetic and home factors) and 30% by teachers.
- Rowe (2003) studied teacher effects using Victorian literacy and numeracy outcomes, finding that in literacy teacher effects accounted for 45% of student outcomes of primary students and 37.8% of secondary students. Teachers accounted for 54.7% of primary student numeracy outcomes and 52.7% at the secondary level. In other words teachers have the greatest *manageable* impact on learning outcomes. As Rowe (2003) states:

*The quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most salient influences on students' cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of schooling...what matters most is the quality of teachers and teaching supported by strategic professional development.*

The Australian Government's *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (2005) produced a study of the evidenced-based research literature on approaches to the teaching of literacy. An insightful and powerful document, *Teaching Reading* offers insights into the flaws of *Towards 2020*:

*So what matters most [in producing quality learning]? Certainly not student compositional characters such as learning difficulties, educational disadvantage, disruptive student behaviour nor school structural arrangements...but the imperative of quality teaching and learning provision, supported by teaching standards and on-going professional development focused on evidence-based practices that are demonstratively effective in maximizing students' learning outcomes and achieving progress. Since the most valuable educational resource available to any school is its teachers, the need for a refocus of the prevailing educational effectiveness policy and research agenda to one that focuses on quality teaching and learning provision is obvious. (Australian Government Dept of Education, Science and Training 2005)*

It is clear that year level configuration is not as significant in improving learning outcomes, as is the quality of the teaching. It is not the school organisational design that adds quality to education or that improves learning outcomes—it is teaching. *Towards 2020* has failed to capitalize on the one readily controlled and relatively low cost educational variable that will produce significant positive learning outcomes—quality teaching.

It is possible that the social and educational upheaval of *Towards 2020* will perhaps result in only minimal change to educational outcomes, and there is no evidence to suggest that the array of year level configurations of *Towards 2020* will stop the halt to the private schooling sector.

#### **Recommendation 6**

*The AEU does not believe that the high-level objectives articulated in the Towards 2020 report are well aligned with the rationale for recommendations about specific sites:*

- *Justification for adoption of specific models in specific circumstance appears to be based on short-term funding expediency;*
- *The high-level objectives listed in Section 1 are invoked in regions where no closures or amalgamations will occur, but not used consistently in discussion about other regions;*
- *In many cases when the educational consequences are considered in detail, there is a mismatch between the educational rhetoric of the Towards 2020 report, and the changes that have actually been recommended; and*
- *Available research evidence to support specific models is often inconclusive or contradictory; and*
- *Inadequate attention is given to the relative importance of good teaching, rather than school configuration, in achieving strong student outcomes.*

## 5 The AEU position on school closure

### 5.1 Does the AEU oppose school closure?

The AEU has never opposed the closure of schools where this would contribute towards meeting the broader goal of improving provision of sustainable quality public education in the ACT. It recognises that without a greater commitment of funding from the federal government, the “neighbourhood school” model of the 1970s and 1980 is no longer sustainable in all regions for a self-governing territory and that communities and government need to work together to find sustainable alternatives.

The need to manage these pressures proactively is not new. The AEU salutes the leadership that has been shown by ACT principals and other education leaders in advance of government action. A good example in recent times has been the development of the Caroline Chisholm School concept, where the principals and their school communities themselves took the initiative to confront demographic change and to engage the community in healthy debate about models and options. The existence of other successful P-10 models in the ACT has helped to win community support.

### 5.2 When is school closure justified?

The AEU agrees with the argument in *Towards 2020* that:

*low enrolments can lead to students having less access to curriculum offerings, specialist programmes and extra curricular activities, and can also affect the school’s reputation, teacher morale and the number of parents who can support the school (p 14).*

This is particularly the case in secondary schools, where small size means that it is more difficult to offer a broad range of subject choices or to offer subjects at different levels of difficulty. A ‘tipping point’ is often reached at which parents exercise their choice of schooling by choosing to go elsewhere. As community support declines, the funding and voluntary contribution made by families also declines, and the result can be seen not only in impoverishment of the curriculum,

but in deteriorating facilities, buildings, grounds and resources. At this point, no matter how loyal the remaining families and how enthusiastic and committed the staff, the provision of quality education suffers, students suffer, and staff experience stress. For these reasons, the AEU has supported the closure of declining schools in the recent past (for example Ginninderra District High School).

#### ***Recommendation 7***

*The AEU supports the closure of declining schools where it confirms to some key principles:*

- *the need to avoid unnecessary destabilisation of schools;*
- *the need for informed, well-managed consultation; and*
- *the need for an improved educational outcome for the students concerned.*

*The AEU does not consider that these conditions have been met in the Towards 2020 process.*

*The AEU recommends that Towards 2020 be reviewed so that:*

- *It has a genuine educational focus underpinned by rigorous educational understandings and practices;*
- *It is geared towards the further educational development of all ACT public sector students and of the school system itself; and.*
- *Further educational development focuses on sustained, quality evidence-based professional development of teaching staff.*

### **5.3 Avoiding destabilisation**

#### *Undermining confidence in individual schools*

One of the significant dilemmas of school rationalization is the destabilisation of any school that comes under consideration: at the first suggestion of closure of a school, a flight of students inevitably takes place. This has already occurred for a number of schools named in the *Towards 2020* report, despite its status as a ‘consultation’ document. The future of closure of other schools is also foreshadowed: the *Towards 2020* report already notes that ‘the Government will need to monitor enrolments at the northern western edge of the [Weston Creek] region to determine future needs for education provision’ (p 11). It is important for school communities to be able to take part in proactive, informed consultation, to consider options and to help to generate solutions that meet local needs, rather than being offered a *fâit accompli*.

#### *Undermining confidence in public education*

Of equal importance is the credibility of the public school system in the ACT. Inherent in *Towards 2020* is the assumption that school organisational changes in terms of year level configuration will improve learning outcomes. In turn it is assumed that improved learning outcomes will make our system the ‘system of first choice of Canberra families’ (Stanhope 2006) in the context of the trend to non-government schooling.

In this context it is important that the *Towards 2020* process does not undermine the confidence of ACT families in the public education system. This will occur if:

- The achievement of public education—even in challenging schools—is not publicly affirmed;
- Families feel powerless to influence the direction of educational provision in the territory, or within individual schools;
- The community perceives that education and the teaching profession are de-valued by the ACT Government;
- There is inadequate attention to the impact of change on individuals and groups;
- There is inadequate resourcing for the process of change; or
- The rhetoric of positive change in public schooling is perceived to be hollow.

#### **5.4 Information to support informed public consultation**

##### *The legislative requirement to provide relevant information*

The AEU calls on the ACT Government to comply with the ACT Education Act 2004 by providing the criteria and data it has used to support closure or amalgamation of targeted schools. In relation to school closures and community consultation the ACT Education Act 2004 clearly states:

*...relevant information is [to be] provided in a timely and accessible way to enable maximum community participation in debate about the proposal.*

To date, no school principal or school board chair or P&C president of a targeted school interviewed by the AEU is clear about the reason their school is closing. By not providing the criteria or reasons for closures and amalgamations, the ACT Government is clearly not providing the relevant information necessary for any effective level of community participation in debate about the proposal. The Minister's statements at community meetings that 'a wide range of criteria have been used to assess schools' is not relevant or adequate information. More specific details are necessary to meet the government's obligations under the Act.

##### *Contradictions and inconsistency*

The rationale for decision-making often appears contradictory or inconsistent: reasons supporting one school's closure may appear as a justification for another school not closing. Such information as has been provided in *Towards 2020* and associated websites reveals anomalies and inaccuracies (as detailed in [Appendix A](#) to this submission). The ACT community is not comfortable with a process through which flawed and contestable data appears to be used as a basis for closing schools, changing the lives of ACT children and their families and for taking the ACT public education system forward.

### *Managing debate and division*

It is the responsibility of government to manage and respond to community debate and to minimise community division. However the AEU is concerned that the current process—poorly informed, lacking in transparency and hasty—has led to speculation and division in the ACT community.

- Community speculation about the decisions underpinning *Towards 2020* results in a frustrating array of closure scenarios, giving way to speculative gossip highly damaging to individual schools and to the ACT Government system generally.
- Destructive community gossip focuses on educational quality, per-student costs including staffing costs and school-based management costs, excess school capacity, building suitability and quality, access to schooling and a range of emotionally charged notions involving socio-economic status and disadvantage.

The AEU calls on the ACT Government to improve transparency and put an end to this haemorrhaging.

#### ***Recommendation 8***

*The AEU considers that Towards 2020 is significantly flawed by:*

- *Lack of educational credibility and focus,*
- *Lack of published criteria, limiting contestability and debate,*
- *Flawed and inconsistent financial and physical data to support decision making; and*
- *Limited consultative processes to enable appropriate community involvement in the proposals.*

*The AEU argues that the ACT Government has failed to comply with the ACT Education Act (2004) by:*

- *failing to focus on the educational impact of the proposed changes on students and on the provision of quality educational opportunities; and*
- *failing to provide relevant information in a timely and accessible way to enable maximum community participation and debate.*

*The AEU calls on the ACT Government to comply with the ACT Education Act 2004 and to better manage community debate by providing the criteria and data it has used to support closure or amalgamation of targeted schools.*

## **6 Criteria and proposals for closure, amalgamation and restructure**

In the absence of transparent criteria and data used to inform the proposed school closures, there has been considerable speculation in the school and wider ACT community about the factors that may have been taken into account in selecting schools for proposed closure. The AEU wishes to comment on flaws with respect to some criteria that may have been used in this process.

## 6.1 School outcomes and ACTAP

Education leaders have speculated that decisions have rested on the failure of some schools to provide for quality learning outcomes for students. This speculation was fuelled shortly after *Towards 2020* was announced by the Department's publication on its website of individual school ACTAP results with evaluative comments.

ACT Assessment Program (ACTAP) data in literacy and numeracy is the only whole-system data that provides quantitative analysis of learning outcomes of ACT primary and high school students. ACTAP is basically a tool to provide a slice-in-time assessment and analysis of individual student learning and, with some discounting, may be used by schools to discuss whole school teaching and learning needs. However the use of such data to assess quality of learning outcomes at the individual school level is likely to be invalid in many instances.

ACTAP's generalised data in school reports needs to be discounted significantly to allow for disparities caused by low socio-economic circumstances and/or learning difficulties of a cohort. Trends in school literacy and numeracy development are highly dependent on taking more than one year's data, and preferably three to five years data. While some information about school literacy and numeracy can be identified, the most accurate data is at the level of school and system means or averages. This data too must be used cautiously. *ACTAP is not a tool for closing schools especially if the interpretations are poorly informed and inaccurate.*

### *Interpretation of the t-score*

Over recent years ACTAP data has been misinterpreted at all levels of the Department, particularly in the use of *t-scores* to identify the significance of the positive or negative growth of a school cohort from Year 3 to Year 5.

The t-score is a mathematical process that allows for the identification of the relative randomness of an event occurring. In ACTAP it is used to identify whether a school's outcomes in literacy or numeracy strands are likely to have been chance or associated with educational factors.

- A t-score value of less than  $-2.7$  in any literacy or numeracy strand is interpreted to show that the performance is significantly poorer than that of the ACT average and that this did not occur by chance.
- Similarly a t-score in excess of  $+2.7$  is interpreted as showing that the performance is significantly better than that of the ACT average and that this did not occur by chance.

School size can have a major impact on the validity of the t-score as a measure of school performance.

- The larger the cohort, the greater is the chance of the school's students falling close to the system mean and not being outside the  $-2.7$  to the  $+2.7$  range.
- Conversely the smaller the cohort, the less is the chance that the school's mean will be close to the system mean and the more likely it is that the small cohort's mean will appear outside the  $-2.7$  to  $+2.7$  range.

The consequence of inappropriate assessment of t-scores is that small cohorts are more likely to have high negative or high positive t-scores than larger cohorts. In other words small cohort schools can either appear to have performed well below expectations or well above expectations.

- The only valid observations are those in which larger cohorts are outside the  $-2.7$  to  $+2.7$  range. In these cases, only, can it be reasonably and confidently stated that the high negative or positive result indicates that the school's poor performance or exceptional performance was not by chance.
- Therefore t-scores are of little value within the ACT schooling structure where cohort sizes vary significantly.

### *Value-added graphing*

The interpretation of *value-added graphing* in ACTAP is also of concern—often presenting a very misleading picture of the learning outcomes of a school cohort as students move from Year 3 to Year 5 in all the strands of literacy and numeracy. These graphs show the growth of the *ACT average* and the growth of the *school cohort*.

It is not uncommon for these graphs to be misinterpreted to show that if a school cohort growth line goes from below the ACT average growth line to above the ACT average line, then the school has added significant value. Similarly it has been misinterpreted that if a school growth line goes from above the ACT average growth line to below then this school cohort has performed significantly more poorly than the ACT average and the school has had a detrimental impact on the learning outcomes of students.

Growth lines of this nature—i.e. growth lines that cross the ACT average—can only be interpreted as showing varying performances by individual students compared to the total ACT cohort.

- Lines rising above the ACT average may show that more capable students performed exceptionally well and/or poorer students performed exceptionally poorly.
- Lines with a negative slope and crossing the ACT average only show that some of the more capable students performed worse than expected and/or the poorer students performed relatively exceptionally well.
- This type of data is identified as *differential data*.

Only school cohort growth lines, which are reasonably parallel to the ACT average growth line, can be used to show the value-adding of a school—but such lines are rare.

- A school with a growth line parallel to and above the ACT average growth line shows that the whole school cohort has made greater growth than the ACT average and that it is reasonable to conclude that the school has been effective and purposeful in value-adding to the whole cohort's learning outcomes.
- Similarly school cohort growth lines which are parallel to and below the ACT average show that the school cohort has performed more poorly than the ACT average and that the school has not added value to the learning outcomes of the students. (It would be invalid to interpret this scenario as the school taking away value from the student's learning.)

### ***Recommendation 9 (a)***

*The AEU recommends that if the Towards 2020 process has used ACTAP data to identify any school for closure or amalgamation:*

- *It must be reviewed to make certain that data such as t-score results and value-added graphing have been appropriately interpreted;*
- *It must take into account the socio-economic situation and intellectual capacity of any specific cohort—not disadvantaging a group or school because of relative poverty, cultural background and specific learning difficulties; and*
- *An analysis of a school’s ACTAP data should not rely on a single school year and should look at a range of years identifying learning trends, using school and system-level means.*

## **6.2 Financial and infrastructure criteria for closure**

### **6.2.1 Use of 2004/2005 financial year figures**

#### *Lack of alignment of census and financial year data*

The AEU questions the use of 2005 February census figures against 2004/2005 financial figures in determining total costs per student per school. Given the extensive closures and amalgamations proposed in *Towards 2020*, the ACT Government should use accurate data from the same reporting period. The decisions are too significant to the lives of children, staff and the parent body to use approximations.

- The first half of the financial figures, including per capita allocations, will have been based on February 2004 enrolments whereas the second half of the funds will have been based on the February 2005 enrolments—two sets of enrolment data which can be relatively quite different.
- In schools with declining enrolments this would mean that the 2004 component of the financial allocations would be higher per student than the 2005 component with the overall cost per student being higher—disadvantaging smaller schools.
  - For example a primary school which had an enrolment of 200 in February 2004 fell by 10% to 180 in February 2005 cost approximately \$1.965 million for the 2004/2005 financial year with total costs per student being recorded as approximately \$10917—not the lower more realistic figure for 2005 of approximately \$10167 per child based on the 2005 calendar year enrolments and financial allocations. This \$750 mistaken difference per child equates to \$84000 for the 180-student school, enough annual funds to mistakenly close the school.

#### *Use of single financial year*

A number of schools may be strongly disadvantaged by a single-year basis for financial analysis, and a weighted average model of staffing costs over three years would be far more accurate.

- For example employee expenses in any one year can be increased significantly if unusual illness hits staff, requiring increased relief staff allocation. Sick leave is accounted for in the staffing process only after the fifth consecutive day of sick leave and not if the period of sick leave is broken by days on duty.
- A similar situation occurs where a school chooses in the targeted year of 2004/05 to buy staffing points from alternate funds such as P&C funds, grants and unused SBM allocations—all viable, allowable and common. Using the single-year analysis process, schools which have taken this path could appear to be significantly more expensive to operate.
  - For example one targeted school in that year reallocated saved SBM funds towards staffing points which have been added to the school's employee expenses for 2004/05. If this had been discounted, the school's employee expenses would go from the currently reported \$44 per student above the primary school system average to \$245 per student below system average, allowing it to go well into the lower half of schools in terms of employee expenses per student.
  - Dickson College used residual savings acquired from P&C funds and saved SBM funds over a number of years to purchase \$200,000 of staffing days in the 2004/2005 calendar year. If these funds had been expended in any other year including 2005/2006, the total per student costs at Dickson College would have fallen by \$353, enough to place its per-student costs well below Copland College and very close to Canberra College—two colleges staying open.

***Recommendation 9(b)***

*The AEU recommends that if financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools that the data should be taken from a range of three past years, developing indexed averaged data.*

**6.2.2 Double counting**

There is a double-counting inaccuracy in the calculation of some costs. In this anomaly, the full amount of an Australian Government grant is counted as an expense to the ACT Government and hence a cost to a school.

- A very small administrative costing may be incurred by the ACT Government but the cost of that is usually deducted from the grant.
- It is assumed that this situation occurs for schools receiving SEF, ESL and other Commonwealth grants such as the Older School Upgrade funds received by a few schools. These are not real costs to the ACT Government, in fact these funds are actually a saving for the ACT Government.
- Schools using Australian Government allocations such as Schools Equity Funds to purchase staffing points have these costs attributed to employee expenses as well as Other in School Expenses providing them with a relative disadvantage in employee expenses.

- The financial figures noted above for targeted schools show the additional staffing funds in both Employee Expenses and also in a second area such as ‘SBM payments’ and ‘Other School Expenses’.

The impact on the apparent cost-per-student is significant.

- For example, in 2004/2005 a targeted primary school received an Australian Government grant of \$50,000 to improve ICT facilities. This has not been recorded as a saving for the ACT Government but as a cost to the school. This has put the cost-per-student up by \$347 per student, which if deducted from the student costs will result in the school being just above average.

***Recommendation 9 (c)***

*The AEU recommends that if financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools:*

- *Costs be counted only once in determining average costs per student.*
- *Only funds received by a school from ACT Government sources be used to identify average costs per student—and not sources such as P&C donations and Australian Government grants.*

**6.2.3 Depreciation of plant and equipment**

The inclusion of depreciation of school plant and equipment is misleading as a means of representing the cost-per-student of individual schools to the community.

- Depreciated plant and equipment are only operational items if included for taxation purposes. Depreciation is not an outgoing to be charged against the education of children on a daily basis or even in the financial year 2004/2005.
- A cursory analysis of the depreciation costs for 2004/2005 indicates that older schools have lower depreciation costs and younger schools are more expensive.
  - Ainslie Primary School as one of the older schools had a depreciation total of \$95704 and Aranda Primary School, a much younger school, had a total depreciation cost of \$117838 but both schools have similar enrolments. This simply reflects the accounting process of depreciation through diminishing value, depreciating more in early years and less as the item ages. Younger schools are therefore disadvantaged.
- Upgrades can also increase the apparent cost of school depreciation, contributing significantly to the calculation of cost-per-student.
  - Dickson College, an old building, had depreciation costs of \$613,779 whereas the much younger and more extensive Lake Tuggeranong College had depreciation costs of only \$608,678. This is accounted by the fact that within the 2003/2004 financial year Dickson College received a \$1.25million upgrade to plant and equipment through the Australian Government Older School Upgrade Grant. The comparative value of Dickson College was thus increased through an Australian Government Grant at no cost to the ACT Government.

The College's depreciation costs then rose and subsequently added significantly to Dickson College's cost per student—it will have added some \$2000 to the per student costs at Dickson. This is therefore an inappropriate element of cost-per-student calculation, especially as the initial cost of the grant was at no expense to the ACT Government.

- Similarly schools which purchased 'valuable' equipment, assets beyond \$2000 per item such as computers, interactive whiteboards, musical equipment and outdoor equipment will have had their depreciation costs for equipment increased.

Similar anomalies can be found throughout the calculation of depreciation costs, indicating that applying depreciation costs to total school costs produces a higher cost-per-student for younger schools and/or those which have had significant upgrades to plant (the building) and equipment within (or even in the few years prior to) the 2004/2005 financial year. During a process of school rationalisation, it benefits a school to be old and buy nothing!

***Recommendation 9 (d)***

*The AEU recommends that if financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools:*

- *Depreciation of plant and equipment should not be included in the total costs per student; and*
- *If it is to be included it must be restricted to initial plant costs and/or calculated using a indexed average process over three years.*

**6.2.4 Educational And Corporate Support Costs**

The cost of the ACT Government education system providing support such as curriculum and financial services to its system schools has been attributed to the base cost per student for each school. As system support is the cost of running a system and not the cost of educating a student, it would therefore seem reasonable that the total educational and corporate support costs would simply be equally divided by sector to each student—however such a flat approach cannot be deduced from the data.

Are additional per-student costs attributed to a school if a school seeks additional support?

- Majura Primary School did not seek additional system support (especially in curriculum) in the 2004/2005 financial year and has a corporate support cost \$270 per child below the system average for primary schools.
- Schools such as Narrabundah, Lyons, Rivett, Yarralumla and Village Creek Primary Schools, with both the need and desire to seek additional support are credited with per student costs above average by \$1499, \$1499, \$1248, \$541 and \$311 respectively. These schools are targeted for closure, amalgamation or change—did their proactive use of system support contribute to their demise?

Additional systemic support a school might access includes an early literacy officer, IT support, behaviour management support, special-needs support, Indigenous education support, financial support in relation to cleaning contracts, IT purchases and building upgrades. It would be educationally counter-productive if any calculation of a school's per-student cost was affected by

its acceptance of system support to enhance literacy, numeracy, ICT or health or to put in place anti-bullying programs, or to help enrich the social and academic lives of autistic children, to put in place cleaning contracts, to purchase items beyond \$2000 ...basically to do what the system encourages or demands.

***Recommendation 9 (e)***

*The AEU recommends that if financial data is to be used to close or amalgamate schools education and corporate support costs should not be included in the assessment of per student costs of a school.*

**6.2.5 Facility condition and suitability**

In other educational jurisdictions the condition of the school facility and its suitability for contemporary education have been identified as contributing factors in the closure of some schools. The ACT Government in *Towards 2020* has failed to indicate that facility condition and suitability are criteria for closure but references to school facility condition occur in the system overview in *Towards 2020*, in particular in showing how the plan will affect each school, and in his budget address the Chief Minister reported:

*Our infrastructure is ageing. Some of our schools are tired looking.* (Stanhope 2006)

*Towards 2020* outlines the government's commitment to school maintenance and the enhancement of school learning environments:

*\$90 million is provided over the next four years for school infrastructure upgrades to greatly enhance learning environments for students and teachers. This will greatly assist many schools with the increase in students as a result of the Towards 2020 proposal and help to provide and maintain quality facilities.*

*The Government has also committed \$20 million over the next four years for the provision of information technology (IT) in schools that will provide students with access to the latest IT to enhance their learning.*

*In addition, the Government has allocated an extra \$3 million per annum from 2008/09 to help maintain school infrastructure at all Government schools across the ACT.*

*In addition to the \$90 million for existing schools two new schools will be established, a feasibility study undertaken for a third, and some schools will be closed or amalgamated to better meet the demographic, social and educational needs of the ACT community.* (ACT Government 2006)

*Towards 2020* appears to down-play building condition and suitability as criteria for closure, but the targeting of schools for closure or refurbishment appears inconsistent and puzzling. Are decisions being made on the basis of the potential cost of refurbishment?

Of the schools identified in *Towards 2020* as in need of refurbishment five are high schools which represents 33% of the current Year 7 to Year 10 high schools in the system not in a suitable condition for contemporary education. Such a situation may contribute significantly to the move away from public education at the high school level.

**Recommendation 9 (f)**

*The AEU recommends that if building condition and suitability are to be criteria for closure that the ACT Government publishes a condition and suitability report on all preschools, schools and colleges before any school closures.*

**Recommendation 9 (g)**

*The AEU further recommends that despite the impact of Towards 2020, the ACT Government act immediately to refurbish all ACT Government High Schools to bring them to a standard suited to contemporary education.*

## 6.3 Demographic issues and school capacity

### 6.3.1 Excess School Capacity

Successive ACT Governments and Oppositions have often been alarmed by what is termed ‘excess school space’ or school enrolments being ‘below school capacity’. The Chief Minister in his 2006 Budget address claimed;

*[Our Government school system] is losing out to an ageing of the population that is robbing our classrooms of boys and girls, leaving almost 18,000 [empty] desks across our system.*

*Our schools are under capacity by more than 30 per cent across the board. (Stanhope 2006)*

*What is counted in ‘excess capacity’?*

The exact level of excess capacity is often questioned by school communities. At times their questions are ill-informed as they assume that ‘school capacity’ includes specialist rooms including art rooms, learning assistance rooms, band rooms and the community room. The capacity formula does not include these additions.

- At times the community concerns are valid especially when disused and unusable portable buildings or windowless quiet rooms are included in a school’s classroom capacity.
- The accuracy of school capacity must be addressed if this is a genuine criterion for school closures.

*What is the issue with excess capacity?*

Financially, the impact of a school being under capacity is negligible in terms of operational costs.

- Schools are funded in the main on a per-capita student enrolment basis: staffing is directly funded on the August projected and February actual enrolments of a twelve month period not on how many students *could* be at the school.
- School Based Management funds are in the main allocated according to projected and actual enrolments, not by the school’s size and capacity.

- It is accepted that cleaning contracts, security and to a degree energy allocations do work towards capacity figures, however these are relatively minor and can be negotiated out of funding costs. Schools usually negotiate that the cleaning contract only covers that part of the building regularly used by the school.
- Security is still controlled and managed by the Department and as such schools have little room to negotiate costs however schools can negotiate securely mothballing rooms to cut security costs.
- Whilst energy costs are in part assessed by floor space, historical data is the prime basis for energy costs and schools are well placed to negate spending energy funds on unused areas.
- Grounds maintenance is juggled to avoid costly ongoing maintenance of unused areas with such measures as establishing dry grass areas. Schools limit communication costs by cutting landline services to unused areas of the school and to employ cheaper and more functional digital communication if necessary.
- Schools also defray costs such as cleaning by the astute use of residual funds and/or P&C funds.
- Some aspects of school funding reflect the school's age but generally most funding is enrolment based including curriculum, IT grants, computers for teachers, corporate support and school administration.

The only item in *Towards 2020* that is related to school capacity that does attract a large cost is depreciation of plant and equipment. However as discussed previously depreciation is not an operational cost and only becomes a real opportunity cost if considerations are to be given to selling school assets (chiefly the site). Excess school capacity therefore really only becomes an economic issue if the Government is planning to profit from the sale of sites. If this is the case then this too must be fully disclosed and financially assessed before any closures occur. In the main however excess school capacity in itself must be seen to be a minor factor.

The treatment of 'school capacity' as a criterion for selection of schools for closure appears to be inconsistent.

- *Towards 2020* claims Cook Primary School is operating at 91% of full capacity but it is criticized for not having space for further growth.
- Tharwa Primary School is only operating at 50% of capacity...25 more children will see it operate at 100%.)

***Recommendation 9 (h)***

*The AEU recommends that 'excess' capacity of all ACT preschools, schools and colleges be*

- *reassessed to ensure agreed accuracy; and*
- *identified as a low level criterion for closure and amalgamation, only to be involved in conjunction with other more significant educational and financial criterion.*

### 6.3.2 Enrolment area/demographics

The *System Overview* section of *Towards 2020* presents a profile of each ACT primary school, high school and college (but not preschools). Part of each profile provides information for most—but not all—school sites indicating in-area and *out-of-area* enrolments as well as percentage of students attending a school from the priority enrolment area. The inconsistent use of this data in discussion of factors relevant to school closure and amalgamation has reduced its credibility and value.

#### *Out-of-area enrolments – a plus or a minus?*

One factor that is treated inconsistently is the level of out-of-area enrolments.

- Giralang Primary School, for example, has a low out-of-area enrolment of 16%, which is described as ‘below average indicating this is not a school of choice for *out-of-area* families’. Giralang’s neighbour, Kaleen High School with 29% out-of-area enrolments is also described as ‘not a choice for *out-of-area* families’.
- On the other hand other schools with similar low *out-of-area* enrolments such as Majura Primary School (12%), Charnwood Primary School (10%) and The Cooperative School (2%) are not identified negatively in this way. High schools and colleges with similar out-of-area enrolments are also treated differently...Melba HS (26%), Kambah HS (31%), Lake Ginninderra College (33%), Copland College (26%) and Canberra College (31%).
- In the rhetoric of the *Towards 2020* report, high out-of-area enrolments are just as likely to be described in negative terms as low enrolments. Schools such as Hall Primary School, Tharwa Primary School, Village Creek Primary School, Mt Neighbour Primary School, and Dickson College, which are also targeted for closure, are not acclaimed for having high out-of-area enrolments of 91%, 64%, 48%, 47%, and 44% respectively. Why are these schools and College not described as a ‘school of choice’ for *out-of-area* families?

As criterion for closure, reference to the percentage of government school students from a priority enrolment area attending the local government school is similarly inconsistent, emotive and confusing.

- A number of schools which attract relatively high levels of in-area public students...Melba HS (74%), Arawang Primary School (67%), Florey Primary School (67%), Fadden Primary School (62%), and Macquarie Primary School (56%) are described as having ‘strong community support’ and are to remain open.
- Other schools with similar or even higher levels of *in-area* students are to close without any acknowledgement of apparent community support—Giralang Primary School (70%), Gilmore Primary School (66%), Dickson College (60%), Kambah HS (58%) and Isabella Plains Primary School (55%). Surely a school with such a high PEA enrolment should be acclaimed as a ‘school of choice’ for in-area families and an indication that it is suggesting fulfilling local community educational and social needs.

- Cook Primary School is described as having strong community support and has 62% of enrolments from the local area and yet is targeted for closure.

#### *Special education provision and out-of-area students*

Out-of-area enrolments must be discounted to some degree to account for special education provision in some schools. Special education students must travel to schools that have been set up to meet this specific need so a relatively high out-of-area enrolment may only reflect a family need for this provision and not a school ‘choice’ by families.

#### *Inconsistent labelling*

The individual school profiles in *Towards 2020* provide another example of inconsistent use of data and reporting—data appears to be used selectively to support the case for closure or to keep a school open. Labels such as ‘not a school of choice’ should not be used lightly, and the ACT Government should take care not to unnecessarily undermine the reputation of ACT public schools.

#### ***Recommendation 9 (i)***

*The AEU recommends that the ACT Government needs to reassess the application of criteria relating to in-area and out-of-area enrolments to ensure that conclusions drawn are transparent, consistent, free of any bias, and suitable for use in community debate.*

## **6.4 Proposal for early childhood schools**

*Towards 2020* justly identifies the importance of Early Childhood education stating:

*Across the world there is increasing recognition of the importance of early childhood development setting foundations for learning, behaviour and health through the school years into adult life.*

This recognition has seen *Towards 2020* appropriately propose the integration of neighbourhood preschools with primary schools. However, the establishment of specialist early childhood schools is less soundly based, and appear to have been recommended only in cases where such a construct would address short-term demographic issues.

- If early childhood schools were to be genuinely seen as a vital component of early childhood development *Towards 2020* would also have envisaged them for Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Gungahlin and even more sites in the other regions.
- The reality is that these schools are being identified within *Towards 2020* as a means of making the numbers work.

Even if the concept of early childhood schools is accepted the short and long term practical viability of the units is highly questionable. The establishment of these schools presents the spectre of introducing another transition point into the educational lives of children at Year 2/3/4, to be followed in most cases by another transition point at Year 6/7. Multiple transitions have been associated in research with delays in development (Alspaugh 1999,

Tucker & Andrada 1998, Howley 2005) and run counter to the spirit of the *Towards 2020* reform agenda.

- Parents are likely to choose to keep their children at one primary school site beginning at Preschool and moving through to Year 5/6, and numbers in the residualised early childhood school will fall.
- The capacity for these schools to maintain numbers in both the short and long term will also be tested as parents choose to keep siblings at one site. This is in part driven by issues of travel time and costs.
  - One reason for locating Preschools within or very near primary schools focuses on transport and parental ease.
  - All siblings being at the one site will also allow an important sense of security for the children and family.
  - With Preschool-Year 5/6 children at the one school, families will also develop a valued historical loyalty to the school. Parents will quickly choose the one school, further cutting the early childhood school's viability.

The only long-term successful early childhood school in the ACT is the Cooperative School at O'Connor. At times its viability has been questionable with many departmental plans and discussions occurring in the 1990s about its future. It struggled but has been able to continue through quality on-site leadership and increasingly strong community support. Today The Cooperative School boasts that it takes in 100% of the Government school children in its small priority enrolment area...a key factor in its current success.

In establishing Narrabundah, Charnwood, Yarralumla, Southern Cross and Lyons as Early Childhood Schools, the community support would start well below the Cooperative's 100% mark. Narrabundah takes in 20% of the children, Charnwood 26%, Lyons 40%, Yarralumla 46% and Southern Cross 69%. These schools would probably start with an even lower local community base greatly eroding their viability.

***Recommendation 10***

*The AEU recommends that early childhood schools be removed from Towards 2020 if they lack viability.*

## 7 Consultation

*Towards 2020* presents itself as a potentially positive and constructive process in which the Minister for Education encourages *all members of the community to engage in [its] vision for education*. This is in line with the ACT Education Act which fosters similar involvement seeking *maximum community participation in debate about the [school closure / amalgamation] proposal*. Such involved engagement by the community is impossible as *Towards 2020* fails to provide relevant information in a ‘timely and accessible way’ (ACT Education Act 2004)

### *Lack of information*

The ACT Government appeared to have provided community consultation in line with the Education Act by providing the community with the proposal, publishing *Towards 2002*, presenting regional information sessions, allowing a six month period before a final decision on the proposal and structuring a feedback process. Any analysis of the actual consultation process, however, shows that it falls short of the Government’s mandated charter by restricting both the extent and quality of information provided and by limiting the community to be consulted.

- As noted previously the ACT Government has failed to provide relevant information to the ACT community about the proposed closures and amalgamations of schools.
- It has not identified the criteria underpinning the proposals to enable the community to respond to the proposal and to understand clearly why one school is closing and another staying open. In place of educational objectives it has used a ‘choice and diversity’ mantra, implying that improved learning conditions and growing public school enrolments will follow from a broader and more diverse offering of school delivery models.

### *Failure to include teacher input*

The ACT Government has also ignored the teaching community in its consultative process, including the support that many teachers and school leaders would have given to the need for school closures.

- A significant component of the ACT educational community, principals and teachers, feel ignored by *Towards 2020* both in its implementation and its development.
- Overwhelmingly principals and teachers believe that some form of rationalisation of the system had to occur, many believing that it was long overdue.
  - Professional associations such as the ACT Primary Schools Principal Association have for years supported and sought action on the closure of schools with little or no response from DET and any Government.
- These organisations, individual principals and teachers agree however that *Towards 2020* simply has not provided adequate consultation with the education community as noted in the following comments:

*Rationalisation was necessary and some closures needed. How many and where, well who could say. Unfortunately, the profession wasn’t included in futures thinking so the plan isn’t informed by high-quality practitioner input.* (ACT Secondary Principal)

*Obviously we cannot sustain the number of schools that are currently operating. Perhaps a consultation period with a committee of Departmental people (Facilities Management), Principals and Government personnel before any decisions or announcements were made would have been more beneficial than the current consultation period. (ACT Primary Principal)*

### *Establishment of an expert committee and consultation with education professionals*

Other jurisdictions make use of an expert committee including education professionals to consult and provide advice to government. Case studies of practice in other jurisdictions are outlined in Appendix D.

The inclusion of practising teachers and principals in developing and implementing the proposal would have helped address some of the current perceptions of a “fait accompli” and would have shown a respect for teacher expertise. Instead the ACT Government has embarked on a path which has left ACT teachers and principals deeply concerned for the system, the students and staff—all of whom they value deeply. The following comments were received:

*My concerns are that this presented the opportunity for ACT public education to be redeveloped to take us into the future - I don't believe this has been achieved in the current model. I think most people in the community recognise that we have too many schools and rationalisation is required but what will be our new model? We seem to have a 'bucket' of approaches which could leave members of the public thinking that the public system doesn't know what it is about and not sure what direction it should be taking. (ACT Secondary Principal)*

*[Staff] are concerned at the plethora of 'models' being set up eg P-2, P-3, P-5 etc. It gives the impression that here in the ACT we'll try anything once! We need to look at parent choice as meaning more than that kind of variety. What do we believe in? What is the appropriate model for the Canberra Community? (ACT Primary Principal)*

*Staff are confused, nervous and upset. Obviously they do not feel as threatened [as targeted schools] as our school is not closing however they do worry about the future of education in Canberra. (ACT Primary Principal)*

*[I have to cope] with the stress and anger of the parent community, the anxiety of having to apply for a new position for next year and concern about choice as many Preschool teachers (14) will have to be placed. [I have] disappointment at the Government's lack of understanding and foresight. (ACT Preschool Teacher)*

*Staff have come to terms with the rationale for closure...They remain concerned that many of [the] socially disadvantaged students/families will be lost in the shuffle and those in the Special Education will face the toughest time as there is insufficient time to prepare them for a transition. (ACT Secondary Principal)*

*My concern and I'm sure that of other principals, is that the [Level One teachers] with true potential will leave the profession. (ACT Primary Principal)*

*[Staff are] not comfortable with consultation method nor that the profession wasn't part of any thoughtful inclusive thinking prior to putting a futures plan to the community. (ACT Secondary Principal)*

*The consultation is not real consultation as alternatives are not being considered. That said it would drag the process out if alternatives were allowed. The problem here is in the ACT and having to have a consultation period of 6 months. The timing is difficult as we are attempting to do too many things. Closures, amalgamations, different educational models, changes to teaching hours, restructuring central office. The impact of one of these options would be great but all of them is very difficult to manage. (ACT Secondary Principal)*

*Staff are generally supportive of the need to rationalise the system however, there is confusion about how the proposal was arrived at...Staff are very concerned about the timeframe of changes and generally feel the time for the implementation of 2020 is too rushed to do a good job of implementing changes. (ACT Primary Principal)*

*[I] hope we end up with a better public education system BUT I don't have great faith in the plan except to say, the principals and teachers will make it happen well, no matter what. (ACT Secondary Principal).*

### *Timing and timeframe*

The timing of the announcement (June) and the mandatory six month consultation period has aggravated the situation, showing a disregard for a wide range of crucial schooling issues especially enrolment and staffing concerns.

- It must be noted (see [Appendix D](#)) that other state education jurisdictions have longer closure amalgamations timeframes usually twelve months or more.
  - New South Wales is compelled to announce any closure proposals by 15 June followed by a consultation period of 18 months. This timeframe in theory may seem extensive but it allows for the practical to occur.
  - Queensland requires such proposal announcements to be made in term one followed by a consultation process resulting in a committee recommendation being forwarded to the Minister in term 3 with a final decision handed down at the beginning of term four.
- A longer timeframe would provide for committee based consultation and sufficient time for the practical to occur. Despite *Towards 2020* allowing for the statutory six month consultation period, the scale of *Towards 2020* suggests that the ACT Government would have been better placed to have chosen a longer timeframe and an earlier announcement date.

### **Recommendation 11**

*The AEU recommends that:*

- *The ACT Government establishes a moratorium on school closures until 2008 to allow a transparent public enquiry to take place into our education system, unless a school community seeks an earlier outcome.*
- *This enquiry be conducted through a representative expert committee including principals, teachers, teachers, parents and community members.*
- *The enquiry also facilitate the following renewed school closure proposal timetable:*

- *Any school board seeking closure in 2006 is to be fully consulted and supported in such a decision and subsequent actions.*
- *The ACT Government to identify criteria for closure in December 2006.*
- *The ACT Government to review all educational, financial and physical data relating to schools during January 2007.*
- *In Term 1 2007 a representative body including teachers and Principals to use the published criteria and renewed data to identify and publish a new set of proposals for closure and amalgamation.*
- *The ACT Government, through the representative committee, to consult with the community in Terms 2 and 3.*
- *At the end of Term 3 the proposals and any changes to be provided to the Minister to make final decisions and publish these at the beginning of Term 4 2007.*

## References

- ACT Government, 2006. *Towards 2020 Renewing Our Schools* Canberra
- ACT DET, 2005. *Teaching and Learning in the Middle Years in the ACT*, ACT Government Canberra.  
[http://www.det.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/middle\\_years\\_pts1\\_2\\_3\\_4.pdf](http://www.det.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/middle_years_pts1_2_3_4.pdf) (21/06/006)
- Alspaugh, J. W. 1999. *The Interaction Effect of Transition Grade Level to High School With Gender and Grade Level Upon Dropout Rates*. ERIC Document ED 431066.
- Chadbourne, R., 2001. *Middle Schooling for the Middle Years. What Might the Jury be Considering?* Australian Education Union Melbourne.  
<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/Middleschooling.pdf> (25/09/2006)
- Coladaric, T., Hancock, J., 2003 *The (Limited) Evidence Regarding Effects of Grade Span Configuration on Academic Achievement: What Rural Educators Should Know*, ERIC Digest <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-2/rural.html> (30/06/2006)
- Darling-Hammond, L., 2000. *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement A Review of State Policy Evidence*, Educational Policy Analysis Archives Arizona State University.  
<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1/> (25/09/2006)
- DEST 2005. *Teaching Reading Literature Review National Inquiry into the teaching of Literacy 2005*, Australian Government Canberra.  
[http://www.dest.gov.au/nitl/documents/literature\\_review.pdf](http://www.dest.gov.au/nitl/documents/literature_review.pdf) (25/09/2006)
- Gorman, D., 2006. *Community Ideas Will Drive Consultation on Future Education in Tamworth*, Press release June 2006, NSW Dept Education and Training, Tamworth.  
<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/newsroom/yr2006/jun/tamworth.htm> (25/06/2006)
- Hagar, C., 2006. *Public Education Under Attack*, Letter to AEU ACT branch members, Australian Education Union ACT Branch
- Hattie, J., 2003. *Teachers Make the Difference. What is the Research Evidence?* Auckland University Auckland New Zealand  
[http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/documents/Teachers\\_Make\\_a\\_Difference\\_Hattie.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/documents/Teachers_Make_a_Difference_Hattie.pdf) (30/06/2006)
- Howley, C.B., 2002. 'Grade-Span Configuration', *The School Administrator*  
<http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=2672>
- Mok, M., Flynn, M., (1997). 'Does school size affect quality of school life?' *Issues in Educational Research*, 7(1), 69-86.  
<http://education.curtin.edu.au/iier/iier7/mok.html>

McEntire, N., 2005, *Grade Configuration in K – 12 Schools* CEEP  
<http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/poptopics/gradeconfig.html> (02/07/2006)

NSW DET 2006. *Discussion Paper: Planning for the Future of Public Education in Tamworth*, NSW Government Sydney.  
<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/newsroom/yr2006/jun/tamworthdiscuss.pdf> (25/06/2006)

NSW Government 2006. *Education Act 1990 No. 8 Closure of Government Schools* NSW Government Sydney <http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/maintop/scanact/inforce/NONE/0>

Paglin, C., Fager, J., 1997. *Grade Configuration: Who Goes Where?* Information Services North-West Regional Education Laboratory. <http://www.nwrel.org/request/july97/grade.pdf> (15/07/2006)

Queensland DEA, 2006. *School Viability Indicators, Access Viability Education, Flowchart for School Closures*, in Dept Education and the Arts Website Queensland Government, Brisbane

Renchler, R, 2005. *Grade Span Trends and Issues School Organisation* CEPM, University of Oregon [http://eric.uoregon.edu/trends\\_issues/organization/grade\\_span.html](http://eric.uoregon.edu/trends_issues/organization/grade_span.html) (21/06/2006)

Rowe, K., 2003. *The Importance of Teacher Quality as a Key Determinant of Students' Experiences and Outcomes of Schooling. Building Teacher Quality* ACER Research Conference 2003 Melbourne  
<http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/documents/Conferenceproceedings2003.pdf> (30/06/2003)

South Australian Government 2006. *South Australian Education Act 1972*, South Australian Government

Stanhope, J., 2006. *ACT Budget 2006 Address*, ACT Government Canberra.  
[http://www.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget\\_2006/html/paper1.htm](http://www.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget_2006/html/paper1.htm)

Stevenson, K.R., 2002. *Ten Educational Trends Shaping Planning and Design* University of South Carolina <http://www.edfacilities.org/pubs/trends.pdf>

Victorian DET 2006. *Building Futures Caring for Your Child* Victorian Government Melbourne

Western Australian DE 2006. *Consultation, Permanent Closure, Closure and Amalgamation School Education Act 1999* Western Australian Government Perth

## **Appendix A**

### **Anomalies in schools targeted for closure, amalgamation or administrative change**

*The AEU provides the following summary of issues and anomalies identified by school principals and other school stakeholders during the consultations for the AEU submission.*

The following presents a sampled study of targeted schools specifically examining the relative merits for each school of school size, per student total costs, excess capacity and projected enrolments as well as individual school issues revolving around building condition and suitability, enrolment area and specific socio-economic issues. It presents picture of contradiction and imprecision for a number of schools targeted for closure and/or amalgamation. Each of these school communities is well entitled to ask the government: *Why our school?*

(Note: 2005 enrolment figures are used to try to best correlate with the use of 2004/2005 financial data in *Towards 2020*.)

#### **Schools Targeted for Closure**

**Gilmore Primary School** had an enrolment in 2005 greater than 36 other primary schools whilst total costs per student were less than 35 other primary schools. Although its excess capacity was relatively high it was still less than 17 other primary schools. Concern is expressed about the inclusion of unused and asbestos-unsafe demountables in capacity figures as well as the general notion that excess capacity is not a significant operational cost. Further its projected enrolment will still be greater than 22 primary schools in 2010...a concern when only 15 primary schools are actually targeted for closure. The school appears to have strong community support with 66% of Government students in the PEA attending the school, indicating a level of local support far higher than many schools remaining open. Why is Gilmore Primary School targeted for closure?

**Isabella Plains Primary School** had an enrolment in 2005 greater than 32 other primary schools whilst total costs per students were staggeringly less than 47 other primary schools. Although its excess capacity was relatively high it was still less than 22 other schools and much of its excess capacity is once again a result of unused asbestos-unsafe demountable buildings, which the Government should remove. Further its projected enrolment will still be greater than 35 schools in 2010...its enrolment will be greater than more than half the primary schools. Isabella Primary School also has relatively strong local community support with 55% of Government students from the PEA attending the school. Why close Isabella Plains?

**Village Creek Primary School** had an enrolment in 2005 greater than 30 other primary schools and is projected to still have an enrolment greater than 25 other primary schools in 2010. Whilst total costs per student, (which are compounded by additional corporate support costs to accommodate students with special needs) and excess capacity were high in 2005 they were still better than 15 and 19 other primary schools respectively. What criteria has been used to target Village Creek Primary School for closure and not other schools?

**Higgins Primary School** is a smaller primary school well and truly paying its way. In 2005 it had an enrolment greater than 23 other primary schools yet its cost per student was lower than 33 other primary schools and its excess capacity was less than a staggering 38 other primary schools. Further it is projected that its enrolment will be greater than 28 other schools in 2010. Higgins has already undergone rationalization and is functionally exceptionally well within its new environment, yet is targeted to close.

**Cook Primary School** is another small already-rationalized primary school that is a positive example of a small successful school working well within economic and physical constraints. Whilst its 2005 enrolment was only greater than 12 other primary schools and it is only projected to be greater than 14 other schools in 2010, its cost per student in 2005 was better than 23 other primary schools and this cost per student may well be miscalculated as Australian Government grants have been included in these costs. More significantly its excess capacity was less than 59 other primary schools. 62% of the area's children attend Cook Primary School indicating that it has strong in area support as acknowledge in its school profile in *Towards 2020*. Cook certainly has a small enrolment but it is not an adverse cost to the Government and no relatively high savings could be made from its closure. The only loss would be to community choice...the choice of schooling in a small successful primary school...a choice that is equally viable as any of the grade configurations presented in *Towards 2020*.

**Hall Primary School** is another special small primary school being successful within economic and physical constraints. A rural school, it is small only having a 2005 enrolment greater than 8 other primary schools and this will still be the situation in 2010. Hall's 2005 excess capacity however was less than that of 29 other primary schools...it is well occupied. Its cost per student was less than 20 other schools. This latter figure could be even better if the NSW Government was to fund Hall's high proportion of NSW students at a level closer to cost of educating a child at Hall rather than an ACT average. Alternatively the ACT Government could stop allocating NSW funds on an average across the ACT and opt for a school basis. Because of its relatively small enrolment, Hall is described as being unable to offer the range of extra curricular activities to its students as offered by larger schools...unfortunately other smaller schools do not have a similar comment made about them, once again reflecting the highly inconsistent and fluky nature of *Towards 2020*. Further Hall attracts 91% of its students from out-of-area but the school is not acknowledge as a school of choice for out-of-area families as other schools with high out-of-area enrolments are described. Why is Hall Primary School targeted for closure?

**Tharwa Primary School** is the ACT's smallest school. A rural school with strong and important historical and cultural significance in the ACT region, Tharwa cannot be assessed along similar lines to other ACT schools as scales of economy will only advantage all other schools and greatly disadvantage Tharwa. It must be noted that Tharwa's excess capacity in 2005 was less than 24 other schools...it is indeed a school of choice. Tharwa should not be seen as an integral part of *Towards 2020* similar to Jervis Bay Primary School. On the other hand no alternative choice but closure has been offered to Tharwa when there are other options. Some schools received a number of options in *Towards 2020*. Why?

**Kambah HS** is a smaller high school that caters for a significant community of relatively disadvantaged students including a very high proportion of Indigenous students. Its 2005 enrolment was greater than Ginninderra District High School and had total student costs significantly less than that school. Further it was close to Kaleen High School in both cases. Yet

Kambah is to close, Ginninderra is to be reshaped as a K to Year 10 school incorporating Higgins and Holt Primary Schools. Kaleen is to be revitalized with a middle school concept. Kambah has not been offered either scenario and well could ask why such options have not been offered to the disadvantaged students at Kambah. Why Kambah?

## **Preschools**

*Towards 2020* fails to give any financial, enrolment or capacity data for any of the individual preschools targeted for closure. It has also failed to give such data for all other ACT Preschools as it has done for the Primary, High School and Colleges. The amalgamated data on preschools presented in *Towards 2020* only addresses employee and school based management costs. No information is given about actual and projected enrolment, capacity, depreciation, corporate and financial support and other school costs as with each other school and college. This is another glaringly sloppy component of *Towards 2020* ... almost dismissive of the Preschool sector and of the ACT community generally. Failure to present such data is glaringly not complying with the ACT Education Act of 2004 and such data must be presented before the community can confidently and effectively engage in debate over the proposal to close any Preschool.

When presenting financial data on ACT Government Preschools it is imperative that the Government discount the cost associated with the ACT Government educating children in its Preschools who do not then attend Kindergarten in an ACT Government school. This would be consistent with data presented in *Towards 2020* for the primary, high school and college sectors. The ACT Government provides funding for Non-Government Schools in these sectors but *Towards 2020* discounts this from per student costs. The same should exist for the Preschool sector if consistency is to be sought.

## **Schools Targeted for Amalgamation or Structural Change**

**Chisholm Primary School** had an enrolment in 2005 greater than 41 other primary schools and will still be higher than 30 other primary schools in 2010. Its total costs per student in 2005 was less than 31 other primary schools and its excess capacity was significantly smaller than other schools being less than 31 other schools. Why does Chisholm Primary School need to be amalgamated with a high school when similar scenarios exist elsewhere and no amalgamations are occurring?

**Wanniassa Primary School's** 2005 enrolment was larger than 32 other primary schools and per student costs were similarly less than 30 schools. Excess capacity was less than 26 other primary schools. The situation should not change for Wanniassa by 2010 when the enrolment is projected to be still greater than 26 other schools. Further there are serious questions about the suitability of housing Preschool to Year 6 students on the high school site as the building design strongly militates against young children effectively using the site. Why amalgamate when Wanniassa Primary School can continue successfully in its own right?

**Southern Cross Primary School** seems similarly placed to continue in its own right as a P to 6 school. In 2005 its enrolment was greater than 29 other schools with per student costs less than 29 other primary schools. Excess capacity is limited with Southern Cross having less excess space than 36 other schools. The community can justly argue that Southern Cross Primary School is performing far better than other schools and will continue to do so in the future. Why

choose Southern Cross to become a P-Year 3 school? There also exists considerable doubt about Southern Cross surviving as a P to 3 school as parents will choose to avoid the transition point after Year 3 and start Kindergarten elsewhere...other government school or the nearby St Matthew's Catholic School.

**The Cooperative School** is yet another small school that appears highly viable. It is small with only two other schools smaller than it in 2005 and that will be similar in 2010. Its per pupil costs were higher than 13 other schools in 2005 but care must be taken to ensure that the Preschool component of these costs have not been grouped with the primary costs. The Cooperative's staffing costs per student however were the lowest of all primary schools. Its excess capacity was less than all but one other school with the school operating at 122% capacity. Further the school attracts 100% of the students in its current priority enrolment area of O'Connor...far greater than any other school. Obviously The Cooperative School is small but is highly valued by its community in both philosophy and action. It should be able to continue to successfully operate in its own right well into the future without diminishing the enrolments of neighbouring Government schools. Why does it need to administratively change when it out-performs so many other sites?

**Narrabundah Primary School** is definitely a small school being larger than only five other schools in 2005 with its total costs per student and excess capacity smaller than only 4 schools. Total per student costs need reassessment and significant discounting. Narrabundah does appear to have disproportionally high depreciation costs for a school of its age and this will need reassessing. Further to justly cater for its special community Narrabundah has sought significant educational and corporate support especially through Indigenous and Curriculum Support and thus has high costs in this area which also need to be discounted from its per student costs. It is widely acknowledged throughout the ACT that Narrabundah Primary School offers a special program to its particular community and that like other sites with special circumstances per student costs need to be assessed beyond the average school.

**The Woden School** will be integrated with **Alfred Deakin HS**. Sufficient relevant data concerning Woden School, however, has not been presented in *Towards 2020* to enable the community to engage in debate over the proposal. The only data available is that the Woden School currently has an enrolment of 67 students. The data on Alfred Deakin HS is far more extensive but can only lead the community to ask why a successful high school at 97% capacity, with the third lowest per student costs and with strong community support would need to change when other sites remain unchanged. The proposal merely states that the two schools will still operate from their respective sites and that:

*Alfred Deakin [will continue] to offer vibrant and responsive education. The curriculum at Alfred Deakin will be strengthened, in particular the programs for gifted and talented students...[T]his is a new and exciting proposal for students with a disability providing 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 information can only lead the community to claim that this proposal is no change to current programs and that other changes must be envisaged by the Government...but what changes? Further the community is just to ask why The Woden School and Alfred Deakin and not other

special education sites—Cranleigh in Holt and the new P-Year 10 school in Holt or Black Mountain School and the nearby Turner Primary School?

**Dickson College** maintains an enrolment greater than Copland College and almost identical to Lake Ginninderra College. Dickson is described however as having ‘low student numbers compared to most other ACT Colleges’. Copland and Lake Ginninderra should be similarly labeled for consistency sake. Dickson attracts 60% of the students in its PEA reflecting strong community support and also attracts 44% of its enrolment from outside the PEA showing it to be a college of choice for families outside the enrolment area as other sites are described.

Dickson College’s per student costs are less than Copland and very close to Lake Ginninderra. Dickson does seem to have been disadvantaged by the direct costs and associated depreciation incurred from the Australian Government Older School Upgrade of some \$1.25 million in the 2004/2005 financial year. Dickson has also been disadvantaged by the fact that it expended \$200,000 on staffing from residual funds in the targeted 2004/2005 financial year. It appears that Dickson’s costs have been inaccurately or unjustly calculated by almost \$2,500 per student... an error that may unjustly and unwisely result in its closure. Further Dickson will have had its costs inflated by its special education programs which also need to be discounted. Despite these facts Dickson College is described as a ‘high cost delivery site’. Once again consistency would require Copland and Lake Ginninderra Colleges being similarly labeled or the community would be justified in being suspicious of the motives behind Dickson’s pending closure.

Dickson College shows it has the capacity to continue in its own right but unlike similar colleges is to close and amalgamate with Campbell High School as a Year 7 to 12 school despite the continued success of Dickson and the college system. The community has just cause to ask why.

## **Appendix B**

### **Regional Analysis**

The following discussion results from consultations with ACT school principals and other stakeholders, and a consideration of school data.

In *Towards 2020* the ACT Minister for Education claimed that the school closure and amalgamation proposal focused on the provision of education in the ACT on a regional basis allegedly providing greater choice and diversity of schooling structure allegedly better meeting the demographic, social and educational needs of the ACT community. He has stated:

*The proposal is designed to give ACT students access to a diverse range of public schools of a quality unequalled in the country.*

*Some schools will be closed or amalgamated to better meet the demographic, social and educational needs of the ACT community.*

*In developing this proposal the Government has considered educational provision across eight regions of the ACT to assist with meeting the needs of local communities and ensure public education is a real choice for students and their families.*

*Towards 2020 will ensure the sustainability of our high quality education system, both now and into the future.*

As shown previously *Towards 2020* has no sound educational basis underpinning it providing no significant educational advantage. Further the notion of providing this wide array of schooling structures on a regional basis is a non-entity. *Towards 2020* and its regional provision of a wide variety of school structures does not provide for choice and diversity on an equal basis often requiring parents to move away from the local area and even out of their region to find their choice of schooling structure precluding an equal choice for less affluent families.

*Towards 2020* fails to provide a clear analysis of the social and educational needs of the ACT community on a regional basis which would seem imperative to any authentic claim that *Towards 2020* is designed 'to better meet the...social and educational needs of the ACT community'. An attempt has been made to convey to the community actual and projected enrolments of individual schools within regions. Through other sources it is also possible to get a clearer picture of associated regional data including the projected ACT population age profile in 2010 and non-government enrolments 2006 . (ACT Government 2006)

The identification of the social and educational needs of the total ACT community is ignored in *Towards 2020* although these needs are to be found to some degree in the Department's new curriculum documentation 'Every Chance to Learn'. A thorough study of any documents fails to uncover any underpinning regional or geographic social and educational community needs that are allegedly met by the provision of the varying regional array of schooling structures of *Towards 2020*.

The community is left to ponder the regional educational and social needs. What is it about the social and educational needs of North Canberra that its community does not need a Year 11-12 college as needed by most other regions? What is it about the social and educational needs of the Tuggeranong community that they do not need an early childhood school (K to Year 3) as do most other regions? What is it about the Gungahlin community's social and educational needs that they require three Preschool to Year 10 schools, disproportionately far more than any other region? What is so special about the social and educational needs of the communities in the two Belconnen regions that they require collegiate structures combining Preschool to Year 12? What social and educational needs of the Weston Creek community determines that they do not need a Kindergarten to Year 10 school common to most other areas? Obviously there are no such social and educational needs requiring the array of school structures of *Towards 2020*. Such farcical statements are only attempting to gloss over the fact that only demographic and financial needs underpin the differing schooling structures. The ACT Government has used its claim of better meeting the social and educational needs of the ACT regional communities to manipulate the community into accepting *Towards 2020*.

The notion of the eight regions is based on geography and history. They have developed out of the stellate planning and development of Canberra and continue to be that way because that's the way it has always been. This is hardly catering to the educational or social needs of Canberrans but merely fitting the Griffin Plan. In complying with the Griffin Plan the eight regions are not of approximate equal population size. The glaring anomaly is the unexplained division of Belconnen by *Towards 2020* into two regions, Belconnen North-West and Belconnen South-East but retaining Tuggeranong as one region, with disproportional enrolment figures as noted in chart 1. The eight regions have an enrolment range of 6113 students with two regions above the average size of 4180 students and six below. The division of Tuggeranong into two regions as in chart 2 would create a range of only 1774 students and with five above and four below the regional enrolment of 3715, which would appear a much fairer basis on which to base regional education provision.

| <b>7.1 REGION</b>    | <b>2010 PROJECTED GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ENROLMENT</b> | <b>2010 PROJECTED TOTAL SCHOOL AGE POPULATION (ACT Govt 2004)</b> |
|----------------------|---|---|
| TUGGERANONG          | 7758  | 19760   |
| BELCONNEN S-E        | 5525  | 8250  |
| NTH CANBERRA         | 4094  | 6800  |
| BELCONNEN NW         | 4039  | 8600  |
| WODEN                | 3954  | 5700  |
| GUNGHALIN            | 3445  | 8300  |
| STH CANBERRA         | 2980  | 3900  |
| SOUTHCANBERRA        | 1645  | 4100  |
| <b>7.1.1 AVERAGE</b> | <b>4180</b>                                       | <b>8176</b>   |

*Chart 1 showing the 2010 projected enrolment into Government schools per region and the 2010 projected total school age population per region based on the eight regions of Towards 2020.*

| <b>7.2 REGION</b>    | <b>2010 PROJECTED GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ENROLMENT</b> | <b>2010 PROJECTED TOTAL SCHOOL AGE POPULATION</b> |
|----------------------|---|---|
| BELCONNEN S-E        | 5525  | 8250  |
| NTH TUGGERA'NG       | 4180  | 10750   |
| NTH CANBERRA         | 4094  | 6800  |
| BELCONNEN NW         | 4039  | 8600  |
| WODEN                | 3954  | 5700  |
| STH TUGGERA'NG       | 3578  | 9000  |
| GUNGHALIN            | 3445  | 8300  |
| STH CANBERRA         | 2980  | 3900  |
| WESTON CREEK         | 1645  | 4100  |
| <b>7.2.1 AVERAGE</b> | <b>3715</b>                                       | <b>7266</b>                                       |

*Chart 2 showing the 2010 projected enrolment into Government schools per region and the projected total school age population per region in 2010 using nine regions after dividing Tuggeranong into two regions.*

Assuming the eight regions are to continue as in *Towards 2020*, the following analysis of each region in terms of choice, diversity and accessibility shows considerable gaps. Of course it must still be acknowledged that the provision of a wide array of schooling structures in any region has minimal educational underpinning and appears to more a financial and physical need than educational.

## **TUGGERANONG**

In 2010 the projected school age population of Tuggeranong will be 19760, however the *Towards 2020* plan still will only bring 7758 students to Tuggeranong Government schools. More than 60% of Tuggeranong students will be attending schools other than Government Tuggeranong Valley schools. This will include Government Schools particularly in Woden and South Canberra and Non-Government Schools across the ACT but particularly in Woden and South Canberra. *Towards 2020* reflects on the situation in 2006 stating:

*Many parents also now exercise choice about their children's schooling. The neighborhood school is no longer the most convenient choice. In some Tuggeranong schools fewer than 50% of students from the local area attend their local school.*

The exercising of this choice in Tuggeranong is not new having existed since the schools in Woden and South Canberra started to decline in enrolments in the late 1970's and when private schools in these areas were allowed to increase in size and number. Tuggeranong parents were encouraged by Governments, school leaders, teachers and community gossip to move away from Tuggeranong and its open plan and poor quality buildings into Woden and South Canberra where schools had space, were designed and operated on traditional schooling lines and had quality buildings. In more recent times convenience to parental workplaces and transport links have provided other reasons to leave Tuggeranong for schooling. To help students move away from the Tuggeranong Valley successive Governments have provided designated bus services although

no such bus services were ever provided within the Tuggeranong Valley to attend Government schools.

This problem is particularly the case in North Tuggeranong's Kambah and Wanniasa areas where since the 1970's these schools have been dogged by the combination of open planned schooling and buildings built on the cheap using open plan as an excuse to create flimsy barn-like structures and thus save costs. Fuelled by community, authority and school gossip, this unfair negative reputation has persisted and, as shown by the figures, *Towards 2020* will do little to redress the problem. The development of a K to Year 10 school in the Kambah area similar to that being developed on the Ginninderra High School site may be a positive step in redressing this significant problem. With some ongoing positive spin provided by the Government and the Department such a school would cater for all students in Kambah, would have the opportunity to overcome the negative myth created by open plan schooling and would present Kambah families with a quality contemporary facility...a facility not available in Woden or South Canberra in either the Government or Non-Government sectors.

Under *Towards 2020* Tuggeranong families will be provided with twelve P-Year 6 schools, two P-Year 10 schools, two Year 7 to Year 10 schools and two Year 11-12 colleges. There will be no provision of any early childhood schools forcing parents who choose this structure to leave the region, a move that well could see these families stay out of Tuggeranong for the remaining years of schooling. There will be no Year 6 to Year 10 school in the Tuggeranong Valley as in other regions ... an option that should have been canvassed for the Kambah area. There will be no Year 7 to Year 12 school as planned for other regions and currently offered by the Non-Government system in Tuggeranong. There will be no stand alone Preschools within the Tuggeranong Valley a situation that will be in other regions and one that may well be attractive to parents who are concerned with safety for their Preschooler within a primary school.

In closing Mt Neighbour Primary School more than half the residents of the area will have to travel beyond two kilometers to access Urambi Primary School or Taylor Primary School. The actual walking distance however is significantly longer. (This two kilometer straight line distance is considered the upper limit for younger children walking to and from school.) This travel will involve many residents crossing Boddington Crescent to access Urambi Primary School or crossing the very dangerous Tuggeranong Parkway to reach Taylor Primary School. Whilst underpasses are available their positioning away from the straight line between home and school may lead to younger children ignoring their safety aspects and dangerously attempting to cross the Parkway. Some Mt Neighbour residents may opt to access schooling outside the Tuggeranong Valley and attend the remaining Weston Creek Government schools or even schools in South Canberra and Woden, close to parental work sites.

Village Creek residents will largely be inside the two kilometer distance from Taylor Primary School and whilst access roads are busy they can be avoided through a series of walkways. Accessing Urambi is far more difficult despite the fact that most residents will not exceed the two kilometer distance. The crossing of the very busy and wide Tuggeranong Parkway is extremely dangerous especially for younger children. There exists the distinct possibility that Village Creek residents may choose to also leave Tuggeranong Valley and attend Government schooling in Woden using dedicated school bus services to these schools.

In closing the centrally located Isabella Plains Primary School *Towards 2020* will force most residents to walk beyond two kilometers to access Richardson Primary School and cross the busy and fast Ashley Drive from the northern end and to negotiate Tuggeranong Creek and Tuggeranong Homestead. To access Bonython Primary School most Isabella Plains residents will be within two kilometers of the school but will have to cross the very busy Drakeford Drive. These residents may also access Monash Primary School but about half will have to travel in excess of two kilometers and cross the very busy and dangerous Isabella Drive.

Closing Gilmore Primary School will force more than half the residents to travel beyond two kilometers to reach Chisholm Primary School to which road access is relatively safe. Attendance at Fadden Primary School is of a similar distance but requires crossing Isabella Drive and Bugden Avenue. Accessing Gowrie Primary School is still more difficult with all residents needing to travel well beyond two kilometers as well as crossing Isabella Drive and Bugden Avenue,

As noted previously significant numbers of relatively disadvantaged families will be further disadvantaged financially and socially as they attempt to access new schools from the Mt Neighbour, Village Creek, Kambah, Gilmore and Isabella Plains areas. Significant numbers forced to relocate will be relatively poor Indigenous families.

Obviously the establishment of a Kindergarten to Year 10 school in Kambah would not only help overcome transport problems but would provide a positive setting for the relative poor.

The provision of dedicated school bus services even if paid for by parents, as implemented for the students of Hackett and Downer when Majura was formed would help alleviate parental fears and concerns related to travel safety and distance if not the cost.

## **BELCONNEN NORTH-WEST**

Despite the proposals of *Towards 2020*, the Belconnen North-West region will still have at least 53% of its school age population attending Government schools in other regions or in Non-Government schools particularly in area but also in other regions. As with Tuggeranong this problem is a critical issue for the ACT Government that will not go away even with the significant number of school closures and amalgamations in the region over the coming years and the formation of the new P-Year 10 school on the Ginninderra High School site. The problem will still exist despite, in *Towards 2020* terms, the opening of this

*New world class preschool to Year 10 school on the site .*

*Towards 2020* provides two options for the Belconnen North-West. Option One provides for six P to 6 schools, one P-Year 10 school and a collegiate consisting of a P-Year 4 school, a Year 5 to 8 school and a Year 9 to Year 12 school/college. (This odd year level school structure is unique to the region and is not offered to other regions making it very clear that the wide diversity of schools on offer in *Towards 2020* is not a response to educational needs but to enrolment and financial figures.) Belconnen North-West is not offered the traditional Year 7 to Year 10 school as offered to other regions. It is not offered the highly successful Year 11/12 college structure.

Option Two provides for seven P-Year 6 schools, a P-Year 10 school and a Year 7 to Year 12 school. Once again there is no offer of a Year 7 to Year 10 school or of the Year 11/12 college and this time no offer of an early childhood school.

The inability of *Towards 2020* to propose a Year 7 to Year 10 high school or a Year 11/12 college in either option suggests that the area simply lacks enough students for one or the other or even both. This is more obvious when the increasing Non-Government enrolments in the Belconnen region at St Francis Xavier and Radford College are considered. The data suggests however that any attempt to juggle P-Year 12 numbers forming strange collegiate structures will be doomed to failure before 2010 arrives let alone 2020. This suggests that a Year 7 to Year 12 school may be preferable but there exists considerable doubt about projected enrolments in such a venture especially as College aged students can readily access Ginninderra College and even Hawker College. Year 11/12 students may exercise such a choice to be seen to be like most other ACT teenagers attending a senior college. The students and their parents may well prefer this option as it seems far more secure than the doubtful prospect of the year 7 to 12 school maintaining numbers especially at Years 11 and 12. It would be perceived by students and parents that a enrolment decline in Years 11 and 12 at the new Year 7 to 12 school would seriously lessen vital curriculum choice.

It appears that it is preferred to maintain Charnwood as a P-Year 6 school and not as a contrived early childhood school (P to 4). This is sensible as this school will have to cater increasingly for Dunlop families and to accommodate students from other closing schools especially with Fraser at capacity. Further Charnwood successfully caters for a distinct group of relatively disadvantaged students who would be greatly disadvantaged financially and socially by being forced to find new schooling after Year 4. Many of these students would be asked to travel more than two kilometers to reach any of the neighbouring schools.

The proposed closure of both Flynn and Mt Rogers Primary Schools and their associated Preschools creates an immense schooling access problem for the residents of Flynn, Melba and Spence. The access issues revolve around road safety and distance of travel to the nearest preferred schools. Road safety is a concern on many of the larger inter-suburb roads and especially on inter-district roads.

For the residents of Flynn wishing to attend the closest primary school, Charnwood most would be within a two kilometer straight-line distance (further if walking distance) but would have to cross the busy Tillyard Drive. Further there has been considerable resistance by Flynn residents to attend Charnwood Primary School for many years. If Flynn residents preferred Fraser Primary School one third would have to travel beyond two kilometers and all would need to cross Tillyard Drive and Spalding Street, both especially busy in the morning leading up to school start times. To attend Latham Primary School, more than half of Flynn residents would have to travel beyond two kilometers and cross the very busy and dangerous Ginninderra Drive both mornings and afternoons. Attendance at Florey Primary School would require most residents to travel beyond two kilometers and cross the prohibitive Ginninderra and Kingsford Smith Drives. Charnwood and possibly Fraser Primary Schools appear best choices of schools for Flynn residents but there are still safety and walking distance difficulties for a number of residents.

For the residents of Melba, Miles Franklin Primary School is within two kilometers for most but there is a need to cross the dangerous and fast Copland Drive. To attend Florey Primary School,

whilst only a quarter of the residents have to travel more than two kilometers, all have to cross the extremely busy and wide Ginninderra Drive. About three-quarters of the Melba residents have to travel beyond two kilometers to attend Latham Primary School and all have to cross the prohibitive Ginninderra and Kingsford Smith Drives. Most Melba residents have to travel beyond two kilometers to attend Evatt Primary School and have to cross Copland Drive. Due to road safety issues Florey and Latham Primary Schools appear inaccessible to most Melba residents with Miles Franklin and possibly Evatt Primary Schools being preferred although the latter has a considerable walking distance problem.

Spence residents are relatively close to Evatt and Miles Franklin Primary School with most within the two-kilometer mark but Copland Drive has to be crossed. To attend Fraser Primary School, many Spence residents would have to travel beyond two kilometers and would need to cross Tillyard Drive and the very busy Kingsford Smith Drive. Florey Primary School would appear too difficult to access for Spence residents as most would have to travel beyond two kilometers and cross Ginninderra Drive and navigate Copland Drive. Evatt or Miles Franklin Primary Schools appear preferable for Spence residents.

The issues of distance and road safety would be considerably eased at least in the minds of the community if a designated parent-funded school bus service was established for the residents of Flynn, Melba and Spence similar to that put in place at Majura Primary School with the closure of Watson, Downer and Hackett Primary Schools.

The other alternative is to cost and consider the closure of both schools and their amalgamation at the most suitable site... Flynn or Mt Rogers. This would produce a highly viable enrolment of around 300 in 2010 including Preschool children (currently 360) with a capacity of 375 at Flynn and 400 at Mt Rogers. Both buildings seem in good order and have good reputations within the community. The amalgamation may also overcome the need to install portable buildings at Fraser Primary School to cope with the projected enrolment in 2010, which is 24 students above capacity, and with Dunlop still continuing to grow. Latham would also face similar problems. The amalgamation also overcomes perceived community difficulties with Charnwood, which also must keep space for Dunlop students plus any new suburb in the area. Further Charnwood appears to be increasing numbers from its own area, which reflects the increasing loss of numbers at St Thomas Aquinas Primary School Charnwood.

## **BELCONNEN SOUTH-EAST**

If *Towards 2020* is implemented Belconnen South-East region will have the highest region enrolments if Tuggeranong is divided into two regions but still will have 25% excess capacity. It will cater for almost 66% of the possible school age students in the region. The proposal will provide residents 'access' to one P-Year 3 school, six P-Year 5/6 or 6 schools, one Year 6 to 10 school, two Year 7 to 10 schools and two Year 11/12 colleges. Three of the sites are to be incorporated administratively into a collegiate structure involving a primary and high school and college. The region seems to definitely have diversity on offer. The model, however, does not offer a P-Year 10 school, which can only be assumed to imply that *Towards 2020* does not see such a structure necessary to meet the educational or social needs of the region's residents!

The development of Southern Cross Primary School as a Preschool to Year 3 school, presents significant difficulties for the residents. As noted previously (Early Childhood Schools) it is

questionable if the school can be sustained as an early childhood school with parents more than likely to choose to avoid the double transition points for their children at Year 4 and Year 7 as is the similar case with proposals for Charnwood, Narrabundah, Yarralumla and ultimately Lyons Primary Schools.

Whilst parents may choose to move their primary aged children to other Government schools such as Hawker, Weetangera, Florey and even the new P-Year 10 school at Holt, there is a distinct likelihood that many will choose St Matthew's Catholic School at Page for both accessibility and reputation. St Matthew's has steadily increased its numbers over the past ten years to now have an enrolment of 307 going against most Government school trends in the area and even other Catholic schools including St Vincent's at Aranda, St John the Apostle Florey, St Monica's Evatt and St Michael's Kaleen which have seen ten year falls from 43 to 173. St Matthew's at Page looks a distinct possibility for many Southern Cross parents especially when the only underpass of Belconnen Way towards Hawker Primary School from Scullin is only one hundred meters from St Matthew's providing a temptation not to cross this very busy and dangerous road.

If they choose a Government school there is no way of predicting the school they will attend. When the last amalgamation of Page and Scullin Primary Schools occurred in 1989, it was intended and assumed that the bulk of Page residents would attend the new school at Scullin. The first Principal of Southern Cross, Mr. Ian McPhee commented:

*Of the two hundred odd students at Page, only 28 came to [Southern Cross]. The remainder went to Weetangera and Florey. It is obvious that if you set a large number of families to thinking for themselves, you cannot rely on their coming to the same conclusion as the wallahs in the Department, no matter how carefully argued and designed their proposition is. (McPhee 2006)*

Assuming that Southern Cross will not continue either as a P-Year 6 school or an early childhood school, there are significant issues for residents of Scullin and Page accessing Government primary schools. Scullin residents do not have excessive straight line distances to reach either Florey or Hawker Primary School, but there are major road safety issues especially when it is realized that many of the residents of Scullin are relatively financially disadvantaged and would thus favour children walking to school. Only a quarter of the residents are beyond two kilometers from Florey Primary School but have to cross the very dangerous Southern Cross Drive. Similarly about one half of the Scullin residents are beyond two kilometers from Hawker Primary School but they have to cross the almost pedestrian impassible Belconnen Way. The walking distance is actually much further than the straight line route as the only relatively safe underpass is in the extreme south-east corner of the suburb. McPhee noted:

*It is not on the direct route to Hawker Primary for any but a limited number of Scullin residents, and its safety advantages would largely be ignored by young pedestrians. (McPhee 2006)*

To attend either the new P-Year 10 school at Holt, Latham Primary School or Weetangera Primary School most Scullin residents would have to travel in excess of two kilometers but more importantly would have to cross Kingsford Smith Drive or Southern Cross Drive as well as

Kingsford Smith Drive. All options seem fraught with danger for Preschool to Year 6 children especially the many who would have to walk.

For Page residents to attend Florey, Weetangera or Hawker Primary School they would mostly be within a two-kilometer straight line walking distance but would have to cross the very dangerous Southern Cross Drive or Belconnen Way. The St Matthew's option may seem safer and with the increased cost of fuel may even be of similar cost.

The provision of a designated parent funded school bus service would not ease the problem sufficiently due to the relative poverty of residents in the area. The more viable option is to leave Southern Cross Primary School open as a vibrant P-Year 6 school. As noted previously Southern Cross Primary School's per student costs were lower than 29 other primary schools in 2005 despite additional costs associated with the provision of education for special needs children. Its excess space was less than 36 other primary schools. The site is in good order. Closing the school as a P-Year 6 school would not noticeably eat into the excess space dilemma of Belconnen South-East or lower total Government costs to any significant degree. It is a small school operating well within financial and physical limits hemmed in by very dangerous roads. Southern Cross serves a community relatively financially disadvantaged who should not be expected to pay for the cost of an unnecessary school closure.

The closure of Giralang Primary School and Preschool will see residents needing to travel excessive distances to attend Kaleen, Maribyrnong or Evatt Primary School. Travel to Evatt would involve more than half Giralang residents traveling beyond two kilometers and across or through busy and dangerous roads... William Slim Drive, Owen Dixon Drive and William Webb Drive. Travel to Kaleen and Maribyrnong would require all residents to exceed two kilometers traveling along Baldwin and Maribyrnong Avenues, both busy access ways. The provision of a parent funded dedicated school bus service would assist to make travel safer.

The establishment of the collegiate structure for Hawker Primary School, Belconnen HS and Hawker College does not add to the educational advantage of the sites as they are currently operating. Although no clear statement has been issued to identify the operational structures and processes of the collegiate, it is assumed that administrative links and sharing are considered such as shared Principalship and other Executive and Administrative sharing. As noted previously, this is totally unacceptable as each school is large enough to maintain their existing staffing structures. These sites have developed highly positive reputations within the community and any erosion of staffing entitlements would eat away at those reputations. Parents expect Principals and other Executive and Administrative officers to be on site. Past experiences have shown that such sharing is dimly viewed by the community especially in Primary and High School situations. This may well be the trigger for these schools to decline especially in the face of the ever increasing growth of near Independent neighbour, Radford College, with its full complement of executive and administrative staff.

## **WESTON CREEK**

*Towards 2020* will provide residents of Weston Creek with three Preschool to Year 5/6 schools and a Year 6 to 10 school. When added to the Catholic and Independent schools in the region the total will still only come to 6 primary, one P-Year 10 school and one high school. The total school enrolment in the region is only 2744. This is trite compared to other regions but it has

been the situation for many years. In fact there has been an increasing tendency for Weston Creek residents to access schooling outside the region and for Government and Non-Government authorities not to supply schooling in the region.

The tendency for this minimal demand for and supply of schooling within the Weston Creek region is indicated by:

- The absence of a Government College (Year 11/12) in the region. This provision has existed with one College but the past ten years have seen this gradually removed suggesting there is no market need.
- The absence of a Catholic high school (Year 7 to Year 12) in the region. The Catholic Education Office has never provided Year 7 to Year 12 education in Weston Creek suggesting that the need has not existed.
- The continuing enrolment decline in the only Government high school (Year 7 to Year 10) in the region. There existed two Government high schools, which amalgamated to one. Except for a small number at an Independent school in Weston Creek, only 615 students attend secondary schooling in Weston Creek. By 2010 this will have dropped to only 460 indicating a significant lack of need for such a facility.
- The presence of only two small Catholic primary schools in the region. Together the enrolment has dropped gradually over the past decade with less than 450 now enrolled at the two schools.
- The presence of only 5 Government primary schools after 8 have existed in the region. *Towards 2020* will see this fall to 3.
- The presence of only two Independent schools with a total enrolment of only 683.

This suggests that the region has increasingly been a region of relatively low demand for and supply of educational facilities within both the Government and Non-Government sectors. There are currently 2774 students enrolled in all Weston Creek schools. There are over 5500 residents of eligible schooling age in the area indicating that over 2000 residents seek school education in other regions, principally Woden and South Canberra. Weston Creek residents choose educational supply outside the region especially at the secondary schooling sector. Educational providers tend to supply education especially in the secondary sector outside the Weston Creek region. This needs to be acknowledged when planning for educational supply in the region.

Despite the proposals of *Towards 2020*, Weston Creek Government schools will hold only 40% of the eligible school age students living in the region in 2010. The remaining 60% will largely be accessing schooling in Government and Non-Government schools elsewhere especially in Woden and South Canberra with a small number in Non-Government schools in Weston Creek. Further Weston Creek will still have an excess capacity of 52%. This excess capacity however does not principally reflect a shunning of the Government schools but the regional demand and supply concepts.

It must be accepted that the Weston Creek trend to supply and demand schooling especially secondary education outside the region is likely to continue. Weston Creek residents in 2006 have the second highest median age at 39.5 years only just behind Woden Valley on 40.0 years. This trend is predicted to continue and in 2010 it is projected that Weston Creek residents (40.5 years) will still be second but slightly closer in median age to Woden Valley residents (40.8 years). The trend is expected to ease after this with the median age for Weston falling very slightly but still

reflecting an older community. Educational providers will continue to be reluctant to introduce new schools into the area especially in the secondary area and residents will increasingly choose schooling in other regions. Weston Creek may well become a region in which schooling is supplied on a minimal level at the Preschool to Year 5/6 level and that secondary education is provided through other areas. This scenario reflects the Catholic schooling system presently.

In closing Weston Creek and Rivett Primary and Preschools a number of distance and road safety issues arise. Weston Creek residents accessing Arawang Primary School will be close to a two kilometer walking distance but students will have to cross Hindmarsh Drive which does present major road and physical safety issues. To access Duffy Primary School most of the residents will be outside two kilometers and face the crossing of the busy Streeton and Dixon Drives. Rivett residents accessing Arawang will be outside the two kilometer zone and face crossing the very fast Streeton and Namatjira Drives. Accessing Chapman Primary School will be easier with most inside two kilometers and only Darwinia Terrace to engage. A designated parent funded bus service would make the more difficult and dangerous journeys more acceptable, although significant numbers of Rivett families will find the additional cost a genuine burden.

The establishment of Stromlo as a Year 6 to Year 10 may have some educational advantages but as noted previously there is no substantial evidence to strongly support this notion. Nevertheless if the advantaged is assumed it does appear that the move to a middle school is only an attempt to keep Stromlo more viable at the expense of the primary school enrolment. It is anticipated that Stromlo will go from a 2006 enrolment of 615 to 630 in 2010 through *Towards 2020*. The primary school enrolments are predicted to rise from 1004 in 2006 to 1015 in 2010 under the plan. (Preschool numbers not included as per *Towards 2020*). Accepting that new students may enroll from North Tuggeranong into the high school and even some of the primary schools and that possible some arithmetic errors have occurred, it is impossible to accept that Stromlo and Duffy will maintain their predicted numbers into 2010 let alone 2020.

Duffy is predicted to go from a 2006 school of 119 to one of 235 by 2010 under the *Towards 2020* plan. To achieve this Duffy needs to maintain all current numbers and acquire 116 new students presumably from Rivett and Weston Creek, which in 2006 only have a total of 159 students. All this needs to be achieved without those Year Six students who elect to go to Stromlo. Further the danger and distance to be travelled for Weston Creek children to access Duffy and the ease and safety for Rivett children accessing Chapman rather than Duffy makes the maintenance of numbers even more problematic. Duffy, an original 'open plan' school, suffers the historical myth that open plan is poor causing many residents to move away from such schools. This problem is further compounded by the fact that Duffy does need refurbishment to bring it to contemporary standard. If Duffy along with Arawang and Chapman, which will both be ten students away from capacity in 2010 cannot provide enrolments for Stromlo then it cannot be considered viable in terms of other ACT Government Year 6 to Year 10 schools.

It may be futile in the long term to prop up numbers at Stromlo and to hope that Duffy can produce the numbers. An alternative exists.

1. Maintain Stromlo as it is and allow it to function as a small Government Year 7 to Year 10 high school in the region catering for those residents who cannot or choose not to access secondary education outside the region plus North Tuggeranong residents who may find themselves closer to Stromlo than any alternative. It would require extensive

- refurbishment to make it into a high quality building for contemporary high school education.
2. Re-establish a primary school (Preschool to Year 6) at the former Holder Primary School site and close Rivett, Weston Creek and Duffy Primary Schools amalgamating all at the new Holder site. The building, which is a positive combination of single cell and open planned classrooms, is substantial with impressive grounds. Refurbishment would obviously be needed to ready it again for contemporary Preschool to Year Six schooling. The site is central to Duffy, Rivett and Weston Creek residents and places most residents within a two kilometer distance. The school would be well placed to accommodate future Molonglo residents. The new school could become a show case within the region and a just compensation for a region devastated by the firestorm of 2003.
  3. Retain Chapman and Arawng Primary Schools as Preschool to Year 6 sites.

## **WODEN**

By 2010 Government schools in the Woden Region will accommodate almost 69% of all eligible school age Woden students and will only have 26% excess capacity through the *Towards 2020* proposal. Many of its students however will come from other regions especially Tuggeranong and Weston Creek. By 2010 Woden will have six P-Year 6 schools, two Year 7 to Year 10 schools and a Year 11/12 college. It may still have one early childhood site and a special education site. There are no other more 'contemporary' school structures, as in other regions, proposed for Woden...no P-Year 10 school, no P-Year 5/6 schools, no Year 7 to Year 12 school, no collegiate. It is an almost embarrassing fact that one of the ACT Government's more successful regions, in terms of high enrolment percentage and low excess capacity, has no need for the wide array of schooling structures on offer in *Towards 2020* except for one Early Childhood school. This region continues to be a region of choice for families across the ACT despite only more 'traditional' school structures being on offer. This continues to undermine *Towards 2020's* educational credibility.

The ultimate formation of Lyons as an Early Childhood School and its more than likely ultimate closure will force more than half Lyons residents to travel beyond two kilometers to access Curtin Primary School and will need to cross Launceston Street and travel along Theodore Street, both reasonably busy before school.

To access Torrens Primary School Chifley residents will all be outside a two kilometer distance and will need to cross Hodgson Crescent and the very busy Beasley Street. Mawson Primary School will be outside two kilometers for three-quarters of Chifley residents and will demand the difficult and dangerous crossing of Athllon Drive as well as Mawson Drive and Hodgson Crescent.

Pearce residents accessing Torrens Primary School will mostly be inside the two kilometer distance but have to cross Beasley Street. Accessing Mawson will be more difficult with half the residents outside the two kilometer distance and needing to cross Athllon Drive and Mawson Street.

The provision of a parent-funded dedicated bus service would alleviate safety and distance issues. Significant numbers of Lyons families would find the additional travel costs a further disadvantage as noted previously.

Obviously consideration must be given to the capacity problem that will exist at Torrens Primary School well before 2010. With the closure of so many schools it is somewhat backhanded to contemplate introducing demountable buildings at Torrens to accommodate expected enrolments. It may be necessary for this school to focus more exclusively on in region students. Currently Torrens Primary School has 69% out of area enrolments.

There is no educational or administrative need to link The Woden School and Alfred Deakin High School as noted previously. There is no educational or social gain for students at either school that is not gained at present. The sharing of educational leadership between the schools is totally unworkable and unacceptable.

## **SOUTH CANBERRA**

By 2010 Government schools in the South Canberra Region will accommodate almost 76% of all eligible school age South Canberra students and will only have about 13% excess capacity through the *Towards 2020* proposal. This is easily the most successful region in terms of enrolment percentage and excess capacity in Canberra.

By 2010 the *Towards 2020* proposal will provide South Canberra with one or two P to year 3 schools, two or three P-Year 6 schools, one K to Year 10 school and a Year 11/12 college. There is no P-Year 5/6 school, no Year 7 to Year 10 school or no collegiate.

As noted previously the proposed Early Childhood schools (Yarralumla and Narrabundah Primary School) lack viability if not immediately especially in the longer term and the sharing of educational leadership is once again unworkable and unacceptable. To access Forrest Primary School, most Yarralumla residents will have to travel beyond two kilometers and cross very busy and wide roads including Adelaide Avenue. Accessing Curtin Primary School will be further travel and would require Yarralumla residents to cross the very busy and almost pedestrian inaccessible Cotter Road as well.

Accessing Red Hill Primary School for Narrabundah Primary School area residents will demand most travel well beyond two kilometers and need to cross the very busy and wide Stuart Avenue, the dangerous Captain Cook Crescent and La Perouse Street. Many will simply not make this journey on foot...even a bus service may not stop increased absenteeism in light of this difficult, dangerous and expensive journey. Narrabundah Primary School area residents will not access Telopea Park School.

## **NORTH CANBERRA**

By 2010 *Towards 2020* will provide North Canberra with one P-Year 2 school, six P to year 6 schools, one Year 7 to Year 10 school and a Year 7 to year 12 school. The region will accommodate almost 60% of the region's eligible school age residents but excess capacity will still be around 25% only down a maximum of 12% from 2006. There will be no Year 11/12 college in the region, no P-Year 10 school and no collegiate structure.

The Dickson College scenario has been addressed previously indicating that its closure makes little sense when compared to other colleges especially when its per student costs and school

profile seem very poorly and sloppily constructed by *Towards 2020*. To the outsider the data looks contrived. Further, the closure of Dickson College will remove the highly successful college system from the North Canberra region. This feature is present in the other relatively successful regions...Woden, South Canberra and Belconnen-South-East...but has inexplicably been removed from North Canberra. This is despite the prediction that North Canberra will have the third highest number of residents aged 15 to 19 years in 2010 just behind North Tuggeranong and Belconnen South-East. It will be more than double South Canberra and one thousand more than Woden...both will have colleges. North Canberra will even be higher than the growing area of Gungahlin in 2010 by which time that region will only be a year away from a college. This makes little planning sense.

Further the amalgamation of Dickson College with Campbell High School decries the fact that Campbell continues to be a successful school, educationally and administratively. Its current enrolment is the sixth highest of all ACT High Schools and is only expected to fall by 15 students in the next four years. Its current per student costs are below ACT High School average despite the inadequate funding process to accommodate its relatively high proportion of NSW students. It has received a significant upgrade through an Older School Upgrade grant and thus is a sound contemporary educational site. *Towards 2020* attests to its success claiming it:

*Enjoys a sound reputation in the community and draws 68% of its enrolments from out of area. 57% of its enrolments come from NSW. 59% of students who live in the priority enrolment area attend the school.*

*The school is conveniently located close to Civic, bus routes and the CIT and therefore has the potential to build stronger links with business and national agencies.*

The projected combined enrolments in *Towards 2020* for the Year 7 to 12 school at Campbell and Lyneham HS in 2010 are 1680. Without the amalgamation, in 2010, *Towards 2020* sites Campbell HS, Lyneham HS and Dickson College to have a total enrolment of 2050. Apparently the amalgamation and *Towards 2020* will cause a loss of 370 students...to other regions? To the Non-Government sector? Inexplicable!

Neither Campbell High School nor Dickson College need to neither close nor amalgamate. They are both producing quality learning outcomes, are financially viable, have had recent significant site and building upgrades and will continue to remain viable. The community expects both to continue.

As noted previously the linking of the administration of Turner and The Cooperative School is unworkable and unacceptable. The enormity of the leadership task at Turner makes such sharing impossible.

## **GUNGAHLIN**

The ACT's newest and most rapidly developing region, Gungahlin by 2010 will accommodate some 41% of the eligible student population but time will see this increase. Through *Towards 2020* Gungahlin in 2010 will have two P-Year 5/6 sites and two P-Year 10 sites with another P-Year 10 site opened to the P-Year 6 stage by 2080. The region will have no Year 7 to Year 10 school and a Year 11/12 college will not have opened by 2010.

For all residents and those from NSW the closure of Hall Primary School will be in excess of two kilometres but many travel similar distances currently. The roads are similarly dangerous. The inclusion of Hall residents in the parent-funded and Government subsidised dedicated school bus services from NSW will assist in travel to other schools.

As noted previously the Funding of Hall Primary School needs to be adjusted to more accurately account for NSW residents and once adjusted this school's per student costs would come significantly closer to the ACT average. Further Hall Primary School can be developed as a positive rural show case school acknowledging Canberra's historical links to local significant pioneers, a rural economy and way of life. It could easily provide a rural/environmental component to its curriculum and be partially funded through neighbouring rural industries. Such a site would continue to attract NSW students and students from Gungahlin and Belconnen North-West.

## **Appendix C**

### **Social justice issues for school closure**

The AEU commends the ACT Government's commitment to social justice. In this light, it provides the following summary of social justice issues raised by educationalists and members of the ACT community during consultations for this submission, particularly as they relate to specific school closure proposals.

It is inappropriate that any currently disadvantaged group be forced to shoulder additional costs or dislocation for the prosperity of the ACT Government and the ACT community at large. The possibility of this exists with the closure of a number of school sites.

The closure of Mt Neighbour, Village Creek, Gilmore and Isabelle Plains Primary Schools and Kambah High School in the Tuggeranong Valley and Rivett Primary School will lead to increased costs for significant numbers of financially disadvantaged families with additional transport costs appearing unjustly inevitable. Similar disadvantages will be experienced by significant numbers of residents of Narrabundah, Scullin, Page, Lyons and Charnwood with the establishment of Narrabundah, Southern Cross, Lyons and Charnwood Primary Schools as early childhood schools and then ultimately their highly likely lack of viability and inevitable closure (as noted in the following section). Whilst the provision of a designated school bus service will enable these communities to access new schools, the associated costs will cause ongoing financial hardships on community members with average family incomes well below the comfortable ACT average.

The relocation of disadvantaged families may well lead to additional social disadvantage along with the financial disadvantage. There exists the real possibility that these disadvantaged groups are seeing the relocation as a result of their relative poverty...they have to move because that is what happens to poor kids. Further the closure of a school will see the more socially, financially and academically capable families locate to perceived better schools leaving the relative poor to move to the nearest school compounding the stigma of relative poverty. This may well be the scenario facing a number of Tuggeranong schools and expressed by an ACT Principal below:

*With a growing proportion of weaker students and lower social economic backgrounds [at the present schools] I am concerned that [the new school] will become the dumping ground for all those who are left. While they may technically have the capacity, the baggage that comes with a marginalised cohort influences the community perceptions about the whole school and so the vicious cycle continues as the better kids look to go to inner schools and/or non government. ACT Principal*

Schools identified to become early childhood schools also face such scenarios with the tendency for the socially capable to move away from these sites for more stable and longer term schooling elsewhere leaving the school with a shift in the social balance of the school. Unfortunately such a shift can have a negative impact on a school leading to issues such as increased playground problems. Such scenarios further disenchant the relative poor with their predicament.

Significant numbers of Indigenous families will be particularly disadvantaged by relocation. Many already endure relative poverty and the relocation cost will be an additional burden and may well be a source of Indigenous children not attending schooling on a regular basis. This will

be particularly the case for Preschool-aged Indigenous children of Mt Neighbour, Village Creek, Isabella Plains and Gilmore areas. In places such as Gilmore Primary School with a current Indigenous population of 15 children, the relocation trauma will be severe. The school has worked consistently to ensure these children attend school through a variety of processes and actions including close contact with families and provision of clothing, food, and funds for excursions. Forced movement to another school, or more likely schools, will see bonds broken between the Indigenous families and their school. A similar situation exists at Kambah High School but this issue will be at its extreme at Narrabundah Primary School should it become an early childhood school or ultimately close. Narrabundah Primary School has created a sense of place for its Indigenous community resulting in essential positive views of schooling. *Towards 2020* acknowledges the bond between the school and the Indigenous community at Narrabundah stating:

*The school has a greater proportion of Indigenous students than in other areas of the ACT [providing] extended services for children and the community and has strong community support.*

Breaking this bond be it through the separating of families at the Year 3/4 levels or through ultimate school closure will devastate the community placing in jeopardy continued positive views of schooling, regular attendance and most importantly a sense of place and belonging.

To help minimise the impact of *Towards 2020* on those relatively disadvantaged Canberra communities especially the relative poor and Indigenous families, the Government may wish to consider a range of recommendations provided during the AEU's consultation with school communities:

- Leave Narrabundah Primary School as a Preschool -Year Six school in its own right.
- Maintain positive, honest and respectful communication with all affected families especially the Indigenous community.
- Establish receiving schools especially those in the Tuggeranong Valley as quality facilities avoiding any feelings of disadvantaged children being moved to poor facilities. This may imply the establishment of a new P-Year 10 school in the Kambah region and re-establishing a revitalised P-Year 6 school at the former Holder Primary School site (see regional analysis).
- Leave Southern Cross Primary School as a Preschool to Year Six school in its own right (see regional analysis).
- Leave Charnwood Primary School as a Preschool to Year Six school in its own right (see regional analysis).
- Ensure that financially disadvantaged families receive their appropriate travel concessions.
- Use school equity funds to provide school uniforms and school texts and supplies for financially disadvantaged students forced to move schools.

## **Appendix D**

### **Case studies: criteria and processes for debate about school closure**

Other Australian education jurisdictions have school closure / amalgamation criteria as part of their education act or procedures, and have conducted worthwhile community consultation processes including involvement of teachers and principals. It would be beneficial to the ACT community and the ACT Government for it to consider such processes and criteria.

#### **New South Wales**

The NSW Department of Education and Training is required by its Education Act 1990 to form a 'School Closures Review Committee', which is to review and make recommendations to the Minister concerning the closure of a school. This committee is to consist of:

- (a) an independent person appointed by the Minister, who is to chair the Committee,*
- (b) the Director-General of School Education or nominee of that Director-General,*
- (c) a nominee of the Local Government Association of New South Wales,*
- (d) a nominee of the Federation of Parents' and Citizens Associations,*
- (e) an Assistant Director-General of School Education nominated by the Director-General,*
- (f) a nominee of the New South Wales Teachers Federation, and*
- (g) a nominee of the Minister.*

The community consultation paper 'Discussion Paper 'Planning for the Future of Public Education in the Tamworth Area (NSW Dept Ed and Training June 2006), provides a good example of the use of a consultative committee to engage the education community in discussion about school closure:

*Principals from the four secondary schools in Tamworth and representatives from the Primary Principals Association have participated in the consultation for this paper. (NSW Dept of Education 2006)*

Although not a mandated process, the involvement of principals in the proposal planning makes both technical and political sense. This paper also indicates the other departmental sources used for the development of the proposals and clearly identifies five scenarios for the Tamworth area and the probable outcomes of each scenario. More importantly the accompanying media release (16 June 2006) from the Regional Director for New England, Mr Des Gorman openly encourages community input:

*"To stimulate the consultation process, this paper presents five scenarios that were developed from suggestions during initial discussions," Mr Gorman said. "I want these to be a starting point rather than a set of choices. Our best solutions will come when everyone shares their ideas."*

Mr Gorman's press release continues informing the community not only about the consultative submission process but also the audience for the submissions...who will read and assess the submission.

*Data and submissions from the consultation stage will be presented to a working party chaired by New*

*England Regional Director, Des Gorman and including local principals, the NSW Teachers Federation; Federation of P&Cs; Tamworth Regional Council; University of New England; and New England Institute of TAFE. (Gorman 2006)*

After receipt of all submissions this working party will consider all information and make recommendations about closures and amalgamations to the Minister in accordance with the Education Act.

### South Australia

The South Australian Department of Education also involves representatives of the community including teachers and principals on a committee of review on school closures. This committee must consist of:

- (a) *at least two (but not more in total than the number gained by multiplying the number of schools being reviewed by two) persons nominated by the Minister (one of whom will be appointed by the Minister to be the presiding member); and*
- (b) —
  - (i) *if the schools are situated within the area of a council or councils constituted under the Local Government Act 1934—the mayor or chairman of each of those councils (or a person nominated by each such mayor or chairman); or*
  - (ii) *in any other case—a person nominated by the Minister for Local Government; and*
- (c) *the Director-General (or a person nominated by the Director-General); and*
- (d) *a person (not being a teacher at a school that is subject to the review) nominated by the Australian Education Union (S.A. Branch); and*
- (e) *the head teacher of each of the schools subject to the review; and*
- (f) *a nominee from the school council of each of the schools subject to the review. (South Australian Education ACT 1972)*

### Queensland

The Queensland Department of Education appoints a similar steering committee, as does Western Australia.

The Queensland Education Act 2006 is a leading document directing that a number of viability criteria be examined prior to making a decision on the closure or amalgamation of a school. These include:

- Enrolments...enrolment history and forecasts
- Accessibility...distances traveled, transport networks, traveling time, comparative transport costs
- Curriculum...extent and maintenance of curriculum, community expectations and access to resources

- Human Resources...number of staff, conditions of employment, student/teacher ratios, class sizes
- School Administration / Structure...ability to support effective learning and teaching
- Physical Resources...residential development and redevelopment, school size appropriateness, building condition, special features, actual and design capacity, design, maintenance levels, level of resources
- Financial Resources...current levels and opportunities to increase funding, P&C improvements and funds, comparative costs per student at home and neighbouring schools, savings through closure, amalgamation and sale
- Community Factors...impact on social and economic life, local business activity, school and community links, use of facilities by community groups, loss of local employment, potential of school site for other government services
- Destination Assessment...additional requirements to convince community of advantages of new site, receiving school capacity.

In addition the Act requires examination of specific local issues and community service obligations which may impact on a community's viability and thus decision to maintain or cease a service.

#### The ACT – then and now

The current approach to school closure debate in the ACT is dramatically different to the round of school closures in 1988 when the then Australian Government published a wide ranging document identifying school closure and amalgamation criteria and its implications for each ACT government school. After an extensive consultation period the government then made the decision on which schools would close and amalgamate. Unfortunately no such opportunity has been provided by the current ACT Government in *Towards 2020*. However the ACT Education Act 2004 directs that

*Before closing or amalgamating a government school, the Minister must...have regard to the educational, financial and social impact on students at the school, the students' families and the general school community.*

Compared with this, the current ACT Government has provided a package of information about school closures and amalgamations which is limited, irrelevant and generally shallow and a consultation process which does not enable maximum community participation.