



Canberra Quilters Inc.

ABN 49 327 425 805

19 March 2009

Amanda Bresnan MLA,
Chair
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Inquiry into school closures and reform of the ACT education system.

Dear Ms Bresnan

I attach a submission from Canberra Quilters Inc. to the inquiry into school closures and the reform of the ACT education system.

Canberra Quilters Inc was established in 1976 and currently has approximately 500 members. Our members meet regularly at various venues across the ACT and we have been actively seeking a permanent 'Home of Our Own' for the last four years. We have been fortunate enough to receive an offer of space in the former primary school at Cook.

We are concerned that the use of Cook primary school, as well as others, is once again under question. Our members have invested a lot of effort and time into the consultation processes, as well as in preparation of various applications and submissions.

We believe that the consultation process on the use of the former school sites was open, inclusive, and accessible and that all interested parties had an opportunity to communicate their views and needs. We believe that re-visiting the decisions made thus far is detrimental and costly to all concerned.

Regards

Susan Blood
President

Submission to Legislative Assembly of the ACT Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs – Inquiry into school closures and reform of the ACT education system.

Submitted on behalf of: Canberra Quilters Inc, PO Box 3297, Weston Creek, ACT 2611
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Canberra Quilter Inc has been offered space in the former Cook primary school. This submission addresses only the aspects of the reform process related to our involvement in consultations after the consolidation and closure decision had been taken.

This submission addresses **Terms of Reference 2.3, 3.3, 3.4 and 4.**

TOR 2.3 The impact of school consolidation closures with a focus on:

- **Financial, social and environmental impacts**

The potential social impact of re-using the former schools is likely to be positive for groups such as Canberra Quilters Inc. We will be able to provide to our members and others in the community the opportunity to participate in our activities at any time, rather than within the restrictions of our present three formal monthly meetings. Our ability to reach out to young people and isolated residents of all ages will be enhanced.

TOR 3.3 Community responses, including

- **Interest expressed by school communities to re-open schools listed for closure**

The constant re-visiting of the decisions to close certain schools can only be unsettling for the children who were affected by the closures. It also is disruptive to the management and planning requirements of organisations that have become involved in the future use of the former school sites.

The decisions once made should be acted upon.

TOR 3.4 Community responses, including

- **New uses for school facilities**

Canberra Quilters Inc participated in the consultation process run by Purdon Associates, which considered the re-use of the closed school sites. We participated in the majority of both the first and second rounds of public meetings that examined and identified the potential uses for the former school sites. The consultations revealed the substantial unmet need in the ACT for premises for not-for-profit community organisations.

From our observations, we believe that all interested parties had the opportunity to put forward their ideas and preferences. The process, however, suffered from a high



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degree of politicisation due partly to the participation of experienced lobby groups such as Save Our Schools and social welfare lobbies. This was often at the expense of small community-based groups such as ours, which had no axe to grind with the Government.

Our major concerns are the length of time taken for the processes and the resulting costs to the community. The consultations for the use of the closed schools started quite some time after the closures. The consultations were carried out over two stages and took several months. The final decision on how each school and its site would be used also took some months. We recognise, however, that the election in October 2008 contributed to the delays, although had decisions been made earlier its impact may have been less.

The processes we are now involved in to actually occupy the space we have been allocated are proving to be drawn out. We were notified informally by telephone in August 2008 of an offer of space in Cook and we received a formal letter notifying us of this offer on 9 February 2009, six months later.

The closed schools have been sitting idle and deteriorating since they were closed. This can only add to the costs of refurbishment. Membership of the not-for-profit community organisations that have been offered space in the former Cook primary school numbers in the thousands, and we respectfully urge you to consider their needs in your deliberations.

Susan Blood
President
Canberra Quilters Inc.