



# Tharwa School

Submission in Response  
to *Towards 2020*

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Tharwa Primary School Executive Board  
Tharwa Primary School P&C Committee  
Tharwa Preschool P&C Committee  
Tharwa Region Residents



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# Executive Summary

Tharwa School provides a unique, high quality educational opportunity for pre-school and primary school students in the ACT.

The school forms a key community hub for the Southern ACT rural population and has attracted growing interest from urban families as the Canberra suburbs have spread further South. The Tharwa School plays an important and active role in the Lanyon cluster, and in organising well-known community events, such as the annual Tharwa Fair attended by thousands of Canberrans.

The school has demonstrated a stable enrolment pattern for over 100 years and is well placed for future growth and expansion once a permanent bridge is constructed in 2007-2008.

Key alternative strategies to the Towards 2020 Proposals are:

- 1) keep the school open;
- 2) set realistic achievable goals to reduce the school costings within a suitable time frame;
- 3) increase preschool capacity and so increase feeder opportunities;
- 4) implement a rural school exchange system for students in the Lanyon cluster, thereby boosting enrolments and increasing cost efficiency;
- 5) use existing grant funds to expand classroom space; and
- 6) implement national recommendations on rural and remote schooling published in 2000 by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission and endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

The *Towards 2020* proposal to close Tharwa school would significantly disadvantage the Southern ACT rural community. School closure would likely turn the vibrant Tharwa community into a ghost town and deprive the ACT of living heritage.

# Part One: Diversity & choice: What Tharwa offers ACT schooling

*Tharwa School offers a unique education for P-6 children.*

***“Students in harmony with each other and  
the environment – experiencing success and challenge”***  
(Tharwa School Motto)

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) acknowledges that students and families living in rural pockets of Australia have specific needs that are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations [1]. The success of Tharwa School over the past 100 years has been an unique example of not only how high quality rural education can be achieved, but also how a rural education has the potential to also attract and benefit students and families from outside the immediate Tharwa district. As you open the quaint gate and step into Tharwa School, it soon becomes apparent that rural education is not second rate education in terms of quality and that it has much to offer in turn to those from urban communities [2].

## **Size**

***“It’s a world away from the Canberra suburbs,  
And everyone there, they can be your pal.”***  
(Tharwa School Song, compiled by students and staff 2005)

Spend a little time in the playground at Tharwa School and you very quickly and easily become part of the community, where everyone knows you by your first name and looks out for you in the playground. The kids are not one of umpteen, rather they are each one known to every other, secure and supported, cared for and respected as members of a group that extends in age range from 4 years old to 12 years old. It has been observed that small rural school environments such as Tharwa School have the capacity to provide closer individual contact and knowledge of the student, producing children who are well adjusted and better behaved. Research shows many kids thrive in small, personal, supportive environments, and an example of this can be seen by spending a little time at Tharwa School [2].

## **Comprehensive Curriculum**

The Tharwa School Plan [3] provides an overview of numerous curriculum initiatives currently being offered at Tharwa School including:

- Cluster Connections – A Middle Years Network – a program designed to improve transitions between preschool, primary school and high school
- Multiliteracies Framework – internationally recognised literacy and numeracy program
- Count Me In Too numeracy program
- Information Communication Technologies Plan
- A variety of inter-school sporting opportunities including: Small Schools Spectacular; Cluster Twilight Fair; Super 8s Cricket; Murrumbidgee Cross Country; orienteering; touch football and AusKick.

Tharwa School has a variety of art and extracurricular programs, with facilities for cooking, woodwork and pottery. The school houses the largest collection of books of any primary school within the ACT, despite having no dedicated library room [4].

## **Ability-grouped Learning**

Tharwa School students receive literacy and numeracy teaching and learning within a small, focused group along with other kids who are at the same level rather than the same grade or age. Teaching and learning are tailored to meet the needs of each individual student within the K-6 group, demonstrating that Tharwa School staff are indeed an example of “teachers in rural areas develop[ing] innovative and alternative forms of education in order to respond to the particular needs of the community” [2]. Ability grouped learning of the core curricula leads to greater individual attention and contact with the teacher, and an enhanced opportunity for teachers to better identify, respond to and support individual learning plans [2]. Empirical research on learning and student development supports the ability-grouped model used at Tharwa School [2] as kids learning in similar environments have been shown to receive a high level of peer support, both academically and socially [5].

## **Environment and Heritage**

***“Its a little place,  
near the Murrumbidgee  
Where the gum tree stands like a king.”***

(Tharwa School Song, compiled by students and staff 2005)

Tharwa School offers diversity from other ACT Government schooling available in the Tuggeranong region. The school has a unique, peaceful bush setting in which students are closer to, surrounded by, and stimulated by a natural environment. From the weather and the seasonal changes, to the bird calls and the wombat trail through the yard with purpose-built fence holes, students are in contact with the world of nature on a continuous basis every day, rather than as an occasional excursion.

The heritage of the school contributes to the sense of community and uniqueness of being in a small village, an experience that is created through years of living rather than through artificial creation of 'communities' by external forces. The school is part of Tharwa village and the village part of the school, with threads being woven both ways on a daily basis, year after year, generation after generation. The school is the hub of the Tharwa community, and the real benefits of the numerous partnerships between teachers, students, parents and community members are demonstrated daily [3]. Events such as the historical and highly successful Tharwa Bush Fair and the recently established Tharwa School Art Show are key events in delivering the educational framework of the school, providing opportunities for leadership, collaboration, creativity and enterprise as the students play an equal role in organising and running events alongside local community members. In Tharwa, like many small rural schools around Australia, there is "wide community support for the school and children ha[ve] a sense of community belonging" [2].

### **Lanyon Cluster**

Tharwa School does not operate in isolation but as part of the Lanyon school cluster. The strength of this cluster of schools, of which Tharwa is a vocal and active part, is reflected in the level of professional development and support, participation in joint sporting and educational events, and administrative links fostered between the schools. Within the cluster, Tharwa provides diversity and choice.

For more than a decade the Lanyon Cluster of schools have collaborated in developing curriculum direction, student and staff well being, shared leadership and administration. Numerous curriculum initiatives have been established by the Lanyon cluster including *Lanyon Teaching and Learning Model*; the *Learning By Design* framework for professional planning by teachers; and a variety of publications related to *the Lanyon Literacy and Numeracy Project*. The Lanyon Cluster and its initiatives around literacy and numeracy are nationally and internationally regarded in the educational community as being leading edge.

## Part Two:

# Key alternative strategies to the Towards 2020 Proposal - Reducing the cost of unique schooling in Tharwa

Through the Towards 2020 document and subsequent discussions it has been noted that Tharwa's high average cost per student (\$19,500 based on 27 students) indicates it is not cost effective when compared to other schools. Due to the very small numbers of students this average number is not a true indication of the "value" of the school – an increase in only 5 student enrollments will drop the average cost by over \$3000 or 16%, an increase in student enrollments by 10 will drop the average cost by over \$5200 or 32%. Using the optimal size of the school of around 45 students (which would require no additional staffing resources) the costs would plummet to only \$11,700 which is more cost effective than quite a number of other schools. The strategies presented below aim over the next few years to increase enrollments to a higher more sustainable level.

Ideally the school would have around 60 primary students and 30 preschool students. The primary would be in three 20 student multi age classes and the preschool in two classes. For this level additional space needs to be made and additional teaching resources need to be allocated.

It is acknowledged that while the school has potential closure hanging over it it is very difficult to attract new enrolments, and even maintain current levels. But once the decision to keep the school open is made, enrolments can be attracted from the region. Tharwa's unique setting can attract students who may be considering leaving the public education systems for the private system.

### **Set realistic achievable goals to reduce the school costings**

The *Towards 2020* Proposal allowed no time for schools in the ACT to set goals to reduce costs. If financial aims were set that were achievable, realistic and given a suitable time frame, it is anticipated that Tharwa Primary would be capable of reducing the cost per student. The temporary closure of the bridge in 2005 and now the permanent closure in 2006 have had a marked impact on the Tharwa community. A fairer assessment of both the Preschool and Primary School would be able to be made after a bridge has been built and is fully operational. A proposed timeframe of 2 years post functional new bridge would allow time for reasonable financial goals to be set, addressed (e.g. by implementing our key alternative strategies) and met.

## **Increase Preschool capacity to increase feeder opportunities**

There is a clear and demonstrated demand for an increase in preschool places at Tharwa School. Thirty applications were received for the 15 preschool places being offered in 2007. Due to the limited number of preschool places, ironically some children with siblings already in the Primary school, and who have already enrolled to attend kindergarten in 2008 have, at time of writing, been unable to secure a place at the preschool in 2007. Preschool places provide a significant opportunity for the primary school to attract future enrolments. The integration of preschool into the early learning years establishes children's place within the Tharwa community and provides families with an opportunity to develop a strong understanding of the school.

Approximately 50% of Tharwa preschoolers go on to attend the primary school. **By increasing the School's preschool places to 30, which could easily be filled by the current demand, feeder opportunities increase proportionally, creating a natural rise over time in the school population.** Increasing the operation of the preschool to 2 lots of 2 full day sessions would require ONLY additional staffing. The room is set up and available for 2 further days of use, without ANY other changes being made.

Ideally the capacity of Tharwa Primary School is that of 50-60 students. By enabling an increase of numbers through from the Preschool, the Primary school numbers will naturally swell and potentially maintain healthy numbers per grade from Kindergarten through to Year 6. To have increased student numbers, the school will require an additional building and a re shape of the existing ones. Funding has been secured for an additional building from a Federal Grant, and plans were discussed with the Department for renovations of the existing administration and classroom, as discussed later in this document. **Doubling the Preschool student numbers could happen as soon as 2007, through efficient Departmental handling.**

## **Rural Experience Program**

The Lanyon cluster of schools proposes the introduction of a "Rural Experience Program", a unique idea to extend the diversity and quality education already offered by the cluster within Tuggeranong. Excess capacity at Tharwa School would be filled through offering of places in the Rural Experience Program (REP) to students at other schools within the cluster. The proposed introduction of an REP has received overwhelming support from cluster schools and the local Lanyon community during preliminary meetings.

The goals of the exchange program would be to provide a unique, individually-tailored rural learning program for children that principals of cluster schools believe would benefit from such an experience. Students would be referred to the program for numerous educational and/or social reasons with the aim to either extend the student or provide additional support – e.g. where the students would benefit educationally from the increased one-one contact with teacher or ability-grouped learning strategies; would benefit socially from student leadership opportunities or supportive environment.

Due to the nature of Tharwa Primary, students are able to work effectively in small groups which target the learning age of the student and encourage pupils to help others within the group. In multi aged classrooms, students from differing year levels can learn from one another and be constantly working within small targeted groups. The Rural Experience Program would be able to offer students from the larger suburban schools the opportunity to work at an educational level that is appropriate for the individual's stage of learning by being within a classroom environment that is smaller and more conducive to the individual's learning.

The natural environment in which Tharwa Primary is situated allows for a greater understanding of the landscape which is the ACT. Close to Birrigai, cluster partnerships will allow for greater relationships between the learning centres and therefore strengthen the rural experience for those involved. Birrigai offers great opportunities for the Tharwa students and when utilised through the Program it will create opportunities for a learning program which is based within the environment.

### **Promotion of Tharwa School within Lanyon cluster**

Promoting the Program within the Lanyon cluster will be relatively easy and simple to administer. As the idea has been discussed within a cluster meeting during 2006, it is a sentiment that already exists within the minds of cluster principals. To promote the Program, principals from all participating schools would meet to outline the appropriate wording for the student's guidelines for the application to attend Tharwa Primary School.

Having agreed on the appropriate format, students would be notified about the Program within their own schools and have a time frame in which to apply for a placement. Students interested in the program would be given opportunities to see the school first hand to be able to gain insight as to how the school operates. In return, Tharwa students may be given opportunities to promote their school within the cluster via video classroom link ups or school visits.

### **Expand classroom space using existing grant**

Class sizes at Tharwa School are currently constrained by the small floor areas of the classrooms. The ACT DET has determined that the current school buildings have a capacity of 50 students [6] however this assessment is highly questionable. When the Minister for Education, Andrew Barr, visited Tharwa School in August 2006, he stated "It would be difficult to fit more students into the classrooms" [7]. On the day Minister Barr visited, the senior classroom was catering for 16 students, and the junior classroom had 12 students. These classrooms also hold the library, teaching resources, computer technology centre and teacher work space. There is a clear need for increased floor space.

In 2005 Tharwa School was successful in obtaining a \$30,000 grant from the Commonwealth Government for extensions to the current school building. These extensions will allow for the library and computer technology centre to be relocated, freeing up classroom space and allowing for feasible expansion of class sizes to DET guidelines.

These Commonwealth funded extensions are a pre-requisite to any plans to increase enrolments at Tharwa School.

### **Increase utilisation of buildings**

As one of the primary community buildings within Tharwa, the school is the ideal location to provide additional community services to the rural community. Plans to increase utilisation of the Tharwa School site have already been identified in the School's strategic plan. As part of the Health Promoting Schools Framework initiatives such as community health workshops and establishment of a Therapy ACT drop-in clinic have been identified by the School Board as part of the 2005-2008 school plan [3].

# Part Three:

## Tharwa's response to Towards 2020

### Current and projected capacity

#### ACT DET Argument

*Towards 2020* information highlights the current and projected enrolments of schools and presents the statistics in terms of percentage of school capacity utilised [6, 8].

#### Response

Analysis of the figures in the Current Education Provision [6] shows Tharwa is the only school in Tuggeranong (and one of few in all of the ACT) predicted to maintain rather than decrease its utilised capacity by 2010. Analysis of the projected figures for Tuggeranong schools under the *Towards 2020* proposal indicates that the negative trend in capacity usage in the region is neither reversed nor significantly impacted by the *Towards 2020* proposal [6].

Figures for Tharwa school regarding capacity have been presented and, with lack of any forthcoming evidence to the contrary, analysed as percentages. Given the small size of the school, use of percentages is simplistic and misleading – although the percentage suggests the school is under-utilised, the loss or enrolment of a single child significantly alters the figures when analysed at this level.

Enrolment figures and projections provided for Tharwa school need to be viewed within local context. Whilst the data presented in the *Towards 2020* proposal is debatable and conflicts with other population projection reports, it has also been presented without consideration to hardships faced by Tharwa community that have impacted upon recent school capacity figures. Following the 2003 bush fires many families left the region resulting in a short-term decline in enrolments – the families now in the area have younger children anticipating attendance at Tharwa school in the next few years. The high demand for places in the Tharwa Preschool (30 children applied for the 15 preschool places available in 2007) indicates there is a strong requirement for extending the early learning services in the region. The extended closure of Tharwa Bridge in 2005, also impacted upon enrolments. However, until the *Towards 2020* proposal announcement and the recent re-closing of Tharwa Bridge, enrolment figures had been gradually increasing.

It should also be noted that prior to the *Towards 2020* proposal neither the School Board nor the Principal were alerted by ACT DET that decline in enrolments was placing the school at risk, therefore there have been no active attempts to address the issue prior to proposing closure. Current ACT DET policies such as the incongruence between priority access for preschools and primary schools; lack of promotion by the ACT DET for events such as Open Days; and restrictions on where and how schools may advertise throughout

Canberra actively hinder attempts to increase enrolments. **It would seem premature for the unique school at Tharwa that services rural ACT families to be closed before implementing initiatives that could reverse the current decline in numbers.**

## **Enrolments from in and out of priority enrolment area**

### ACT DET Argument

Information about the *Towards 2020* proposal highlights that some Tuggeranong schools have high numbers of out-of area students and low in-area enrolments [6, 9-11], and it is implied in the information that this statistic has been used in the identification of schools for closure.

### Response

Many Canberra schools with a high percentage out-of-area enrolments have been praised in the *Towards 2020* literature for the high quality education and diversity these schools offer to attract out-of-area families. It is claimed throughout *Towards 2020* that the decision to send a child to a school in another area of Canberra reflects community choice and families selecting the most appropriate schooling for their children [12-14]. The experience is similar in Tharwa – the school attracts a high percentage of out-of-area students due to the quality and uniqueness of the educational experience Tharwa school offers.

Despite low local attendance rates, other schools in the ACT (e.g. Amaroo and Evatt with only 46% of local children attending both of the schools) have been listed in the *Towards 2020* proposal for maintenance or expansion [12, 13]. No criteria outlining the selection of schools with low local area attendance rates for rejuvenation versus closure has been provided by DET in response to Tharwa community members' requests. Without such detail, the transparency of the *Towards 2020* process is highly questionable.

In light of the ACT government's responsibility to provide accessible schooling to rural communities and protect the unique schooling needs of such communities [1, 2, 15, 16], the ability of a school such as Tharwa to attract enrolments from outside its local area can only be seen as a financial advantage, reducing what would be a significantly higher cost per student head if additional enrolments were not attracted. For a variety of reasons a handful of students (see above discussion regarding presentation of enrolment figures as percentage) living in the Tharwa priority enrolment area attend other government schools. **The right of these families to make this choice is presented in much of the *Towards 2020* information as one of the highlights of the ACT schooling system.**

## Heritage

### ACT DET Argument

Members of the Tharwa community have received communication from ACT Ministers suggesting that a primary reason for the selection of Tharwa School for closure is its heritage status precluding development of the buildings [9-11].

### Response

As part of the Federal Government's *Investing in Schools* initiatives, **Tharwa School has already obtained a grant for extensions of the school buildings.** Architect plans were developed and approved by ACT Heritage in early 2006. Whilst the Heritage Act places restrictions on the type of development appropriate for a particular site, these do not preclude maintenance nor expansion of the site, nor necessarily increase the costs of building developments. In many instances the costs of building and grounds maintenance for heritage sites increases when the site is no longer used for its intended purpose.

## Curriculum

### ACT DET Argument

The literature relating to the *Towards 2020* proposal states that "small schools limit the opportunities for students to access and participate in a rich curriculum and all key learning areas," [6, 8] implying this has been a consideration in selecting Tharwa school for closure under the *Towards 2020* proposal. Personal responses received by members of the Tharwa community indicated that the ACT DET is concerned that Tharwa may not be able to offer a broad curriculum [9-11]. ACT DET has also suggested that smaller schools have problems with teacher professional development and morale [6].

### Response

In response to enquiries relating to perceived deficiencies in the curriculum offered at Tharwa implied by the *Towards 2020* proposal [6], ACT DET responded that the only reason Tharwa was selected for closure was "low enrolments and high cost per student head" [17]. The ACT DET has been unable to identify any specific curriculum deficiencies at Tharwa, despite its size. As already presented, the curriculum at Tharwa offers unique learning opportunities to students whilst covering the full range of ACT curriculum requirements despite its location and size. Those who have suggested that students at Tharwa do not receive access to as broad a range of subjects as available in urban ACT schools demonstrate poor insight into, and understanding of, the exciting and flexible learning programs initiated at Tharwa School – many of which have been adopted throughout the rest of the ACT after being trialed in our small school. **Tharwa's position within the Lanyon cluster of schools negates the potential disadvantages of a rural setting such as curriculum shortcomings and lack of professional development for and isolation of staff.**

## **Financial costs**

### **ACT DET Argument**

In all correspondence and follow-up with ACT DET [9-11, 17], the financial cost of Tharwa school has been presented as the primary reason why Tharwa Primary is under discussion for closure under the *Towards 2020* proposal.

According to the financial statements provided by ACT DET, the cost of educating a student at Tharwa Public School, for the 2004-05 financial year is approximately \$19,500 [18], which is disproportionate to other schools within the ACT.

### **Response**

It is acknowledged that the cost per student at Tharwa school is higher than other ACT schools. Indeed the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) identified the increased cost of rural schools as a potential factor in discrimination against rural communities in 2000 [1, 15, 16] and recommended national strategies to be used by State and Territory governments to promote rural schooling in Australia.

In the 2000 HREOC report a crucial factor in the rising costs of rural schools was identified as being “funding formulas based on city schools disadvantage rural and remote students” [15]. Analysis of funding information [18] presented by ACT DET suggests this is the case. For example, costs referred to as ‘Educational and Corporate Support Costs’ (ECS) that cover corporate costs such as finance and human resources, make up a significant component of Tharwa School’s annual cost. The ACT DET financial report indicates that Tharwa School pays \$3,089 per student for ECS, despite being a small school with presumably minimal corporate, departmental and human resource requirements. In comparison, a large urban school (e.g. Ainslie PS) pays only \$1,366 per student for ECS [18].

In addition, over the previous decade teacher numbers and roles have been adjusted to higher cost models, due to departmental requirements initiated by the ACT DET. The Tharwa experience is consistent with the HREOC’s finding in 2000 that “the imposition of urban regulation, urban models and urban funding and staffing formulas has had a damaging impact on rural and remote area education, disempowering country students, families and teachers” [15] throughout Australia. In response to the 2000 HREOC report on rural and remote education the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEEYTA) developed specific guidelines for State and Territory governments relating to allocation of resources and funding priorities [1] - initiatives that have been implemented throughout Australia but have not been adopted within ACT despite being the ‘bush capital’ with unique rural areas such as Tharwa. **Why has this important national enquiry into equity of access to education for rural students not been considered by the ACT government?**

# Part Four:

## What has not been addressed in *Towards 2020*?

### **Rights of children in rural and remote communities**

The HREOC report firmly highlights its purpose as being to eliminate “...negative forms of discrimination based on...geographic location” [1]. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Special Rapporteur on Education of the UN Commission on Human Rights have analysed the content of the international human right to education and found the following principles are essential for providing education without discrimination [15]:

- Availability - education must be available without discrimination of any kind;
- Accessibility - education must be within safe physical reach;
- Affordability - access to education should be affordable to all; and
- Adaptability - education must meet the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings.

HREOC report that a “one-size-fits all education modeled on urban situations has failed many students in rural and remote areas” [15] as the individual rights of each child to education must meet the needs of the child within their local community to allow development to fullest potential. “Current rural economic instability and social circumstances make the delivery and maintenance of children’s, community and social services much more difficult and tenuous but at the same time more essential” [15].

**The Towards 2020 proposal to close Tharwa School threatens the international principles of education provision through decreasing access of rural students to schooling adapted to their local setting; increasing the financial and social cost of accessing education; and increasing the risk of harm to rural children** (e.g. increasing travel on heavy vehicles roads; decreasing opportunity for exercise and play).

### **Costs to rural families**

“The greatest educational ‘disadvantage’ faced by people in rural and remote locations is that to gain access to an education ... they have to pay more...” [2]. Whilst there is a small travel benefit available for Tharwa families travelling long distances to access a government school, as found by the HREOC in 2000, this does not cover the out-of-pocket expenses of rural families. **By forcing rural families travel to urban schools, these families face a disproportionate burden in accessing education including travel time, petrol and car expenses, loss of income and more** [1].

## **Cost to the community**

In 2002 a report by the Australian Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation identified the significant benefits to rural communities that schools provide. Beyond being merely educational facilities, schools provide one of the major opportunities for social interaction, and this is especially evident in rural areas. School-community linkages have been shown to influence numerous social and economic outcomes within rural communities and provide many positive benefits for young people, including a sense of belonging [19]. MCEETYA concurred with these findings, highlighting that “[t]he needs of rural and remote students should be met through local commitment and ownership as well as through predictable and sustained government funded initiatives” [1].

The role Tharwa school has played in supporting the recovery of the local community from the 2003 bushfires cannot be understated. This traumatic event that is still a strong memory within Tharwa is poignantly recorded in the school song and sung passionately by school and local community members each assembly:

***“When Mount Tennent was ablaze,  
we were stuck like in a maze  
But we survived,  
With the drama at it’s height,  
we fought with all our might,  
But we survived, yes we survived.***

***It’s a little place  
that’s stepping forward  
now the time has moved along  
For all the people  
who all together  
face the future forever strong”***

(Tharwa School Song, compiled by students and staff 2005)

**The *Towards 2020* proposal to close Tharwa school would significantly disadvantage the Southern ACT rural community. School closure would likely turn the vibrant Tharwa community into a ghost town and deprive the ACT of living heritage.**

## Transport

The HREOC report identified a broad range of concerning issues for rural kids travelling longer distances to school including [2]:

- access to suitable bus routes;
- the extra hours rural children spend travelling rather than playing and exercising;
- safety of (often under-maintained) rural roads carrying heavy vehicles;
- a significant financial and lifestyle burden placed on rural families who can least afford it.

Rural families in the Tharwa district will face all these issues should Tharwa School be closed, with the current trip-time from Tharwa into Tuggeranong at 20 minutes (although this trip is up to double in time for some families living south of Tharwa). **The negative social impact to rural families of travelling further distances has not been addressed in *Towards 2020*.**

Whilst the *Towards 2020* proposal states that “the school will work with the Department of Urban Services and ACTION to address potential traffic issues and optimise public transport arrangements” [8], our own inquiries suggest that ACTION buses will be unable to provide public transport services to Tharwa next year [20]. **The ACT DET *Towards 2020* cost analysis [18] does not include the significant cost of implementing public transport** for Tharwa preschool and primary students (and their families). Providing the minimum service of 2 return bus services on school days would cost, at a minimum, \$140,000 annually [21]. It could be reasonably anticipated that significant upgrades and regular maintenance would be required on south-Murrumbidgee roads to accommodate bus services safely, further increasing the estimated annual expense of transporting Tharwa students to Canberra schools.

## Use of the Tharwa School site

Plans for the ongoing use of the Tharwa School site have not been presented as part of the *Towards 2020* proposal. The ongoing use of the primary community site within Tharwa is a significant issue for the community and the ACT DET has provided no information on how the site will be maintained, the costs associated with same nor other potential uses of the site. Currently, the site and buildings are cost-efficiently maintained by being in continual use with a high level of community participation and care. This issue is of primary concern to the Tharwa community and those owning real estate in the area. **Without providing information about the ongoing use of the site, consultation with the community on school closure is not fully transparent.**

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