

Mr Andrew Barr MLA  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir,

## **Submission on the proposed closure of Kambah High School**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this submission is to state why Kambah High is a viable 7-10 school. The Kambah High community also strongly disputes the capacity figures quoted in the Towards 2020 policy document and we will demonstrate the errors in this paper.

2. The towards 2020 proposal will in effect close public education in Kambah. It is evident from the proposal that for some reason known only to the drafters of that document that Kambah has been singled out. The towards 2020 document purports 'choice, diversity and opportunity' yet all of that is already available at Kambah High School right now.

### **Kambah High School**

3. Kambah High School has been part of the Kambah community since the mid seventies and celebrates it's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2006. It will be a shame if this is the last major milestone for such a wonderful and successful school.

4. The school has evolved and changed to meet the different needs in the area. Kambah High offers unique educational settings for all students. Prior to the towards 2020 announcement Kambah High had just over 300 students. Teachers are able to personalise the learning environment for each student and provide high levels of support at all levels of need from extension to remedial work.

5. The Kambah Enriched Academic Program (KEAP) caters for students with individual or multiple strengths. Alternatively students can be placed in mainstream or modified classes where additional Literacy and/or Numeracy support is provided. Kambah High School utilises its unique Reading Program in conjunction with the focus on Boys Education Strategies where we are part of a National Lighthouse Program.

6. Mixed ability classes in Physical Education and Health, The Arts, Technology and Japanese round out the academic program. In Years 7 and 8 students experience a balance of these subjects before being able to specialise in an elective program in Years 9 & 10. Most of these subjects have opportunities for students to compete, perform and represent the school. The Sports Excellence Program, The Band Program, Dance and Drama productions enable students to perform at elite levels. This is complemented by

opportunities to travel to Japan as part of our annual exchange program with Makabetsu Junior High School which has been happening since 1997.

7. The Student Pathways Program in Year 9 and 10 formalises the preparation and planning for future study options, careers planning and transition from post High School Education to the world of work. This is an integral part of the pastoral care program. This is supported with many Vocational Education and Training (VET) opportunities with Certificate 1 and Certificate 11 qualifications available. Students in Years 7 and 8 also have opportunities to experience real workplace situations through the Student Participation in Community Enterprise (SPICE) Program.

8. Students are placed in ability-grouped classes in the core areas of English, Maths, Science and Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE).

9. The projected enrolments in the towards 2020 proposal showed Kambah High remaining (reasonably) steady and we feel Kambah High has a very viable future and is essential to the fabric of the public education system of the ACT that a school like Kambah High is available in Tuggeranong.

10. I trust you will consider this document without a pre-conceived bias and more importantly with a willingness to be 'swayed' by constructive arguments against what you have proposed for Tuggeranong, but in particular for Kambah High and it's feeder schools.

## **Kambah**

11. Kambah is without question the largest 'suburb' in Canberra and as a result of its size (1130ha) must be treated differently than all others. It is more than twice the size of Wanniasa for example, a suburb that will have three Secondary Schools. Wanniasa will be permitted to keep one Government P-10 campus down the road from another P-6 campus.

12. According to the DET student residency figures (ACT Govt and Non Govt Student Suburb Residency) Kambah has 883 primary and 484 high school students attending government schools. By comparison, Wanniasa has 475 primary and 238 high school students yet is permitted to keep two primary schools and the high school. Interesting that Kambah has twice the number of children with less public school places?

13. The socio-economic mix in Kambah is clearly not understood (or considered) by the drafters of the 2020 document. Kambah has a vast mix including single income pensioners through to the more comfortable in Gleneagles Estate.

14. We are constantly being told demographics are changing, yes they are. Families are moving into the area, with housing at reasonable prices and the proximity to Woden, Tuggeranong and the City. Housing interest rates are on the rise and homes are still affordable in Kambah. Drakeford Drive runs past Kambah High and through the suburb of Kambah, linking to the expressway that goes to the City and Belconnen. You can get on the expressway and be in Civic in 15 minutes and Belconnen comfortably in 25 minutes.

15. Recent figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that Kambah has over 16,000 residents, 2,500 (almost 15%) of them are on some form of welfare payments.

## Other Factors

- **Centrelink** are building their National Offices in Tuggeranong that will employ 2500 staff in the Valley. It is a reasonable presumption that many of those people will choose to live and have their children educated in the valley. Removing Kambah High would in effect leave 4 suburbs without secondary education. Suburbs such as Kambah Greenway, Oxley, and Bonython will have very limited choices.
- **Indoor Sports Kambah** have provided a valuable sporting choice for many families and an after school meeting place for many Kambah and neighbouring children for many years. Kambah schools have a long history of supporting this venue and regularly have teams made up entirely of 'school mates'. For many children this venue is their first opportunity at organised team sports and is an all-weather venue that may well suffer if the schools in Kambah close.
- **Local Shops** have expressed concern that their businesses will now fail as a direct result of the school closures. They have expressed the view that parents will no longer have their children use 'the corner shop' and will purchase goods at larger shopping centres on their way to and from work/school.
- **Just Hanging Out** for many children after school will no longer be an option. The kids sense of 'community' will be lost as they will spend this time on buses or in cars travelling home from school. The real positive of neighbourhood schooling as a parent is having the confidence the kids can play together after school and get themselves home. Kids catching buses will not have this 'opportunity'

## Capacity Figures

16. The (so-called) capacity figure for the school is outdated and based on a time when larger class sizes were the norm, when schools did not use 'computer labs' and learning support centres within mainstream schools did not exist. The towards 2020 document claims Kambah High can cater for 722 students. A more realistic capacity for the school is 608 students. In a recent review of the capacity of the school a revised figure of 703 was determined. This was based on rooms that no longer existed, staff rooms as class rooms and computer labs which counted as two classrooms.

17. Kambah High School currently has 30 teaching spaces. These are utilised by an average of 16 classes per teaching line on the timetable. Occupational Health and Safety requirements further restrict the numbers of students who can work in practical areas. Spaces that were originally designed as tutorial/withdrawal rooms have been joined to open up spaces to accommodate both equipment and students. These include two computer labs and a Health and Weights room. Similarly the introduction of Smart Boards and computers in the classroom have meant that tutorial rooms are no longer practical with the volume of equipment required to be housed along side the students.

18. Learning support classes, computer labs, and social welfare support all takes up space that was once used as 'class' space. There is a broader range of subjects offered and these require classrooms that were NOT necessary when the school was constructed in the seventies. Technology, Drama, Dance, Art, Photography, Band/Music, speciality PE/Health/Outdoor Education and Vocational Studies are all now part of Kambah High School and all require specialty classrooms or learning spaces. Now of course these

learning spaces do not need to be 'dedicated' to one subject, however the dynamic of a high school at least requires the space to be available when required.

## **Special Needs and Learning Support**

19. Kambah High is NOT a special school, nor is it a Learning Support school. Kambah High is a fully integrated school that caters to all students superbly. To close this school and force many of these students to start all over again would not just be wrong; it would be morally reprehensible. Any child who is forced to change schools takes some months to settle. Advice from the parents of these students for these kids that 'settling in' period is increased exponentially.

20. Kambah High is one of only two High Schools in Canberra that offers specialised settings for children with special needs. One of their main feeder schools in Kambah, Village Creek Primary, has Canberra's only Learning Support Centres for all three learning support levels for primary school children. Junior Learning Support (K-1), Middle Learning Support, (2, 3, 4), and the Senior Learning Support Centre (5, 6). The transition program for these children from the Senior Learning Support Centre to Kambah High has been working successfully for many years.

21. The Learning Support Centres opened in Village Creek in 1988, and have sent many children from their settings to Kambah High School. Not all of the learning support children at Village Creek automatically go into Learning Support units at Kambah High. Many become integrated into the mainstream, something I don't think would be possible if there wasn't that primary to high school culture Kambah has. These children move to High School with all the children from their Primary School and are therefore not seen as 'different'. The cost of the disruption to families cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

22. Kambah High does not use 'integration' simply as a word; it is a reality and the reason the school is so treasured by the parents that support it. We, the parents and staff, doubt very much that many of the mainstream kids at the school have a clue that some of their peers or 'school yard' mates have any learning difficulties at all. It is the simple fact of completely including all of these students in the day to day operation in certain subjects offered by the school that makes it work. These children have their own classes for most of the core subjects however are fully integrated into the 'elective' areas of study. It is not simply the staff, the equipment, resources or the infrastructure; rather it is the overall culture of the school that works. You cannot simply relocate that culture to other schools.

23. These children MUST be carefully managed irrespective of the outcomes of the 'consultation period'. We strongly encourage you to consider that:

- These children are difficult to relocate without major disruption to their continued education;
- This unit is managed extremely well in a friendly school environment with some children now attending mainstream classes;
- Parents have expressed dismay over any change in their current educational environments;
- Have the 'surviving' schools been questioned on their ability to accept and cater for the children or is this like the priority enrolment area and yet to be considered;
- Many of the children in this program have siblings in mainstream classes (at neighbourhood primary schools) and if Kambah High closes parents may find their children at different schools, in different suburbs or be forced for simplicity sake to move the 'other' children closer to the 'other' high school;

- These programs are well established at Kambah High and are now part of the wider school community. There is very little bullying as the children in the whole have no real knowledge of any one child's particular learning difficulties;
- All children at Kambah High, including special needs are provided the same opportunities. All children are able to attend school camps, sporting activities (both at the school and regional competitions) and take part in special events at the school including performances and the like.

## **IT Infrastructure**

24. It is acknowledged that Kambah High has been starved of funding for the upgrade of IT services and equipment. Over the past 18 months the staff and parents have been able to secure substantial funding to upgrade IT services in the school. This includes

- Federal grants to the values of \$150000 which allowed for substantial upgrades to servers, software, hardware and printed resources all based from the library. This space has now been turned into a state of the art resource centre. The resource centre alone provides for 40 new PC terminals with state of the art printing services through a dedicated colour photocopier.
- An additional 10 eMacs will also be added to the photography lab
- ACT Government grants for infrastructure upgrades worth \$60000 to improve cabling and bandwidth to all areas of the school.
- Parent contributions totalling \$14000 to purchase Interactive White Boards. This was matched by ACT government contributions and enabled the school to purchase 4 IW. These are now widely used in all areas of the school.
- The Kambah High P&C have also made the purchase of additional IWB a priority with a number of fundraising events already taking place to raise these additional funds.

These initiatives compliment the three computer labs that already exist in the school

## **Location**

25. The location of Kambah High School is ideal. The school sits just off Drakeford Drive and is passed daily by hundreds of cars heading north to Tuggeranong Parkway from southern Tuggeranong. The school is also accessible by buses from either Tuggeranong or Woden.

26. One of the options if Kambah High closes is Wanniasa School. Wanniasa High School has the main entrance on Wheeler Crescent, which is also close to Wanniasa shopping Centre. The additional traffic (both motor vehicle and ACTION Buses) will be bedlam.

27. Kambah High students apparently have a priority enrolment area anywhere geographically south of Lake Burley Griffin. Where on earth did this come from and why on earth was it even contemplated? Could it be that the Department is well aware of the fact that the students will not fit within the confines of other high schools in the Tuggeranong valley.

## **Transport Issues**

28. Has the Government thought about the increased ACTION services that are going to be needed because of the large numbers (200 high school students in Kambah alone),

that will now have no other 'choice' but to catch a bus to a school. That school (whichever is chosen) at the moment is outside of their current priority enrolment area.

29. It was with dismay that the parent groups trying to keep schools from closing heard that there are to be cuts to ACTION. Information to hand shows that 76% of the year six students were going to attend Kambah High. Most of these children will need to travel to school by bus (or be driven by parents or carers). ACTION services need to be improved and funding increased to attract people to the service, not cut.

## **Infrastructure**

30. Considerable investment has been made into the maintenance of the Kambah High Building over the past few years. These include.

### **Building Works & Maintenance undertaken over the last 10 years at Kambah High School.**

#### **Works undertaken by Department of Education under Asset Management Plan.**

- All vinyl flooring replaced progressively over a three year period ending around 2003.
- Original vinyl in gymnasium replaced with 'Regupol' flooring around 2002.
- Most carpet replaced progressively over a three to four year period ending around 2003.
- External repainting was done around 2001.
- Front office refurbished around 1999.
- Level five unit (Endeavour Unit) refurbished/built around 2002.
- Technology area refurbished around 1999
- Car park resurfaced around 2004.
- Fences erected to curb vandalism (successfully) progressively around 2002-2005.
- School became 'wheelchair friendly' around 2001. ie: ramps, auto doors x 2 (requiring front foyer to be refurbished), new disabled toilet built, purchase of hoist.
- All asbestos fire doors progressively replaced over 10 year period to 2006. (Some by school some by Department)
- All student toilets refurbished over a three year period up to 2004.
- Change rooms refurbished around 2004
- Lever mixing taps fitted to all staff toilets. (Water saving project)
- Ceiling tiles replaced in all learning areas around 2004.
- Emergency lighting and EXIT signs upgraded around 2004.
- Asbestos audit carried out 2006 currently being replaced as needed.
- Ceiling grids in all learning areas to be repaired and leveled during the October holiday period.

#### **Approved works under Asset Management Plan postponed due to 2020 proposal.**

- Canteen due to be refurbished June 2006. (applied for in 2001)
- Staff toilets due to be refurbished in 2006.

### Work undertaken by Kambah High School using SBM funds

- Internal painting on a rotational basis by caretaker. (almost all walls have been repainted at least once in the last ten years. Corridors more often.)
- Gyprock walls in almost all student access areas have been reinforced with particle board by caretaker over a ten year period.
- All urinals fitted with manual flush cisterns to replace automatic flushing units, to save on water usage.
- Push button timed taps fitted to all student toilets to save on water usage.
- 1 Staff toilet cistern replaced with dual flush cistern by caretaker with a plan of progressively replacing the remaining single flush units.
- All original hot water services (30 yr old units) have been replaced over the last 5 years. (two replaced September 2006)
- Lighting in the canteen replaced in 2005.
- Lighting in all areas is repaired and or replaced as necessary on a regular and rotational basis.

### IT Infrastructure installed or improved over the last ten years at Kambah High School.

- Digital photography lab (Computer lab 1) set up around 2004 including 2 i-macs, 4 e-macs, several digital camera's.
- Four electronic whiteboards. One in each of the following areas: Maths, English, Science and the Endeavour Unit.
- Computer lab 2 refurbished with new computer desks (32 workstations) around 2003.
- Computer lab 3 refurbished with new computer desks (21 workstations) around 2004.
- Science lab 4 networked with 8 computers and lockable cupboards.
- New student server installed around 2003 with extra cabling to labs

### Improvements from grants received by Kambah High School.

- Permanent steel shade structure erected at the rear of the building. Outdoor seating installed. (Health promoting schools grant 2004)
- Library IT upgrade. We received a grant of \$146000 from the Federal Government to purchase and upgrade the student computer network in the library. With this money we have purchased 35 new student computers and monitors and new student server. We have designed and built the work benches for this, we have also purchased a colour photocopier.
- Purchase of virtual babies, fatal vision kit (beer goggles etc from safe driver training) Drug education grant 2005 purchased this year.
- Learning Centre Grant. We are awarded \$6000 per year for the learning centre; with this money we buy much needed resources and laptops for our students with special needs.

31. Ideally every school should be able to provide students with optimal temperature conditions to in. Kambah High is one of the few school buildings that provides a conducive and pleasant environment to learn in. The Government should be expanding the use of air-conditioned building to support learning not reducing them.

## **Air Conditioning**

32. Information to hand indicates that one of the big influences over the decision to close Kambah High is because of the cost of the Air Conditioning. If this is true, we find it appalling that the education of 300 children will be because of the way a building is designed. Wanniasa High is the same building and very similar floor plan so why were options not looked at to bring Kambah in line with the Wanniasa building.
33. The towards 2020 document talks about efficiencies of scale so why is the ACT Government singling out one school because of this cost. Surely Kambah is not the only school with high energy costs, and if it is, why aren't options being considered to make this high school more energy efficient.
34. *ACTEW-AGL* provide electricity to the ACT, they then bill the ACT Govt who in turns bills each school, the schools then pays the bill back to the provider? Why on earth isn't this task centrally managed and that line item removed from the school based management profile. I would have thought it would make economical and practical sense to allow Principals and Teachers an opportunity to teach, not become finance managers trying to juggle utility bills in place of educational needs.

## **Building Maintenance**

35. The building maintenance issue has been brought up at every meeting I have attended across Canberra and the ACT Govt are claiming they will be spending record numbers to upgrade all school building to a suitable standard and keep them there. The Kambah community applauds this initiative but NOT at the expense of our High School. If parents actually make the effort to walk into Kambah High they are amazed at the condition of the building on the inside compared to the rather dull and lifeless look outside.
36. Non-Government parents are required to pay a 'building levy' which is tax deductible and the main reason why the building have been maintained. Mr Barr spoke at length about the age of some of the schools that were proposed to close, however most non-Government school buildings are actually older than their Government cousins are. They look great from the outside as these schools spend money on making sure the building have 'street appeal'. Under the school-based management Kambah High last year had only \$28,000 of its budget to actually spend on learning, this is less than \$95.00 per year per student.

## **Cost per Student**

37. The cost per student is an interesting exercise but we must dispute this figure based on the fact that we do not know what 'costs' they represent. Presuming of course ALL costs are included, on the figures from February 2005 then costs of educating a child at Kambah compared to (say) Kaleen are very similar. Kaleen have been provided options to remain open where Kambah has been proposed to close. Are you suggesting that children from Kaleen deserve opportunities that Kambah High students do not?

## **Options**

38. The following options are provided for your consideration to leave Kambah High open. The vast majority of parents at the school are very happy with the school as is.

Kambah High is producing students who are progressing to college and are achieving excellent grades. The above outlines why Kambah High School is a viable school as is and could continue to be viable until 2020 and beyond. This is of course a 'Consultation Period' so we will 'consult'. Where is the 'Choice, Diversity and Opportunity' for the 300 students attending that school prior to the towards 2020 proposal.

39. The community does NOT want Kambah High to be perceived as the 'Dumb Kids' school. For many years the skills learned in a vocational setting are seen as less important than those of a tertiary nature. If the school only concentrated on vocational or trade skills then it wouldn't be long before ANY child that attended the school would be seen as 'one-of-them' kids. It is our view that in addition to the vocational education offered, Kambah High should still be able to offer the other programs it has currently running, including the Academic and Sports Excellence programs.

40. Kambah has 16,000 residents, 2,500 of them are on some form of welfare. In the ACT 25,500 families live in poverty, 26% of those low-income families live in Tuggeranong, or 6,630 families. It is unfortunate, but we cannot change public perception overnight. We must ensure that the children and young adolescents in an area such as Kambah (and for that matter, other areas in Tuggeranong) are given every opportunity to rise above their environment.

- **Option One, 7-10.** Leave the school how it is. Kambah High will be the only 7-10 option for many families in the North of Tuggeranong. Parents have told us that they prefer the 7-10 model and the 'smaller' school feel that Kambah offers. Although it is speculation, if other 'proposed' amalgamations and closures occur, Kambah may be seen as a very attractive alternative. Kambah, Wanniasa, Fadden, McArthur, Gowrie, Bonython, Oxley, Monash, Richardson, Greenway, Isabella Plains and Gordon WILL NOT have a 7-10 option if the proposal succeeds as is.
- **Option Two, 7-10 with Vocational Education.** This proposal basically leaves the school operating as is with the introduction of a specific Vocational Education Unit and providing the option for relocating vocational education services such as the Student to Industry Program, Master Builders or pre apprenticeship programs. Inviting community programs such as the Student in Community Enterprise Program and links with the Chamber of Commerce could round out this concept.
- In 2005 the '*Framework for Vocational Education in ACT Schools*' outlined 4 goals and the outcomes and initiatives to achieve those goals. Goal 2 was to 'Increase student participation in vocational learning and VET'. Included in this was an initiative to support schools to broaden options for special needs and 'at risk' students in compulsory years and develop new T/V courses in skill shortage areas. The school already meets, and possibly exceeds this criterion, however with the introduction of a specific vocational education unit and having the staff responsible for these students on hand could only improve this.
- **Option Three, 7-12 with Vocational Education.** As with option two, however this could extend to college students, perhaps with a tradeschool or SNAPS focus. It is clear that Tuggeranong and Erindale Colleges are full to overflowing. The Kambah site is an ideal location and could be used to cater for the vocational education or at least everything under the Students to Industry program.

- **Option Four, 9-12 Students to Industry School.** As with Option 3, limited to years 9-12.
- **Option Five, Combination with direct CIT link.** This option would need immense work before it could be considered. There would need to be consolidated discussions and forums between the High School, the Colleges in Tuggeranong (and perhaps include Canberra College) and the CIT.

## **Summary**

41. The parents of Kambah High would like to stress however that we do not want to lose the outstanding framework that the high school already has. That is, all children at Kambah High already receive '*Choice, Diversity and Opportunity*' so for these children there is nothing in the towards 2020 proposal for them. By closing their school you are forcing those children, some of which are in a very vulnerable position, into the unknown, to a school they do not know, away from the community they have grown up with.