

SUBMISSION BY THE BOARD AND P&C OF MELBA HIGH SCHOOL IN RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSALS CONTAINED IN *TOWARDS 2020*.

Overview

Based on wide consultation, the Board and P&C of Melba High School unequivocally rejects the *Towards 2020* proposals that affect our school.

We have received a strong and clear response to the proposed options for Melba High School, summarised in Box 1. We urge you to listen.

Box 1 Results of survey of parents and guardians at Melba High School

Responses from parents and guardians to the *Towards 2020* proposals were as follows:

- 91.4% said ‘No’ to a Year 5–8 ‘middle school’
- 85.9% said ‘No’ to a Year 9–12 ‘upper school’
- 83.4% said ‘No’ to a Year 7–12 secondary college on the Copland site
- 88.1% said ‘Yes’ to retaining a Year 11–12 college on the Copland site.

We also asked a question about the proposed P–10 school in Holt; 93.5% of parents and guardians said ‘No’ when asked if they would send their children to such a school, and many added strongly worded comments opposing the idea of a ‘super school’.

See Appendix A for survey details.

Both proposals in *Towards 2020* are fundamentally flawed. They are based on unrealistic school-capacity figures now acknowledged by the department to be inaccurate and fanciful projections of enrolments to 2010 already proven to be wrong. The options would reduce choice, significantly decrease the standard of educational program offered at our school and be expensive to implement.

Alternative proposals

We suggest three alternative proposals, all of which would cost the government **nothing**, because there will be no need to refurbish to accommodate a different age range or to create a single-campus school:

- a) *Leave Melba as it is* — this is our preferred option. Recognise and reward our success!
- b) *Create a Year 7–12 Melba Secondary College on two campuses* (7–10 on the Melba High site and 11–12 on the Copland College site).
- c) *Create a Melba Collegiate of schools with standard transition points* (P–6, 7–10, and 11–12); this would involve linking Melba High with Copland College and either (or both) Mount Rogers Community School and Flynn Primary School.

In the rest of this submission, we expand on our reasons for rejecting the proposed options in *Towards 2020* and provide more detail on our proposed alternatives.

Rejection of proposed options in Towards 2020

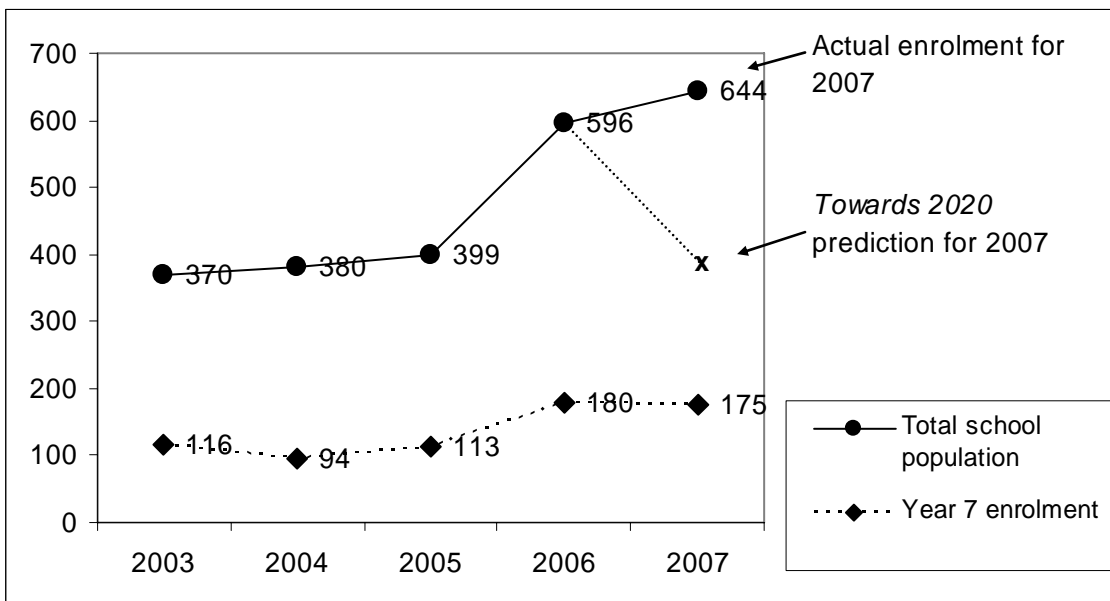
Introduction

This submission has been prepared by the Board and P&C of Melba High School, but reflects the views of the community. It is based on wide consultation, achieved through public meetings and information sessions for parents and students, a survey of our entire school community and meetings with other schools in North West Belconnen.

Melba is a thriving and extremely successful high school. The projected decline in enrolments contained in *Towards 2020* is wrong, as shown in Figure 1. In recent years, enrolments at Melba have increased (in contrast to many other government schools), and our Year 7 enrolments for 2007 already **prove** the projection to be grossly inaccurate.

The real trends are **up** not **down**.

Figure 1 Total school population and Year 7 enrolments, 2003–2007



Given the success of Melba High School, evident from its strong popularity in the local and wider community, there is no reason to move, amalgamate or close it. *Towards 2020* contained not a shred of credible evidence to change it.

Rejection of option 1

Option 1 in *Towards 2020* is to form a 'Melba Collegiate of Schools' with Charnwood Primary becoming a P–4 school, Melba High a 5–8 school and Copland College a 9–12 school.

Our community is overwhelmingly against the idea of a Collegiate with a 'middle school'. This proposed option is impractical and undesirable for several reasons:

- The three campuses are spread over more than 5 kilometres and would continue to be three separate schools; because of the distances involved, students moving from one campus to the next would feel as though they were moving school.

- If Melba were to be a Year 5–8 ‘middle school’, in practice, the only intake would be from the proposed P–4 Charnwood Primary. Parents from the other feeder primaries, which would continue to be P–6, would be reluctant to send their children to Melba in Yr 7, to have yet another move at the end of Yr 8. A survey of one of our feeder primary schools, otherwise unaffected by *Towards 2020*, makes this point clearly (see Miles Franklin survey in Appendix B) as does the survey conducted by Charnwood Primary.
- This option would reduce choice because a student who wanted to go to college would spend Years 7–8 at Melba, Years 9–10 at Copland, and 11–12 at the college of their choice; that is, three schools in six years.
- Having transition points that are so out of step with the rest of the ACT education system would condemn all three institutions in the Melba collegiate to decline.

The Board and P&C fully endorses Charnwood Primary’s desire to remain a P–6 Primary and not be part of a Melba Collegiate of Schools on geographical grounds.

Rejection of option 2

Option 2 in *Towards 2020* is to make Melba part of a 7–12 school on the Copland College site.

Our community is strongly against the idea of a 7–12 school on a single site. Again, this option is impractical and undesirable for a number of reasons, outlined below:

- Parents and students in the ACT strongly value the college system and there is no evidence of a desire for a change to a 7–12 school.
- Neither the Copland nor the Melba site is large enough for a 7–12 school (this issue of capacity is enlarged on below).
- The Copland site is an excellent site for a college but is neither safe nor amenable for younger high-school children because it is bounded by two major roads and has no recreation or sports area (and no room to create one).
- To operate effectively, a Yr 7–12 campus needs to have separate areas for ‘juniors’ and ‘seniors’; that is, a senior area is more than highly desirable — it is essential in a Yr 7–12 school. The Copland College site is not conducive to such separate areas.

Capacity

The combined population of Melba and Copland from *Towards 2020* was 1032 students. The capacity of Copland College is listed at 879. Therefore, a 7–12 school on the Copland site will only be viable with a significant fall in enrolments. Melba’s strong Year 7 enrolment for 2007 suggests that the projected decline in combined enrolments by 2008 is wrong.

The capacity of Melba High School is listed in *Towards 2020* as 779. This **was** the capacity when the school opened in the 1970s. Since then, there have been many improvements that have reduced the school’s capacity but are not accounted for in the school-capacity formula. These improvements include a music room, a Learning Assistance Centre and five computer rooms — Melba is proud to offer one of the highest computer–student ratios in the ACT.

We have not been shown how a Year 7–12 school could fit on a single site without a detrimental effect on the facilities, the removal or compromise of specialist teaching areas, and a resultant decline in the quality of the education programs offered to our children. On the contrary, we have been told that a combined school would fit on a single campus in 2008 but we might have to run English classes in the auto-shop. We fear that this type of compromise will inevitably follow.

Neither site has the capacity for a viable, effective, educationally sound 7–12 school. No amount of timetabling will get around the fact that there is only one kitchen, one music room, one drama room, one wood and metal workshop, and one library on either site. No amount of timetabling will save our valuable specialist teaching areas or compensate for the lack of a designated senior school. No amount of timetabling will create space for a sports and recreation area on the Copland site.

Projected enrolment

As indicated above, the projected enrolment figures in *Towards 2020* are wrong. In 2007 Melba High School will have approximately 250 students more than predicted.

The steady increase in Melba enrolment was occurring **before** the closure of Ginniderra High School and has continued **after** it.

We suspect that the government's predicted decline to 2010 is based on an estimation of the impact of the so-called 'super school' to be built at Holt. However, as our survey showed, the community remains deeply suspicious of the concept of a P–10 school.

Moreover, **three** of our feeder primary schools concerned about the impact of *Towards 2020* surveyed parents and found similar results: well over **90%** of respondents said that they would not choose to send their children to a P–10 school (see Appendix B).

Together this represents hundreds of parents saying 'no' to the idea of a P–10 school.

Rejection of closures of feeder primaries

The long-term health of Melba High and Copland College will be undermined by the closure of feeder primary schools. The proposed closure of Flynn Primary and Mount Rogers Community School would leave three adjoining suburbs in northwest Belconnen (Flynn, Melba and Spence) without a primary school. We believe that both primaries should remain open, because having such a large geographical area without a primary school would be highly detrimental to public education in the region.

Alternative proposals

(a) Leave Melba as it is

Melba High School is a viable and growing school that is strongly supported in the community. Maintaining the status quo is the community's overwhelming preference and will cost the government **nothing**. In fact, keeping Melba as a 7–10 high school will **save** the government the cost of the refurbishments that will be necessary if it becomes a middle school or merges with Copland College as a 7–12 school.

(b) Create a Year 7–12 Melba Secondary College on two campuses

If the government insists on making a change, we urge you to implement a variation of the two options outlined in *Towards 2020* — a two-campus secondary college housed on the existing Melba and Copland sites. This will be less costly than the middle school option in *Towards 2020*, because it will avoid the need for either school to be refurbished to accommodate a different age range.

This revised option also builds in a crucial element — time.

If by 2010 enrolments at Melba and Copland do decline, as predicted in *Towards 2020*, the two campuses could at that stage be combined on a single site. However if, as the evidence of recent years indicates, the projection for Melba is wrong, the two-campus school can be continued beyond 2010.

(c) Create a Melba Collegiate of Schools with standard transition points (P–6, 7–10, and 11–12) involving Melba, Copland and either or both Mount Rogers Community School and Flynn Primary School

This is another variation on the options outlined in *Towards 2020*. It is the model proposed for Hawker, and involves separate campuses and three principals. We believe that this could work successfully in our area, involving either or both Mount Rogers and Flynn Primary School. As indicated, we support the retention of both schools.

Conclusion

The biggest threat to the future of Melba High School is not the lure of the so-called super school or even the private sector but the instability and uncertainty about our future caused by the government.

Following the closure of Ginninderra High School there was damaging speculation in the media about the future of Melba High School. We sought, and received, an unequivocal statement from the previous Minister indicating that Melba would not close. We circulated that letter widely and have worked hard to dispel the impression that we are on a government 'hit-list'. We ask you to honour the previous Minister's commitment and to keep faith with those who came to Melba from Ginninderra High School with a promise of stability.

Our anger and frustration over *Towards 2020* is generated because it again casts doubt over the future of our school. **Despite all this, our enrolments are flourishing.** This should tell you something — the community wants a medium sized school in the Melba area providing a high quality education program for Year 7–10 students in a safe and supportive environment We urge you to preserve this choice and to recognise and reward our success.

Appendix A — Melba High School parent survey results

Response= 235

Question 1: Which of the following options would you prefer for your child/ren's High School education?

Year 7-10 school	(194) - 83.26%
Year 7-12 school	(39) - 16.74%

Question 2: Would you like Melba High School to become a Year 5-8 'middle' school in 2008?

Yes	(20) - 8.55%
No	(214) - 91.45%

Question 3: Would you like Melba High School to become a Year 7-12 Secondary College on the Copland College site in 2008?

Yes	(38) - 16.38%
No	(194) - 83.62%

Question 4: Which of the following options would you prefer for child/ren's College education?

Year 11-12 College	(201) - 88.16%
Year 9-12 College	(27) - 11.84%

Question 5: Would you like Copland College to become a Year 9-12 'upper' school in 2008?

Yes	(32) - 14.04%
No	(196) - 85.96%

Question 6: Would you consider sending your child/ren to a large P-10 school (800-1300 students) in Holt?

Yes	(15) - 6.44%
No	(218) - 93.56%

Appendix B — Feeder primary survey results

B1 Miles Franklin Primary parent survey results

Note: Questions unrelated to secondary education not cited here

280 parent surveys were sent out – 119 surveys were returned = 42.5% return
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Question 3: If Melba High School was to become a Year 5 – 8 middle school in 2008, would you enrol your child/ren at this school?

Yes	No	Other
(18) – 15.1%	(98) – 82.4%	(3) – 2.5%

Question 4: Which of the following options would you prefer for your child/ren's high school education?

Year 7 – 10	Year 7 – 12	Other
(55) – 46.2%	(60) – 50.4%	(4) – 3.4%

Question 5: If a Melba Secondary College for Years 7 – 12 was to be established on the Copland College site in 2008, would you enrol your child/ren at this school?

Yes	No	Other
(42) – 35.3%	(73) – 61.3%	(4) – 3.4%

Question 6: Which of the following options would you prefer for your child/ren's college education?

Year 11 – 12	Year 9 – 12	Other
(93) – 78.2%	(11) – 9.2%	(15) – 12.6%

Question 7: If Copland College was to become a Year 9 – 12 school in 2008, would you enrol your child/ren at this school?

Yes	No	Other
(22) – 18.5%	(92) – 77.3%	(5) – 4.2%

Question 8: Would you send your child to a large school incorporating Preschool – Year 10 (approximately 800-1300 children)?

Yes	No	Other
(3) – 2.5%	(115) – 96.6%	(1) – 0.8%

B2 Flynn Primary School parent survey

Note: Questions unrelated to secondary education not cited here

Question 3: If Melba High was to become a 5-8 middle school in 2008, would you enrol your child/ren at this school?

Yes	17	18.48%
No	74	80.43%

Question 4: Which of the following options would you prefer for your child/ren's high school education?

7-10 School	63	68.48%
7-12 School	25	27.17%
Other	2	2.17%

Question 5: If a Melba Secondary College for years 7-12 was to be established on the Copeland College site in 2008, would you enrol your child/ren at this school?

Yes	32	34.78%
No	58	63.04%

Question 6: Which of the following options would you prefer for child/ren's college education?

11-12 College	78	84.78%
9-12 College	4	4.35%
Other	9	9.78%

Question 7: If Copland were to become a 9-12 school in 2008, would you enrol your child/ren at this school?

Yes	14	15.22%
No	75	81.52%

Question 8: Would you send your child/ren to a large P-10 school (800-1300 children)?

Yes	5	5.43%
No	86	93.48%

B3 Hall Primary school parent survey

Note: Questions unrelated to secondary education not cited here

4 Would you enrol your child/ren at a Yr 5-8 middle school?

	Yes	No	No Resp	Total
Number	19	41	3	63
%	30.2	65.1	4.8	100

5 Which of the following options would you prefer for child/ren's high school education?

	Yr 7 - 10	Yr 7 - 12	Yr 9 - 12	Pre - Yr 10	Other	No Resp	Total
Number	28	28	3	0	4	0	63
%	44.4	44.4	4.8	0.0	6.3	0.0	100

Other responses were:

2 for either Y 7-10 or Yr 7-12
 1 for either Y 7-12, Yr 7-12 or Yr 9-12
 1 for Yr 9-10

Suggested - Home based computer schooling with 2 days/week school attendance

6 Which of the following options would you prefer for child/ren's college education?

	Yr 11 - 12	Yr 9 - 12	Yr 7 - 12	Other	No Resp	Total
Number	30	5	24	3	1	63
%	47.6	7.9	38.1	4.8	1.6	100

Other responses were:

2 for either Yr 11-12 or Yr 7-12
 1 for either Yr 11-12, Yr 9-12 or Yr 7-12

Suggested - Home based computer schooling with 1 day/week school attendance

7 Would you enrol your child/ren in a large P-10 school (800-1300 children)?

	Yes	No	No Resp	Total
Number	1	62	0	63
%	1.6	98.4	0.0	100

8 Do you plan to enrol your child/ren at a private high school?

	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
Number	15	44	4	63
%	23.8	69.8	6.3	100