



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

### Executive Summary

The Ainslie P & C finds *Towards 2020* alarmingly weak as a new “vision for education”. The P & C has discussed the proposal at each of our meetings since the budget.

The Ainslie P & C is concerned *Towards 2020* may be a hurriedly conceived reaction to budget pressure that will unnecessarily damage the education of our children. Minister Barr, in his letter to this P & C of 13 September 2006 states, “the Government has considered a range of demographic, educational, financial and social matters”. The Ainslie P & C would expect a proposal constructed in these terms to contain a great deal more detail, discussion of issues and trends in education, a longer transition plan and a more genuine approach to engaging the community on a difficult topic.

Putting the alarm the Government’s approach has generated aside, the key issues with the proposal for the Ainslie community are:

- **Support for the college system.** Many parents feel an adequately funded and sustainable college system would be a central feature of “a world-class public education system”.
- **A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Secondary School for North Canberra.** If the Government substantiated the case for a 7-12 choice, Ainslie parents would expect adequate transition time and resources to make the change successful. The Government has not convinced Ainslie parents that educational or transition issues have been given due consideration and believe more time and funding is required for this.
- **Social justice** issues in relation to the closure of Reid Pre-school. Reid pre-school serves a number of vulnerable and disadvantaged families who are unable or unlikely to enrol their children at pre-schools that are not within walking distance. The Ainslie community questions whether closing Reid pre-school will really save the community money in the long term.

The Ainslie School community is supportive of the stated aims of *Towards 2020* and recognises the increasing pressures on the Government system. The Ainslie community cannot overstate, however, the simple fact that the Government appears to be imposing a poorly thought out proposal on the community. A proposal that appears likely to damage the education of our children. We expect and demand more transparency, rigour and thought in *Towards 2020*.



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

### Genuine Consultation?

Given that planning in schools for 2007 is now well advanced, parents are sceptical about the genuineness of the consultation process and the ability for parent feedback to influence the outcome of the process. This scepticism lowers community confidence in the government's ability to administer a world class education system.

The Ainslie P & C raised 23 questions in a letter to the Minister on 13<sup>th</sup> July (see Attachment A) and received a form letter in response. While the Department's web site addresses some of these questions, many remain unanswered. With answers, the Ainslie community might be in a position to make constructive suggestions to help the government achieve the stated aims of the proposal. This information has not been provided.

### Where is the detail?

The Ainslie community is concerned about the lack of detail in *Towards 2020*. The community has found it impossible to judge the proposal on objective grounds given this lack of detail. The lack of detail and reasoned argument supports the view that the proposal has not been given sufficient time to mature. This in turn creates the concern that the Government has not thought the proposal through from both financial and educational perspectives.

### A school is not a building

The Minister recently wrote to the P & C asking for suggestions on how the school infrastructure might be improved. Doubtless, all but the newest ACT public schools would benefit from some infrastructure spending.

This operating versus capital cost perspective, however, counts for little in the community. A school is not a building.

The community wants our children to reach their full potential. Ainslie School's achievement of a 2006 National Literacy Award had nothing to do with infrastructure. A credible "vision for education" must address current issues and



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

trends in education: curriculum, special needs, class size, grade split, teacher professional development, assessment and reporting for example.

### Closing Dickson College

On the closure of Dickson College, Ainslie parents share and support the concerns raised by the Dickson College P & C. Towards 2020 has failed to convince Ainslie parents that the financial savings are real. Parents are concerned about reduced choice of electives and the disruption caused to current and future students.

Ainslie parents note the support for the College system documented in the Government's own 2005 review. Dickson College has many specialised facilities that would appear to make it a candidate for consolidation rather than closure.

### Campbell Secondary School

The 2020 proposal is light on detail with respect to the closure of Dickson and creation of Campbell as a 7-12 school. As a primary school community, the Ainslie community is willing to listen to the merits of a 7-12 versus the college system. 2020, however, has failed to convince the Ainslie community that the Government has conducted adequate planning and financial modelling on the proposal.

The Ainslie community understands the infrastructure improvements required at Campbell would represent many, many year's worth of the savings estimated from the closure of Dickson College.

The Ainslie community is also concerned that older Ainslie children will be adversely affected by the timetable imposed by the Government. The savings estimated by the Government do not justify this aggressive schedule. The Ainslie community expect Campbell School to be given adequate time to plan and implement the infrastructure, management and educational changes required for a 7-12 school to be a success.



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

### Closing Reid Pre-school

Ainslie parents are concerned about inequity. Reid is attended by children from various disadvantaged groups which are unlikely to be able to travel to a more distant location. Reid typically gets enrolments throughout the year (after census) highlighting the relative lack of engagement by the very groups most likely to benefit from pre-school. The Ainslie community is concerned that the Government was not aware of this and did not therefore consider social justice issues or model the potential costs of lower pre-school attendance.

### Conclusion

The Ainslie School community is supportive of the aims of the Towards 2020 proposal – equitable access, meeting regional community needs, making government schools the schools of first choice, and securing the future of the ACT public school system.

The Ainslie community is neither opposed to change, nor naive about the cost of education. The Ainslie community, however, expects competent financial management from its Government, community engagement and demonstrable rigour around difficult decisions. *Towards 2020* has failed to demonstrate these attributes and has not won the support of the Ainslie community.



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

### Attachment A

#### On the closure of Dickson and the creation of Campbell as a 7-12 secondary school

1. What criteria did the Government use to determine that Dickson must close?
2. What savings does the Government estimate for this component?
3. What infrastructure costs at Campbell have been included in the estimates?
  - Projected enrolments for Dickson and Campbell are above Campbell's current capacity.
  - Secondary schools typically provide discrete facilities for year 11 and 12 students (such as common rooms and dedicated classrooms).
  - Dickson currently has facilities that Campbell does not.
  - College age students and increased staff numbers will require increased car parking capacity.
  - There does not appear to be sufficient space for these facilities at Campbell given the location between the War Memorial and CSIRO.
4. What assumptions with respect to priority enrolment areas and NSW students did the Government factor into the savings estimates? Campbell currently has a large proportion of NSW students. Are these students to be "returned" to NSW? What funds does the ACT Government receive from the NSW Government for schooling NSW students?
5. Creating a secondary school is a change to the model. A more significant change than the amalgamation two primary schools. What non-infrastructure transition costs have been estimated specifically for the Dickson-Campbell change?
6. *Towards 2020* has unquestionably created uncertainty and many parents are concerned about lower enrolments at Campbell. What specific measures has the Government planned and funded to promote Campbell to prospective parents?
7. In formulating *Towards 2020* did the Government summarise available research on grade span and educational outcomes? If so, will the Government make its analysis public?
8. We understand \$1.8M was recently spent at Dickson to improve infrastructure. Was this factored into the Government's decision making?
9. Campbell High attracts parents who feel their children will thrive in a smaller school. How has the Government modelled the relative costs of small and large schools, as opposed to the costs relating to under-



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

- capacity? Dividing the school budget by the census enrolment is a crude measure that does not consider special programs, infrastructure age, location or other factors. To estimate real savings we assume the Government developed a more sophisticated model.
10. Clearly closure is not the only option for cost savings. What magnitude of saving would the Government consider as a viable alternative to closure?
  11. The Dickson College Board has questioned the capacity and enrolment figures used in *Towards 2020*. Which figures are correct?
  12. What does the Government plan for the Dickson College site and buildings?
  13. Does the Government's savings estimate include consequent costs outside the education budget (such as increased ACTION subsidies)?
  14. Vehicle access to Campbell High School can be difficult, even dangerous at peak times, with issues at both Limestone Avenue and at the CSIRO car park. Does the Government's savings estimate include the cost of road safety improvements that might be required with larger numbers of driving age students?
  15. *Towards 2020* has clearly considered cost. What consideration has been given to alternative sources of increased income?
  16. The Government's own 2005 Review of Secondary Colleges supported the college system: "The observation was often made that a traditionally structured Year 7 to Year 12 high school would find it impossible to match the breadth of course choice." It seems unlikely that the Government did not understand the budget position at the time of commissioning the review. Can you explain the apparent lack of correlation between the December 2005 review and the June 2006 budget proposal?

### On the Closure of Reid Pre-school

17. Reid pre-school serves a number of vulnerable and disadvantaged families who are unable or unlikely to enrol their children at pre-schools that are not within walking distance. Reid typically gets enrolments throughout the year (after census) highlighting the relative lack of engagement by the very groups most likely to benefit from pre-school. Has the Government considered social justice issues in its decision making and the impact on those least able to cope with the closure?
18. The benefits of early intervention are well documented. Has the Government considered the costs to Ainslie or other primary schools of a larger cohort of children who have not attended pre-school? For example, additional English language support.



# Ainslie School P & C

## Towards 2020 Submission

19. Reid P & C advise current enrolments are higher than published in *Towards 2020*. Reid has a pattern of late enrolments. Has the Government considered this pattern?
20. What does the Government plan for the Reid pre-school site and buildings?
21. Co-locating pre-schools with Primary schools is under consideration for other parts of the ACT. Did the government consider locating the Reid preschool at the old Ainslie infants school building?
22. Since parent monetary contributions and labour cover expenses at pre-schools that would have been covered by the government budget at a primary school, what consideration has been given to the increased costs of some aspects of delivering pre-school services under the new model?
23. Anecdotal evidence suggests Ainslie and other suburbs have bottomed out of a demographic curve – a second generation of families are moving back and having children. The last ABS Census is five years old. What then is the basis for the 2010 enrolment projections? What evidence has the Government collected to identify trends that may have established since the last census?