

NOTICE OF DECISION

The Decision

I, Andrew Barr, MLA, Minister for Education and Training have decided, pursuant to section 20 of the **Education Act 2004**, that:

THARWA PRIMARY SCHOOL will close at the end of 2006.

Background

1. On 6 June 2006 I released a proposal titled "*Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools*" (the Proposal).
2. The purpose of the Proposal was to reinvigorate the government school system so that it would remain the first choice for the majority of families. The principles underpinning the Proposal were those of choice, diversity and opportunity. The Proposal outlined the Government's plan for the future provision of public education in the Australian Capital Territory (the Territory). The Proposal provided for a different configuration for Territory schooling provision, involving the integration of preschools into primary schools, the closure of a number of schools and preschools, the amalgamation of others and new structures such as P-3 schools, 5-10 schools, 7-12 schools and collegiate arrangements.
3. The Proposal also included the biggest capital injection into schooling since self-government with \$90 million for capital upgrades, \$67 million for new schools and \$20 million for information technology (IT) upgrades.

The Statutory Requirements

4. The *Education Act 2004* (the Act) governs the provision of public education in the Territory. The general principles and objects of the Act are contained in Part 1.2 Section 7 as follows:

7 General principles of Act

- (1) Everyone involved in the administration of this Act, or in the education of children of school age in the ACT, is to apply the principle that every child has a right to receive a high-quality education.
- (2) Without limiting subsection (1), a high-quality education is based on the following principles:
 - (a) school education and home education provide a foundation for a democratic society;
 - (b) school education and home education should—
 - (i) aim to develop every child's potential and maximise educational achievements; and
 - (ii) promote children's enthusiasm for lifelong learning and optimism for the future; and

- (iii) encourage parents to take part in the education of their children, and recognise their right to choose a suitable educational environment; and
- (iv) promote respect for and tolerance of others; and
- (v) recognise the social, religious, physical, intellectual and emotional needs of all students; and
- (vi) aim over time to improve the learning outcomes of students so that the outcomes are free from disadvantage because of economic, social, cultural or other causes; and
- (vii) encourage all children to complete their senior secondary education; and
- (viii) provide access to a broad education; and
- (ix) recognise the needs of Indigenous students;
- (c) innovation, diversity and opportunity within and among schools should be encouraged;
- (d) effective quality assurance mechanisms should be applied to school education;
- (e) government funding should be directed to children through their schools or school system;
- (f) the partnership between the home, community and educational providers should be recognised;
- (g) school communities should be given information about the operation of their schools.
- (3) Everyone involved in the administration of this Act, or in the education of children of school age in the ACT, is to apply the principle that school education—
 - (a) recognises the individual needs of children with disabilities; and
 - (b) should make appropriate provision for those needs, unless it would impose unjustifiable hardship on the provider of the school education.
- (4) Corporal punishment is not allowed in ACT schools.

5. The establishment and operation of government schools is governed by Part 3.2 of the Act, in particular section 20 which provides as follows:

20 Establishing government schools etc

- (1) The Minister may establish government schools and preschools (*government schools*).
- (2) The Minister may decide the kinds of government schools to be established and the educational level or levels for the schools.
- (3) The Minister may establish school-related educational institutions and services (*school-related institutions*).
- (4) The Minister may name, and change the name of, a government school or school-related institution.
- (5) Before closing or amalgamating a government school, the Minister must—
 - (a) have regard to the educational, financial and social impact on students at the school, the students' families and the general school community; and
 - (b) ensure that school communities affected by the closure or amalgamation have been adequately consulted during a period of at least 6 months.
- (6) To ensure that school communities affected by closing or amalgamating a government school are adequately consulted, the Minister must, before a decision is made on the proposal—
 - (a) tell the school communities about the proposal; and
 - (b) listen to, and consider, their views.
- (7) The consultation must be done in a way that gives effect to the following principles:
 - (a) consultation should focus on access to, and the provision of, quality educational opportunities;
 - (b) consultation should be open and transparent;
 - (c) consultation should lead to sustainable decisions by involving effective community engagement;
 - (d) without limiting paragraph (c), consultation should ensure that—
 - (i) relevant information is provided in a timely and accessible way to enable maximum community participation in debate about the proposal; and

- (ii) opportunities are provided for feedback about the proposal, especially from families and other people with significant interest in the proposal;
- (e) consultation should include seeking the views of school boards that are likely to be affected by the proposal.

The Consultation Process

6. On 6 June 2006 I announced the establishment of a consultation process in accordance with the Act. The consultation process was developed and conducted in accordance with the ACT Government's Community Engagement Strategy. Attachment A – Consultation Strategy outlines the entire consultation process. I am satisfied that the consultation process gave effect to the principles outlined in s 20(7) of the Act.

Reasons for the Decision

7. I have decided to close or amalgamate a number of schools and preschools in the Territory. The Government will then make a large capital investment of \$90 million for school infrastructure upgrades and provide \$20 million for IT upgrades across all schools so that students now, and into the future, receive the best possible educational programs in contemporary facilities.
8. The fundamental principle that underpins the Government's proposal is to provide children and young people in the Territory with a vibrant, responsive and world-class public education system that is second to none, and that provides the very best chance for each student, no matter which government school they attend.
9. I have decided to close Tharwa Primary School (Tharwa PS) as part of a restructure of the Tuggeranong region because whilst it is important for all young people to have access to a nearby school which provides for their educational needs, small schools may limit the opportunities for students to access and participate in a rich curriculum in all key learning areas due to their small size and fewer teachers.
10. Based on the recent Australian study by Professor Brian Caldwell (2005)¹ Tharwa PS, with 25 enrolments, (ACT Department of Education and Training February 2006 School Census), would be regarded as an exceptionally small school and projections (ACT Department of Education and Training Projected Enrolments 2006 to 2010) indicate that enrolments will not increase. As such Tharwa PS would be unable to provide the breadth of curriculum offerings available to students attending one of the other P-6 schools in the Tuggeranong region such as Charles Conder PS which has a projected 2010 enrolment of 365 mainstream students (Projected Enrolments 2006 to 2010) and is therefore considered to be the optimal size based on the Caldwell study. The closure of Tharwa PS will not impact on the strength of the Lanyon Cluster as the Cluster's operation is not site dependent.

¹ Caldwell, B. (2005). Research on school size: An educational transformations briefing paper. *Educational Transformations*. Melbourne.
<<http://www.educationaltransformations.com.au/>>

11. Current figures suggest that many parents of children living within the Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) for Tharwa PS are not choosing schools within their area and of the 25 students enrolled at Tharwa PS only nine live in the PEA for Tharwa PS. (February 2006 School Census) The proposed provision for Tuggeranong will provide parents living in the region the choice to access P-6 schools operating at the existing sites of Bonython PS, Calwell PS, Charles Conder PS, Fadden PS, Gilmore PS, Gordon PS, Gowrie PS, Monash PS, Richardson PS, Taylor PS, Theodore PS, Urambi PS and Wanniasa Hills PS. Two P-10 schools at Chisholm Community School and Wanniasa School will provide middle schooling options in the region and provide smooth transitions from preschool to high school. A P-2 school at Isabella Plains, and preschools at Village Creek (until 2010) and Mt Neighbour will provide an additional early years focus for Tuggeranong families. A new P-10 school will open in Kambah in 2011.
12. I find that the provision for the Tuggeranong Region will ensure a network of innovative and contemporary educational facilities allowing for a continued focus on high standards and a range of educational opportunities for students. There are currently no programs offered at Tharwa PS that cannot be provided or accommodated in other schools in the region. I find that the needs of students, staff and families have been considered to ensure that the learning environments in alternative schools are appropriate.
13. Demands placed on staff in small schools are much higher and the opportunity for the staff at Tharwa PS to transfer to a larger school, where they would form a part of a larger collegial group, was considered to be important for their professional growth, health and wellbeing. Current industrial agreements do not allow for the category of a teaching principal as it would be exceptionally difficult for a Level 1 teacher to focus on core teaching functions as well as attending to the administrative and community engagement functions required of school principals; therefore this was not considered to be an option for Tharwa PS.
14. With only 25 students enrolled at Tharwa PS (February 2006 School Census) and with enrolments not expected to increase (Projected Enrolments 2006 to 2010), the cost per student per year will remain significantly higher than the ACT average. Closure of Tharwa PS is anticipated to result in a saving of \$1,229,000 between 2007-2010. (Derived from ACT Department of Education and Training 2004-2005 audited financial statements - Refer Attachment B.)
15. Based on the current figures of the percentage of students who live in the PEA and who attend government schools, only 53% (representing only nine students) are actually enrolled at Tharwa PS (February 2006 School Census). Therefore a large percentage of parents are already transporting their children some distance from their homes to attend school. Many of these students will be able to attend other schools in the Tuggeranong region which will be closer to their homes. Transitional support of \$750 will be offered to each student affected by the closure of Tharwa PS, who attends a government school.
16. I have given assurances that because Tharwa PS is within a heritage listed precinct the Government is mindful of the need to minimise impacts on the buildings and the need to respond with integrated planning strategies. For Tharwa PS to be brought up to the standards evident in other ACT schools it would need to undergo upgrades, in particular in the areas for staff facilities and administration, but because of the heritage listing of the precinct the school cannot be expanded to increase its capacity. Cessation of the

school operations will not impact on the heritage listing of the buildings and the buildings will return to the Department of Territory and Municipal Services for their administration, in accordance with usual practice. The preschool will continue to operate within its current location thereby maintaining a local educational presence.

17. In reaching this decision I had regard to the general principles and objects of the Act; the criteria specified in section 20 of the Act and the views expressed by school communities by way of the consultation process as outlined above. An assessment of the pertinent issues, considered by me to be material to this decision, is included in the Findings On Material Questions of Fact.

FACILITY – THARWA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Findings on Material Questions of Fact

18. Tharwa Primary School is situated in the Tuggeranong Region for the purposes of the Towards 2020 Proposal.
19. The educational model proposed for the Tuggeranong Region is the provision of excellent secondary education through two year 11 and 12 colleges at Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong and years 7 – 10 at Calwell and Lanyon High Schools. In addition students will be able to access two P-10 schools at Chisholm Community School and Wanniasa School. These will strengthen middle schooling practices in the region and provide smooth transitions from preschool to high school. The provision of P-6 schools will be at the existing sites of Bonython, Calwell, Charles Conder, Fadden, Gilmore, Gordon, Gowrie, Monash, Richardson, Taylor, Theodore, Urambi and Wanniasa Hills. A P-2 school at Isabella Plains and preschools at Village Creek (until 2010) and Mt Neighbour will provide an additional early years focus for Tuggeranong families. The Government's intention is to establish a new P-10 facility on the current Kambah High School site in order to provide a state of the art school for students in the northern Tuggeranong area. Special education, an Intensive English Centre and early intervention units will continue to be provided in the region.
20. This model will guarantee the provision of a network of innovative and contemporary educational facilities for the region, allowing for a continued focus on high standards and a range of educational opportunities for students.
21. The Government recognises that many parents within the Tharwa area are not currently choosing the option of public education within their PEA for their children.
22. The proposed model for Tuggeranong focuses on a regional, rather than a neighbourhood provision of education, more closely reflecting the choices that parents in the Tuggeranong Region have been making over recent years. In addition it takes account of the fact that the number of children of compulsory school age has declined significantly since the settlement of the region.
23. A number of issues in relation to the educational, financial and social impacts of the Proposal on students, students' families and the school community in relation to Tharwa PS were raised and I had regard to and considered these. The major issues and my findings in relation to those issues are detailed in the following sections.

1 Educational

Small school

24. The current 2006 enrolment at Tharwa PS is 25 students. (February 2006 School Census) The projected 2010 enrolment for Tharwa PS is 25 students (Projected Enrolments 2006 to 2010). Of the 25 students attending Tharwa PS only nine live in the PEA.

25. Projections are based on recent demographic trends and are generally in line with population figures released by the Demography Unit, Chief Minister's Department. Population forecasts are subject to change but projections from each school are determined from: school census data; data from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages on the number of births by suburbs; recent levels of grade to grade retention rates; estimates of enrolments from any proposed new residential developments; and any known enrolment policies or other factors, such as capacity limitations, which influence enrolment levels.
26. Some parents expressed the view that they had selected Tharwa PS for their children because it was a small rural school with a family feel within the school. They described this as meaning that the children all knew each other and that the staff knew all the children. Parents valued the caring and friendly nature of a small school and felt that their children received more individual attention than in a 'big' school. Several parents expressed a view that a small school setting was preferable to a 'super' school setting.
27. Current Australian research by Professor Brian Caldwell (2005) indicates that the appropriate and effective size for a primary school is 300-400 students. Whilst it is important for all young people to have access to a nearby school which provides for their educational needs, small schools may limit the opportunities for students to access and participate in a rich curriculum in all key learning areas due to their small size and fewer teachers. This also places higher demands on teaching staff.
28. **I find that Tharwa PS, with 25 enrolments, would be regarded as an exceptionally small school and projections indicate that enrolments will not increase. As such Tharwa PS would be unable to provide the breadth of curriculum offerings available to students attending one of the other P-6 schools in the Tuggeranong region, such as Charles Conder PS which has a projected 2010 enrolment of 365 mainstream students and is therefore considered to be the optimal size based on the Caldwell study.**

Impact on Lanyon Cluster

29. Tharwa PS community members raised the concern that Tharwa PS was an integral part of the Lanyon Cluster of schools which has been cited in international research as an exemplar model.
30. **I find that the closure of Tharwa PS will not impact on the strength of the Lanyon Cluster as its operation is not site dependent.**

Parental Choice

31. The Government recognises that many parents in the Tuggeranong region are not choosing the option of public education within the PEA for their children. Of the students who live within the PEA for Tharwa PS and who attend government schools, only 53% (February 2006 School Census) are enrolled at Tharwa PS. Parents are choosing to send their children outside of their PEA for their schooling.

32. Parents felt that the closing of Tharwa PS would result in a loss of choice for parents in the region. Parents would no longer be able to choose the small school option for their children and some felt that by simply closing schools there was less choice.
33. The educational model proposed in *Towards 2020* focuses on providing families with a range of options to consider when making decisions as to where to enrol their children. The Proposal is also aimed at ensuring that government schools, many of which were developed in the 1970s, and in the case of Tharwa PS in 1899, will be able to meet the educational needs of students through to 2020.
34. **I find that current figures (February 2006 School Census) suggest that many parents of children living within the PEA for Tharwa PS are not choosing the school within their area. The proposed provision for Tuggeranong will ensure parents living in the region can access P-6 schools operating at the existing sites of Bonython PS, Calwell PS, Charles Conder PS, Fadden PS, Gilmore PS, Gordon PS, Gowrie PS, Monash PS, Richardson PS, Taylor PS, Theodore PS, Urambi PS and Wanniasa Hills PS. Two P-10 schools at Chisholm Community School and Wanniasa School will provide middle schooling options in the region and provide smooth transitions from preschool to high school. A P-2 school at Isabella Plains and preschools at Village Creek (until 2010) and Mt Neighbour will provide additional early years focus for Tuggeranong families. A new Kambah P-10 school will open in 2011.**

Educational Outcomes

35. Currently the ACT Assessment Program (ACTAP) is one of the forms of assessment undertaken by students in areas of literacy and numeracy. These results are reported to parents to inform them of their child's progress. ACTAP results are used to assist schools in developing teaching and learning programs to address the needs of students.
36. Parents claim that Tharwa PS has such good educational outcomes that it should remain open. They believe that this is because the small setting enables greater individual attention for their children. Some argued that the small rural school setting was relevant to educational outcomes.
37. **I find that the ACTAP results at Tharwa PS have been variable and ACTAP data is not necessarily reliable given the small cohort of students in each year level who sit for this systemic test. A review of the educational programs and practices at Tharwa PS at the beginning of 2005, conducted as part of the routine discussions between the Principal and Schools Director, indicated that there would need to be a significant overhaul of their operations to bring them into line with contemporary ACT government school practices. There are currently no programs offered at Tharwa PS that cannot be accommodated in other schools in the region.**

Staff Issues

38. The issue of the pressures placed on the Principal and staff of Tharwa PS was considered. Being a part of a small group of teaching staff places additional and considerable pressures on staff.

39. **I find that the moving of staff to bigger schools, where they would form part of a larger collegial group, is important for their professional growth, health and wellbeing.**

2 Financial

Cost of Operating School

40. The total cost to the Territory of operating Tharwa PS in 2004-05 was \$546,000. This figure is based on the direct and indirect costs associated with running the school, such as salaries and superannuation, school based management funds, school equity funds and student support funds, as well as school support services which are incurred and controlled centrally but relate directly to the school's operation. The figures for Tharwa PS are set out in Attachment B – Financial Data.
41. Currently the average cost of educating a child at Tharwa PS is \$19,502 per year as against the ACT average of \$9,570 per student in a primary school. This figure is based on the total expenses divided by the number of students enrolled at the school.
42. Parents have argued that as the most significant cost in operating Tharwa PS is the staff salaries and that the school could make savings by continuing to operate without a principal or alternatively with a teaching principal.
43. **I find that the current industrial agreements do not allow for the category of a teaching principal as it would be exceptionally difficult for a Level 1 teacher to focus on core teaching functions as well as attending to the administrative and community engagement functions required of school principals. It is necessary to have a principal attached to the site.**
44. **Further, with only 25 students enrolled at Tharwa PS (February 2006 School Census), and with enrolments not expected to increase, the cost per student per year will remain significantly higher than the ACT average. Closure of Tharwa PS is anticipated to result in a saving of \$1, 229, 000 between 2007-2010.**

Capacity

45. Tharwa PS has a capacity to take 50 students and currently there are 25 students (February 2006 School Census) enrolled at the school. Only 50% of the capacity of Tharwa PS is being utilised. Because of the heritage nature of the buildings utilised by Tharwa PS it is not possible to upgrade and expand the school to the standard evident in other ACT schools.
46. **I find that currently Tharwa PS is under utilised and there is excess capacity within the Tuggeranong region. To provide a range of educational settings in modern facilities and within the geographic area that will be financially sustainable in the future, Tharwa PS will be closed to align the region's capacity with the demand.**

Costs To Families

47. The primary cost to families identified by the consultation process was the increased cost of transporting their children to school should the neighbourhood school close.
48. **I find based on the current figures, only 53% (representing nine students) of the students who live in the PEA and who attend government schools are actually enrolled at Tharwa PS. Therefore a large percentage of parents are already transporting their children some distance from their homes to attend school. Many of the students at Tharwa PS will be able to attend other schools in the Tuggeranong Region which will be closer to their homes.**
49. **Transitional support of \$750 will be offered to each student affected by the closure of Tharwa PS, who enrolls in a government school.**

3 Social Impacts

Loss of community facility

50. The school community and families of students at Tharwa PS have expressed their concerns regarding the closure of the school in relation to it being the 'heart of the community'. It is felt that there will be a loss of the community networks that are based around the neighbourhood school.
51. **I find that Tharwa Preschool will continue to operate in the village thereby maintaining an educational facility in the town around which community networks can be maintained and promoted.**

Closure of Tharwa Bridge

52. Parents have expressed concerns that the closure of the bridge affects enrolments as it adds additional travelling time for parents who live outside of the PEA.
53. Approval has been given for the construction of a new bridge at Tharwa, anticipated to open in July 2008. (Minister for Territory and Municipal Services Media Release October 2006.)
54. **I find that a new bridge is expected to open in July 2008, however, on the basis of enrolments (February School Census) at Tharwa PS over the last few years when the bridge was in operation and enrolment projections, I would not expect the new bridge to result in significant additional enrolments. There is ample capacity for the remaining schools in the Tuggeranong region to accommodate students who are currently enrolled at Tharwa PS.**

Loss of historical aspect of school

55. The school community and the community generally expressed concern over the possible loss of the heritage status and the significance of the history of the school. The National Trust of Australia (ACT) considers Tharwa PS 'to be of substantial historical and heritage significance to the ACT'. In correspondence, the Trust noted that Tharwa School has been identified by the Australian Government in its 1987 listing of the site on the Register of the National Estate, and by the National Trust of Australia (ACT) as a place of intrinsic value in its nomination to the Heritage Register. Also that it was an ACT Heritage Council nomination to the ACT Heritage Register.
56. **I have given assurances that because Tharwa PS is within a heritage listed precinct the Government is mindful of the need to minimise impacts on the buildings and the need to respond with integrated planning strategies. For Tharwa PS to be brought up to the standards evident in other ACT schools it would need to undergo upgrades, in particular in the areas for staff facilities and administration, but because of the heritage listing of the precinct the school cannot be expanded to increase its capacity. I find that cessation of the school operations will not impact on the heritage listing of the buildings and the buildings will return to the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) for management, in accordance with usual practice.**

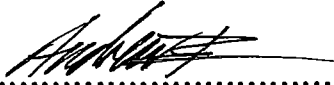
4 Further Issues Considered

57. I have considered the issues raised in the joint submission of the Tharwa Primary School Executive Board, P & C Committee, Preschool P & C Committee and the Tharwa region residents (Tharwa PS, S2) along with the submissions received from Mrs E Miller (Tharwa PS, S1) and the Tharwa Private Submission Group (Tharwa PS, S3). Submissions are held in the Department and published on the Department's website.

Tharwa PS, S1 etc. refers to the folio number of the submission in the Department's records.

58. I or my Department have responded to 29 pieces of written correspondence relating to Tharwa PS, recorded in Attachment C – Correspondence Schedule. (Copies of these documents are held in the Department.). I have attended two meetings which dealt with issues related to Tharwa PS and Departmental representatives have attended a further 11 meetings with the school and school community. (Records of meetings are held in the Department.)
59. In addition to the issues and impacts referred to above, I have also had regard to and considered the matters set out in Attachment C. The issues described in part 1 of Schedule C relate to Tharwa PS specifically. The issues described in part 2 of Schedule C are matters related to the Proposal generally and not specific to Tharwa PS. The Schedule includes telephone calls (P), Departmental records and correspondence (D), school meetings (SM), Ministerial meetings (M), written correspondence and emails (C) and submissions (S). (All records listed are held in the Department.)

Signed:



.....
Andrew Barr, MLA
Minister for Education and Training

CONSULTATION STRATEGY Attachment A

The consultation process

The ACT community consistently demonstrates the value it places on public education and its desire to have input into decision-making on issues that affect the education of children and young people. The Government also has statutory obligations under Section 20(5) of the *Education Act 2004* that require that the Minister for Education and Training engage in a consultation period of at least six months before closing or amalgamating a government school.

Accordingly, at the time of the announcement, the Government advised that a comprehensive community consultation process would be implemented between 6 June and 6 December 2006, in accordance with the *ACT Government Community Engagement Service Charter*¹ and *Community Engagement Manual*².

On 6 June 2006, briefings were provided for government school principals, representatives from the Australian Education Union, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Community and Public Sector Union, the Canberra Preschool Society and the non-government education sector. In the days following the announcement, School Board Chairs were invited to consult with the principal and the region's Schools Director about the proposal.

Meetings with major stakeholder groups continued throughout the consultation period. A *Towards 2020* project team was established within the Department of Education and Training to manage the consultation process.

Consultation publications

Eight four-page publications entitled *Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools* were distributed to school communities, key stakeholder groups and members of the broader community. These set out the current educational provision and the Government's proposal for each of the educational regions of Canberra: Gunghalin, Belconnen North West, Belconnen South East, North Canberra, South Canberra, Weston Creek, Woden and Tuggeranong.

These documents contained relevant data relating to government schools and preschools. School information covered current enrolment numbers, projected enrolments at 2010 (based on current sites), the enrolment capacity of the school, the percentage of the school utilised, the percentage of students enrolled at each school coming from out of

¹ ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (2005), *ACT Government Community Engagement Service Charter*, Canberra

² ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (2005), *Your Guide to Engaging with the Community*, Canberra

area and the percentage of government school students living in the school's priority enrolment area (PEA) who attended the school.

In addition, information was provided on the proposed regional school provision, including projected student enrolments at 2010 for each school under the proposed arrangements. Also included were details of the date and venue of community forums scheduled for each region, notification of the *Towards 2020* website address and telephone inquiry hotline number and information about how the community could seek clarification on the proposal and provide feedback.

Copies of *Towards 2020* publications were made available at ACT Government Shopfronts and the Gungahlin Library. A leaflet was also distributed to all households in the ACT providing the details of community forums and contact details. An open letter from the Minister to parents and carers in affected schools was included in school newsletters. Letters were also sent to families of students with special needs to invite them to meet with school and special education staff to discuss the particular transitional support needs of their children should the proposal proceed.

Consultation website

The Department of Education and Training's *Towards 2020: Renewing Our Schools* website was activated immediately following the announcement. It contained the same information as the printed publications, as well as a page for each school which gave parents and carers and community members access to information concerning the possible effects on their school community.

Papers on the education models proposed were available for reference and Frequently Asked Questions were updated regularly in response to common questions. Additional statistical and financial information was also posted on the site. The website detailed the avenues available to the community to provide feedback and seek further information.

Community consultation forums

Ten community forums were offered to the public. An evening public forum was held in each of the eight regions during June and July 2006. The Minister for Education and Training outlined the educational, demographic, social and financial criteria drawn upon in developing the proposal and, along with Departmental representatives, answered questions from the floor.

In October, Departmental officers and Ministerial staff attended a community forum for parents and carers of students with special needs. The Minister also attended a *Youth InterACT* forum which was also held to discuss the *Towards 2020* proposal with school age young people and representatives of the Ministerial Youth Council.

Between August and October 2006 a series of six education seminars was held, focusing on the new curriculum framework, early years of schooling, emerging technologies and special education. Over 600 people attended these seminars.

In addition, the Chief Executive and/or Departmental officers attended meetings of the Canberra Preschool Society to discuss preschool issues and of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body to discuss issues for Indigenous students and their families.

Consultation correspondence

The ACT Chief Minister, the Minister for Education and Training and the Department of Education and Training provided over 1650 responses to correspondence received regarding the *Towards 2020* proposal during the consultation period. This included responses to emails, letters and submissions.

Consultation submissions

Over 350 submissions were received on the proposal. Submissions were called for by Friday 3 November 2006 but were accepted until the end of the consultation period on 6 December 2006.

Some communities developed a collaborative approach to preparing submissions. This involved school governance groups, school staff, parents and carers and community members. Consolidated submissions of this kind enabled communities to put forward their views in a coherent and cogent way.

Submissions for which permission was given for publication will be available on the *Towards 2020* website³ from 13 December 2006.

Consultation meetings

Over 700 meetings were held by the Minister, Ministerial staff and Departmental officers during the six-month consultation period. These included group and individual meetings with parents and carers, school communities, members of school boards, Parents and Citizens Councils, Preschool Parents Associations, community members, business groups and other stakeholders.

The Minister visited, or met with representatives of every school proposed for closure and in a number of cases followed up with further meetings with school communities. He met with representatives of school boards, parents' associations, the ACT Government School Education Council and community groups. These meetings provided the opportunity for the Minister to hear the views of the community and to consider issues over the length of the consultation period.

³ *Towards 2020*, <http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/index.htm>

FINANCIAL DATA

Attachment B

<p>School: Tharwa Primary School – Proposed for closure 2006</p> <p>Financial (all figures in this section relate to 2004-05 unless otherwise indicated)</p> <p>Average cost to educate a student: \$19,502 (ACT average \$9,570 per student in a primary school)</p> <p>Operational Costs</p> <p>Direct employee expenses: \$0.366m</p> <p>Direct SBM payments: \$0.075m</p> <p>Depreciation: \$0.010m</p> <p>Other in school expenses: \$0.009m</p> <p>Educational & corporate support costs: \$0.086m</p> <p>Total cost to operate the school: \$0.546m</p>
--

Savings from Closure			
	SBM	Salary	Total
	\$m	\$m	\$m
2006-07	0.037	0.139	0.176
2007-08	0.073	0.275	0.348
2008-09	0.073	0.275	0.348
2009-10	0.075	0.282	0.357
Total	0.258	0.971	1.229

Notes:

1. Employee expenses include salary and superannuation costs for all teachers and administrative staff at the school during the year. This includes centrally funded relief.
2. School Based Management (SBM) payments are made to schools for site running costs such as cleaning, minor maintenance and utilities. 2004-05 amounts include 2 quarterly payments in 2004 and 2 in 2005.
3. Other in school expenses include Australian Government specific purpose funding and other general expenses incurred in providing educational programs in schools.
4. Depreciation includes depreciation on buildings and plant and equipment.
5. Educational and corporate support costs are the sum of costs which are centrally funded such as curriculum, and other corporate costs such as finance and human resources.

Source: ACT Department of Education and Training, derived from 2004-2005 audited financial statements.

CORRESPONDENCE SCHEDULE

Attachment C

Part 1 Tharwa Primary School

Concern / Issue raised	Correspondence schedule numbers
<i>Educational issues raised</i>	
Schools proposed for closure	
<i>General:</i>	
Current enrolments make school viable	C1, C4/5, C19
School achieving good educational outcomes -no need for change	C4/5, C10, D7
Loss of rural education programs	S2, C14
Claimed that once identified for closure, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy	S1
Why not offered amalgamation?	C19
Proposing a teaching principal	M1
Transition visits not sufficient	C29
<i>Questions of data</i>	
Capacity: modern education requires additional space	S2
Claimed that projected enrolments: demographic data flawed Prospect of more enrolments in future if preschool numbers build Prospect of attracting more out-of-area enrolments	S2
Claimed that projected enrolments: have not taken account of school 'turning around' and attracting future enrolments	S2
Question process of calculation	C18, C26
Objection to NSW students being used in calculations	C19
Parental choice	
Loss of choice across the ACT	S2, C10, C11, C12

Fewer schools means less choice, out-of-area options	C25, C26, S2
Fewer schools means less access to NSW parents	S2
Small schools will no longer be available	S2, C19, C25, C26
Loss of choice locally	S2, C9, C14
Loss of neighbourhood school	C4/5
Loss of a particular model of schooling: rural school	S2
PEAS	
Explain new PEA	C25
Value of small schools	
Individual attention	S2, C14
Caring & friendly	S2, C13, C14, D7
Research evidence suggests improved outcomes for 'at risk' and special needs students	C7, C10, C11
Curriculum provision meets parent expectations, Provides extra-curricular opportunities	S2
Small school preferable to big one	C12, C16, C25, C26
Small schools should be treated differently	C20
Models	
Models will support 'seamless pathways'. Tharwa students have pathways through Lanyon cluster	S2
Concern about physical and social wellbeing of young students in integrated setting	C2, C13
Staff matters	
General staff issues	D6
Financial issues raised	
Questions about costs data	
DET expected savings figures claimed to be inaccurate or overstated for schools proposed for closure	S2 (agrees costs high but a small sample: an increase by a few students would reduce cost per student significantly - rural schools should be costed differently) C10, C19, C23, C25

DET school costs figures claimed to be inaccurate	C6, C5, D1 (Why is Tharwa so expensive?)
Proposal does not take a cost- benefit approach (including costs to families and community)	C10, C23
Costs to families	
Transport	C4/5, C10, C15, C19, S1, D7
Private education too costly- so not an option	C7
Uniforms	C27
Costs to communities	
Loss of community resources eg sporting fields	S2, C12, C15
Effects on business, loss of local shops	C25
Proposal really about land sales	S2 (no indication of how site will be used)
Future use of community facility	C26, C25
Tenants	
Future use of heritage site	C22
Social issues raised	
General	
Loss of neighbourhood school (community social networks)	S2, C12, C15, C20, C23
Students will lose friends	C23
Loss of school as 'heart of community'	S2, C4/5, C10, C16, C22, C25
General community issues	D6
Loss of heritage values	S2, C10, C12, C16, C22 (Nat.Trust.Aust(ACT)), C25, C26, D7
Along with loss of bridge, closure of school will affect town	C8, S1
Difficult time for community after fires, floods, etc.	C18
EEO (Human Rights of Tharwa residents)	C25
General transition issues	D6

Transport	
Length of bus travelling time when bridge not in use	S1, D1
Timing of notice on new bus routes	P1
Need to revise bus policy eg rural to any ACT school	C25
Impact of free bus travel to other schools	D4
General issues raised	
Agrees Government needs to review and renew schooling provision	C4/5, C14, C15, C16, C18, C24
Criteria for proposed closure of particular schools not explicit	C1, C11, C18
Why proposed to close in 2006, not 2007/2008?	C12, C26

Summary of proposal	Schedule number
Delay any decision on Tharwa for 2 years to allow for the Monaro Highway bridge construction and for the school to demonstrate that it can make savings that make Tharwa a viable component of ACT public education.	S2
Promote Tharwa PS as an integral part of the Lanyon cluster.	S2
Make better use of the buildings for community purposes.	S2
Use part of Tharwa school to offer a 'rural experience program'.	S2

Part 2 Correspondence - General

Concern / Issue raised	Correspondence schedule numbers
<i>Educational issues raised</i>	
Schools proposed for closure	
<i>General:</i>	
Current enrolments make school viable	C17
Loss of specific curricula	C239
Loss of extra curricula programs	C238, S15 (requests protection) P34,
Schools achieving good educational outcomes - no need for change	C170
Loss of good facilities	C9, C17, C43, C51, S20
Protection, storage or new location for school assets, memorabilia etc	C9, C43, C231
Concerns about students coping with change and moving to new schools	C118
Questions of educational, social, and financial impact on students	C128, C134
General opposition	C19, C35, C37, C43, C58, C79, C85, C92, C93, C102, C103, C179, C180, C228, C323, C250, C225, C266, S33
General support	C28, C29, C39, C40, C54, C56, C63, C67, C90, C101, C112, C116, C135, C136, C141, C171/176, C172, C173/174, C175, 198, C208, S27
Concerns about the rights of Yass Valley students	C151
Concerns standard of education is decreasing	C206
Suggested ways to improve education in the ACT	C214
Closures should result in better educational outcomes for students	S21
General lack of educational rationale behind proposal	S26, C247 (requests evidence of educational advantages of new models)
Claimed that there is a lack of resources to implement set schedule	S26
Negative impact of closures to outcomes of students	S30

Educational quality is not related to number of empty places at a school	S37
Questions about data	
Capacity: are demountables counted?	C51, C115, C135, C157, P3
Capacity: modern education requires additional space	S8, S34
Projected enrolments: claimed that demographic data flawed	C33, C72, C75, C77, C100, C119, C167, C242, C243, S30, S33
Claimed that current enrolment figures incorrect	C91, S3
More detail of criteria required	C4, C21, C49, C57, C71, C74, C81, C109, C121
Claimed that capacity figures in accurate	C25, C52, C75, C77, C87, C91, C100, C132, C135, C166, C170, C243, S24, S37, S44, D3
Request data about public attending local schools	C147
Why are some schools with a lower percentage capacity rate staying open?	C157
Enrolments are already decreasing because of proposed closures	C167, C230, C264, C265, S4,
Equity concerns	
Claimed that inequitable impact on indigenous students and families	C43, C240, C255, S30,
Claimed that inequitable impact on low SES students and families	S18, S24, S30, S34, S42
Government must protect the rights of all students	S21
Dealing with equity in 2020	P13
Parental choice	
Claimed that will result in loss of choice across the ACT	C26, C131, C170, S24, S34
Range of models not available in all regions	S34, S36, S44
Larger schools offer more choice	S1, S43
Small schools will no longer be available	S20, S30, S34
Loss of choice within region	S34
Range of models not available in region	C130
Loss of choice locally	C121, S6

Parents don't want their children leaving permanent buildings to go into demountables	C146, S34
PEAS	
PEA system operates against choice (eg some specialist programs only available in one region)	
Enforce student attendance within PEA only	S34
PEAS – timeline for new areas	P31
Lack of information about PEAS	C109
Choice of school - rights	C3, C76, C223, S36
Negative effect on hopeful out of area enrolments	C6, C76, S34
Should address why people don't go to school	C6
Government deciding what schools will close, then thinking of PEAS – should be the other way around	C202
How are the NSW students being considered?	C236
Students not attending local schools because of lack of educational value	S3
Review of PEAS is complicating matters	S34
Out of area priority	P7
Request for info about PEAS	P23
Value of small schools	
Individual attention	C26, C37, C44, C82, C115, C209
Caring & friendly	C197, C238, C239
Suggestions about improved outcomes at small schools	C221
Cost effectiveness	C62
Teach children valuable life skills	C102
General value	C140, C160, C165, S30, S34, D3
Behaviour problems are better dealt with	C238, S3
Small schools assists sense of community	S8

Inconsistent attitude towards small schools (still supporting them in the private sector)	S31
Models	
General	
Too many models	S4
Models will support 'seamless pathways'	S7
Some models will mean too many transition points through schooling	C205
Some students will need to move multiple times because of 2007 closure	C15
Support for models	C15
Requests for evidence of advantages of and disadvantages of models and larger schools	C119, C120, S34
Concerned about disadvantages of larger schools	C154, C160, C221, C237, C264, S17, S24 (provides examples), S29, S30, S39, S39, S42
Criteria for deciding on particular models of schooling	C124, C138
Public needs to be made more aware of educational advantages of new models	C141
No consistency within regions	C146, S7
Expected educational outcomes for new models	C146, S30 (no evidence to suggest improved educational results) S44 (similar outcomes as current model)
Cost of adapting existing schools to cater for the new grades the school will have	C218
Will current programs be lost?	C224
Concerns about lack of choice of particular models	C224, S34 (retain use of larger and smaller schools)
Capacity issues will force students into particular schools	S36
Provide counselling to improve behaviour	S41
Research that supports putting year 6 into high schools	P10
Early years	
Specialist early childhood schools should be P-2, not P-3	C204, S7, S20, S43
Importance of early learning, thus importance of trained staff	S20
Middle Schooling	

Positive response to middle schooling	C238
Model unproved	C48, C218
Loss of Y6 leadership in primary schools	S36, C266
More information about what middle schooling involves	C109
Will students be forced to do year 6 at HS?	C18, C266
Doesn't believe students will attend Stromlo in year 6	C238
Interested in middle schooling, but believes it won't suit all students	S36
7-12 schools	
Loss of successful college model	S11
Less curriculum choice than colleges	S11
Loss of young adult environment	S11
Where did the demand come from?	C144
Existing 11-12 model would be weakened by integrating other years	C149, C167, S11, S29, S34 (support for 11-12), C244, C262 (requests evidence to support 7-12)
ACT schools will miss out on grants if all other states have 11-12	S23
Students with particular needs	
Impact on:	
Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder	C150
Students with disabilities	C210
Concerns about:	
Appropriate facilities and resources	C1, S43, S46
Students coping with change	C235, C245, S36, S42
Unit cohorts remaining together	C1
Continued provision of mainstreaming opportunities	C189, S46
The detrimental effect large schools will have on students with special needs	S34

Availability of schools in their area with special needs unit	C210, S46
Government "targeting" students with special needs	C232
The closing of schools with LSU	C235
Early childhood schools will mean additional transition for students with special needs	S46
Stress for families	S46
Need more time for planning and transition	C246, C259, D1
Heard rumours of special ed funding reduction	P9
Heard point system to change – harder for students to get into units	P9
Staff matters	
Loss of staffing positions, including executive opportunities	C52, C161
Teacher stress	S9, S34
Bigger classes	C185
Timing of transfer outcomes	C230
Effect on school staff	C104
Concerns about future working conditions	C137
Request for funding to go towards teachers and assistants	S13 (not technology), S19
Concern that teachers not involved in the development of proposals	S13
Concern that professional development opportunities will be lost	S20
Concern that staff will not have early childhood training	S20
Government needs to address the lack of social recognition teachers have in the community	S21
Provide a career path for gifted teachers	S41
Provision for minimum number of teachers	S43
How many staff at schools will be affected	P2
Preschools	

Desirability of childcare and long day care programs associated with preschools	C13, C234, S6, S28
Criteria not clear	C108
Integration with PS needs to ensure appropriate structures take place	S6
Government doesn't have a commitment to early childhood education	S20
All viable preschools should remain open, even if their primary school closes	S120
All students should have the right to government preschool	S20
Preschool registration should be earlier	P8
Financial issues raised	
Questions of costs data	
Schools proposed for closure	C108, S6, S30
Claims that DET school costs figures inaccurate	S30, S37
Proposal does not take a cost-benefit approach (including costs to families and community)	C264, S26
Issues with cost analysis	C128, C129, C211, S3, S34, S44
Put more money into schools	C103
Don't close schools to make money for dragway	C132
Closure of preschools results in small savings	S7
Cost per student doesn't reflect special needs provision	S9
School configuration based on economic factors	S19
Requests more money spent on upgrading existing schools	S24, S41
Waste of public resources	S31, P12 (who is paying for ads?)
Costs to families	
Transport	C239, C256, C258, S13, S14, S18, S20, S30
Costs of changing schools eg uniforms	C148, P4 (heard "rumour" about support)
Advice on Transition funding (eg when known; how much)	C115, C126, C150, S18, P10

Ask parents to pay more taxes to save schools	C73
Increased costs may result in more truancy amongst disadvantaged students	S18
Costs to communities	
Loss of community resources eg sporting fields	C119, C168, C206, S37, S48
Loss of school impact on house prices	S14, S30, S44, P7
Effects on business re loss of local shops	C153, C213, C264, S30, S48
Proposal really about land sales	C33, C47
How will vacated land be used? (may provide suggestion)	C207, C234, C248 (request for childcare use), C249, C253, C257, S2 (use for cheap accommodation for needy), S22, S30 (suggestions), S34, S44, P10 (vandalism concerns), P21, P32,
Employment effects	S30, P2 (contractors)
Questions about what is going to happen to P&C funds, excess uniforms, etc.	C260
Tenants	
Building used as a homeless shelter	C114
<i>Social issues raised</i>	
General	
Loss of neighbourhood school (community social networks)	C5, C30, C86, C98, C147, C264, S16, S30, S44
Students will lose friends	C27, C86, C115
Loss of school as 'heart of community'	C9, C27, C30, C98, C100, C105, C130, S16
Stress for students with special needs	C7, C9, C270
Loss of parental involvement	S20
Community support for schools to remain open	C131, S16
School closures will effect community and parents generally	C166, S24
Stress for parents and community	C169, C212
Request for social impact assessment	C226

Schools in each suburb not necessary – community is broader	S1
Co-location of early childhood services in proposal	S5
Community contribution for fundraising	S20
Transition support requested	S30, S40, S43, P3
Transport	
Transport difficulties due to changes (eg no car/one car)	C148
Environmental impact of families needing to use transport	C262, S30
Student health concerns as no longer walking to school	C30, C43, C82, C239, C262, C264, S16, S20, S34,
Safety concerns (eg parking, road crossings, bicycle paths, traffic lights)	C43, C197, C238, S14, S16, S17, S24 (requests upgrades), S30
Inadequacy of school bus services	C109, C183
Wanting free bus transport	C30
What provision will be made to ensure travel arrangements will not be a burden	C151
Travel on public transport isn't safe	C151, S16
General transport issues with increased traffic	S9, S24
School bus scheme	P13
General issues raised	
Timeline too short for 2007 implementation	C5, C8, C42, C45, C80, C81, C89, C95, C97, C119, C125, C169, C197, C230, C238, C245, C259, C262, S6, S20, S29, S34, S37, S46
Government should have consulted before developing proposal	C45, C203, C262, C264, S13, S42, S48
Individuals or groups did not have their views heard	C12 (old tech process)
Decisions were already made (consultation not genuine)	C130, C143, C158, C225, C237, S8, S26, S29, S34, S37, S38
Criteria for proposed closure of particular schools not explicit	C3, C138, C216 (requests statement of reasons), C262, S13, S17, S30, S34
Unclear whether outcomes data (eg ACTAP) were used to inform proposal	C10, C70, C170
DET using data not available to public to inform recommendations	C193, C245, S9, S19, S42, S44
Requests for information	C2, C11, C16, C22, C32, C35, C38, C46, C49, C60, C61, C68, C69, C83, C94, C108, C110,

	C117, C121, C126, C127, C128, C129, C134, C155, C157, C159, C161, C182, C188, C191, C204, C211, C216, C219, C255, S34, P24
Against sale to private schools	C31, C33, C36, C115, C215
Lack of an experienced minister	C104
Need for objective report/study	C64, S48
Towards 2020 – anti live in Canberra campaign	C86, C185, S16, S37
Consultation period not long enough	C117, C125, C143, C170 (bad timing), C212, C262, S34, S42
Request evidence of consultation- believes there is a lack of consultation	C117, C146
Requests support with submissions	C139
Government needs to do more planning	C144, C200, C259
How government determines funding for non-government schools	C142, C176
Honesty with community required	C146, C207, C264, S31 (explain terminology) C57 (suggests FAQ's)
Requests sensitivity for dates and method of announcement of the final decision	C201, S38 (inconsiderate)
Losing people to non-government schools	C203, C261, S4, S34, S36, S37, D3
Requests information on who and how the submissions would be analysed	C217 (requests independent party) C219
Close schools sooner rather than later	S1
Concerns over language of proposal	S7
Questions priority of government	S17
Offers suggestions to reverse decline in government school enrolments	S23
Suggested ways to improve demographics of areas with closing schools	S23
Question relationship between Towards 2020 and territory plan	S26
Should have undertaken risk analysis	C 240, C255, S34
Requests government to conduct surveys to gain information from parents, students, and staff	S40
Suggests DET discuss school closures with other organisations	S40
Family moving to ACT- needs to know what's happening	P5

Issues with savings as costs	D1
West Belconnen only open P-6 in 2009 – Request for P-10 “as promised”	P19
“Schools Location Bill”	C263
Request for compensation for schools that were proposed to close but didn’t	C265

Summary of proposal	Schedule number
Review assistance schemes to minimise effects of school closures on disadvantaged and homeless students	S18
Delay decision till 08 to allow full public enquiry and time to manage change	S18
Leave Narrabundah, Charnwood & Southern Cross as 3 schools	S18
Establish a revitalised school on the Holder site (instead of Duffy)	S18
Intergenerational facility on site possibly including ‘independent government school’	S22
Use excess space more productively to support community benefit	S30
Strengthen public education through development of community schools	S30
Use submissions as starting point for extended process to support more informed decisions: no closure of amalgamations until 2007	S34
One-stop-shop sites for families incorporating infant and day care, preschool to Year 5 and before and after school care.	S34
A strategy that includes smaller and larger schools.	S34
Development of guidelines for future proposed closures and amalgamations.	S34
Requires a revisit of the strategy in 2020 as a matter of urgency	S44
Suggests that different aspects of education system be considered within a hierarchical framework – at a local, subdistrict, district or metropolitan level	S44

The correspondence schedule numbers refer to correspondence and briefings for Ministerial meetings on the Proposal, held in the ACT Department of Education and Training. Correspondence is coded as follows:

- P Telephone calls
- D Departmental correspondence
- M Ministerial meetings
- C Written correspondence and emails
- S Submissions

P1 etc. refers to the folio number of the record of the telephone call held in the Department’s records.
D1 etc. refers to the folio number of Departmental records and correspondence.

SM1 etc. refers to the folio number of records for school meetings

M1 etc. refers to the folio number of records for Ministerial meetings.

C1 etc. refers to the folio number of written correspondence or emails held in the Department's records.

S1 etc refers to the folio number of the submission held in the Department's records.