

Secretary
Towards 2020 Submissions
Department of Education and Training
PO Box 1584
TUGGERANONG ACT 2901

Dear Secretary

Submission by Hughes Primary School Parents and Citizens Association

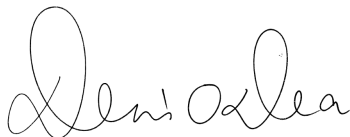
Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the ACT Government's proposal, *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools*.

On 24 September 2004, the Stanhope Labor Government released its Education Policy, 'ACT Labor's commitment to Education' as part of its re-election campaign. The policy emphasised the importance that a well-resourced education system provides to Canberra's intellectual and social development. It also emphasised the importance that the education system plays in Canberra's development as a city.

In the 2006-07 Budget the ACT Government announced the *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools* package which will allocate \$90m over the next four years for school infrastructure upgrades to enhance learning environments for students and teachers. The proposal also allocated \$20m to provide for information technology in schools. In addition to these amounts, the ACT Government will provide \$11.3m for capital works upgrading this financial year and, from 2008-09, an extra \$3m per annum to help maintain school infrastructure.

It is in the context of Labor's policy statement and the Government's policy commitment that Hughes Primary School P&C Association bases our submission (attached). I would be happy to discuss our submission with you at a mutually convenient time. I can be contacted on 0419 237 977.

Yours sincerely



Denis O'Dea
P&C President
Hughes Primary School Parents and Citizens Association
3 November 2006

Hughes Primary School Parents and Citizens Association

Submission

Our submission seeks to provide a quality education program to our children and future children who will attend Hughes Primary School to 2020. The submission also touches on broader issues associated with the provision of education services in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

We consider that a quality education program is delivered through the attraction and retention of quality staff; design and development of a tailored curriculum; and the provision of a high-quality learning environment.

Background

On 24 September 2004, the Stanhope Labor Government released its Education Policy, 'ACT Labor's commitment to Education' as part of its re-election campaign. The policy stated "*Schooling provides a foundation for young Canberrans' intellectual, physical, and social development. Providing a well resourced education system is vital. An excellent and professional learning environment contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future*" (p.2).

In the 2006-07 Budget the ACT Government announced the *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools* package which will provide "...the largest capital funding injection for education since self-government" by way of allocating over the next four years \$90m for school infrastructure upgrades to "...greatly enhance learning environments for students and teachers" and \$20m for provision of information technology in schools. In addition, the ACT Government will provide \$11.3m for capital works upgrading this financial year and from 2008-09 an extra \$3m per annum to help maintain school infrastructure.¹

It is in the context of Labor's policy statement and the Government's policy commitment that Hughes Primary School P&C Association bases our submission.

¹ *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools, p.1*

Attraction and retention of quality staff

People are attracted to an employer for a range of reasons. These could include: type of work, remuneration, conditions of service, quality of working environment and professional development opportunities. A workplace needs to be a place where people are supported by management to further develop their skills, expertise and experience so as to be able to make an effective contribution. It needs to be a place where they are able to have a sense of achievement and, thus, self-fulfilment.

To ensure that quality teachers remain in the public education service, it is vital to provide a standard of remuneration and conditions of employment that acknowledges this demanding career.

Community Value of the Teaching Profession – The community needs to demonstrate in a tangible way the value it places on education by giving teachers a solid pay increase without eroding working conditions. As such, we consider that funding teacher pay increases by cutting support staff in schools and staffing levels in the Department is not sound public policy. We believe that such measures would not enhance the quality of education in the ACT. In fact, these actions would reduce the level of support services provided to teachers and would adversely impact on their ability to deliver quality education outcomes.

School Administrative Staff – Schools are busy and demanding places. To ensure that teachers are able to focus on their core task – that of teaching – it is important that they have adequately funded administrative support. We recognise that administrative and support personnel at schools have an important role. They assist to deliver a quality education program to our children by reducing the administrative burdens from teaching staff.

Department of Education and Training Central Office Staffing – We consider that the Department's central office plays a very strong role in the overall administration of the education system in Canberra. It delivers solid results in key activities, such as policy advice and curriculum development. In this context, we are also concerned about the cut to staffing levels proposed for the Department's central office. We are very concerned that curriculum development will be cut. This is a key activity of the Department and such a cut would significantly impact on the work that the central office does in relation to the development of a high-quality curriculum in schools in the ACT.

Design, development and delivery of a quality education program through a tailored school-based curriculum

The ACT has been at the cutting edge of school-based curriculum development for decades. This has enabled schools to provide curriculum opportunities that address the specific education needs of the students in their care. At Hughes, the ability to deliver a tailored curriculum is extremely important, as staff have a wide multicultural student base that a curriculum needs to be designed for to deliver an effective education program.

Some of these students come from education systems in other western industrialised democracies, such as Europe, Japan and North America. Many other students come from countries which have far less sophisticated education systems than that of countries in the OECD. Students from South Asia, South-East Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East present particular challenges for the school. Only a school-based curriculum is able to address their needs.

We know, from parental feedback, that we are currently addressing the needs of students. A centrally driven curriculum would place rigidities in the curriculum which would reduce the quality of education that the school provides.

As can be seen from the above a 'one size fits all' curriculum would not work in the context of a school like Hughes Primary.

Provision of a high-quality learning environment

Successive governments have not undertaken any significant upgrades to facilities at Hughes Primary School for many years. Allocations from the Board, assisted by fundraising efforts of the P&C, have made some contribution to improving the School's amenities. The Board and the P&C have funded a number of projects including upgrades to the School's computing program, mathematics and reading resources, sports equipment, as well as smaller and on-going projects. The School's capacity to allocate funds for major facilities renewal is limited by tight budgets.

Currently, Hughes Primary School offers placement for Kindergarten to Year 6 pupils. However, as outlined in *Towards 2020* it is stated that: "*By 2008, it is expected that all primary schools will incorporate the preschool years, creating P-6 schools.*"

Given that there are anticipated school closures at Melrose Primary School and Chifley and South Curtin preschools, Hughes Primary School expects to experience an increase in student numbers in coming years. To meet these new demands we would seek a commitment from the Government that any changes to the building, to accommodate

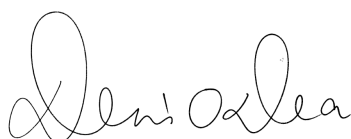
new students, be fully funded so that all students (current and future) are provided with learning environments that have the appropriate infrastructure.

We also urge the Government to increase the capital investment in our school to renew facilities (such as, new playground equipment, classroom refurbishment, and additional installation of interactive whiteboards). The majority of our other immediate needs are concerned with providing sunshade protection, improving student safety, enhancing security, facilitating environmental improvements, and landscaping to ensure the efficient use of water (these are outlined further in the attached annex).

Conclusion

The Government's *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools* package represents the most significant change to the delivery of education services in the ACT ever. We consider that, in the context of the above issues, *Towards 2020* represents a significant opportunity for the Government to demonstrate its commitment to the education service it delivers to the Canberra community. It also offers an excellent opportunity for the Government to create a public education system that is the standard-setter for the other states and the Northern Territory to aspire to.

We believe that education should not be seen as an expense, but rather as an investment in the development of our children. We consider that a quality education provides the foundation that ensures children have the lifelong capability to contribute to the long-term wealth of Australia.



Denis O'Dea

P&C President

Hughes Primary School Parents and Citizens Association

3 November 2006

Annex 1 – Facility improvements and renewal of equipment

Major Capital Upgrades

- **Classrooms and Internal Hallway** – Refurbish classrooms. Refurbish corridor of main building of school.
- **Playground Equipment** – Renew and modernise playground equipment. Playground equipment is sparse and near the end of its functional life. Increase the quality and range of playground equipment in playground areas.
- **Road Entrance** – The road entrance to the school has the potential to cause a serious accident involving a child. The current ‘key-hole loop’ configured access road is very congested with motor vehicle traffic. Like many schools designed in the 1960s, it was an appropriate design for traffic flows of that period. There is an urgent need for the access road to be re-designed to eliminate ‘blind spots’ and facilitate better traffic flow to ensure child safety.

Minor Capital Works

- **Interactive Whiteboards** – Provision of interactive whiteboards.
- **Fencing** – Replacement of cyclone fence along Groom Street. The fencing is damaged and in very poor condition. There is also a need to construct a cyclone fence along the path parallel to Kent Street to put a barrier between the children and what is a very busy street.
- **Water Coolers** – Replace bubblers outside senior and junior buildings. The few remaining bubblers are dated and in poor condition.
- **Landscaping** – Landscape area at front of school hall and garden area at entrance. Refurbish garden beds at front of school entrance with native Australian plants. Plant large trees in playgrounds.
- **Timber Seating** – Replace timber seating outside the junior and senior buildings. These structures are significantly damaged or in very poor condition.
- **Paintwork / Signage** – Refresh paintwork throughout main school building, hall, Hughes Preschool and junior school building. Renew signage.
- **Shades** – Construct shaded seating area for both senior and junior areas.