

Submission to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Inquiry into school closures and reform of the ACT education system



John Flynn Community Centre
Early childhood precinct, school and
inter-generational community hub

Supplementary submission prepared by the
Flynn Primary School P&C Association
John Flynn Community Group
April 2009

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Recommendation:

That the ACT Assembly work with the Flynn community through the John Flynn Community Group and Flynn Primary School P&C to implement:

- a) a stand-alone government-funded Flynn Primary School and childcare centre or
- b) a sustainable government-funded P-6 school and community-based childcare centre as part of a multi-generational community centre using the Flynn school building and grounds.

 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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I would like to thank the committee for holding this Inquiry and allowing the John Flynn Community Group to present this afternoon.

The John Flynn Community Group is about the future and specifically the future needs of the Flynn community. To this end we propose a multi-generational community centre including:

P-6 school

Community based childcare

Appropriate tenants to complement the school and community needs.

1. Community need

The Flynn Primary School is in sound physical condition due to its strong construction and a full schedule of maintenance carried out in recent years. The creative open-plan design facilitates flexible use by children of all ages, and by the community.

This initiative will allow the community to rebuild after the devastating loss of the school and the associated community activity in 2006. Flynn Primary was more than just a school it was the heart of this community. As such, it is essential to the functioning of this community.

We propose:

- a restored primary school
- a childcare centre
- an intergenerational community hub.

2. Heritage

In late 2007, the JFCG nominated the school and grounds for listing on the ACT Heritage Register. The basis of this proposal was:

- the distinctive design of award-winning architect Enrico Taglietti
- the status of the school as the first open plan design school the ACT, built with the intention of introducing a 'new educational philosophy'
- the cultural significance of the building and grounds through long-established links to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. This is symbolised by the national memorial to the Reverend John Flynn.

3. Cost of re-opening a school

The cost of opening a school and community centre will not be an undue burden on the ACT community.

The Minister has identified the cost of re-opening a school to be \$2 million. That's the same amount that has been promised for building a new childcare centre in NW Belconnen.

We suggest that for \$2.5 million we can have both at Flynn.

The government could establish a P-6 school and community centre, including 70-place childcare centre. It is an economically and environmentally viable proposition.

With the closure of Flynn, the community has lost the estimated \$300,000 invested over 30 years into the facility. In addition, \$1.5 million has also been taken out of the community over 3 years as 'savings' to government. It is reasonable that some of that should be returned.

4. The proposal

Our proposal seeks to maintain community involvement and ownership of the school and grounds. It also brings efficient service delivery for government.

The JFCG proposes to establish a skilled Community Board to oversee the sustainable operation of the centre. This will be in close cooperation with collaborative partners and government. Community Board members will be elected from the community for terms of two or three years.

The Community Board will be responsible for ensuring that the centre continues to meet the needs of the suburb and region. It will carry out needs assessments and attract appropriate and complementary service providers. It is also proposed that the Community Board would share the responsibility of financial and business management of the entire operation.

The School Board will take responsibility for operation of the school.

This explicitly recognises the link between the school and the local community.

Primary school

A primary school and childcare centre is key to the ongoing viability of the community centre. The needs of the school will take precedence in the running of the facility, so the school can grow as enrolments increase. Space not required by the school will be managed by the Community Board to ensure locally relevant and complementary uses.

Full-time leases and casual bookings, administered by the Community Board, support the operating costs of the school.

Community hub

The entire facility will be managed as proposed by the Community Board as a multi-purpose, intergenerational hub. Our submission proposed three governance options, and the preferred option is:

- ownership of the building is with the Department of Education and Training, who is responsible for ongoing maintenance and upgrades.
- JFCG are responsible for the building as a cooperative trust through the Community Board, overseeing tenancy arrangements and casual bookings to ensure they are running at a nett social, environmental, educational and financial benefit to the community

The final model and business plan would be determined in consultation with government and collaborative partners.

Irrespective of the model introduced, the JFCG would seek a community water/water recycling grant to make more efficient use of water including feeding water off the centre roof to a reservoir to enable upkeep of a high quality playing field for ball sports.

5. Hub will produce greatest long-term benefit

A safe, locally accessible school, early childhood and intergenerational community hub will produce the optimum long-term benefits and flexibility for the ACT Government and the community.

The annual benefits will outweigh any short-term gains from selling off the land for housing.

This will be most obvious in terms of the improved social capital in a suburb without any other social infrastructure such as shops, schools, churches.

Through early intervention and improved social inclusion, the hub will reduce the burden of government costs in the areas of health, welfare, crime prevention and rehabilitation.

This is 'a bottom-up approach' that empowers local communities to take responsibility for these community facilities and resources. It requires everyone to think outside the square and allow the Flynn community to help shape our future.

6. Recommendation:

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Options for management of the John Flynn Community Centre and school

Asset ownership	Tenancy administration	Operating costs
1a. Department of Education (DET)	• Needs assessments and potential tenants brokered by JFCG • Lease agreements with DET • Body corporate administration and costs • Casual bookings arranged through JFCG or key partner	• DET maintains site • Full-time leases and casual bookings offset operating costs • Provision for subsidy or grant for community development
1b. TAMS/DHCS Department	• Needs assessments and potential tenants brokered by JFCG • Lease agreements with TAMS/DHCS • Body corporate administration and costs • Casual bookings arranged through JFCG or key partner	• TAMS/DHCS maintains site • Full-time leases and casual bookings offset operating costs • Provision for subsidy or grant for community development
2. Asset transferred to the community through JFCG as compensation for school closure	• Needs assessments and tenancies brokered and arranged by JFCG • Body corporate administration and costs • Casual bookings arranged through JFCG or key partner	Total and annual savings from Flynn school closure used to fund operating costs and maintenance together with the revenue from full-time leases and casual bookings
3. The asset and adjacent green space are transferred to the community through the JFCG. This would be cost neutral or at price agreed with Govt	• Needs assessments and tenancies brokered and arranged by JFCG • Body corporate administration and costs • Casual bookings arranged through JFCG or key partner	The community through the JFCG is responsible for all operational costs, community facilities and development on the site and adjacent oval.