

9 Welsh Place
Chifley ACT 2606
martinmiller.au@gmail.com

3 April 2009

The Secretariat
Standing Committee on
Education, Training and Youth affairs

Terms of Reference: Inquiry into School Closures and reform of the Education system

I am writing to the committee on the impacts of the *Towards 2020, renewing our schools* in Woden primarily which was a proposal to close 38 schools based on the Functional Review document submitted to Cabinet in early 2006.

The final decision was to close 23 schools across Canberra and in Woden the Closure of Melrose primary in Chifley at the end of 2006 and the closure of the Lyons primary at the end of 2008. Lyons would then reopen as an early childhood centre from 2009. This was the worst outcome for Woden and Parents with children living in the Chifley - Lyons area. The final decision had no community support what so ever, there were at least three other better options than this decision.

The best and only option was to amalgamate Lyons and Melrose primary schools on the Chifley site and the relocation of the YMCA to the Lyons primary site so that the walking distances for primary school age children would be no further than 2km and the majority, far less. There is only one safe shared pathway between Chifley and the other locations and that is to Lyons and vice versa. The other schools (Torrens and Mawson) that Chifley was assigned to there are no safe pathway routes and the distance is 3km way. Why?

The figures for the enrolment decline that the ACT government used for Melrose Primary was based on the average for Woden and not Chifley's demographics. The Chifley school community and the Chifley Preschool community was able to show through the work of an independent Statistician that while there was a decline in the 5 to 9 year olds; Chifley had the highest increase in Woden in the 0 to 4 year olds and had started a rejuvenation ,with younger families moving into the area.

The issue about quality of schools and the quality of teaching in public schools has been raised by the ACT government several times and as reason for parents deciding to go to private schools, in Chifley while the enrolments where at 88 students, another 94 students within the 2006 PEA were going to other public schools. This doesn't take into account those students within the area attending private schools like Sacred Heart located in Pearce.

Why such a huge drift away from Melrose Primary? If it was a quality school with great facilities and quality teaching, why were so many Parents not sending their children to their local school? These questions have never been answered by the ACT Government and the Education Department only stating that parental choice is this issue for the move, and a policy that is still supported today. Melrose wasn't unique in this statistic. Weston Primary had a 2006 enrolment of 58 students with another 144 in area attending other govt. schools, Narrabundah had 60 enrolments with 244 going to other out of area schools and Kambah High had in area enrolments of 203 with 286 attending other govt. schools. This is a bit more than parental choice and I would go as far to say that having visited some of these schools, they have been terribly run down by the Education department and there are obviously issues with the perception of quality teaching in these schools.

If you look at the reverse of this situation like older inner suburbs like Forrest, Red Hill and in Woden, Torrens. Forrest had in area PEA of 104 students with 329 students attending from out of area, including 20 NSW students. Red Hill had an in area of 158 with 308 students coming from out of area, including 68 NSW students, and Torrens Primary with 116 in area students with 254 students from out of area. This hasn't been a concern for the ACT government rather than to focus on the trend away from public schools to Private and force more Parents to travel further and further to schools.

ACTION had to put on 38 new school Bus services at the start of 2007 followed by more this year. This has been at significant cost to the ACT taxpayer and one the ACT government didn't consider in its full costs for transition to other schools. I have been trying to get the full cost of the annual school bus costs, from 2005 to this year, from ACTION but I am unable to get the information from ACTION before this Submission cut off date. I have managed to attain a document which relates to a School Bus Deletion document which states that the average or approximate costs of operating a school bus morning and afternoon for a year is \$ 50 000. The committee may like to request this information from ACTION as I have been unable to get the full costs. You could reduce by half the costs of school Buses if students attended schools in their local area.

The Chifley school community was not advised by the Education department about the new priority enrolment areas (PEA) for Chifley until the middle of January 2007. We were told initially that school students at Melrose primary had right of entry into any school within the geographical area Woden. We were surprised to see that Mawson primary was allocated into the PEA for Chifley. For students walking or cycling to Mawson they would have to cross two major arterial roads, none with adequate crossing points on the Chifley side. A report conducted by an ACT roads consultant confirmed this by stating, *'that given the distances involved it would be unlikely that primary school children would be able to walk or cycle to school'*.

This is the same distance to Torrens Primary where there traffic issues are a major concern because of Torrens Primary high out of area enrolments.

A morning Bus to Torrens and Mawson Primary schools was initially provided as the normal route Buses didn't service Torrens or any other school in Woden without catching two buses. This was later revised to Torrens only after one month because of no students going to Mawson. ACTION chair a Student Bus Transport Liaison Committee to address school bus issues but this had only been recommenced seven months after the first round of school closures. Why weren't there meetings earlier?

The Lyons Italian bilingual program was relocated from Lyons to Yarralumla primary so for those living in Woden attending Lyons this is a major imposition. No school Buses have been provided to date. It must be said the Italian bilingual program offered at Lyons wasn't a success with their enrolments at 76 (lower than Melrose) with 74 attending other schools. There wasn't an offer to amalgamate from the ACT Government so with Melrose likely to close there wasn't time to sit down with both schools and look at the options.

There are further transport issues under the current PEA for students attending the Early learning school at Lyons with the PEA option to go to Curtin or Hughes primary once completing Year 2. These P2 schools located on existing school sites haven't been explained to the community and in fact the majority of the community have never supported this model. Why can't you have an Early childhood centre co located with a P6 school? This would be a Birth to Year 6 just like the P to 10 schools that the ACT Government is building and consolidating existing schools.

Why wasn't there option to build a P10 school like other areas? The Melrose high school site could have been considered or look at building a new primary school campus in Pearce, so that the school is in a central location for the three suburbs of Chifley, Pearce and Torrens.

In summary I agree that there were some decisions to make about closing schools and amalgamations to make but it shouldn't have been the Governments but rather a decision for local communities with a focus on encouraging parents and their children to support their local schools within their own area. Thus reducing transport costs and congestion around our schools. The Government would solely focus on providing quality teaching and better facilities. Schools are now competing with each other for enrolments when this shouldn't be the case. In Woden, we didn't receive anything but the loss of one and half schools. The decision would have been received better, if Woden was receiving a newly built school even if two had to close.

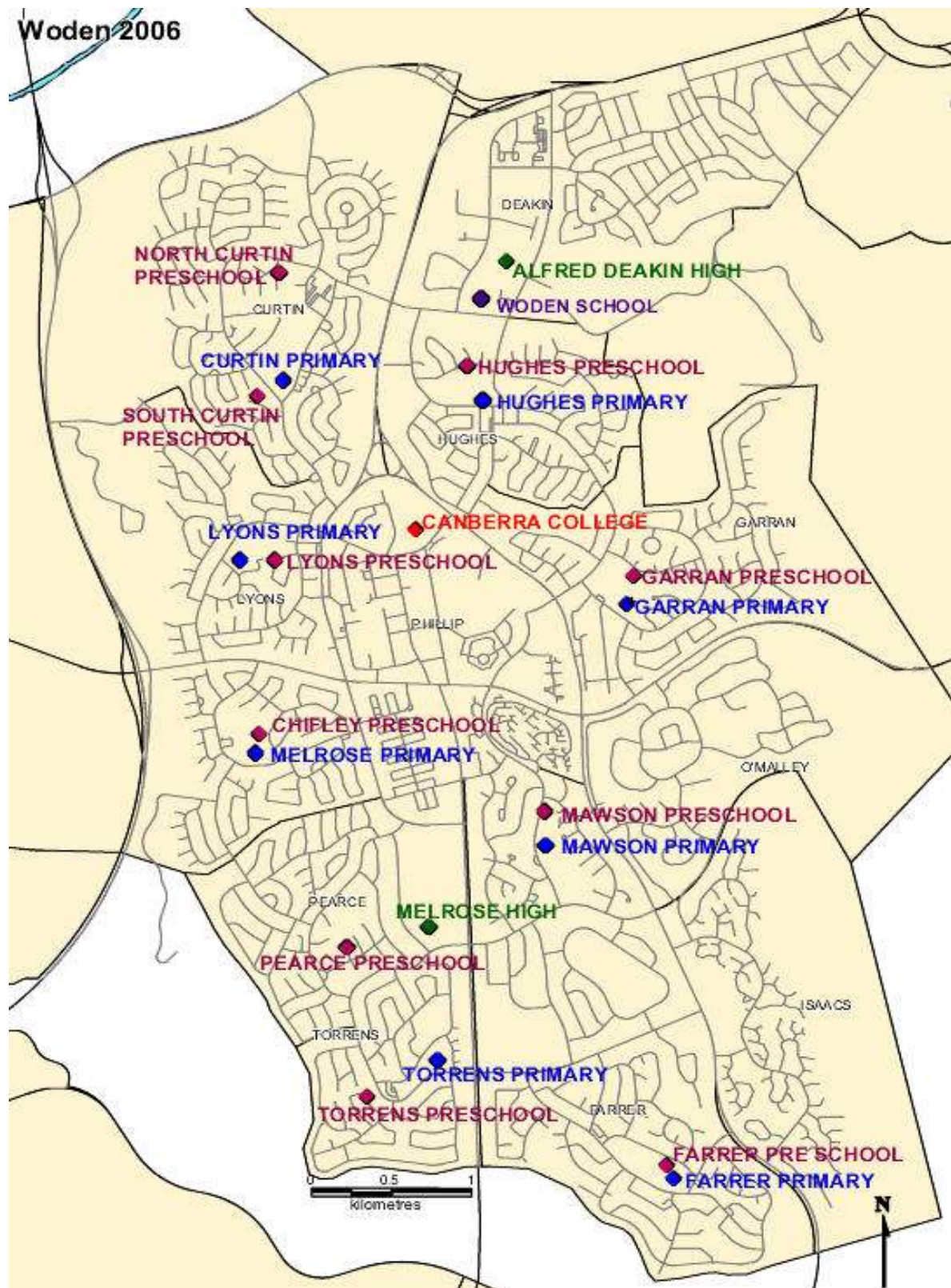
Climate change and Peak Oil, which the ACT is not immune, are of major concern to us, rather than the perceived and one sided higher education costs per student in low enrolment schools like Melrose primary. It is quite clear that the basis for the majority of decisions made was based on car travel and where parents were driving their children to school. This does not go well for the ACT as we are facing an uncertain future. The ACT is in serious trouble if petrol prices spike again like the midway through 2008, when petrol prices reached \$1.74 /litre or if the eight dollar a litre price suggested by the CSIRO in their *Fuel for Thought – the future of transport fuels* paper. We also have high childhood obesity rates with 1 in 4 primary school age children and Type II Diabetes increasing when it was never a children's disease. We should be transitioning our city to minimise the impacts of higher fuel prices like supporting neighbourhood schools.

I am quite happy to appear before the Standing to answer any questions relating to the issues I have raised in this Submission.

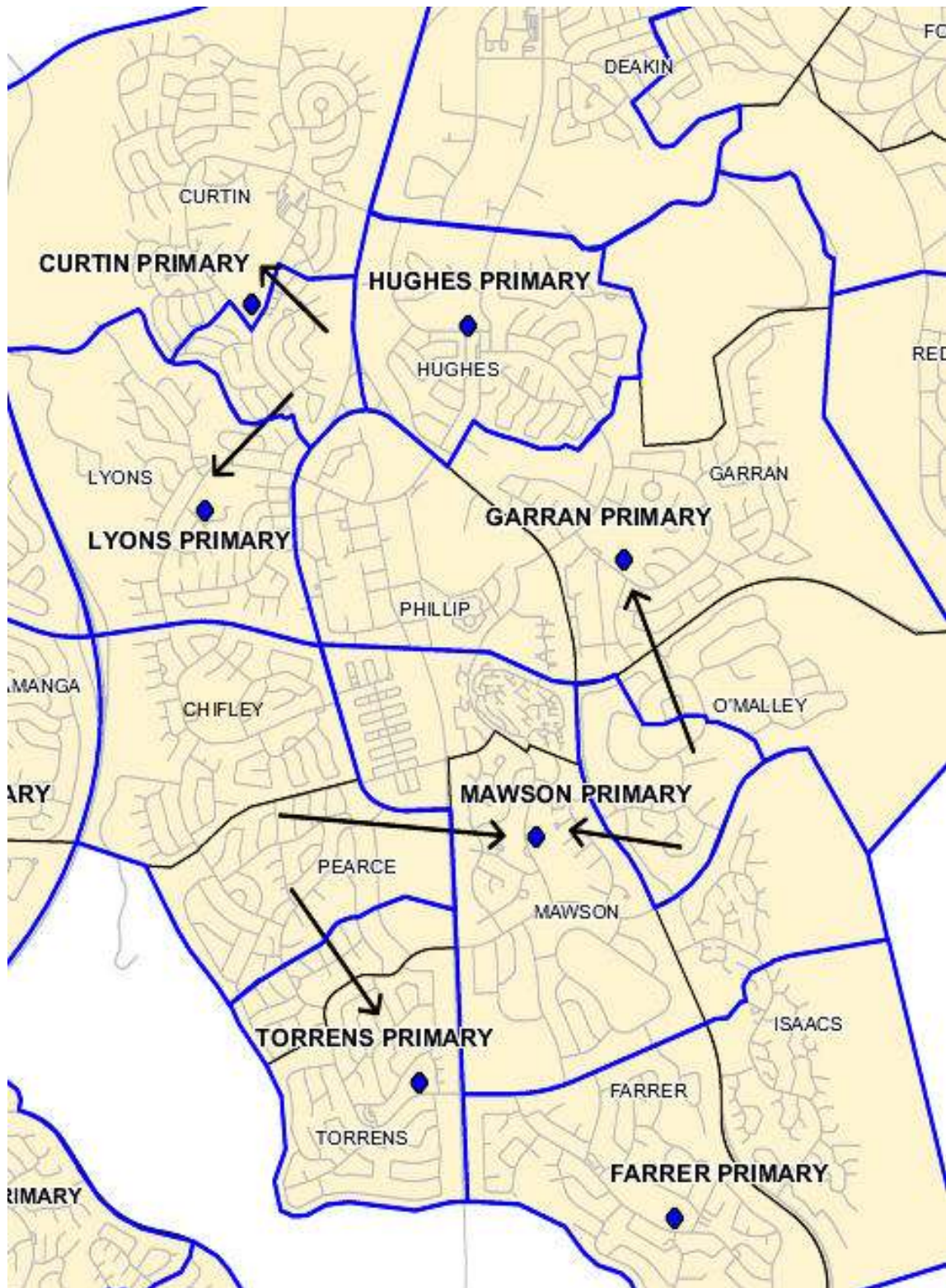
Yours Sincerely

Martin Miller, Chifley ACT.

Priority Enrolment Area Woden 2006.



Priority Enrolment Area Woden 2007-8 as set by the Department of Education and Training .



Priority enrolment Areas (PEA) 2009 as set by the Department of Education and Training

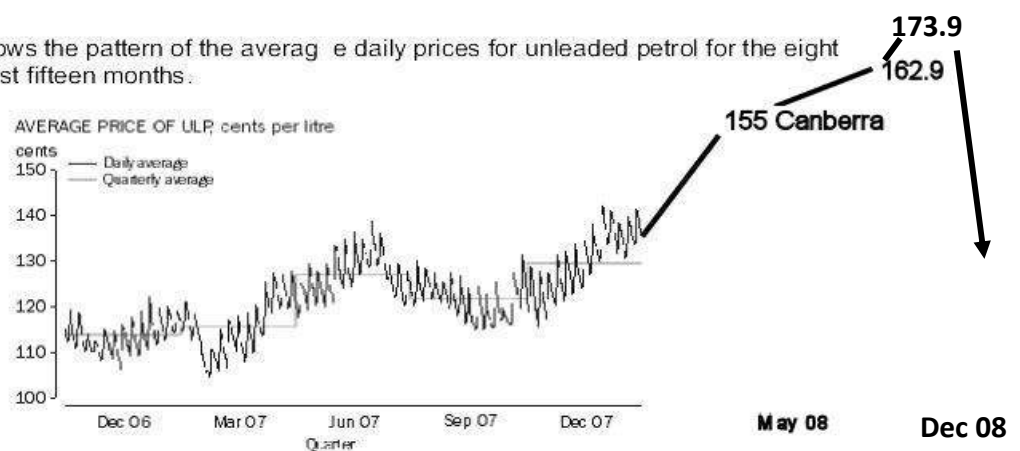


TRANSPORTATION (+2.4%)

The most significant increase in transportation costs this quarter was due to the rise in the price of automotive fuel (+7.3%). Most other categories in transportation rose, with motor vehicle repair (+0.9 %) and urban transport fares (+1.5%) being the most significant. The only offsetting fall was in motor vehicles (-0.7%).

Automotive fuel prices fell in July (-3.4%) and August (-2.2%) then rose in September (+0.7%), October (+2.0%), November (+5.8%) and December (+4.7%). The automotive fuel expenditure class contributed +0.47 index points to the overall 1.50 index points change in the All Groups CPI in December quarter 2007 and +0.87 index points to the through the year change.

The following graph shows the pattern of the average daily prices for unleaded petrol for the eight capital cities over the last fifteen months.



Through the year to December quarter 2007, the transportation group rose 5.6%, the rise in automotive fuel (+14.3%) was the most significant contributor to the increase. There were also rises in the price of motor vehicle repair (+2.9%), other motoring charges (+5.2%), motor vehicle parts and accessories (+5.4%) and urban transport fares (+4.4%). Motor vehicles prices fell 0.5%.



REVIEW OF TRAFFIC ISSUES AROUND SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

FINAL REPORT

16 April 2007



Consulting Engineers

Document No: T106038-1/0

Review of Traffic Issues Around Selected Primary Schools: Report 1, April 2007

Summaries

3.15 On average, students relocating from a closed school will travel greater distances to the school than those currently enrolled and can therefore expect to generate at least as high, and probably higher, private vehicle use.

13. Torrens Primary (distance 3km average from Chifley)

Assessment

13.6.1 The parking at the school operated at nearly capacity in 2006. The additional demand generated by the increase in enrolments had resulted in wider spread on-street parking throughout the adjacent streets.

13.4.4 Pathway connections to Pearce and Chifley are all on-street paths with some improved opportunities for road crossings provided by pedestrian refuges.

No work or funding has been provided as yet!

13.4.5 There were nine bicycles observed in the school racks (school enrolment of 400 students)

14. Mawson Primary (distance 3.5km average from Chifley)

Assessment

14.6.1 There has been no significant change in activity in 2007. Parking is adequately accommodated.

14.6.3 There are adequate pathway connections to Pearce via the underpass on Athllon drive, but the links to Chifley are poor requiring the crossing of two arterial roads. However, the distance between Mawson school and the two suburbs is such that it is unlikely that primary school children would walk or ride to the school.

No work or funding has been provided as yet!

Extract from Chifley preschool submission to the Towards 2020 Education policy:

***Table 1 – Growth in the under 5 age cohort compared to the 5-9 age cohort:
Chifley compared to surrounding area***

Age cohort	Chifley	Woden - excluding Chifley	Total Woden
0-4	186	1480	1666
5-9	110	1700	1810
Growth in under 5 age cohort compared to 5-9 cohort %	69%	-13%	-8%

Source: Population Estimates by Age and Sex, Australia by Geographic Classification (3235.0.55.001) Australian Bureau of Statistics, issued 30 June, 2006.

Table 2 – Births and fertility rate: Chifley 2000-2005

Year	Births	Total fertility rate
2000	25	1.50
2001	38	1.63
2002	23	1.55
2003	31	1.63
2004	52	1.93
2005	38	2.22

Source: Births, Australia 2005, Table 3.8, Australian Bureau of Statistics (33010) , issued 17 October, 2006.