

Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools

Submission from Wanniasa School P&C

Date: 2 November 2006

Executive Summary

The *Towards 2020* proposals announced by the ACT Government in June 2006 affect the Wanniasa School in two ways:

1. Student enrolments are likely to increase because of the proposed closure of Mt Neighbour Primary, Village Creek Primary and Kambah High Schools.
2. The Wanniasa Junior Campus and Preschool are to close at the present locations and be moved to the Senior Campus site. The school is to become a P-10 school, with the move to be implemented at the commencement of the 2008 school year.

This submission examines these matters in more detail and concludes that:

- The move of the Junior Campus and Preschool does not appear to have any educational benefits
- Parents view the existing separation between the Senior and Junior Campuses as providing a positive environment for learning, reducing the risk of intimidation and bullying, and providing a dispersion of traffic
- There will be a significant cost associated with the move of the Junior Campus and Preschool, which may outweigh any identified financial benefits
- Increases in enrolments are only likely at the Senior Campus (ie. Years 7-10)
- Enrolment trends and school capacity confirm the need for new buildings, but it is unclear whether the proposal for new buildings for Preschool to Year 2 is sufficient
- Links with cluster schools in the Kambah, Wanniasa, Greenway, Oxley and Monash region, especially for the Year 6 to Year 7 transition, need to be strengthened
- The timeframe for implementation is too tight

As detailed plans for the re-location of the Junior Campus and Preschool are not yet available, the Wanniasa School P&C recommends that the proposed changes be deferred for a period of at least 12 months. This has two benefits:

1. It allows time for a comprehensive examination by both the Department of Education and the Wanniasa School community, including cluster schools and neighbouring Kambah schools, of the details of the proposal so that an acceptable outcome might be achieved; and
2. Should the closure of Kambah High School go ahead, it allows for a smoother transition of Kambah High students into the Wanniasa School environment.

It must be emphasised that, at this point in time, the Wanniasa School P&C is neither supportive of nor hostile to the proposed consolidation onto the Senior Campus site. The P&C requires substantially more information about the precise nature of the changes, and how they will affect the school, before committing either way.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Background.....	5
Process.....	6
Educational Issues.....	7
Financial Issues.....	9
Geographical Issues.....	11
Social and Demographic Issues.....	13
Other Issues.....	16
(a) Links with cluster schools.....	16
(b) Timeframe for implementation.....	17
Conclusion and Recommendation.....	18
References.....	19

Introduction

Wanniassa School is a single K-10 school arising from an amalgamation of the Wanniassa Primary School and the Wanniassa High School in 2000. The two former schools now constitute the Junior and Senior Campuses of the K-10 school. They are located in separate buildings on two parcels of land separated by a pedestrian path. The Junior Campus fronts onto Sternberg Crescent, Wanniassa, while the Senior Campus fronts onto Wheeler Crescent, Wanniassa. The two campuses are connected by public walkways emanating from the rear of each building.

Wanniassa Preschool is located on the same parcel of land as the Junior Campus, and shares its car park.

The amalgamation into a single K-10 school has also resulted in a single School Board and a single P&C Association. A separate Parents Association exists for the Preschool.

The School Board has been active over the last 5 years in facilitating a smooth learning journey for students through the whole school. In particular, it has developed an integrated K-10 curriculum and strengthened the ties between the two campuses especially in relation to the transition from Year 6 (end of the Junior Campus) to Year 7 (beginning of the Senior Campus). From Year 2, students are slowly introduced to the teachers at the Senior Campus, so that by the end of Year 6 the students are very familiar with the high school environment and commencing Year 7 is not such a daunting experience.

Wanniassa School values relationships that are caring and respectful, a safe well-structured school environment and culture, and high quality teaching and learning. It offers all students an inclusive and comprehensive education program from Kindergarten to Year 10. The school sees its key role as developing successful future pathways for every young person. These pathways are not just within the confines of the K-10 school environment. They extend to ensure there are successful transitions from early childhood, to college, to other educational pursuits and to future employment prospects. In this context, the school's environment and educational programs are consistent with the ACT Department of Education and Training's Strategic Plan 2006-09 and embody the principles underpinning the *Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools* proposals – ie. choice, diversity and opportunity.

The school's vision is to be recognised as the leading school in the ACT in the delivery of programs of innovation. Recognising the links with the arts and creativity, the focus on innovation engages students in all subject disciplines through integrating and connecting learning with specific real life contexts and higher order problem solving opportunities. The curriculum is inquiry based, incorporates action research and provides opportunities for authentic, rich, task-based learning and assessment in all subjects studied. This includes but is not limited to arts-related subjects. The school believes these skills will be essential for the challenging world ahead for our students, and will contribute to initiatives aimed at addressing Australia's reported skills shortage.

Background

On 6 June 2006, the ACT Government brought down its Budget for 2006/07. Included in the Budget was a comprehensive package of change for the ACT public school system, titled “*Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools*” (hereinafter referred to as *Towards 2020*).

For the Wanniasa School, it was announced that “Wanniasa Preschool and Primary School students will move to the High School site from 2008” (DET 2006b). In addition, Wanniasa School would become a P-10 school and would “build on its current music/arts focus” (DET 2006a).

The *Towards 2020* package also announced a number of school closures, to take place over the next few years. Of particular relevance to Wanniasa School is the closure of Mt Neighbour Primary at the end of 2006, and Village Creek Primary and Kambah High at the end of 2007 (DET 2006a).

In accordance with the subsection 20(5) of the ACT *Education Act 2004*, the ACT Government has embarked on a mandatory six month consultation process concerning the *Towards 2020* proposals. This consultation period closes on 6 December 2006, and includes provision for the public to make written submissions. These submissions are to be lodged no later than 3 November 2006.

Subsection 20(5) of the *Education Act 2004* also requires the Minister to “have regard to the educational, financial and social impact on students at the school, the students’ families and the general school community” before closing or amalgamating a government school. The ACT Government has, therefore, suggested that submissions may wish to consider:

- Educational issues
- Financial issues
- Geographical issues
- Demographic issues
- Social impact issues, and
- Local, regional and system level implications

This document represents the formal written submission from the Wanniasa School P&C Association. It concentrates on the issues of relevance to Wanniasa School.

Process

The ACT Government's *Towards 2020* proposal, especially as it relates to Wanniasa School, has been the subject of much discussion at successive School Board and P&C Association meetings. The P&C appointed a working group to:

- Discuss the proposal with the parents of the school community
- Seek more detailed information from the Government
- Prepare related correspondence, submissions and notices
- Provide advice and direction to the P&C

The working group consisted of:

- Aaron Oshyer, P&C President
- Dan O'Brien, Delegate to the Council of P&C Associations
- Andrew Miller, P&C member
- Julian Barrington-Smith, P&C member

The working group has:

- Conducted an information session with parents
- Distributed bulletins to parents
- Written to, and met with, the ACT Minister for Education
- Drafted this submission

It is also proposed that the working group will

- meet with the Facilities Group of the Department of Education and Training to obtain a detailed briefing on the specifics of the re-location of the Preschool and the Junior Campus
- visit other K-10 schools – Telopea and Amaroo – to gain an understanding of how they operate on the one campus

Educational Issues

Under the question “What was taken into consideration in developing *Towards 2020?*”, DET (2006c) identifies the following range of educational factors:

- the number of enrolments in the school, the trend over time and projected enrolment numbers
- the educational provision in the school and the region, and options available for creating stronger pathways from Preschool to Year 12
- extra-curricula activities
- staff administrative and supervisory load
- access to a greater range of curriculum offerings at other schools in the region
- special needs programs – the portability of these programs
- out of area enrolment at the school
- the potential for the school to be converted into a different educational structure
- educational outcomes
- ability for strategic partnerships
- new focuses on early childhood and infants schooling, middle schooling and senior schooling
- providing more options for the provision of education for Canberra families, including an alternative to the stand alone college system
- maintaining and developing further excellence in the school system
- developing the type of education we want for our children by 2020

Issues dealing with enrolment numbers and trends are dealt with separately under “Social and Demographic Issues” (see below).

It is understood there will be a shift towards a new integrated P-12 curriculum for all schools in the ACT. The Wanniasa School P&C views this as a positive step that reinforces the initiatives undertaken by the School Board to institute a K-10 curriculum. We will be well placed to adopt the new framework.

In relation to the *Towards 2020* proposals, the question for Wanniasa School is:-

“How will the re-location of the Preschool and the Junior Campus assist in achieving better educational outcomes for students or improve delivery of educational programs by teachers?”

The proximity of the Preschool to the Junior Campus allows for teaching staff to share ideas and experiences, and for students to gain first hand experience of “big school”. The P&C acknowledges that the potential exists for the Junior Campus to have a closer relationship with the Preschool, and therefore strengthen early childhood learning outcomes.

As the school is already a K-10 school with an integrated curriculum, teaching and physical resources are already shared. Teachers from the two campuses already meet to share professional dialogue, and there are opportunities for staff at the Junior Campus to work at the

Senior Campus (and vice versa). There is also a close working relationship between the teachers at the Wanniasa Preschool and the Wanniasa K-10 school.

The integrated curriculum makes provision for early childhood, middle and senior schooling. Specific activities are undertaken to prepare each level of schooling for the next, particularly for the Year 6 to Year 7 transition. From as early as Year 2 students begin to get to know Senior Campus teachers and undertake some classwork at the Senior Campus. This is gradually increased so that by the end of Year 6 primary school students are very confident of the high school environment.

The system-level changes in the curriculum should go a long way towards achieving improved educational outcomes for all age groups, without needing to physically move the Preschool or Junior Campus from their present locations.

It is understood there is a wealth of research (see, for example, SOS 2006 & Jimerson 2006) which demonstrates that educational outcomes for students are improved in schools of relatively small enrolment numbers (200 – 400 for primary schools and 400 – 800 for high schools). Consistent with this, over the last few years, the ACT Government has also been moving to reduce class sizes, especially in the early childhood years.

Enrolment and student capacity numbers indicate that each campus at Wanniasa School fits neatly within the small school parameters. It can be argued that the re-location of the Junior Campus to the Senior Campus site creates a large school environment for our primary school students, which may have a detrimental effect on overall educational outcomes for these students. Parents are certainly concerned about the increased risk of intimidation and bullying, particularly of young students. Some primary school students have also expressed fears about being so closely associated with high school students (their physical size makes them “scary” to younger children). The existing separation of the Junior and Senior Campus is therefore seen as creating a positive environment for learning. It also contributes to student safety by dispersing traffic across two locations.

The P&C is aware that there are other K-10 schools in Canberra operating from single campus arrangements (Telopea Park and Amaroo). Enrolment numbers published by the Department of Education and Training (DET 2006d) indicate that these schools would fall into a large school definition. The P&C is confident that parents at these schools would report satisfaction with the educational outcomes being achieved. However, it is unknown whether there is comparative data to identify whether educational outcomes at these schools are better than those achieved at Wanniasa School.

The overall conclusion is that it is difficult to see any educational benefits being derived from the re-location of the Preschool and Junior Campus students to the Senior Campus site. They are far more likely to be achieved through continuing curriculum development.

Financial Issues

Under the question “What was taken into consideration in developing *Towards 2020?*”, DET (2006c) identifies the following range of financial factors:

- how much is it costing to educate a child in the school
- how old in the building – maintenance costs, costs to bring up to a minimum standard
- what it is costing to operate the school
- significant under-utilisation of Canberra’s public schools as a result of changing demographics and more families choosing non-government options
- an education system that is costing, on average, 20% more than in other states

It is difficult for the Wanniasa School P&C to discuss broad issues concerning the ACT public school system and its comparison with other jurisdictions. We are much more focussed on the specific proposals for our school. However, in general, if the ACT community wants to maintain a high educational standard, it should be prepared to pay a premium for that. This means it should be acceptable for the ACT system to cost more than other states. Acknowledging that there is always room for improvement, it is a matter of judgment as to whether 20% more is an acceptable figure.

In relation to the *Towards 2020* proposals, the question for Wanniasa School is:-

“What will the re-location of the Preschool and the Junior Campus cost, what savings can be achieved, and how do the two compare?”

The *Towards 2020* website identifies savings totalling approximately \$0.78m over the financial years 2006/07 to 2009/10 (DET 2006e). The Minister has advised that these savings arise from savings in re-current expenditure (ie. electricity, water, depreciation, cleaning, maintenance, etc) as the existing Preschool and Junior Campus buildings will not be occupied. However, while this saving may accrue to the Education Budget, it may not be realised by the taxpayer if the ACT Government uses the site for other community services.

Enrolment projections and the current Senior Campus capacity indicate that new buildings will be needed at the Senior Campus site to adequately accommodate all students and teachers (see “Social and Demographic Issues” below). The Minister has confirmed that the proposal is to construct new buildings for the early childhood years – ie. a new Preschool and new accommodation for Kindergarten to Year 2. The cost of these new facilities and associated fitout and equipment requirements is expected to amount to several million dollars.

In addition to the new buildings, the existing Senior Campus building and surrounds will require extensive refurbishment and upgrades to ensure they are suitable for today’s educational and building standards. The following list (not exhaustive) provides an example of the renovations required:

- canteen will need to be altered to cater for children as young as 4
- canteen will need to be upgraded to comply with current standards

- additional IT networking facilities will be required
- potential for additional space for an expanded library service
- re-arrangement of existing staff facilities to allow for more students and more staff
- re-design of existing classrooms to cater for primary school educational processes
- provision of new toilet facilities, specially designed for younger children
- upgrade of existing toilet facilities
- replacement of damaged facilities (particularly walls, doors and ceiling tiles)
- changes to existing playground areas to cater for increased numbers of students while protecting student safety
- provision of new playground equipment, especially for younger students
- larger car parking facilities and drop-off zones to cater for increased traffic
- replacement of aged HVAC infrastructure to cater for change in building usage

In addition, there may be other costs associated with the re-location that accrue to other ACT Government agencies, such as additional traffic calming measures for Wheeler Crescent incurred by Territory and Municipal Services and changes to bus routes incurred by ACTION.

The overall conclusion is that, taken in isolation, it is unlikely that the changes proposed for the Wanniasa School will realise any financial benefits, as the capital costs associated with the re-location to a standard that meets or exceeds existing facilities outweigh any savings to be achieved. It is not expected that these costs will be re-couped within the forward estimates period. However, refurbishment and upgrades to the existing Senior Campus school buildings are desperately required to bring the school up to standard and make the school an attractive proposition for potential new enrolments. The P&C therefore welcomes any additional funding for this purpose.

Geographical Issues

Under the question “What was taken into consideration in developing *Towards 2020?*”, DET (2006c) identifies the following range of geographical factors:

- where schools are located within each region
- alternative schools for families to access in the region
- proximity to other schooling options

For the North Tuggeranong region, there are:

- 9 primary schools – Taylor, Mount Neighbour, Village Creek, Urambi, Wanniassa, Wanniassa Hills, Monash, Fadden and Gowrie
- 9 preschools located at each primary school
- 2 high schools – Kambah and Wanniassa
- 2 colleges – Lake Tuggeranong and Erindale

In relation to the *Towards 2020* proposals, the question for Wanniassa School is:-

“What are the geographical implications for Wanniassa School, and how will the re-location of the Preschool and the Junior Campus affect them?”

Changes proposed in *Towards 2020* for Fadden and Gowrie Primary Schools will not affect Wanniassa School. These two schools are outside the priority enrolment area for Wanniassa.

Towards 2020 proposes to close Mount Neighbour and Village Creek primary schools and preschools. It is expected that the priority enrolment areas for these schools will be added to Taylor and Urambi, as they will be the remaining primary schools in Kambah. Therefore, very few (if any) students are expected to transfer to Wanniassa School Junior Campus as a result of the closure of Mount Neighbour and Village Creek schools.

Towards 2020 also proposes to close Kambah High School. As the nearest alternative high school in Tuggeranong, it is anticipated that many students from Kambah High will transfer to Wanniassa School Senior Campus. Also, the priority enrolment area for the Senior Campus is expected to be increased to incorporate the area servicing Kambah High.

Wanniassa School Junior Campus, Wanniassa Hills Primary and Monash Primary operate in a “cluster” arrangement given they form the existing priority enrolment area for Wanniassa School Senior Campus. It is expected that Taylor and Urambi Primary Schools will join this cluster should the closures proposed under *Towards 2020* go ahead.

At the college level, Wanniassa School Senior Campus is included in the priority enrolment area for Erindale College, while Kambah residents are able to choose between Lake Tuggeranong and the Canberra College. It is unclear how the priority enrolment areas for the colleges are to be redefined.

The key geographical impact on Wanniasa School is the potential for increased enrolments arising from the closure of Kambah High School and the inclusion of Kambah in the Senior Campus priority enrolment area. Increased enrolments means there is less spare capacity in the existing buildings to accommodate Preschool and Junior Campus students, increasing the probability that new buildings will be need to be constructed. To address this, the Minister has indicated that there will be new facilities for Preschool to Year 2 students.

The overall conclusion is that it is yet to be established whether the existing buildings will be sufficient to accommodate current Senior Campus students, Years 3 – 6 and the additional students transferring from Kambah High, while ensuring sufficient additional capacity remains to give effect to the guarantee that all students in the priority enrolment area who are desirous of attending Wanniasa School can do so. The P&C looks forward to further discussions about this matter.

Social and Demographic Issues

Under the question “What was taken into consideration in developing *Towards 2020?*”, DET (2006c) identifies the following range of social factors:

- the changing nature of communities, with neighbourhood schools no longer the first choice for families
- changing demographics in many regions, with falling numbers of children overall
- fewer children walking to school
- the need to have schools where the children are and where the community wants them
- the capacity of schools

In addition, the following points listed under the education issues appear to be relevant to the demographic considerations in this section:

- the number of enrolments in the school, the trend over time and projected enrolment numbers
- special needs programs – the portability of these programs (ie. could they be delivered at another site)
- out of area enrolments at the school

The *Towards 2020* proposal for Wanniassa School is not to close it or to amalgamate it with another school, but to re-locate the Preschool and Primary School (Junior Campus) to the High School (Senior Campus) site. The P&C concludes from this that the ACT Government considers that demographic profile of the Wanniassa, Oxley, Greenway region justifies the retention of both a primary and a high school. In this context, the question for Wanniassa School is:-

“What impact does the re-location have on the existing Senior Campus capacity, and what is the enrolment trend likely to be in future years?”

Trends in enrolments are important to the extent that the existing Senior Campus buildings have the capacity to adequately cater for the increased numbers of students arising from the move of the Preschool and Junior Campus and the proposed closure of other schools in the region, most notably Kambah High. The following figures are relevant to this matter:

- The Department of Education and Training has stated that Wanniassa Senior Campus capacity is 836 students
- For 2006, there are 353 students enrolled at the Senior Campus, 251 at the Junior Campus and 35 at Wanniassa Preschool (DET 2006d)
- For 2006, there are 296 students enrolled at Kambah High (DET 2006d)

These figures show that, if all of these students were to move to the Senior Campus, the site would be 99 over its capacity. This scenario is highly unlikely as it is expected that a large number of Kambah High students will move to schools other than Wanniassa. However, they do indicate that new buildings will be required to house all students.

While not formally announced within the *Towards 2020* package, the Minister for Education has advised the P&C that new buildings will be constructed for the early school years – that is, for Preschool to Year 2 students. There are 122 students enrolled in these years in 2006 (DET 2006d). The P&C is yet to be provided with any details concerning the design of these new buildings. It seems reasonable, however, to assume that the new Preschool would mirror the existing building with two classrooms, and that there would be capacity for two or three classes for the K-2 years. Based on a class size of 25 for Preschool and 21 for K-2, the new buildings would provide a minimum additional capacity of 176.

The next question is: if new buildings are being provided for Preschool to Year 2 students, can the existing Senior Campus buildings accommodate all remaining students? Based on 2006 enrolment numbers (DET 2006d), and again assuming that all Kambah High students transfer to Wanniasa, the remaining students total 813, which is very close to the existing capacity of 836. Since 2000, enrolments have fallen by:

- 38% at Wanniasa Junior Campus,
- 24% at Wanniasa Senior Campus, and
- 28% at Kambah High. (DET2006d and previous years' census data)

If these trends continue, and given that not all Kambah High students will transfer to Wanniasa, it would appear that the existing Senior Campus building has sufficient capacity to accommodate remaining students. Some renovations will be required to ensure that appropriate adjustments are made for teaching in a primary school environment.

On the other hand, the ACT Government also announced in the *Towards 2020* package that Wanniasa School would “build on its current music/arts focus” (DET 2006a). This should make the school more attractive to students who wish to pursue an arts direction in their education, and therefore act as a counter to the current downward trend in enrolments. In addition, the increased focus on the arts indicates that the school will need new or improved facilities to enable this to occur. (It is acknowledged that some of these facilities may be available at other schools, most notably Erindale College.) The effect of these influences is that it is likely the capacity of the school will be increased.

There are three other factors that may act to increase enrolment numbers at the Wanniasa School:

1. Students enrolled at primary schools in Kambah will now become part of the priority enrolment area for the Senior Campus. This increases the pool of potential enrolments, and means that the Government must ensure sufficient capacity exists to allow all students in Kambah to attend Wanniasa Senior Campus if they wish (see “Geographical Issues” above).
2. It has been reported in the Canberra Times in recent months that Wanniasa and Oxley are at the lower end of suburb-by-suburb analyses of both average incomes and median house prices. This may make these suburbs more attractive to new families to the ACT

or young couples seeking to enter the housing market. This may act to renew the numbers of children in the area overall, and assist in putting a break on falling enrolment numbers at both the Junior Campus and the Preschool.

3. The development of improved links with existing cluster schools at Wanniasa Hills and Monash (see discussion under “Other Issues” below).

The overall conclusion is that construction of new buildings is essential to accommodate all students on the one site. However, given enrolment trends, ACT Government initiatives and other environmental factors, it is unclear whether the proposal for new buildings for Preschool to Year 2 is sufficient to cater for future enrolments. It may be that new facilities are required for Years 3 – 6 also. The P&C welcomes further discussion on these matters.

Other Issues

(a) Links with cluster schools

Year 7 enrolments at Wanniasa Senior Campus in recent years show that:

- more than 90% of Wanniasa Junior Campus students go on to the Senior Campus,
- less than 10% of Wanniasa Hills Primary School move to the Senior Campus, and
- only about 20-30% of Monash students move to the Senior Campus.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that there is history of parents and students at both Wanniasa Hills and Monash Primary Schools not regarding Wanniasa Senior Campus highly. The concerns expressed include:

- the physical appearance of the buildings
- the educational programs on offer (particularly band programs)
- the worst students go to Wanniasa School
- they do not belong to the Senior Campus “family”

The first two points are being addressed through the *Towards 2020* proposals by the upgrading of buildings and the increased focus on the arts.

The third point needs to be explored further, and any misconceptions debunked. Concerns expressed appear to be based on the perception that Wanniasa School is a lower achieving school and that the students are ill disciplined troublemakers. The P&C does not believe this is the case, although it concedes that management and resourcing of high need students can always be improved.

The issue of greatest concern is the view that the Wanniasa Senior Campus is exclusively for Junior Campus students. The amalgamation of the former Wanniasa High and Wanniasa Primary Schools to form a single K-10 school has resulted in a view among many parents at Wanniasa Hills and Monash Primary Schools that they are no longer welcome at the High School. This is particularly evident with the middle schooling programs, which provide great opportunities for Year 6 students at the Junior Campus but do not involve Wanniasa Hills or Monash students. With the proposed closure of Kambah High and the inclusion of Kambah in the priority enrolment area for Wanniasa School, there is a danger that this view may be shared by the Taylor and Urambi Primary School communities. The P&C is concerned that the physical move of the Preschool and the Junior Campus to the Senior Campus site will further entrench this view.

In the opinion of the P&C, it is far more important to develop better links between the cluster schools in the Wanniasa and Kambah regions, than to re-locate the Junior Campus and Preschool. This will have the effect of improving enrolment numbers at Wanniasa Senior Campus, improving community focus and relieving pressures on capacity at other High Schools, particularly Melrose.

(b) Timeframe for implementation

The Government has stated that the *Towards 2020* proposals for Wanniasa School are to be implemented in time for the commencement of the 2008 school year. The P&C believes this is extremely ambitious for the following reasons:

- the school community is not yet convinced of the merits of the case for re-location
- there are reservations about the capacity of the Senior Campus buildings to accommodate all students and meet educational requirements
- detailed planning and design of new buildings and changes to existing buildings have not yet been provided
- significant changes to car parking and playground arrangements are required, and detailed discussions are yet to occur
- issues such as traffic calming measures for Wheeler Crescent and changes to bus routes are yet to be worked out, let alone agreed and implemented
- public perceptions in the priority enrolment area about the Senior Campus need to be addressed
- the precise nature of an improved focus of the arts needs to be determined
- middle schooling programs that involve all cluster schools need to be developed

In addition, the P&C believes that implementation of construction and other changes at Wanniasa School will be doubly disruptive for Kambah High students, as the proposal to close Kambah High is to take effect at the end of 2007. It would be far better to welcome these students to the new environment without the added difficulty of major construction works, additional student movements and other changes to the curriculum.

The P&C understands that the Minister shares this concern about the timeframe. He has offered to support a deferral of 12 months to ensure that details can be properly worked through. The P&C welcomes this offer and hopes that it will be sufficient for all issues to be satisfactorily addressed.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is no doubt that the ACT community expects the ACT Government to deliver a vibrant, responsive and world-class public education system that provides excellent educational opportunities in quality learning environments. Under the banner of *Towards 2020*, the Government has put forward a package of reform aimed at advancing this desire, and securing it for the future.

The P&C recognises that the Government needs to weigh the costs and benefits of the entire *Towards 2020* proposal as an overall package of reform. It is understood that the Government needs to consider broader issues in making its decisions about the future arrangements for public education in the ACT. The P&C is not equipped with all the knowledge and data that is available to the Government to make judgments across the education system. This paper, therefore, outlines the P&C's concerns and views with the *Towards 2020* proposals as they relate to Wanniasa School. The paper is intended to critically analyse those proposals, but should not be interpreted as being negative of those proposals.

It is always arguable whether particular reforms are beneficial for the community, and the *Towards 2020* package has certainly encountered extensive criticism. For Wanniasa School, there do not appear to be sufficient educational, financial or social benefits to justify the changes proposed. In addition, there is concern that the changes will adversely affect student safety, leading to a greater risk of intimidation and bullying. As far as the P&C is concerned, the school already provides excellent educational opportunities in a quality learning environment (although upgrades to the Senior Campus buildings are desperately required).

Notwithstanding this, it must be emphasised that, at this point in time, the Wanniasa School P&C is neither supportive of nor hostile to the proposed consolidation onto the Senior Campus site. The P&C requires substantially more information about the precise nature of the changes, and how they will affect the school, before committing either way.

As detailed plans for the re-location of the Junior Campus and Preschool are not yet available, the Wanniasa School P&C recommends that the proposed changes be deferred for a period of at least 12 months. This has two benefits:

1. It allows time for a comprehensive examination by both the Department of Education and the Wanniasa School community, including cluster schools and neighbouring Kambah schools, of the details of the proposal so that an acceptable outcome might be achieved; and
2. Should the closure of Kambah High School go ahead, it allows for a smoother transition of Kambah High students into the Wanniasa School environment.

References

Department of Education and Training (DET) (2006a), “Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools”, ACT Department of Education and Training, Tuggeranong

Department of Education and Training (DET) (2006b), “Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools – Proposal Overview”, retrieved from <http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/word/WanniassaSchool.doc> on 16 October 2006

Department of Education and Training (DET) (2006c), “Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools – Frequently Asked Questions”, retrieved from <http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/faq.htm#o6> on 17 October 2006

Department of Education and Training (DET) (2006d), “Government School Bulletin, February 2006 Census”, retrieved from http://www.det.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/Govt_School_censusFeb2006.pdf on 21 October 2006

Department of Education and Training (DET) (2006e), “Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools – What’s New - Savings by School 2004/05”, retrieved from http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/pdf/Savings_school_2004_05.pdf on 21 October 2006

Jimerson, L (2006), “The Hobbit Effect – Why Small Works in Public Schools”, retrieved from <http://www.ruraledu.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=beJMIZOCiRH&b=1842453&ct=2907931> on 21 October 2006

Save Our Schools Canberra (SOS) (2006), “Small Schools Achieve Better Results for Students from Low Income Families”, Press Release retrieved from <http://soscanberra.com/issues/small-schools-achieve-better-results-for-students-from-low-income-families> on 21 October 2006