



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mr Jonathan Davis MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Peter Cain MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure

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Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Email: LCommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au

Submitted by Mawson Primary School P&C Committee

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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To whom it may concern

Re: ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into the Management of School Infrastructure

We write on behalf of the Mawson Primary School Community to provide input to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion's inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure.

The Mawson PS community is strongly in favour of a more robust and long term plan for the management of school infrastructure in the ACT. Mawson PS itself has seen a massive growth in student numbers from 483 in 2018 to over 520 students in 2021. This increase has been driven not only by demand for the school's Mandarin Immersion program, but also by development in the Woden area over the last decade. This urban infill has focused particularly on the suburbs of Phillip and Mawson, both of which fall within the zoning for Mawson PS. There is no sign of this boom abating.

According to the 2018 census of ACT schools, the schools in Woden are already significantly larger than those in most other parts of Canberra.¹ In 2018 Woden Valley primary schools had on average 502 students. This compares to only 337 in Tuggeranong and is second only to the North/Gunghalin schools in terms of average size. At the same time, most of the schools in the Woden area are now above 50 years of age and require significant maintenance and upgrades to meet the requirements of this growing population. It is therefore essential that the ACT government begin to plan now for the population growth ahead.

As the Committee would be aware, the recent report by the [NSW Auditor General on Delivering School Infrastructure](#) noted that "Developing a longer-term pipeline of priorities would signal the areas of greatest need and allow greater scope to consider a range of options to best meet those needs." It therefore recommended that the NSW government develop a "ten-year list of

¹ https://www.education.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1246892/August-2018-Census.pdf

priorities to meet the forecast demand for new classrooms and contemporary fit for purpose learning environments, which identifies individual projects and programs in the short-term and priority geographic areas and programs in the medium-term.” We encourage the ACT government to embrace a similar long term planning approach, that is mapped to the current and predicted future needs of the community.

Of the topics identified in the terms of reference, there are three on which we plan to focus our comments:

- the management of capacity issues in schools, including the use of temporary facilities for schools running above capacity;
- the demand for sporting facilities on school grounds and measures to address this demand; and
- the adequacy of parking and bike storage facilities.

Capacity Issues in Schools

Capacity is without doubt the most pressing issue facing ACT schools, and those in the Woden Valley in particular. All three of the primary schools servicing central Woden - Mawson, Garrahan and Curtin - are already Category A schools, unable to accept out of area students due to capacity issues.² To put it bluntly, they are already “full”. Yet at least two new residential towers are currently being considered for approval in this same area.³ Such towers are no longer the abodes of single adults alone, and it is inevitable they will create more pressure on our already stretched school system. At the same time, the large size of blocks in the older Woden Valley suburbs has led to many single dwelling homes being demolished and replaced with multiple townhouses, bringing even more families into the area.

Mawson PS, being one of the physically smaller of the Woden Valley schools, in particular shows the impact of increased population growth without sufficient planning for school infrastructure. It has had no substantial change to its permanent infrastructure since it was built in the 1970s, save for an environment centre. As a result, the school library and even the environment centre itself have had to be re-purposed in recent years to house classes to cope with the rapid student increase.

Thanks to the efforts of our current Principal, three demountable classrooms have now been added to house overflow classes, allowing us to restore these multipurpose spaces to their former use. However, the school’s central infrastructure remains inadequate for the number of students it serves. Of particular concern is the lack of school hall large enough to house the entire school body. As a result, school assemblies are either restricted to only a few years, or are held outside. This causes problems for engagement between the senior and junior school

² Note the Mawson PS may accept out of area enrolments for the capped bilingual programs, but for all other purposes will be a Category A school: (<https://www.education.act.gov.au/public-school-life/enrolling-in-a-public-school/enrolling-in-kindergarten-to-year-12/category-a-schools-alphabetical-order>)

³ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7071342/build-to-rent-apartments-among-proposed-woden-towers/>

students and limits the ability of the school to meet with its cohort during the colder winter months. It also presents issues for parental engagement as the premium on space means that parents are often not able to attend, or are seen standing in the atrium to the hall due to lack of space.

A multifaceted approach is needed to address the capacity issue facing Mawson. This includes:

- Improved infrastructure at Mawson PS, and in particular a school hall capable of holding the entire student body
- A thoughtful approach to school zones, ensuring population growth due to development is spread equitably
- Improved infrastructure for surrounding schools, to ensure they are suitable for the increased enrollments

Sporting Facilities

Similarly, Mawson's sporting facilities are not adequate for the student cohort. It does not have a dedicated oval for the children to play sports on during lunch and recess, and the areas of grass that are available are of poor quality and are not particularly even. The three demountables, while relieving classroom stress, have taken over what was previously open areas for playing sport. As is discussed above, the hall does not provide an appropriate alternative, as its size makes it inadequate to allow students to partake in important physical activities such as gymnastics.

Creative thinking could provide relatively simple solutions to some of these problems. For example, consideration could be given to extending the school boundary out into the unused grass verge of the Mawson playing fields next door to provide a more spacious and level grass playing field that could support multiple sports being played at once. However, the maintenance of this area and the need for a more adequate hall would still require a longer-term strategic approach.

Parking and bike facilities

The capacity issues faced by the school have also resulted in significant traffic issues during peak times around school drop off and pick up. The small parking area at the front of the school provides for students to be picked up or dropped off without parents having to exit the car. This area is often full by 2:30pm of parents waiting in the car to pick their child up at 3pm as the spaces are so limited. Of a morning, there is a line of traffic coming from both directions waiting to turn into the pick up/drop off zone, causing delays to both parents dropping off children and local traffic. This has resulted in a significant number of near misses in recent years for both vehicles and pedestrians as cars try to weave in and out of the driveway.

Unlike many local schools that border a number of roads (as they sit on a peninsula block and have two or three streets available for parents to park or have good sized parking areas), Mawson has only a single street front onto Ainsworth Street. As a result, the school only has a small road frontage available for longer term parking, which must be shared with a private school situated next door. Parents who park the car on the road and enter the school to collect

their children can end up parking several hundred metres up the road near to Mawson Drive. The Mawson P&C would like to see investigation into the scope for additional parking either in the form of a parking lot or as 90 degree or angled parking along Ainsworth Street.

The parking situation is not helped by the paucity of bicycle parking facilities. In the past the Mawson P&C has attempted to participate in the ACT government's Ride or Walk to School Initiative, but have been told directly by parents that they are discouraged from riding due to the inability to secure bikes during the day. The school currently has nothing more than a metal chain link rope and some divots for tyres alongside a wall on one of the main thoroughfares where bikes can be chained and left. In most cases, bikes are either leant against the wall or lying on the ground so as to secure them to the chain link rope. The area that the bikes are placed is high traffic and unprotected from the elements. Given the expense of bikes these days, these are unsuitable areas for bikes to be kept as they are open to any student who may wish to play with or on them and are not protected by the weather. An enclosed bike facility that has metal stands and a roof, and that can be secured during school hours, would be welcomed by families in the school and help encourage a more active culture within the school community.