



Forrest School P&C Association

**C/- Forrest School
Hobart Avenue
FORREST ACT 2603**

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
ACT Minister for Education
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed merge of the Forrest Primary, Yarralumla Early Childhood School and Deakin Preschool. As a community we have listened to your department officials, debated the virtues of the proposal amongst our community and discussed options with the other schools.

Overwhelmingly, the Forrest School community rejects that there are benefits for our school in this 2020 Plan proposal.

There are only downsides for the Forrest School

Foremost it will impact directly on class sizes across the school and in doing so educational outcomes for our children. At Forrest, the school community has worked closely with the school to keep our class sizes as low as possible making other sacrifices. *Your proposal will return classes sizes to where they were a decade ago*, when the evidence is clear that teacher time per student is a key determinant in our children's educational success. This approach also specifically contradicts your government's own policy that smaller class sizes support better educational outcomes.

Further it will not realise the estimated cost savings without reducing one management position. The reduction of a management position in Forrest or Yarralumla would have significant consequences and hidden costs for both communities.

The Forrest School is already viable and sustainable. Forrest is a successful school sought after by its local and the broader community. It will remain viable to 2020 given its proximity to the workplaces of much of the Canberra Community, the educational programs offered and support services for families. *Your proposal will overstretch the Principal and executive across sites taking them from their leadership responsibilities at Forrest; increase the complexity for any School management with two different models across the sites; and it will reduce 'out of area' access, and consequently family choice, to the Forrest school.*

Early years schooling is critical

We commend the Yarralumla School submission to you. Together we agree that the early years of schooling are vitally important regardless of which primary school families choose. So unless there is demand for an Early Childhood School why would the government be considering this move. If the government wants to strengthen the 'early years schooling' then do so by trialing strategies in some sites, which could include Yarralumla.

It is unclear why the proposed model for Yarralumla Early Childhood School is P-year 3 when the existing early childhood school and the Departmental curriculum documents focus on the development stage of P-year 2. This lack of consistency seems to suggest that this proposal, and the others proposed for Canberra, are adhoc and opportunistic, rather than a considered approach based on clear evidence that it will support children's education.

An Alternative Option

We understand the government is concerned about three issues:

- . making cost savings;
- . the viability of the Yarralumla school; and
- . expanding the Early Childhood schooling model in the southside of Canberra, although not in every region which is confusing in itself.

In short, if there is actual community demand for an Early Childhood school, our alternative proposal could deliver real monetary savings by creating a vibrant Early Childhood School that is not constrained in size by the accommodation available at the Forrest site for senior students. The alternative proposal potentially rationalises sites from three to two providing opportunities to realise one site for other purposes. It also expands choices available to Yarralumla families and families in the broader community who may wish to access an Early Childhood School.

Importantly, any dedicated Early Childhood School needs to be appropriately supported and resourced. The family and health support services must be established on site as a single one-stop shop. There must be viable and sustainable student numbers - your proposal fails to detail the numbers of students needed and the proposed catchment area - for this proposed school. If the government is not committed to this investment, our community believes that it should abandon its plan for the Early Childhood School.

The attachment provides detail of our proposed alternative option for your consideration. We have discussed these alternatives within our community, and with other schools, with high levels of support.

In Summary

. One school across two sites does not equal growing enrolments as stated in the Towards 2020 Plan, in fact quite the opposite. If the Year 4-6 children need to be accommodated at Forrest then the size of the Yarralumla Early Childhood School will always be capped. In addition, our consultations show that a portion of these families will move straight to the private school system at year 3 or earlier.

. Will 2020 Plan proposal enhance family choice? Not necessarily for Yarralumla families if they don't want the Forrest school. Not for 'out of area' families who would otherwise be able to choose Forrest School. Not for the Canberra community if they don't want an Early Childhood school.

. Will your proposal create better education outcomes for Canberra children? There is no evidence in the 2020 Plan proposal of this, particularly as it is inconsistent with the Departmental curriculum documents and existing models for early childhood schools. Furthermore there are risks in the proposal for the children of the existing Yarralumla and Forrest primary schools both in transitioning between schools, as in the case of Yarralumla, and with increased class sizes.

. The current timing of decisions in December 2006 and changes in 2007/2008 leave little room for planning for families and school communities, whether they are preschools, primary or high schools. Our children and families deserve better than rushed transition arrangements.

We appreciate that a vibrant and contemporary public education in the ACT is a must for the future and that change is inevitable. Our alternative proposal does not ignore this reality; in fact it addresses the issues where they exist and puts forward better solutions, not compromised outcomes.

We are always available to discuss this proposal with you or your department. To arrange this discussion please contact Robyn Calder, Vice President, Forrest P&C Association on 0438 200 590.

Yours faithfully

Carl Binning
President
Forrest Primary P&C Association

September 2006

Cc Ms Michelle Bruniges, Chief Executive ACT Department of Education and Training

Cc Ms Joanne Howard, Director, ACT Department of Education and Training

Cc Mr Paul Henryon, Principal, Forrest Primary School

Cc Ms Sue Nott, Principal, Yarralumla Primary School

Cc Ms Sue Lindsay, President, Yarralumla Primary P&C Association

A Proposed Way Forward – Forrest Primary, Yarralumla Primary and Deakin Preschool

A vibrant and contemporary public education system, should offer choice, it should also respect and encourage family connectedness and value children. The system also needs to be workable and attractive to keep the best teachers and support them to get better.

The following proposal does just that.

It has the potential to reduce costs across the system in the long term. It enables leaders to use their valuable time in their schools, not travelling between them. It broadens the choice for families and respects their priorities and demands. Importantly it puts the children at the centre.

1. If the Government is committed to this direction, it should flag intentions to establish a southside Early Childhood School on the existing Yarralumla Primary site beginning in 2009, subject to demand.

- . Seek potential enrolments in January 2007 and in July 2007, based on the response, make the decision whether or not to proceed. There is little point initiating a new school model, and hoping that families will arrive, far better to know it is a viable operating entity.
- . Any childhood school should be managed independently from neighbouring schools, as there is no apparent cost advantage in managing them together.
- . Managed independently, alongside the proposed details below, an Early Childhood school could grow well beyond, the current Yarralumla Primary figures.
- . Yarralumla Primary should remain open until it possibly reverts to an Early Childhood School in 2009. If there is little demand for the new school model, a decision should be taken in mid 2007 to close Yarralumla primary to realise potential savings or continue to operate this school as it is currently.

2. Families of the existing Yarralumla ‘in area’ school zone, should be given ‘priority enrolment status’ for Forrest Primary, Curtin Primary, Hughes Primary schools, as well as the possible new Early Childhood School at Yarralumla.

- . This provides maximum choice for these displaced families, who may prefer not to cross major access ways (Adelaide Avenue), have their children close to their workplaces (Civic, Barton or Woden) or a smaller school environment of the Hughes Primary School
- . Further this displacement of students will have minimal disruption for the other schools listed, two of which (Curtin and Forrest schools) are already close to capacity with ongoing waiting lists.

3. To avoid any reduced access to the Forrest Primary School one or two additional classroom facilities should be developed on site. Concurrently, the school hall should be redesigned to accommodate the entire school population.

- . A large number of families choose to have their children educated close to their workplaces to manage time pressures (70% of employment in Canberra remains in the Civic and Barton areas, and is expected to continue).
- . To accommodate new enrolments from Yarralumla, the existing level of access would need to be reduced. Given existing waiting lists, which will continue for the long term, consideration should be given minor permanent infrastructure enhancements. Demountables are not a long term solution, and will impact on the aesthetics of the school grounds.

4. The Deakin Preschool, in the first instance, should be amalgamated with any new Early Childhood School to build a strong collegiate team of early childhood teachers.

- . The preschool could stay on its current site or be relocated to the Yarralumla site.
- . Amalgamating the existing Yarralumla and Deakin preschools into any new Early Childhood School potentially increases costs to the government, as the parent community meets the current operational costs.
- . The preschool management structures need to be reconsidered given preschool parent committees provide significant direction at present. These could be amalgamated with any P&C for the Early Childhood School.
- . If the Early Childhood School does not proceed, further consideration should be given to having this preschool managed by one of the existing Primary schools.
- . Any facility expansion at the Forrest School could be extended to include a preschool facility, thereby freeing up the existing preschool site for other community uses.

5. The schools in the district should be encouraged to continue and enhance any professional collaboration to support pedagogy and curriculum. Further if the cost savings need to be made, then provide the school management with the flexibility and responsibilities to decide how this could be achieved.

- . Investing in our teachers will enhance student learning. The pace of technology alone dictates the need for continued collaboration and enhanced teaching environments.
- . School management is best positioned to identify ways to enhance educational environments and given the opportunity could identify creative solutions with their communities.