

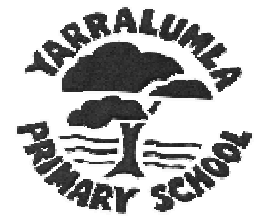
Yarralumla Primary School



P&C Association Submission *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools*

13 September 2006

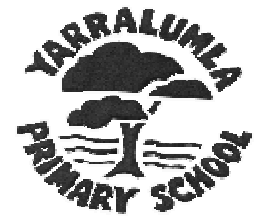
Current Situation



Yarralumla Primary School (YPS) is a well equipped and maintained school serving K-6, Pre-school, Montessori and Special Needs students on a single campus. We have highly trained and committed staff. Parents, Carers, Teachers and Students believe that YPS students are offered the highest quality education, care and opportunity at this school.

- Leading in ICT implementation – every classroom has an interactive whiteboard as part of a whole school student network
- Fully equipped Computer Laboratory
- Every class has a My-Classes website
- Four new computers in every classroom
- Gifted and Talented programme
- Well equipped gymnasium
- Purpose built art room
- Rostrum Public Speaking Competition, Tournament of Minds, Cluster Music, Science and Arts projects
- After School Care
- Canteen
- Senior snow trip
- Identified as a case study for the Learning Federation in using learning objects
- Fundamental movement skills P-6
- Student Buddy system
- Bully Busters Anti-Bulling Programme
- “You can do it” Social Skills Programme
- Dare to lead indigenous participation
- Visual and performing arts
- Music programme
- Footsteps dance lessons
- Fife and Drum band
- After school sports programmes
- School gardens
- Allergy friendly school
- Strong parent supported P&C

Our Understanding of the Towards 2020 Proposal



The impact on YPS of the Towards 2020 proposal is significant. The school is not closing outright, however 43% of the current classes are proposed to be removed from this school in 2008.

- From 2008 onwards YPS is proposed to become a P-3 School
- All Year 4-6 students will be moved to Forrest Primary School
- Limited information has been released on the future of the Learning Support Units or the Montessori school

The Minister has confirmed that the rationale for the proposed changes to YPS is:

- Focusing on YPS student numbers
- Overall cost redistribution and savings in the education sector
- Providing a focus on Early Childhood Education
- Strengthening Public Education

We will address each of these individually, plus comment on other considerations.

YPS student numbers ...



Recent Department of Education & Training difficulties reduced YPS numbers significantly in 2002, but the school is once again growing under the strong leadership of the current Principal. Over the next two years the school roll should return to 'normal' as the strong numbers in Years 3 and 4 remain at YPS.

- Yarralumla Primary School has traditionally been well supported by the local community, however 6 Principals in 5 years has had a dramatic effect on school enrolment in 2002, when student numbers fell from 220 to 140, particularly in the senior years.
- The school is rebuilding and has strong student numbers in years P-4.
- Yarralumla's demographic is becoming younger as evidenced by full pre-school enrolments continuing to feed into the school. We attract large numbers of diplomatic families and families new to Canberra.
- Yarralumla has a strong and active parent, carer and business community that will continue to support the school.

Cost Redistribution and Savings...



Minimal information has been provided on the savings anticipated if this proposal is implemented. The Minister has agreed that cost saving is not the driving force behind the proposed changes to YPS. More information is required for adequate consideration, although we know:

- YPS costs must be recalculated to include two Learning Support Units.
- Infrastructure costs at the school will not decrease as many of these costs are fixed.
- Marginal cost savings have been identified, however these savings will quickly be outspent by transition costs associated with implementing the Towards 2020 proposal.
- Under this proposal, costs may actually increase as the school will need to prepare for an increase in younger children.
- Departmental staff costs will not change significantly as the students who are removed from YPS will still need teachers somewhere. Contrary to the savings documented, a commitment has been made that the YPS campus will have it's own Principal. No staff savings can therefore be evidenced.
- This year the school has undergone a significant refurbishment minimising ongoing maintenance issues.
- The school has embarked on a 'sustainable school project', which commences in 2007. This project aims to reduce infrastructure costs of the school such as heating and electricity. Please refer to Appendix One for further information. This will result in significant cost savings that could be applied to other schools in the State.

Focus on Early Childhood Education...



We understand that the DE&T and the Ministry have a strong focus on Early Childhood Education. We support this initiative, however we ask why implementing this model at YPS necessitates moving years 4-6 offsite? The vast majority of ACT schools will need to implement the Early Childhood curriculum in a P-6 environment. We should do the same.

- Repeated requests have been made for information to explain why splitting schools to implement the P-3 curriculum is better for students than providing a single school to deliver primary education. No information has been provided. We conclude that this initiative is untested.
- We understand that there is currently no implementation plan for the early childhood model, no consistent understanding of what 'early childhood education' encompasses and no measures for how the success of the model will be assessed. Without this, it is irresponsible to consider uprooting students in 2008.
- New schools are being built elsewhere in the state without the geographically split P-3 model, however we understand that the early childhood focus will be implemented at these schools.
- The P-3 model removes mentoring and leadership opportunities from the YPS Year 4-6 students. At an age when they should be flourishing in a known, comfortable school environment they must start again building new friendships and establishing new norms. This is proven to have a significant impact on educational performance.

Removing Year 4-6 students is an unnecessary action in the implementation of the P-3 curriculum and will result in significant negative student impacts.

Strengthening Public Education



We strongly support this, however YPS parent and carer response to Towards 2020 is...

- If their children are going to be forced to have a break in their primary schooling, they won't wait until 2008 – they will move their children as young as possible – next year.
- Feeder years into Private Education are Years 3, 5 and 7. Towards 2020 is forcing a change of school at Year 4. Parents and carers will remove their children from Public Education at the completion of Year 2, to avoid having 3 different schools in 3 years.
- The Towards 2020 proposal is confusing. It proposes a multitude of different schooling arrangements without any obvious overall master plan or explanation of benefits.
- Any benefits that are detailed in the proposal are contradicted elsewhere in the document. The P-6 model is highly favoured and the benefits of a 'seamless' education for children is often referred to. None of these benefits are available to YPS students.
- Parent/carer involvement in P-3 schools will be diluted as it is spread too thinly across multiple schools in different suburbs.
- Parent and Carers believe their choices have been removed from them.

This proposal does not strengthen Public Education – it will drive more students out.

Other Considerations...

Learning Support Units



YPS has two Learning Support Units. These units differ from others in the ACT as the transition between junior and senior classes is seamless. Our units are highly successful, have stable teaching staff, are producing excellent educational opportunities for the students and provide an unmatched transition for students who would otherwise struggle in mainstream classes.

- YPS has a purpose built environment.
- The Autistic Programme and students are fully integrated and embraced into YPS.
- The senior autistic students need appropriately aged peers. Separating them from the buddy relationships they have formed in P-3 will impact these students greatly.
- It is extremely difficult to move autistic students as they suffer from impairment in social interaction, impairment in communication, and build up acceptance of their environment and routine.
- Larger schools still need to cater to autistic students on a small scale – small schools are perfectly designed for this.

The Autistic programme currently operating at YPS should be held up as a model of best practice - not destroyed by fractionation.

Other Considerations...

Child Safety



Implementing this proposal will impact the safety of YPS children both physically and emotionally. We would ask that significant consideration be given to this concern.

Physical Safety

- In 1991 a proposal to merge schools including Yarralumla and Forrest was rejected due to traffic safety issues. Traffic has only increased. It is 4 km over six busy roads from YPS to Forrest Primary School.
- Increased traffic in drop-off zones is an accident waiting to happen.
- YPS children who currently walk or ride to school cannot in Years 4-6. Children will become fatter and unhealthier as parents and carers have no option but to drive them to school.
- For parents and carers it is logistically impossible to safely drop off or pick up 3 young children from 3 different schools.
- An unfenced school on a busy road can be a huge risk for an LSU student.

Emotional Safety

- Towards 2020 is moving children at a vulnerable age. We will see an increased sense of isolation and anomie in some students.
- Reduced social resilience is a high risk.
- Only YPS children will be impacted in this merger with Forrest Primary.
- YPS students begin 'at the bottom of the ladder' at an age when they should be given leadership and mentoring opportunities. The buddy programme is impossible to maintain.
- There is far less opportunity for community linking and spontaneous parent-to-parent support for students should this proposal proceed.

Other Considerations...

Forrest Primary



Forrest Primary School is regarded as a high quality school. We believe the same of Yarralumla Primary School. Issues associated with merging these schools include:

- Parents and Carers from both schools are greatly concerned about the impact of the merger.
- Yarralumla parents choose YPS for high school-time parent involvement, community feel, small-school advantages - a choice lost for Years 4-6 under the Towards 2020 proposal.
- Forrest Primary is at student capacity. They will need to restrict enrolments or build new classrooms to cater for YPS students, neither of which is desired.
- Merging the schools was rejected in 1991 due to traffic safety concerns. These remain.
- Forrest Primary does not have LSU's and is not in a location to support them. This proposal forces the Senior LSU students and Year 4-6 YPS students to abandon established buddy relationships as they will be required to attend different schools. This will harm both sets of students.
- Yarralumla is a diverse community. Some YPS families do not have the means to transport their children to Forrest. They need their local school.

A merger with Forrest Primary School does not deliver any educational or social benefit to students nor any financial or logistical benefit to the schools.

An Alternative Proposal



The alternative proposal we present delivers all of the positive features that the Towards 2020 proposal rationale requires. Additionally, it diminishes the negative outcomes that will result for YPS students if the current proposed model is implemented. The alternative proposal is:

- As YPS has been identified as an 'ideal' site for Early Childhood Education, use this school as a site to pilot the implementation of the Early Childhood curriculum.
- As the vast majority of schools will need to implement the early childhood model in a P-6 environment keep Years 4-6 on-site at Yarralumla.
- To create a strong Early Childhood environment amalgamate Yarralumla Pre-School, Deakin Pre-School, Montessori Pre-School and Yarralumla Primary School.
- Yarralumla has the beginnings of a strong Early Childhood program based on established links with Yarralumla Pre-School and programs such as Fundamental Movement Skills, integration of appropriate ICT for early childhood and specialist Autism programs.
- Maintain both Learning Support Units at YPS and use these classes as a model of excellence in integration of Special Education in a mainstream setting (particularly Early Childhood).
- To manage such a complex site and implement an exemplary Early Childhood setting a full time Principal would be required on site, therefore an administrative amalgamation with Forest Primary would be counter productive to establishing this Early Childhood curriculum.
- Investigate offering before school care, Special Education support services, Health and Childcare services on the current Yarralumla site to support the Early Childhood full service model.

Implement the Early Childhood curriculum at YPS, keeping Years 4-6 on-site. Use YPS as a pilot site for the implementation of Early Childhood focus in a P-6 school. There is no financial, educational or social need to move these students to another school. All impacts of moving these students are negative.

Alternative Proposal Benefits



The alternative proposal provides all stakeholders with greater positive outcomes.

The ACT Government:

- Strengthens Public Education
- Saves transition expenditure
- Maximises the investment already committed rather than creating more cost
- Satisfies the voting community

The Department of Education:

- Establishes the Early Childhood curriculum.
- Works the model into the P-6 environment – important for the majority of implementations
- Allows time to work out the details of what Early Childhood Education will look like in the ACT without negatively impacting any students

The YPS Community:

- Provides a safe environment for all students
- YPS students are given the same educational opportunities as other students in the ACT
- Ensures a strong enrolment base
- Ensures the ongoing viability of the school

Summary



■ For Yarralumla Primary School, Towards 2020...

- ❑ Implements an untested educational model.
- ❑ Does not strengthen Public Education.
- ❑ Will not increase student numbers.
- ❑ Will not save costs.

■ For YPS Parents and Carers, Towards 2020...

- ❑ Removes our Choice.
- ❑ Decreases Diversity.
- ❑ Offers no more Opportunity than we currently have.
- ❑ Increases our Risk.

■ Our Alternative to Towards 2020...

- ❑ Provides positive outcomes for all stakeholders.
- ❑ Costs less.
- ❑ Provides a positive model for future implementations.