

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Andrew

Towards 2020 and the impact on Lyons Primary School

I'm writing to you in my private capacity as a parent in the Lyons Primary School community.

Our son attends the Italian Bilingual Immersion Program (IBIP) which has been running in its current form at Lyons Primary for the past two years. I want to add my personal support to the school community's submission and highlight the reasons why I believe you should not continue with the proposed changes to Lyons Primary School.

As a former language teacher, I believe passionately in language education as an integral part of a well-rounded education. I believe that the acquisition of language skills helps to develop the whole child. There are truck loads of research that bears this out and Australia's foremost language specialists have commented favourably on the Lyons project. (Some of this material is attached to the Lyons submission.)

We chose the Lyons IBIP because as a family we strongly believe in the value of language learning and the importance of laying down those foundations at a young age. All of our children have had some language training, some as far as tertiary level, and I have always been unhappy with the amount of LOTE in primary schools. (I believe we waste our opportunities here but that is a discussion for another day.)

When the opportunity arose for our son to be part of a real, bilingual immersion program we grasped it. In addition to the opportunity to learn a language he has flourished in every way from day one. Lyons has been good for him.

I want to particularly echo the sentiments in the school submission that this project is only in its beginning phase and to change the structure of the school would almost certainly mean that the project will fail.

We are aware of costs identified by *Towards 2020* and agree that over time those costs must be brought down. Unfortunately Lyons looks like a very expensive school because the costs in the reporting year coincided with the peak cost of implementing the IBIP. The school community has committed to the process of bringing those costs down.

I believe that the options before you, in relation to Lyons, are to:

- work with the school to help create another cost-effective, high quality bilingual program like Telopea; or
- ruin the program.

For the program to succeed and flourish, I, along with every other parent who has chosen Lyons, contend that the school must continue to the end of primary on the one site. In addition it must be a dedicated bilingual school. It will not flourish if it is a bilingual stream in a larger school.

I do not want to get into the debate about the desirability of P-3 schools here. My only contention is that if you create Lyons as a P-3 school you will ruin the IBIP there.

There risks are many. The economies of scale will be ruined if the children in years 4-6 are moved to Curtin and we continue to try and run the IBIP there. We risk creating a group of marginalised children in a separate stream which will eventually peter out. If you run the IBIP as a separate stream in a P-3 school with a parallel conventional stream you will have the same inefficiencies on that campus. Moving Italian teachers between campuses will be inefficient. There would need to be a duplication of resources which is also inefficient. In sum it needs a single location to work.

It is my sincere belief that the proposal for Lyons is simply misguided, that the suggestion was made by someone who did not understand the program and that it is in a delicate stage of development.

I am also aware that the Italian government has made an offer of a Memorandum of Understanding to support bilingual education in the ACT. I do not know the terms of the offer, nor should I at this stage. I would ask you to consider it carefully and to consider how you might work with the Italian Government and the community to make bilingual education an adornment to the ACT government school system. Please consider how you might answer the Italian Government's offer if you persist with restructuring Lyons.

As a parent I ask that you give Lyons a chance to prove itself. If in five years or so we have not made the savings and boosted the enrolment to a satisfactory level we will have failed and I don't believe that anyone will give you an argument if you want to change the structure. At the moment however, two years into the project, you run the risk of undoing all the hard work of the school community. Work that was done before our family came to Lyons.

Our beautiful school could become a great asset to the diversity of the schooling system but only if you give it a chance. So please keep it intact and work with the community to create efficiencies and a win/win for everyone.

I want to reiterate that these are the views of a parent and I make my appeal as a parent, standing aside from any other role I might have in the wider debate.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Dunne
3 November 2006