



Submission from The Woden School P&C on *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools*

This submission is in response to the ACT Legislative Assembly's proposal to amalgamate the Woden School with Alfred Deakin High School by 2008 as stated in the *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools* document.

Definition of Amalgamation.

Whilst it has not been stated in the document, the government representatives at the Community forum and later in a meeting with the Woden School Board have stated that this is an administrative amalgamation. Although a firm definition of administrative amalgamation is not available, the salary savings indicated in the 'Financial Costs by school 2004/05' document suggest that when the two schools are amalgamated there will be significant salary savings. This suggests that some staffing cuts are envisaged for the dual campus school and it seems logical to assume that these staff would be lost from the administrative staff from both schools which could include a Principal, BSO, Registrar and a number of Executive teacher positions.

Position of the Woden School P&C.

The Woden School P&C formally rejects the proposed administrative amalgamation with Alfred Deakin High School. This position was reached after careful consideration, taking into account the following:

- views and concerns of our families and students
- discussions within the P&C and in conjunction with the Woden School Board
- meetings and discussion with the Alfred Deakin High School P&C Committee
- attendance at government community consultation forums
- research and information from Department of Education website, policy documents and the Education Act 2004.

This position was reached for a variety of reasons, the most important of which will be addressed in the rest of this submission.

The Educational Costs.

The *Towards 2020: Renewing our schools* document states that the proposal will "allow for additional opportunities for students with special needs". No suggestion has been made about what opportunities there would be or how students would access them.

- Individual Educational Programs for Students

The Disabilities Services Act 1991, (Schedule 2.4) states that “services should be tailored to meet the individual needs and goals of students with disabilities.” All students attending the Woden School have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This is designed by the parents, the class teacher and either the Deputy or the Principal at the start of each year and later reviewed. All participants have a role in ensuring that the IEP can be implemented and the Deputy and Principal also need to ensure that any ‘reasonable adjustments’ are made. Reasonable adjustments are a legal requirement to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability (Making Reasonable Adjustments, 2006). It is difficult to see how with a reduction of staff both these legal requirements could continue to be met.

- Curriculum Development:

The reduced number of Administrative Staff would mean that responsibility for curriculum in both campuses would fall to fewer and possibly less experienced staff. The ongoing development of appropriate curriculum for all the students at the Woden School and Alfred Deakin High School is currently the responsibility of a number of Executive Teachers. While all the teachers in the school have input into curriculum development, the Executive Teachers organise and facilitate the writing and implementation of appropriate curriculum. With fewer Executive Teachers, the role would become wider for the remaining staff which may mean more reliance on pre-written curriculum. Children with special needs often have very differing educational needs from their mainstream peers as well as each other. It is difficult to see how their diverse needs could be met with less staff than working in this area than do now.

- Professional Development and Mentoring

The Principal, Deputy Principal and Executive Teachers are responsible for the mentoring and on-going, school based professional development of the staff in their schools. With fewer of these staff available it is highly unlikely that all the staff would be able to be involved in the variety and quality of professional development they currently access. Administration staff and Executive Teachers not only run courses and meetings but co-ordinate opportunities for staff, inform staff of available sessions, implement strategies to enable staff to attend professional development outside the school and engage staff in meaningful dialogue with each other so that information can be widely disseminated. This is both cost effective and allows staff to cement understandings and develop ideas and knowledge. All of these things give both schools high quality, well informed teaching staff, able to provide the best possible learning situations for all the students.

The Social Costs.

- Support for Students.

The importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of students is an undermining principle of the Education Act 2004. Students at The Woden School are involved in specific programs to support their social development. Wombaroos is a program that has been running in the school for 3 years, it is continuing to develop with the incorporation of restorative practices. To continue meeting the needs of the students this program will change in the future.

Support from Executive teachers, and other senior staff is vital for future directions to be cohesive and unified.

The administrative staff at the Woden School are actively involved in supporting students with special needs every day. Their roles are greater than just providing administrative support, including giving medication and organising the bus program (to and from school), so having them based at Alfred Deakin High School could mean that this support is lost. This would equally apply to staff moving down to The Woden School from Alfred Deakin High school. Splitting staff would be isolating and inefficient. In the particular case of The Woden School and Alfred Deakin High School amalgamation is not just a case of an increased number of students but an increased number of tasks. The way funding and staff are allocated and organised for students with special needs is different to how this is done for other students. The education programs are also distinctively different and often have specific administration and organisation tasks. So in linking these two schools, it would not be a case of dealing with larger numbers for the same tasks but rather two sets of tasks.

- Support for Families.

The Education Act 2004 includes in its principles that the school system is responsive to community needs and developing emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing of all students. Families at The Woden School may access a variety of services due to the demands of bringing up a child with special needs. Administrative staff may be involved in linking families with respite care facilities, therapy and counselor support, medical emergencies (for students with epilepsy and other medical conditions) and other crisis support. Co-ordination of these services in a caring, professional way can be a time consuming task and loss of staff will result in less support for the vulnerable families at both schools.

- Support for SCAN and In-school Reviews.

The Principal and/or the Deputy Principal of The Woden School currently attend every SCAN and In-school Review meeting for each student. This is in accord with the Department of Education and Training Policy on Services to students with disabilities and mandatory Reporting, (March 1998/2001) which states that Principals “provide appropriate information and active encouragement of parent/guardian/carer and community participation.” However it is a time consuming process, as it is necessary to co-ordinate with the needs of parents, other staff and students. Reduction in numbers of Executive staff would result in these people having a reduced role in these important meetings. They are usually the people who see the whole school and are able to see how reasonable adjustments can be made to support a number of students and how innovations can be used to enhance outcomes for many students.

The Financial Costs.

- Infrastructure.

An administrative amalgamation between The Woden School and Alfred Deakin High School poses some inefficiencies in the running of two campuses. The current arrangement of ICT would need to be modified to allow for access of information between both campuses. This may mean re-networking of computer systems for both staff and students. Given that the campuses do not share a common boundary, appropriate paths between campuses would need to be built. It is possible to

walk along the footpath but this takes up to 15 minutes between the buildings and there are security issues for staff moving money and other valuables. The need for efficient communication between the schools would also need to be addressed and added phone lines may be necessary to support the increased communication needs.

- Community Support.

It is possible that with an administrative linking the community perception of The Woden School as a provider of education for children with special needs will change. Currently projects of The Woden School are often given high priority by clubs and community groups for funding. In the past donations for the operation of buses, provision of equipment and goods for fetes, raffles and other fundraising activities have been offered. This changed perception of The Woden School could impact on these donations, requiring that any shortfall be met by the government.

Inclusivity.

The Woden School and Alfred Deakin High School are currently involved in a number of inclusion programs such as Hospitality, Disability Awareness and individual, developmentally appropriate integration programs for The Woden School students. Both schools are committed to developing these programs in the future in a way that supports all the students. Some suggestions for future collaboration include access to facilities (gym, industrial kitchen, horticulture area), mentoring programs, cross campus work experience, developing a community garden (and other joint projects), combined social and educational activities (excursions, camps, supervised shared lunch days) and staff involvement in combined Professional development. These activities will require planning and careful management by staff who understand the students and the school management and culture at both campuses. Effective inclusion and collaboration programs may require an increase in staff to adequately support such an initiative.

Recommendation.

The Woden School P&C recommends that the ACT Government reconsiders the proposal of a multicampus school combining The Woden School and Alfred Deakin High School and leaves the schools operating separately without staff cuts. Collaboration between these schools in a way which supports the principles outlined in The Education Act 2004 will improve learning outcomes for all students. The Woden School P&C will support the staff of The Woden School in the development of new and innovative programs so that both schools can continue to provide excellent education outcomes for individual students without the need for changes to the basic structure of either school.

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