



HALL PUBLIC SCHOOL

1911 TO 2011 AND BEYOND



A Submission to the *Towards 2020* Taskforce

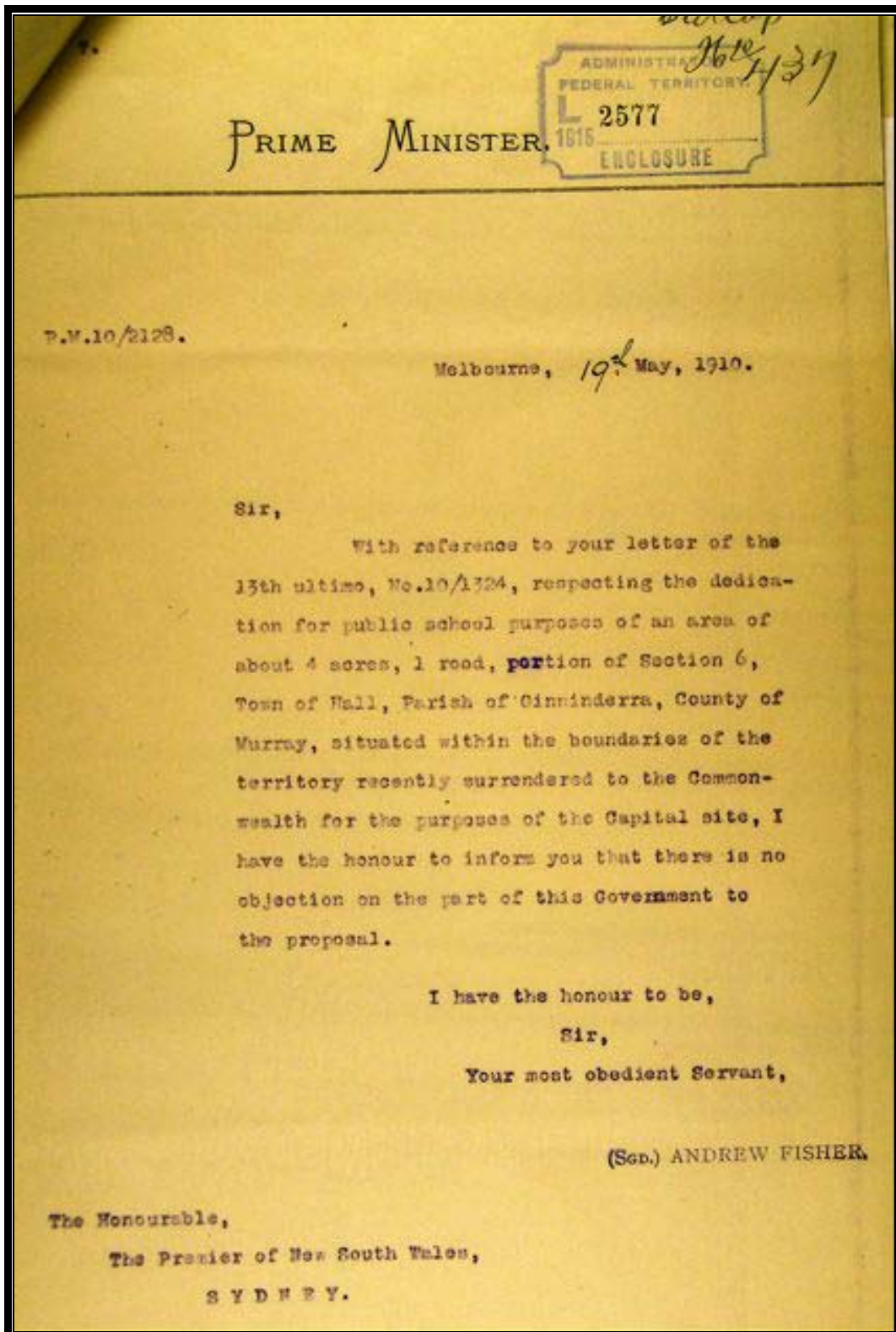
from

Hall Primary School P&C Association Inc.

Hall Preschool Parents Association Inc.

Hall Primary School Board

(On behalf of parents and members of the
Hall Primary and Hall Preschool communities
and the broader Hall region.)



Reproduction of Letter dated 19 May 1910 from Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher to the Premier of New South Wales agreeing to the establishment of a public school at Hall in the newly proclaimed national capital territory.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hall Public School comprising Hall Primary and Hall Preschool (Hall PS) is a heritage listed school located in a rural village setting on the fringe of the Canberra suburban area. For 95 years Hall PS has been opening its doors to the children of the surrounding region, some of whom are descendents of the school's founding fathers.

Hall PS provides families in Gungahlin and northwest Belconnen with diversity by offering the opportunity for choice of a smaller, community based school for their children's preschool and primary education.

With the Laurie Copping Heritage Centre (the Museum) at its heart, Hall PS is a living heritage education resource and provides an essential learning environment, not just for the students at Hall PS, but for the ACT and surrounding communities.

Our vision for Hall PS is its continued operation as a P-6 school with a strong focus on early childhood education. With the primary school, preschool and out of school hours care services all located within the school grounds, Hall PS is ideally positioned to adopt the Government's vision of a seamless curriculum for early childhood education.

We shall maintain our strong focus on the core curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy, achieving the quality educational outcomes our parents have come to expect for their children, whilst continuing to adapt our programs as the ACT education system's curriculum evolves. The Key Learning Areas will continue to be well supported alongside the varied extra-curricula activities including music, sport, the arts and special interest areas. We also envisage taking advantage of our rural connections to expand our agri-environmental focus, developing units of study that may be used by other ACT schools.

Hall PS has an exemplary and enviable record of family and community support. This support is demonstrated by: assistance in the classroom and at school events including sports carnivals and concerts; participation on the School Board and P&C; above average rates of voluntary contributions; and commitment to fundraising activities.

To address the physical requirements of the school buildings, we will pursue a variety of funding sources, including establishment of a School Building Fund, applying for heritage and other suitable grants and the development of innovative funding arrangements such as public/private partnerships.

Hall PS is essential to the economic and social well-being of the Hall community. The school and the activity it generates are vital to maintaining a vibrant local community and maintaining the village character of Hall.

The physical separation of Hall Village from suburban Canberra coupled with the loss of Hall PS would have a devastating impact on the lifestyle and well-being of the elderly residents of Hall Village. Given that there is no ACT public transport available to them, these residents rely heavily on the social interaction between Hall PS and the community. Also, local businesses would experience declining patronage and subsequent financial loss.

Hall PS is committed to working with the ACT Government to capitalise on the community support for the school in a way that meets the Government's fiscal requirements and also takes advantage of all Hall PS can offer.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 *That Hall PS continues operating as a P-6 primary school within the ACT public education system.*
- 2.1 *That Hall PS and the Laurie Copping Heritage Centre be further developed as a living education/heritage resource for the ACT public education system and for the ACT tourism sector.*
- 2.2 *That Hall PS pilot the emerging early childhood education program and curriculum.*
- 2.3 *That Hall PS continue its focus on core curriculum and providing rich experiences for students in broader curriculum areas whilst maintaining its successful values and student welfare programs.*
- 2.4 *That Hall PS further develop its rural and environmental programs as an education resource for the wider ACT public education system.*
- 3.1 *That Hall PS, as a small school within a small rural village community, be recognised as an essential element in the ACT public education system.*
 - 3.2.1 *That Hall PS extend its Cottage Care before and after school care services to include preschool students.*
 - 3.2.2 *That Hall PS participate in developing Government strategies to market public education.*
- 3.3 *That the traditional catchment area to the north and west of Hall Village be recognised as belonging to the Priority Enrolment Area for Hall PS.*
 - 3.4.1 *That curriculum development be undertaken on a cluster or regional basis.*
 - 3.4.2 *That Hall PS work with others schools both within and across clusters to establish a system for sharing specialist teachers.*
 - 3.5.1 *That Hall PS work with others schools both within and across clusters to establish a system for sharing administrative services such as janitorial staff and office staff.*
 - 3.5.2 *That Hall PS community work with the ACT Government to negotiate an appropriate contribution of additional resources from the NSW Government to the ACT public education system.*
 - 3.5.3 *That Hall P&C Association pursue funding to build a bus shelter and covered walkways as a priority.*
 - 3.5.2 *That Hall PS pursue the feasibility of re-equipping the Hall Pavilion for use as the Hall PS school hall.*

LIST OF APPENDICES (available on request to P&C Council)

Appendix 1	Hall School – A Brief History.	Prepared by Jo Hall, Hall Village Resident and Mother of Andrew (14) and Rania (10).
Appendix 2	Heritage Implications Regarding Hall Village.	Prepared by Jo Hall, Hall Village Resident and Mother of Andrew (14) and Rania (10).
Appendix 3	The Laurie Copping Heritage Centre – A Treasure Trove for Students and Teachers – Notes on Museum Open Day, Sunday, 1 October 2006.	Elizabeth Burness, Storyteller/ Teacher/Illustrator, 'History With A Difference' and Voluntary Curator, Laurie Copping Heritage Centre.
Appendix 4	Educational Opportunities for the Laurie Copping Heritage Centre (Hall School Museum).	Prepared by Helen White, retired Teacher and Hall Village Resident.
Appendix 5	The Man Who Saved His Old School.	Article by Sally Hopman, Canberra Times, Sunday 19 July 1998.
Appendix 6	'Once Upon a Time at School' – Handout for Students Visiting the Hall School Museum on Rural Heritage Celebration Day, 3 November 2006.	Prepared by Elizabeth Burness, Storyteller/ Teacher/Illustrator, 'History With A Difference' and Voluntary Curator, Laurie Copping Heritage Centre.
Appendix 7	Hall Primary School Programs and P&C Services and Activities.	Prepared by Jennifer Lewis, Mother of Ben (11) and Jack (8), and Maryann Harris, Mother of Sean (12), Aidan (11) and Erin (9).
Appendix 8	Choice and Diversity – the role of Hall Primary and Preschool.	Prepared by Rebecca Smith, Hall Village Resident and parent of two former Hall PS students.
Appendix 9	Hall and Surrounding Region Survey, October 2006.	Co-ordinated by Anita Kilby, Mother of Sam (13) and Jack (11).
Appendix 10	Educational Outcomes and Goals.	Prepared by Hugh Watson, Hall Village Resident and father of 3 former Hall PS students.
Appendix 11	No Educational Rationale for School Closures.	Dr Ian Morgan, 27 August 2006.
Appendix 12	Geography and Demographics – the role of Hall PS in the ACT Region.	Prepared by Rebecca Smith, Hall Village Resident and Mother of two former Hall PS students.
Appendix 13	Letter to Editor, Canberra Times.	Tony Morris, Hall Village Resident, Wednesday, 5 July 2006.
Appendix 14	Costs and Cost Reduction Strategies.	Prepared by Leigh Crocker, Father of Georgia (8), Emma (6) and Tekla (3), Kirsty Windeyer, Mother of Charlotte (7), Jessica (4) and Harrison (1), and Rebecca Smith, Hall Village Resident and Mother of 2 former Hall PS students..
Appendix 15	Social, Economic, Health and Environmental Impacts of Closing Hall PS.	Prepared by Mary Hyndman-Rizik, Grandmother of Oliver (9), Saami (7) and Amani (3); and David Vernon, Father of Michael (8) and Jonathan (5).

1. Introduction

Continued operation of Hall Public School (comprising Hall Primary and Hall Preschool) as a P-6 public school is considered the best option for all stakeholders, and accords with the Government's *Towards 2020* catchcry of 'Choice, Diversity and Opportunity'.

Recommendation 1.1: That Hall PS continues operating as a P-6 primary school within the ACT public education system.

Hall Public School (Hall PS), as a smaller rural based and heritage rich P-6 school is an invaluable and essential learning environment and education resource within a strong, diverse and high quality ACT public education system. The school provides an early childhood focus with strong emphasis on core curriculum. Hall PS is committed to supporting all students to become responsible, independent and caring citizens who value learning and are equipped to effectively contribute to a changing society.

As one of very few ACT Schools with a student capacity less than 200, Hall PS provides families in Gungahlin and northwest Belconnen with **diversity** by offering the **opportunity** for **choice** of a smaller, community based school for their children's preschool and primary education. The continuation of this option is essential as parents investigate, consider and carefully choose what they believe to be the best educational environment for their children.

The body of our submission addresses four aspects:

Our Vision – Hall PS 1911-2011 and Beyond

Our proposal for the continued operation and development of Hall PS as a P-6 school and heritage education resource within the ACT public education system. (Section 2)

Towards 2020 Proposal – Issues for Hall PS

A discussion of the issues and suggested strategies to deal with challenges specific to Hall PS identified as a result of the *Towards 2020* proposal and our subsequent fact/information gathering endeavours. (Section 3)

Towards 2020 Proposal – Impact on Hall Community

This section deals with the importance of Hall PS to the Hall Village and District and the serious social, economic and financial impacts on these communities should Hall PS close. (Section 4)

System Wide Issues of the Towards 2020 Proposal

A brief discussion on issues which have implications for the ACT public education system as a whole. (Section 5)

Our position and submission are based on:

- views and concerns of our families and students;
- extensive discussions within and between the Hall Primary School P&C Association, the Hall Preschool Parents Association, the Hall Primary School Board and the wider school community;
- discussions with and surveys of members of the school community, residents of Hall Village and broader district community;
- attendance at government community consultation forums and expert education seminars;
- meetings and/or discussions with various MLAs (both Government and Opposition);
- meetings and/or discussions with Department of Education staff;
- meetings and/or discussions with representatives of other school parent bodies;

- visits to other schools and discussions with parents and staff of those schools;
- research on relevant issues (eg, DET website, media articles, research papers); and
- reference to relevant Acts and Guidelines.

We have done our best given the time, resources and information available to us.

2. OUR VISION – Hall PS 1911-2011 and Beyond

Our vision for Hall PS is:

- a public school where parents will be queuing to enrol their children to take advantage of its uniqueness and quality educational outcomes;
- a community school, taking advantage of the very high level of community support and parental involvement in the school;
- a small school, offering choice for parents seeking to have their children educated in the supportive and caring environment that a small school offers;
- operating with an enrolment of 170 students in the primary school and all preschool places filled;
- an efficiently run school, exploiting the high level of parental involvement, and reducing operating costs by sharing administrative and specialist resources with other schools;
- taking advantage of the P&C's on-site before and after school care service (Cottage Care) to pioneer the development of early childhood learning programs;
- using the rural nature of the school to develop rural education resources for the ACT public education system, including farm visits and specialist rural education courses; and
- proudly educating residents on both sides of the ACT/NSW border, with appropriate input from the NSW education system.

Hall PS is the oldest continuously operating public school in the ACT and is due to celebrate its centenary in 2011. A brief history of the school and The Laurie Copping Heritage Centre (Museum) is set out in Appendix 1.

Hall PS is unique in the ACT. As a heritage listed, smaller, community based school located in a rural village setting on the fringe of the Canberra suburban area, it provides choice and diversity not available at other schools. Our school must be maintained and further developed as an invaluable living heritage education resource and an essential learning environment for the ACT and surrounding communities.

2.1 A Living Heritage and Education Resource

Recommendation 2.1: That Hall PS and the Laurie Copping Heritage Centre be further developed as a living education/heritage resource for the ACT public education system and for the ACT tourism sector.

Hall PS (the grounds and all buildings including the Museum) is listed in the ACT Heritage Register as part of the Heritage Listing of Hall Village Precinct. It is the only ACT school to have full heritage listing.

The opportunity to maintain the school and the museum as living heritage features for the ACT should not be discarded. A heritage listed school successfully functioning as a school within the public education system has more value to the ACT than just the shell of its buildings. The ACT has a unique opportunity to sustain a vital link to its history and the importance of public education. (See Appendix 2.)

Heritage listing means that the school and Museum are eligible for Heritage Advisory Service support and funding from the Heritage Grants Program; and the site must be maintained for community use in perpetuity.

The collection of historical artefacts, books, photographs, etc, held in the Museum represents a wonderful resource for researchers. This resource can be used to develop programs for use by all educational institutions, both public and private, from preschool through primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

The value of the Museum's collection and strategies to promote its use by education researchers, teachers, students, and community groups is set out in more detail in Appendix 3, Appendix 4 and Appendix 5.

Hall PS will host a Rural Heritage Celebration Day on Friday, 3 November, an event which exemplifies the way the Museum can be a catalyst for educational opportunities. Students and teachers from seven schools have been invited to join our students in celebrating our region's heritage. Students will: visit the museum schoolhouse to experience a typical school day in the early 1900s (Appendix 6); participate in traditional games; enjoy a taste of damper; and witness sheep shearing and whip cracking. It is intended that this will be the first of many such educational days for ACT students.

2.2 Early Childhood Focus

Recommendation 2.2: That Hall PS pilot the emerging early childhood education program and curriculum.

Hall PS is ideally situated to meet the challenges of the fast emerging National and Territory focus on Early Childhood Education.

Viable options within a Hall PS P-6 environment include:

- a full time preschool with mixed session types (two full day sessions or three half day sessions) and a Playgroup operating from our on-site before and after school care centre (The Cottage); or,
- a part time preschool with Playgroup and/or Playschool on non-preschool days.

From our research and discussions regarding this topic, we have identified two key elements of this early childhood focus. The first is the development of a 'seamless' pathway and curriculum for the Preschool to Year 2 education band (4 to 8 years old) within the ACT public education system. The second is the significantly increased investment needed in training and professionally developing appropriately qualified staff.

Although *Towards 2020* includes several Early Childhood Schools, there is no consistency in the models being proposed – they include P-2, P-3 and P-4 schools. Projected enrolments at these schools range from 75 to 150. We understand that there is currently no system wide plan to implement the Early Childhood School model or to assess its success. Also, it is understood that all P-6 schools and the current and yet to be constructed P-10 schools, will be implementing the early childhood education focus.

With the preschool being located within the primary school grounds, Hall PS is an ideal site to pilot the implementation of the early childhood seamless curriculum within a P-6 school. An early childhood focus does not necessarily require a structural segregation for students. There are advantages for retaining Years 3 to 6 at Hall PS for the younger students (buddy system and role models), the older students (mentoring and leadership opportunities) and for maintaining parental involvement from preschool through to Year 6.

From a parental perspective, Hall PS has operated informally as a P-6 school for many years. Close ties and co-operation between both parent associations and shared experiences involving preschool and junior primary classes already exist.

2.3 Focus on Core Curriculum Areas

Recommendation 2.3: That Hall PS continue its focus on core curriculum and providing rich experiences for students in broader curriculum areas whilst maintaining its successful values and student welfare programs.

Hall PS is a smaller, rural community based school which supports and promotes innovation and lifelong learning. At Hall PS we strive to satisfy the needs and appreciate the unique qualities of each student. We recognise that education is a collective responsibility. We offer a balanced program that supports students to become responsible, independent and caring citizens who value learning and are well equipped to effectively contribute to a changing society.

To achieve this, Hall PS places strong emphasis on the core curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy as these represent crucial building blocks for a student's further learning. A belief held by many experts in the field of education is that primary schools should concentrate on the development of basic skills (that is, literacy and numeracy).¹ Hall PS also provides successful programs in the broader curriculum areas of Science & Technology, ICT, SOSE, Health and Personal Development, and the Arts. Students participate in: PSSA events; Music in Primary & Secondary Schools; UNSW Australasian Schools Competitions; band programs; Chess Club; Science Club; annual pottery, photography and art show; and much more.

At Hall PS we implement a student well-being model and program called "Standing Tall at Hall", incorporating the *SCARF Values* and *Bounce Back! Resiliency Program*².

We are able to take advantage of the small school size to encourage and teach social skills, protective behaviours and anti-bullying strategies to ensure that students have the skills to deal appropriately with problems and to ensure a safe and secure school environment. With these programs in place, we provide children with opportunities to succeed and develop self-esteem. Consequently, student management is a significantly smaller part of our school model.

2.4 Rural/Environmental Education Program

Recommendation 2.4 That Hall PS further develop its rural and environmental programs as an education resource for the wider ACT public education system.

The school's agri-environmental focus developed from when it became the first ACT school to form a Junior Landcare group in 1990. Hall PS continues to be involved in projects with Greening Australia, Waterwatch, the International River Health Conference, Waterbug Snapshot, Clean Up Australia Day and so on.

Hall PS will increase its value to the public education system by strengthening existing environmental education programs and links with the surrounding rural area. Parental involvement will be used as a catalyst to forge links with regional agricultural colleges and schools, developing units of study for ACT schools. Community and particularly parent involvement will be used to develop courses and farm visits to help ACT students to

¹ Educational Seminar on Shaping the Future of Public Education in the ACT, 29 August 2006.

² Helen McGrath and Toni Noble, 2003.

appreciate the rural community and the entrepreneurial and employment opportunities it offers. Topics envisaged here include: animal husbandry; agriculture; forestry; and farming technology and methods.

The *Towards 2020* process has mobilised the Hall community and parents and reinforced the importance and uniqueness of Hall PS to the community. The Government now has the opportunity to capitalise on this mobilisation and further develop Hall PS in a way that will strengthen its unique role in the ACT public education system. The Hall community and P&C have a history of committed and ongoing involvement in the school, maybe more than any other school in the ACT. The community and P&C want to work with the ACT Government to show how, at very little cost to the Government, Hall PS can greatly enhance choice, diversity and opportunity within the ACT public education system.

The Hall PS curriculum and the extra curricular activities and programs offered by the school and its P&C are discussed in more detail in Appendix 7.

3. TOWARDS 2020 – ISSUES FOR HALL PS

This section of our submission discusses the issues and challenges specific to Hall PS and identifies strategies to establish it as an integral part of the ACT public education system.

3.1 Choice, Diversity and Opportunity

Recommendation 3.1: That Hall PS, as a small school within a small rural village community, be recognised as an essential element in the ACT public education system.

The ACT Government is committed to providing a public education system that offers choice and diversity. The advantages of providing choice and diversity are discussed in Appendix 8 and include: increased participation of students, parents and families in school programs and activities; improvements in school achievements and student behaviour; improved teacher morale; and more positive attitudes towards teachers.

As a small school within a small rural village community, Hall PS holds a unique position in the ACT education system and is therefore an essential element in the provision of a full range of learning environments for parents and students.

Overwhelming support for Hall PS is demonstrated by the 4,392 individuals who endorsed our petition³ calling for the retention of Hall PS. A survey conducted by Hall PS P&C of Hall district residents about their education choices for their children and their employment, business and social links to the ACT clearly indicate that the choice of a small, rural community based school is highly valued. The comments provided by respondents illustrate their perception of themselves as being a part of the Canberra community. (See Appendix 9)

The advantages of small schools in terms of educational outcomes and social wellbeing of students is widely documented. Appendix 10 discusses these issues further. Small schools can produce outstanding and rounded educational outcomes and do not suffer many of the social impediments of larger schools. They provide a safer, saner education.

There is no general consensus as to what constitutes a small school. Some researchers argue that the optimum size for primary schools is 300-400 students. However, there is growing support for a move towards small, neighbourhood schools with an average enrolment of 200. Research is showing that small schools provide better educational

³ Petition tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly by Ms Mary Porter, AM, MLA on Wednesday, 16 August 2006.

outcomes for some students, better participation rates in extra-curricular activities and provide a safer environment for children.⁴

The advantages of small schools are also highlighted by Dr Ian Morgan in his paper titled “No Educational Rationale for School Closures”, 27 August 2006 (Appendix 11).

The nature of small schools where all teachers interact with all students, enables students experiencing difficulties to be easily identified and supported. Children in smaller schools are accepting of individual needs both within the classroom and in the playground. Small schools provide a very supportive environment for special needs students whose families wish them to remain in mainstream classes.

Hall PS offers both composite and single year class groups. Composite classes can be advantageous for both students and teachers. For students, a composite class allows for acceptance of differing skill levels among classmates where those who have attained a specific skill level, regardless of age, can work together. As in single year classes, teachers must provide diverse and challenging programs for every student based on individual learning abilities and needs.

When questioned on the issue of seeking to close small schools, particularly those with enrolments below 200, the Government has repeatedly stated that *Towards 2020* is ‘not a cost cutting exercise’ and that ‘this is not a one size fits all model’. The Government has also stated that ‘small schools have a role to play in a strong and vibrant public education system’⁵.

Small schools enjoy committed parent and community support. Hall PS has an exemplary and enviable record of parent, family and community support. The P&C Association enjoys a very successful record in raising funds to augment school resources and support school activities. In recent years, annual totals of \$9,000 to \$15,000 have been raised which is, pro rata, above the ACT average. The school has no difficulty in filling School Board positions and the average annual rate of voluntary contributions received is 70%, almost double the ACT average.

At Hall PS, parents are involved in their children’s education on a daily basis, assisting with reading and maths groups, participating in sporting events, art & craft enrichment programs; and, assisting with other events such as concerts and assemblies.

Hall Preschool enjoys the same level of parental commitment, both financial and in the classroom.

3.2 Capacity and Demographics

Hall PS capacity has been identified as 175 and with a 2006 enrolment of 128 is operating at 73% of that capacity. Hall Preschool capacity is 40 (based on two sessions of 20 students, if operating as a full time preschool), not 50 as stated in the DET documents. Hall Preschool currently operates part-time. Its 2006 enrolment of 15 represents 75% of its part-time capacity.

There is no conclusive evidence of a declining enrolment trend. In 1986 Hall PS enrolment was 128 and during most of the 1990s, student numbers were in the 140s. Enrolments have moved from 140 in 2001, to 165 in 2003, 110 in 2005 and 128 in 2006. Hall Preschool enrolments have ranged from 15 in some years to 20 (with a waiting list) in other

⁴ “Ten Educational Trends Shaping School Planning & Design”, Kenneth R. Stevenson, Ed.D., Department of Educational Leadership and Policies, College of Education, University of South Carolina, September 2002).

⁵ FAQs, DET Website, FAQs regarding proposed closure of Ginninderra District High School and construction of new West Belconnen P-10 school).

years. Over the past 10 years, preschool enrolments have averaged 18 which equates to 90% of its part-time capacity.

The Gungahlin-Hall District has the second fastest growing population (behind Barton) in the ACT⁶. Given the current rate of population growth in the Gungahlin-Hall District and the fast growing rural residential developments in the Murrumbateman area, it is inevitable that the number of families choosing to enrol their children at Hall PS will rise in the coming years.

Strategies to increase enrolment numbers closer to Hall PS capacity of 215 (primary 175 and preschool 40) include improved marketing of the school and its programs, further development of the Hall PS website and extending out of school hours care to preschoolers. We plan to provide centre-based childcare services for preschool children in conjunction with our current out of school hours care program. Preliminary discussions held with relevant Territory and Federal agencies indicate that our plans are feasible.

Recommendation 3.2.1: That Hall PS extend its Cottage Care before and after school care services to include preschool students.

We welcome Ministerial/Departmental offers of assistance to develop school websites as marketing tools. We are committed to ensuring a vibrant and relevant public education system. We look forward to working with the Minister next year in marketing public education in the ACT.

Recommendation 3.2.2: That Hall PS participate in developing Government strategies to market public education.

3.3 NSW Resident Students

The high percentage of NSW resident students and the significant number of out-of-area ACT enrolments at Hall PS, combined with the apparent low level of support from in-area students attending other public schools, have been raised as issues of concern for Hall PS.

When considering statistics relating to these issues, the difference between the official Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) for Hall PS and its traditional catchment area must be considered. The official PEA for Hall PS encompasses the Village of Hall and the surrounding rural areas within the ACT, a total population of 400 persons. However, since opening its doors 95 years ago, Hall PS has educated residents in NSW to the north and west of Hall, including Wallaroo, Kaveney's, Nanima and Spring Range Roads as well as the Murrumbateman area. These issues are discussed in Appendix 12.

The extremely small official PEA population means that out-of-area enrolment percentages for Hall PS are greatly inflated. Inclusion of the region's traditional catchment area within Hall's PEA, irrespective of an arbitrary line drawn on a map, would give a more accurate figure.

Recommendation 3.3: That the traditional catchment area to the north and west of Hall Village be recognised as belonging to the Priority Enrolment Area for Hall PS.

For residents of Hall Village and District, the political boundary between the ACT and NSW is nothing more than an administrative border. It does not in any way form a physical

⁶ Population Projections for Canberra Suburbs and Districts, 2004-2014, Demographics, Chief Minister's Department Website)

boundary between the local community resident in the ACT and the local community resident in NSW. Community members regard themselves first and foremost as residents of the Hall Village and District, regardless of administrative arrangements. (See Appendix 13.)

Indeed the Postmaster-General recognised the integration of Hall Village and District when the postcode of 2618 was allocated to the entire district in 1967. It is one of the very few Australian postcodes that ignore State and Territory boundaries. Postcodes were allocated on the basis of commonality of interest within a geographical district.

The exclusion of NSW residents from the Hall PS PEA is contrary to the principles of choice, equity and right of reasonable access to quality education which underpin the ACT public education system. It should be acknowledged that should Hall PS close, students resident in NSW will simply enrol in other ACT schools, not necessarily achieving any significant cost savings to the ACT budget. This is demonstrated by the cost/student figures at schools in adjacent regions:

- Gold Creek \$10,786;
- Ngunnawal \$8,782;
- Palmerston \$8,888;
- Evatt \$10,524; and,
- Maribyrnong \$11,481.

The difference between the cost of educating NSW students in the ACT public education system and the monies received for this purpose, via the Commonwealth Grants Commission, is discussed in Section 3.5 along with options for sourcing additional funding.

3.4 Educational Issues

The Government has stated that 'a viable school is one that is able to offer a broad curriculum and broad educational opportunities.....small schools may limit the opportunities for students to access and participate in a rich curriculum and all key learning areas'⁷.

Appendix 10 sets out how Hall PS meets the stated purpose, vision and priorities of the ACT public education system. In summary, the best outcome for our children is what we already have – a school that has met community needs for almost a century, a school that has adjusted to meet increasing educational demands, and a school that has retained a close, caring and friendly culture in an increasingly individual-dominated world.

The responsibility for curriculum development places a large burden on small schools and their staff. We welcome indications from the Department that it is moving to implement curriculum development on a cluster or regional basis instead of at individual school level.

Recommendation 3.4.1: That curriculum development be undertaken on a cluster or regional basis.

To ensure the provision of as broad a curriculum as possible, we will be seeking to share specialist teaching resources with other schools in the surrounding areas.

Recommendation 3.4.2: That Hall PS work with others schools both within and across clusters to establish a system for sharing specialist teachers.

Hall PS has installed modern IT infrastructure, equipment and resources. Interactive whiteboards are located in all teaching spaces and in the Library, the school's computer lab

⁷ DET *Towards 2020* website FAQ section.

was refurbished in 2005 and we have submitted an application for an *Investing In Our Schools Programme* grant that, if successful, will upgrade IT equipment in the computer lab and classrooms.

3.5 Financial Issues

Issues relating to school operating costs, building maintenance costs, construction of an appropriate school hall and refurbishment of existing buildings have been raised in conjunction with the *Towards 2020* proposal for Hall PS. Our comments and response in respect of each of these issues are set out in Appendix 14.

As demonstrated in Appendix 14, based on information made available, increasing primary student numbers to 170 (95% capacity) would decrease the cost per student at Hall PS to \$8647. This is well below the ACT average and substantially closes the gap between cost of educating NSW students and monies received via the Commonwealth Grants Commission. The development of a cost-reduction plan in conjunction with the Department of Education (DET) will further reduce costs and bridge this gap. Initiatives to be pursued include: sharing administrative staff (office manager, janitor) costs with other schools; sharing of specialist teachers with other schools; and negotiating for the NSW Government to directly fund a teacher for Hall PS. The negotiation of an equitable cross border agreement with the NSW Government including education services, is another avenue to be pursued. The Hall PS community is eager to assist in this matter.

Recommendation 3.5.1: That Hall PS work with others schools both within and across clusters to establish a system for sharing administrative services such as janitorial staff and office staff.

Recommendation 3.5.2: That Hall PS community work with the ACT Government to negotiate an appropriate contribution of additional resources from the NSW Government to the ACT public education system.

A building condition assessment of Hall PS buildings in July 2004 indicated that the buildings were on average below desired standards. A five year program to maintain the buildings at normal standards was proposed at a cost of \$143,800. This figure equates to a cost of \$3,375/m² that compares very favourably with many other ACT public schools (Appendix 14).

The Minister has also stated that Hall PS requires capital expenditure on an appropriate school hall, bus shelter, covered walkways between buildings, shade structures, and refurbishment of the toilet block. The presence of asbestos in the school buildings has also been mentioned.

It is a fact that many ACT public schools, including Hall PS, have buildings that could use an upgrade. However, we believe that Hall PS should not be closed because it has buildings that are ageing, an issue that goes hand in hand with the school's heritage status. Adequate ongoing maintenance is required for all buildings. In the case of a heritage site, this should be approached as a challenge to be met, not as a reason to close a unique school.

Funds for the construction of a bus shelter, covered walkways and shade structures can be sourced in various ways including: P&C fundraising activities and volunteer efforts; establishment of a School Building Fund (for which there is solid community support as shown by survey results reported in Appendix 9); applying for heritage and other suitable grants; and the development of innovative funding arrangements such as public/private partnerships.

Recommendation 3.5.3: That Hall P&C Association pursue funding to build a bus shelter and covered walkways as a priority.

A strong community commitment to identifying and accessing suitable funding sources is evident in the Hall community. Indeed, in 2005, Hall PS was successful in gaining an \$86,000 grant through the Federal *Investing In Our Schools Programme* for the construction of a shade structure over the playground equipment. This structure was designed to provide additional shaded areas for students and included provision for the collection and storage of rainwater as a first step in the upgrading of the school oval. These grant monies have been placed on hold by the Territory Government pending its decision on the *Towards 2020* proposal.

In respect of the construction of a school hall, the estimate of \$1.5m quoted by the Minister's staff seems extraordinarily high given the requirements of a school the size of Hall PS. Further investigation of this issue is needed. In any event, if capital funds are not available within the Education Budget, we and the Hall community can equip the Hall Pavilion to meet the needs of Hall PS for whole school events. Funding can be sourced through the means mentioned above. Although a school without a hall is not ideal, Hall without a school is unacceptable.

Recommendation 3.5.2: That Hall PS pursue the feasibility of re-equipping the Hall Pavilion for use as the Hall PS school hall.

The Government has also raised the presence of asbestos in Hall PS buildings as a matter of concern. Hall PS is not unique in this respect with many other schools and public buildings in the ACT also containing asbestos. We acknowledge the potential for asbestos to be a problem; however, we know that methods exist and are continually being improved for the containment of asbestos during necessary building works. In terms of IT technology and infrastructure, the use of wireless technology and use of external or internal conduits eliminate or minimise the need to disturb the asbestos.

4. TOWARDS 2020 PROPOSAL – Impact on Hall Community

Hall PS plays a vital role in the life of Hall Village district, it is essential to the economic and social well-being of the wider community. There is a danger that closing the school will have a detrimental effect on local businesses and would change Hall from village to dormitory suburb with serious consequences to the heritage nature of the village. The school and the activity it generates are vital to maintaining a vibrant local community and maintaining the village character of Hall.

The elderly residents of Hall Village rely on the social interaction between Hall PS and the community and the services provided by local businesses, particularly the post office and general store. The loss of these activities and services would have a devastating impact on their lifestyle and well-being. With no ACTION bus service available to them, these elderly residents would be left isolated.

The physical separation of Hall Village from suburban Canberra makes travel to and from school a more significant issue compared with students moving from one suburban school to the next. Children who are residents of Hall Village will no longer be able to walk to school. Children currently travelling by bus to Hall PS will be faced with increased travel time exceeding the acknowledged maximum of 30 minutes for one-way travel between home and school.

We submit that a true cost/benefit analysis including all direct and indirect effects, both quantitative and qualitative, would support our position that the benefits of keeping Hall PS open far outweigh the costs.

The economic, environmental, health and social impact on students, families and the wider Hall and District community of the *Towards 2020* proposal are discussed in further detail in Appendix 15.

5. SYSTEM WIDE ISSUES OF THE *TOWARDS 2020* PROPOSAL

Many questions and concerns remain as to the rationale for the *Towards 2020* proposals. No assessment of the full costs and benefits of the proposal has been undertaken. Parents are concerned that Government is experimenting with their children's education.

The *Towards 2020* targets preschools and primary schools. However many of the issues raised as problems within the current system have more relevance to the secondary and college sectors. For example, the stated need for broad curriculum choices applies more to the secondary and college sectors rather than the P-6 years where a focus on basic skills is required.

The requirement for choice and diversity is not met by providing different models in different regions. This limits choice, as once commenced with a specific model, a student is tied into remaining with that model. To move suburbs and attend the local school would result in students entering an entirely different education model. To ensure equity of choice all models must be offered in each region.

Before any schools are closed or amalgamated or new schools built, there needs to be a thorough and detailed debate and analysis of all the issues from the ground up so that the most appropriate model for a vibrant, dynamic and successful public education system can be identified.

A recurrent theme in education forums has been the need for more investment in education, particularly in: the early childhood education programs; professional development of teachers; and provision of appropriate learning environments suited to individual student needs. Perhaps the higher cost of the ACT system is the premium which must be paid to achieve what the Minister has stated is the 'best public education system in Australia'.

6. CONCLUDING COMMENT

Hall PS is unique. Its blend of rural location, size and its history are features that can benefit public education right across the ACT. *Towards 2020* has highlighted to Hall parents and the wider Hall community the importance of the school within the region.

Hall P&C looks forward to working with the ACT Government to capitalise on the community support for the school in a way that meets the Government's fiscal requirements and also takes advantage of all Hall PS can offer.