



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT

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# Submission to the Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT

Greater Canberra, 31 March 2023

## Introduction

Greater Canberra is an organisation that advocates for a more affordable, liveable, and sustainable Canberra. We believe that urban intensification and higher-density living is critical to making housing more affordable while improving our city's urban amenity and sustainability. However, school infrastructure poses a major urban design challenge as Canberra families with children are increasingly making the choice to live in higher-density areas.

## Town centres need vertical schools

Educational investment in Australia has often been premised on the false assumption that denser communities are not attractive to families with children, meaning that higher-density areas are unlikely to require new school infrastructure, even as their populations grow. In fact, the evidence indicates that as the ACT seeks to become a more compact city, families with children will increasingly be attracted to more affordable and convenient housing options in medium- and high-density communities. Ensuring that these families have adequate schooling choices will mean additional school infrastructure needs to be built in these communities. This presents a challenge, as land in higher-density areas is likely to be more limited and costly. As such, traditional 'flat' school infrastructure typologies that are currently used in the ACT will need to be complemented by higher-density 'vertical' schools.

The Belconnen town centre provides a great example of this challenge. As at the 2021 Census, almost all of the around 4,700 homes in the suburb of Belconnen were medium or high density units. Around 2,095 families live in the suburb, with the average family having around 1.4 children. In total, 245 children are already living in the Belconnen town centre and attending primary school. However, despite the large volume of families living in this area, the closest primary school is in Florey. As the number of children and families in the Belconnen town centre is projected to expand rapidly over the next decade, this raises the question of where additional schooling infrastructure may be provided.

In this context, investing in a new vertical primary school in the rapidly growing area would be a great way to efficiently provide additional schooling options for Belconnen families, while maximising green space. Insisting only on the creation of new flat schools would likely

increase the fiscal and environmental costs of new school investment, and force families living in these areas into longer, more polluting commutes. Vertical school typologies can also allow for more space to be dedicated for outdoor playgrounds, or for schools to be built closer to existing green spaces, without encroaching on these spaces. This is particularly important as the amount of space provided for outdoor play has become a key concern in many Australian cities.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the ACT is currently lagging far behind other jurisdictions in terms of embracing vertical school typologies. In particular, we note that the Molonglo Valley Community Forum has called for the new high school in the Molonglo Group Centre to be a vertical school, in order to maximise green space and retain valuable CFZ land for other community facilities.<sup>2</sup> We further note that the Victorian Government has successfully made vertical schools a focus of its new educational infrastructure investment.<sup>3</sup>

We strongly recommend that the ACT Government investigate potential locations and designs for vertical schools, and invest in such vertical schooling infrastructure as a priority. Future plans for vertical schools should be integrated into relevant strategic planning documents, such as the City Plan, town centre master plans, and the soon to be finalised District Strategies.

**Recommendation 1: The ACT Government should urgently prioritise planning for more schools in town centres, and explore opportunities for more vertical schools.**

### Investing in an East Lake Primary School

Over the past two decades the population of Kingston has increased from 2,057 residents in the 2001 Census to 6,579 residents in the 2021 Census. With the redevelopment of East Lake and further development of the Wentworth Avenue Corridor and Kingston Group Centre, the population of Kingston will likely continue to grow.

Around 400 children under the age of 10 lived in Kingston in 2021, substantially more than the lower density suburbs of Red Hill (320), Forrest (97), Deakin (319), and Yarralumla (297). However, all of these suburbs have their own primary school, while Kingston does not.

As East Lake and the adjacent Dairy Road development push Kingston's centre of gravity further east, and consequently further away from Red Hill School, Forrest Primary School and Telopea Park School, the difficulty of young families continuing to remain in Kingston will mount, as the closest of these primary schools will be over 2 km from the edge of the new East Lake precinct.

As with other high density areas of Canberra, the number of children in the 0-4 age group (236) is substantially higher than the 5-9 age group (161). While there are certainly other

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<sup>1</sup> ["School playgrounds are getting squeezed". The Conversation, August 2022.](#)

<sup>2</sup> ["Molonglo residents want future high school to be built up, not out". Lottie Twyford, The RiotACT, 10 September 2022](#)

<sup>3</sup> ["Designs and Tender Release for Eighth Vertical School". Victorian Government, February 2021.](#)

factors, the lack of a local primary school is a major disincentive to young families remaining in these areas.

**Recommendation 2: The ACT Government should consider a small footprint, vertical primary school as part of the East Lake Place Plan and future development.**

## Schools should be integrated with public and active transport

As a city with an ambitious climate action agenda and a reputation as Australia's green capital, the ACT should be able to provide all students and their families with active and public transport options that make commuting to school without a car easy, safe, and fun. However, as it stands, even those Canberra families who live near schools and who don't need to rely on a car for their other transportation needs point to the arrival of children as a key factor in their decision to purchase their first vehicle or an additional vehicle.

Put simply, Canberra's existing public transport network is not necessarily well integrated with the schooling system - especially when it comes to new schools - and our active transport network is often not safe enough to instil parents with confidence that their children will be able to walk or cycle to school safely. This increases reliance on cars, congestion, and transport pollution, but also means that families and carers without access to a car (or who have multiple children) are forced into longer and more complex commutes. Research indicates that these longer, more car-centric commutes are likely to be particularly burdensome for women, as they take on the majority of caring work.<sup>4</sup>

While there are many changes that could be made to boost usage of public and active transport infrastructure among school children and their families, we point to several key areas where additional investment and planning are required:

- **Traffic calming** - areas around schools, and school pick-up and drop-off zones are often pointed to as being unsafe and unwelcoming for pedestrians and cyclists. Expanding low-speed zones and investing in additional traffic calming measures such as speed-bumps, narrowed streets, and tactical tree plantings would ensure children arriving on foot or by bike are just as safe as those arriving by car.
- **Dedicated pedestrian crossings and bike lines** - while pedestrian crossings are often available in the immediate vicinity of schools, there is often a lack of good pedestrian and bike infrastructure in the surrounding areas. Investigating common bike and walking routes for families, and investing in bike lanes and safer crossings along these routes would be a high-impact way to increase active transport take-up.
- **Easy access to public transport for new schools** - all new schools in the ACT should be integrated with an existing (ideally rapid) public transport route, and should

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<sup>4</sup> ["Three reasons why urban planning matters for gender equality". Greater Canberra, March 2022.](#)

ensure families and kids arriving by public transport are able to make use of a convenient and easily accessible bus or light-rail stop. Further investigation should be made into ways existing schools can be better integrated with the public transport network.

**Recommendation 3: All schools in the ACT should be well integrated with public and active transport networks. The ACT Government should prioritise investment in child-safe pedestrian, cycling, and public transport infrastructure around both existing and future schools.**