



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mr Jonathan Davis MLA (Deputy  
Chair), Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT

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Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion,  
ACT Legislative Assembly,  
GPO Box 1020,  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via Email: [LCommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:LCommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

## Submission - Inquiry into the future of School Infrastructure in the ACT

Thank you for the opportunity for the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) to provide input to the Inquiry by the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion into the future of School Infrastructure in the ACT.

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the national association representing professional town planners throughout Australia. The Institute has a total membership of about 5,500 people. The ACT Division of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA ACT) is led by a committee of members who voluntarily help advance the planning profession in the ACT.

The ACT Community Wellbeing Framework includes a Social Connection Domain. This highlights that connecting with people is one of the key determinants to affecting people's wellbeing. This included connections to family and friends but there was value in belonging to community groups, teams and the like. It was important that people be provided with opportunities to connect through suitable spaces (pg24).

The ACT Planning Strategy 2018 and the Draft District Strategies released recently recognise the role that community facilities play in supporting the liveability of new and existing communities. The latter highlights:

- The need for community facilities to 'keep pace' with changing requirements – in terms of adaptability and accessibility
- The 'mismatch' in the distribution of community facilities with the population
- The 'lag' in the provision of community facilities within growth areas
- Siting community facilities in the right areas
- The 'co-location' of community facilities – with a focus on locating community facilities in town and group centres.

Schools (including buildings and surrounding spaces, such as ovals) are invariably classified as a community facility or social infrastructure. In 2019 Infrastructure Australia conducted the Australian Infrastructure Audit which highlighted the importance of social infrastructure in the nation's wellbeing (pg388). In the report education was included as social infrastructure – being the buildings and spaces that are used to provide social services.

The term 'community facility' is generally taken to include education/schools but also covers uses such as cultural, health, civic and recreational facilities.

In the Territory Plan, the term 'community use' includes the term 'educational establishment' which means 'the use of land for the purpose of tuition, training or research directed towards the discovery or application of knowledge, whether or not for the purposes of gain, and may include associated residential accommodation'. Most schools are located on land which is zoned Community Facility.

Schools are an important community facility – while their main function is to provide education for the students – they also are a resource for the wider community through the use of halls/meeting spaces to the community/organisations – outside of school hours where community members come onto the school site. This establishes a relationship with the community and provides valuable resources to those who might need/use them.

The school resources made available depends upon a range of factors, some of which can compete with each other. For example, the objective of safety and security of a significant asset can compete with the desire for openness and community connection. Urban planning and facility design, asset management and governance are critical issues that need to be considered in developing schools. As a starting point schools should not be seen as buildings, but as a facility for a range of organisations with networks of connections.

If designed appropriately, with both governance and asset management attuned to enabling schools to operate more than a school, improved wellbeing outcomes could be achieved.

The planning for schools and other community infrastructure are often undertaken within different agencies. While the planning agency allocate zoned land for community facilities, when these are developed and for what purposes falls within the ambit of other agencies. It is not clear what level of connectedness between agencies occurs.

There has been considerable interest both internationally and nationally on schools taking on more of a role as infrastructure that would be used to deliver community programs and services, alongside its operations as a school. For example, the University of Melbourne and other organisations were funded from 2019 – 2022 by the Australian Research Linkage Program to inform better design and sharing of school infrastructure that improves education and strengthens communities: <https://sites.research.unimelb.edu.au/learn-network/home/projects/building-connections> .

As compact city programs continue to be rolled out, the need for schools to become broader community facilities becomes greater. There is more strain placed on existing infrastructure and the funding available to community infrastructure must deliver greater 'benefits'. This makes the availability of resources/services from existing community facilities, such as schools, even more critical. This needs to be considered along with how accessible/adaptable existing schools are.

We note that the NSW planning system directly supports the shared use of school facilities. It is a provision in the *Transport and Infrastructure State Environmental Planning Policy* (SEPP) that requires any consent authority to consider whether a proposed development

"enables the use of school facilities (including recreational facilities) to be shared with the community". We consider the ACT planning system could include similar provisions.

Most schools in the ACT have their own management structures and independent booking systems, as is the case with other individual community facilities. There is no integrated booking system for all community facilities across the ACT. This is consistent with the ownership/management of community facilities being likewise spread across various groups. While the benefits of a consistent database for all community facilities is appreciated, we acknowledge this may result in the need for considerable resources to maintain such a database. As such, we suggest that until such time that a database can be established and appropriately resourced, consideration could be given to establishing a centralised Asset Management, even just for the public sector schools. This would follow a similar model to that of School Infrastructure NSW that has a dedicated Assets Activation team which specifically deals with managing shared use of school facilities.

The availability of data on how schools are used by the community/community groups is limited. Data on what community facilities are used by schools also appears to be limited. In 2009 the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission estimated that two-thirds of Victorian schools might share their facilities in some way (<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/sharing-of-government-and-community-facilities.pdf>) (pg36).

We note that the NSW Education system have made considerable improvements in how they use their school assets and share these with the community. The NSW Department of Education has established a *Sharing of School Facilities Policy* and a series of implementation procedures (<https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2009-0400>).

There are also many circumstances where the revenue from fees generated from community use of certain school facilities in NSW have been reinvested in supplementing funding to improve the quality of school facilities and also, to establish support programs to improve service delivery in schools. In essence, it's a passive income to feed into helping and supporting the ongoing improvement of public schools in NSW.

In addition, we understand that NSW is also looking at digital capacity in a centralised system to standardise and timetable the use of school facilities by communities.

Thank you, again for the opportunity to provide input to this important inquiry.

Should you require any further information or clarification of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0411 018 099 or [trevor.fitzpatrick@planning.org.au](mailto:trevor.fitzpatrick@planning.org.au)

Yours sincerely



Trevor Fitzpatrick MPIA (Fellow)  
**PIA ACT President**