



**Legislative Assembly for the  
Australian Capital Territory**

Standing Committee on Social Policy

# **Inquiry into E-Petition 007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School**

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory  
Standing Committee on Social Policy

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Approved for publication

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# About the committee

## Establishing resolution

The Assembly established the Standing Committee on Social Policy on 2 December 2024.

The Committee is responsible for the following areas:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
- Community Services
- Disability
- Early Childhood Development
- Education
- Families
- Health and health services
- Homelessness and housing services
- Intergenerational fairness
- Justice Health
- LGBTIQ+
- Mental health
- Multicultural Affairs
- Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
- Seniors
- Social Housing
- Veterans
- Women (including the Office for Women)
- Youth Affairs.

You can read the full establishing resolution [on our website](#).

## Committee members

Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, Chair

Ms Chiaka Barry MLA, Deputy Chair

Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

Ms Caitlin Tough MLA

## Secretariat

Ms Katie Langham, Committee Secretary

Ms Erin Dinneen, Assistant Secretary (until 30 September 2025)

Ms Jennifer Forest, Assistant Secretary (from 1 December 2025)

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## About this inquiry

E-Petition 007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School was presented to the Assembly on 6 May 2025. The petition received at least 500 signatures and was referred under Standing Order 99A to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Standing Order 99B requires the Committee to make a decision on whether or not to inquire into a referred petition within 28 days of the Minister's response to the petition being tabled in the Assembly.

The Committee decided to inquire into the petition on 12 August 2025.

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# Acronyms & Abbreviations

<b>Acronym or Abbreviation</b>	<b>Long form</b>
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
BACT	Badminton ACT
LHS	Lyneham High School
LHS P&C	Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association

# Recommendations and Findings

## Finding 1

The Committee finds that the current Lyneham High School gymnasium is not fit for purpose for students and out-of-hours community users.

## Finding 2

The Committee finds that whole school capacity data is insufficient to determine the usage rates and expansion needs of gymnasiums given their use for physical education (especially during wet weather), school assemblies and out-of-hours use by community sports.

## Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government utilise demand metric tools to include a measurement of community sports use when it comes to determining scope of school gymnasium upgrades or replacements.

## Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government reconsider its decision to reduce the scope of works at Lyneham High School from the double gymnasium designed and briefed in 2022, taking into account:

- the current non-compliance of the Lyneham High School gym with modern building codes;
- the needs of students and staff using the gym safely for physical education and wet weather contingencies;
- the benefits of being able to hold whole-of-school assemblies;
- the demand of indoor, competition-standard sports and recreation facilities in the Inner North;
- the inadequacy of the current capacity formula for determining gymnasium use and need for expansion; and
- evidence provided to the Committee indicating that investing in significant upgrades to the existing gym, given its insufficient size, would be an inefficient and inappropriate use of public funds.

## Finding 3

The Committee finds that the ACT Government failed to make it clear to the Lyneham High School Principal and Leadership that the construction of a new double gymnasium, as detailed in the April 2022 'Lyneham High School New Gymnasium Design and Master Planning Project Brief', was not guaranteed at that time.

#### **Finding 4**

The Committee finds there was insufficient evidence presented to the Lyneham High School Leadership and community prior to the ACT Government’s decision on the scope of works in the 2024–25 ACT Budget to refute the community of the belief that ACT Labor’s election commitment was to build a new double gymnasium.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that, in any consultation with school communities on potential capital works upgrades, all options under consideration are shared with the community unless a final decision has already been made to select one option over others.



# 1. Introduction

## Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.1. On 12 August 2025 the Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into E-Petition 007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School.
- 1.2. The Committee received 11 submissions which were published on the inquiry website and are listed at **Appendix A**.
- 1.3. The Committee held a public hearing on 4 November 2025. The Committee heard evidence from witnesses listed at **Appendix B**. The transcripts and video recordings are available on the Legislative Assembly website.
- 1.4. There were five questions taken on notice during the public hearings, details of which are listed at **Appendix C**.
- 1.5. Statistics on the gender of witnesses, collected in response to an audit by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, are at **Appendix D**. The information is collected to determine whether committee inquiries are meeting the needs, and allowing the participation of, a range of genders in the community. Participation is voluntary and there are no set responses.

## Background

- 1.6. Prior to the 2020 election, ACT Labor announced a four-year \$99 million school infrastructure renewal program. The announcement included a commitment to ‘upgrading the gymnasium at Lyneham High School.’<sup>1</sup>
- 1.7. In the 2024–25 ACT Budget, the ACT Government committed \$5.746 million to refurbish and modernise the gymnasium with an expected physical completion date of June 2026.<sup>2</sup> This was pushed out to June 2027 in the 2025–26 Budget.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.8. On 20 November 2024, several documents were released in response to a Freedom of Information request, which included details of consultation and a design brief prepared in April 2022.<sup>4</sup> This brief noted:

Because of the low functionality of the existing gymnasium, the focus is not on refurbishing the existing space, but to construct a new two court gymnasium fit for modern sporting activities on the northeast of the site. It is proposed that the

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<sup>1</sup> ACT Labor, ‘Every public school will continue to be a great school under ACT Labor’, *Media Release*, 22 September 2020.

<sup>2</sup> ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2024–25: Budget Statements F*, p 25.

<sup>3</sup> ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2025–26: Budget Statements F*, p 26.

<sup>4</sup> ACT Government, *Education FOI disclosure logs*, Reference number EDU\_2025\_008, <https://www.act.gov.au/open/foi-disclosure-logs/education-foi-disclosure-logs> (accessed 14 January 2026).

existing gymnasium will be adapted for reuse as a double storey learning space at a later stage.<sup>5</sup>

- 1.9. On 6 May 2025, E-Petition 007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School was presented to the Assembly. The Minister for Education responded to the petition on 8 July 2025.<sup>6</sup> The Committee commenced this inquiry on 12 August 2025.
- 1.10. This report examines the key issues raised with the Committee including:
- safety and user requirements for the Lyneham High School gymnasium;
  - data metrics used to support school infrastructure decisions;
  - consideration of the announced upgrades compared to the replacement option designed in 2022; and
  - consultation with the school leadership and broader community.

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<sup>5</sup> ACT Education Directorate, *Lyneham High School New Gymnasium Design and Mater Planning Project Brief*, April 2022, p 3. ACT Government, *Education Disclosure Log*, Reference number EDU\_2025\_008, 'EDU\_2025\_008 Records Stage 1' <https://www.act.gov.au/open/foi-disclosure-logs/education-foi-disclosure-logs> (accessed 14 January 2026).

<sup>6</sup> ACT Legislative Assembly, *E-PET-007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School*, <https://epetitions.parliament.act.gov.au/details/e-pet-007-25> (accessed 14 January 2026).

## 2. Fit for purpose

### Safety and user requirements

- 2.1. A key area of concern raised with the Committee was that the Lyneham High School (LHS) gymnasium did not meet safety requirements and the user needs of students, teachers or community sports organisations.<sup>7</sup>

### Safety

- 2.2. Former Principal Rob Emanuel advised that ‘the primary need for a new gymnasium has always been about safety and a fit for purpose school and community facility.’<sup>8</sup> He outlined safety issues impacting student and teacher wellbeing due to the single court size and condition of the gymnasium:

The fundamental flaws are:

- the existing gymnasium floor is not large enough (e.g. not a competition court size, court runoff areas are dangerous)
- the existing gymnasium roof is not high enough (e.g. cannot play a game of volleyball without the [ball] hitting the roof rafters)
- poor student toilet / change room facilities (e.g. despite ongoing repairs and maintenance they are not fit for purpose in design, security or safety)
- poor staffroom facilities for teaching and support staff.<sup>9</sup>

- 2.3. Some submitters reported that the building does not meet current safety requirements outlined in the National Construction Code.<sup>10</sup> Mary Rahman summarised these concerns:

The baselines should be a minimum of 2 meters in length however ours is only 1.83 from baseline to wall. This is extremely dangerous as it limits the amount of allowed space for run-off... The floors are also concrete or a concrete adjacent material, which are not shock absorbent, leading to stress and pain in joints as well as injury... The lighting and ceiling fixtures also pose a safety and performance risk - the ceilings are not high enough for our competition standard, often getting balls caught up between the bars. The lighting is bright and glary when you look up at the ceiling mid game for the ball which is a big contrast to the dimness of the base of the gym. Overall the gym does not meet the safety standards of the National Construction Code.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Rob Emanuel, *Submission 10*, pp 3–4; Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 3; Mary Rahman, *Submission 3*, p 2; Jamie Bell, *Submission 6*, p 2; Theo Knott, *Submission 1*, p 2.

<sup>8</sup> Rob Emanuel, *Submission 10*, p 1.

<sup>9</sup> Rob Emanuel, *Submission 10*, pp 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Jaimee Bell, *Submission 6*, p 1; Mary Rahman, *Submission 3*, p 1.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Rahman, *Submission 3*, p 1.

- 2.4. In its submission, the ACT Government advised that the ‘gymnasium complied with all relevant building codes in effect at the time it was built. Today, there are no identified safety issues preventing normal, supervised use of the gymnasium.’<sup>12</sup> Officials acknowledged there were risks around the mezzanine and limited run-off areas in the LHS gymnasium and advised that these were being managed in line with regularly updated risk assessments.<sup>13</sup> The Committee heard that the investment announced in the 2024–25 ACT Budget would ‘address and meet current code and standard requirements as well.’<sup>14</sup>

## Student use

- 2.5. Several submitters identified the impact that the gymnasium’s single court size had on students’ use of the space.<sup>15</sup> The Lyneham High School Parents and Citizens Association (LHS P&C) noted that ‘Health/Physical Education activities stop...during wet/extreme weather as there is no space to facilitate learning for 300 students who can be participating in class at the same time.’<sup>16</sup> This was supported by Rob Emanuel, who advised:

On a day like today with rain, you might have five or six classes on a particular line that do PE in a year group. All of a sudden, where do you go? Basically, everybody is in a warm and dry spot, but there is no teaching and learning happening. School programs are not operating...<sup>17</sup>

- 2.6. The principal petitioner and former LHS student, Shasta Bignell, commented on the impact that limited gymnasium space had on his learning:

The lack of indoor space also meant that the opportunity to be active for PE during wet weather wasn’t available to us, since the single indoor court could only realistically accommodate 1-3 classes, instead of the 10+ that are on each PE class line. This not only felt unfair but hampered both my learning opportunities and those of other students; since there’s only time for a couple of 50-minute PE classes per week, losing one to rain would put us behind on our learning, and remove an opportunity to stay physically active.<sup>18</sup>

- 2.7. The ACT Government acknowledged the limitations of the current ‘outdated’ facility:

The size of the gymnasium limits the scale and nature of physical education (PE) activities able to be undertaken, requiring some PE activities to take place on the school ovals. There is also limited “run off” areas in the current gym, meaning the edge of the court is much closer to the wall than in newer gymnasiums. The

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<sup>12</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 32.

<sup>14</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 46.

<sup>15</sup> Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 3; Mary Rahman, *Submission 3*, p 2; Theo Knott, *Submission 1*, p 2.

<sup>16</sup> Lyneham High School Parents and Citizens Association, *Submission 8*, p 3.

<sup>17</sup> Mr Rob Emanuel, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 14.

<sup>18</sup> Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 3.

mezzanine level, designed as a spectator gallery, is currently sectioned off and is being used for storage.<sup>19</sup>

- 2.8. Several submitters also raised concerns that the lack of a large enough indoor space to hold whole school assemblies at LHS potentially impacted ‘communication and community cohesion.’<sup>20</sup> The LHS P&C raised recent lockdown experiences where students needed to be distributed across four separate spaces, stating it was an ‘unsafe practice’ that caused ‘unnecessary stress’ for teachers and students.<sup>21</sup>
- 2.9. The ACT Government advised that it was common for ACT high schools to run smaller, year-group assemblies, with the Minister noting that it would be ‘unusual these days’ for schools operating at full capacity to hold full-school assemblies.<sup>22</sup>
- 2.10. Officials advised that schools use a process of ‘timetabling’ as well as risk management to ‘maximise use of the spaces that they need for different classes and activities.’<sup>23</sup> Officials acknowledged the ‘fantastic job’ LHS staff do to manage the use of the current gymnasium.<sup>24</sup>

## Community requirements

- 2.11. The Committee heard from community sports organisations that school gymnasiums, like the building at LHS, provide the training and competition venues which underpin their sport’s participation.<sup>25</sup> However, the standard and single court size of the LHS gymnasium meant it ‘no longer meets contemporary standards for accessibility, safety and multi-use functionality’ and could not be used for community sporting competitions.<sup>26</sup>
- 2.12. Badminton ACT (BACT) commented on the limitations of an aged building, like the LHS gymnasium, in providing ‘effective play of one of the fastest growing sports in Canberra’, and how competition to ‘hire school sports halls’ had placed pressure on clubs:<sup>27</sup>

Given the lack of facilities in which to play the sport (particularly over the peak weekday evenings and weekends) and competition from other sports to hire school sports halls, most BACT clubs are at capacity with waiting lists for people wanting to join.<sup>28</sup>

- 2.13. This was an experience echoed by Basketball ACT, which noted the Canberra City Stallions club, which trains out of the LHS gymnasium, has stopped advertising because ‘they are

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<sup>19</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 8.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Jamie Bell, *Submission 6*, p 1; Lyneham High School Parents and Citizens Association, *Submission 8*, p 1; Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, *Submission 8*, p 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 39.

<sup>23</sup> Ms Jo Wood, Director-General, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 39; Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 40.

<sup>25</sup> Basketball ACT, *Submission 11*, p 3; Badminton ACT, *Submission 2*, p 2.

<sup>26</sup> Basketball ACT, *Submission 11*, p 3.

<sup>27</sup> Badminton ACT, *Submission 2*, p 2.

<sup>28</sup> Badminton ACT, *Submission 2*, p 2.

hamstrung by where they can train' due to limited suitable training facilities in the inner north.<sup>29</sup>

- 2.14. The Minister advised that community sporting needs are considered when planning new school infrastructure:

We have a more recent policy, within the last five or so years, where we now build double gymnasiums at high schools, new high schools, and single gymnasiums at least at primary schools. However, we will be building a double gymnasium at Garran Primary School because of the need within that community for additional indoor sports facilities, given the changes there.

Our schools can make a bit of a difference in that space, given that the schools are empty outside school hours, so making sure that those multimillion-dollar facilities are used by the community is appropriate. Garran is probably a little bit different to the standard, but all our new high schools are built with a double gymnasium.<sup>30</sup>

- 2.15. While the Committee acknowledges this is the standard when building new schools, it received evidence supporting investment in multisport, indoor facilities at ageing schools as well. Basketball ACT advised:

... we also believe immediate priority needs to be given to providing safe and sustainable venues for Canberrans to play sport across ageing or outdated infrastructure not just in the new suburban areas. The Lyneham High School gym is not only a school asset but also a critical venue for community sporting programs, local competitions, and development pathways.<sup>31</sup>

### Committee comment

- 2.16. School gymnasiums play an important dual role in supporting student learning and engagement, as well as providing facilities for community sport, in both growth areas and older suburbs.
- 2.17. The Committee considers that the LHS gymnasium does not meet the contemporary safety and user requirements of students, teachers and community sports organisations. The size constraint of the single court facility is the most significant barrier to student participation in physical education classes and presents run off space and height issues. The size of the gymnasium is also a barrier to whole school assemblies and has limited community sporting organisations from expanding their offerings in the inner north, despite a growing population and robust demand for community sports.

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<sup>29</sup> Ms Nicole Bowles, Chief Executive Officer, Basketball ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 30.

<sup>31</sup> Basketball ACT, *Submission 11*, p 3.

## Finding 1

The Committee finds that the current Lyneham High School gymnasium is not fit for purpose for students and out-of-hours community users.

## Data

- 2.18. School infrastructure decisions are informed by a combination of enrolment and population projections.<sup>32</sup> The ACT Government explained:

Informed by this data and evidence, the Directorate plans ahead to ensure there are places available for students at their local schools. Where necessary, this includes changes to PEAs [Priority Enrolment Areas] and infrastructure investment, including transportable classrooms for schools experiencing temporary growth or enrolment peaks, permanent expansions where enrolment growth is projected to continue, and new schools.<sup>33</sup>

- 2.19. Projected enrolments are used in determining the capacity of a school and how many students can be accommodated.<sup>34</sup> Data shows that LHS consistently operated at the top of its capacity utilising between 92 percent to 96 percent of the available space over the past five years:

	Students enrolled	Capacity	Utilisation
2020	1,076	1,126	96%
2021	1,078	1,126	96%
2022	1,035	1,126	92%
2023	1,061	1,118	95%
2024	1,050	1,118	94%
2025	1,042	1,107	94%

Figure 1: Lyneham High School enrolments and utilisation between 2020–2025 [Source: ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 9].

<sup>32</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 9.

<sup>33</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 9.

<sup>34</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 9.

- 2.20. The Committee heard that the decision to upgrade the LHS gymnasium rather than build a new one was based, in part, on enrolment projections that indicate the school will remain in ‘a stable enrolment range for the foreseeable future.’<sup>35</sup> However, officials acknowledged that capacity figures indicate how many students can be accommodated in the school and ‘do not reflect how many students can be accommodated within a facility like the school’s gym at any particular time.’<sup>36</sup>
- 2.21. The Committee heard that the use of school capacity and enrolment data as a measurement tool did not fully assess student needs.<sup>37</sup> Witnesses reported overcrowding across classrooms and the gymnasium, despite LHS enrolments falling within the school’s calculated capacity.<sup>38</sup> Shasta Bignell explained his experience while a student at LHS:
- I know that there was consistent overcrowding in classrooms. I think the standard is 19 people per classroom. We regularly have 20 and 25. I know that the lead class had over 30. In the gym, obviously I have detailed all of those other problems. I think the fact that those experiences are happening in the first place with the current school capacity really shows that there is an existing problem, even without going over capacity on whatever metric you want to take.<sup>39</sup>
- 2.22. A previous Assembly committee recommended adjusting capacity calculations when considering school facility needs to more accurately represent usage of school areas and address overcrowding.<sup>40</sup> The Education Directorate advised in response to that recommendation that ‘ACT public school capacities are reviewed regularly to support demand management and inform future planning. Directorate work is continuing to review capacity assessment opportunities.’<sup>41</sup>
- 2.23. The Committee heard that issues of overcrowding and space at LHS had ‘affected people’s decisions on whether or not to move to a private school...’<sup>42</sup> and facilities were ‘a factor’ in parents’ enrolment decisions.<sup>43</sup> The Minister noted that there are a range of factors that shape parents’ decisions to enrol their child in a particular school.<sup>44</sup>
- 2.24. The Committee queried whether data was collected to ascertain what impact the standard of school facilities had on enrolment decisions.<sup>45</sup> Officials advised that school satisfaction is measured broadly through the School Satisfaction and Climate Survey, which seeks families, carers, staff and student responses to public education in the ACT.<sup>46</sup> In response

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<sup>35</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 39.

<sup>37</sup> Mr Rob Emanuel, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 8.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 2; Jaimee Bell, *Submission 6*, p 1; Theo Knott, *Submission 1*, p 1.

<sup>39</sup> Mr Shasta Bignell, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 24.

<sup>40</sup> Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, *Report 9: Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT*, March 2024, p 10. Recommendation 5 called on the ACT Government to develop a school capacity formula that more accurately represents usage of schools and responds to existing crowding issues accordingly.

<sup>41</sup> ACT Education Directorate, *Annual Report 2024–25*, p 164.

<sup>42</sup> Mr Shasta Bignell, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 28.

<sup>43</sup> Mr Rob Emanuel, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 41.

<sup>45</sup> Mr Thomas Emerson MLA and Ms Chiaka Barry MLA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, pp 40–41.

<sup>46</sup> Ms Jo Wood, Director-General, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 41.

to a question taken on notice, the Minister confirmed there is one question in the survey related to infrastructure, where ‘respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “My/This/My child’s school is well maintained.”’<sup>47</sup>

- 2.25. The Committee heard that sports demand data could provide an additional metric when considering the likely out-of-hours demand for school gymnasium facilities. Basketball ACT explained:

We look at things and utilise different systems that look at facility capacity and potential use. SportsEye is a great tool that we utilise that measures our participants by postcode, looks at what facilities we have within the area and creates our demand metrics and all those different types of things. Sport and [Recreation] have access to that as well, so they can help Education to look at overlaying some of those data points.<sup>48</sup>

- 2.26. The Minister advised that community sporting needs are considered when planning new school gymnasiums:

We often talk with our sports community and our school community about what those particular needs might be in that area. With Evelyn Scott School, for example, its double gymnasium was built with a multi-indoor-sport purpose in mind, particularly focusing on roller derby. Roller derby needs different line marking and wider spaces, to be able to hold their competitions. That school was specifically built to include that purpose.<sup>49</sup>

### Committee comment

- 2.27. The Committee acknowledges that school capacity and enrolment data provide valuable metrics about the projected future school infrastructure needs. However, the Committee notes these do not necessarily reflect the experience within specific school areas or facilities, such as gymnasiums, which may experience higher usage and potential overcrowding. They also do not reflect the projected out-of-hours usage by community organisations and sporting clubs.
- 2.28. The Committee considers there is also insufficient information captured by the ACT Government to understand the extent to which the quality of school facilities affects parents’ enrolment decisions.

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<sup>47</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *answer to QTON 3*, 4 November 2025 (received 18 November 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Ms Nicole Bowles, Chief Executive Officer Basketball ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 18.

<sup>49</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 30.

## Finding 2

The Committee finds that whole school capacity data is insufficient to determine the usage rates and expansion needs of gymnasiums given their use for physical education (especially during wet weather), school assemblies and out-of-hours use by community sports.

- 2.29. The Committee considers sports demand data would support infrastructure decisions by providing greater information about community need and projected out-of-hours usage when considering whether to upgrade or replace existing school gymnasiums.

## Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government utilise demand metric tools to include a measurement of community sports use when it comes to determining scope of school gymnasium upgrades or replacements.

## Upgrades

- 2.30. In the 2024–25 Budget, the ACT Government announced \$5.746 million to the existing LHS gymnasium, including ‘upgrades of the flooring to competition standards’.<sup>50</sup>
- 2.31. The ACT Government advised that the project is in a planning phase and consultation has occurred with the school to identify its priorities.<sup>51</sup> The Minister indicated at the hearing that consultation had commenced based on the funding that had been allocated:

The Education Directorate is having further consultation with the school about the process going forward. There will be fuller consultation with the community about the scope of the works and other things that may or may not fit into the funding bucket...<sup>52</sup>

- 2.32. Officials expanded on these priorities at the hearing:

The first priority of the school in the upgrade, apart from the flooring, was to remove the mezzanine. The school has an old mezzanine on top of a number of equipment storage rooms which butt up against the playing surface. One of the early proposals was to remove the mezzanine and those storage rooms, giving us more floor space—still not enough to have a competition floor, but more floor space for student movement. Those storage rooms will be moved outside the building, into a shed. The other upgrades are to the change rooms, updating

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<sup>50</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Letter to Lyneham High School Board and Lyneham High School P&C dated 27 June 2024*, accessed within ACT Government, *Education Disclosure Log*, Reference number EDU\_2025\_008, EDU\_2025\_008 Records Stage 1, Record 80, <https://www.act.gov.au/open/foi-disclosure-logs/education-foi-disclosure-logs> (accessed 14 January 2026).

<sup>51</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 7.

<sup>52</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, pp 37–38.

them. They have not been updated for a very long time. Provided the budget can accommodate it, we would also look at the PE staffroom.<sup>53</sup>

- 2.33. Witnesses raised concern that the announced upgrades did not represent value for money and would not address the key safety and use issues arising from the single court size constraints.<sup>54</sup>
- 2.34. Shasta Bignell drew attention to the possible floor replacement as a ‘waste of money’ as ‘the gym can never be competition standard because the building isn’t big enough.’<sup>55</sup> The LHS P&C noted that refurbishments could not address the existing space constraints that prevent the LHS gymnasium being more widely used by community sporting organisations.<sup>56</sup>
- 2.35. Former LHS Principal, Rob Emanuel, likened the upgrades to ‘putting lipstick on a pig’ and explained:<sup>57</sup>

Simplistically proceeding with an upgrade to a 60-year-old gymnasium by installing a “competition standard” floor and other cosmetics changes does not address the fundamental safety risk and unsuitability of the existing gymnasium.<sup>58</sup>

- 2.36. The LHS P&C raised concerns regarding the reason for the announced upgrades, noting:

Returning to the point, there seems to be an obsession with this idea that the election promise of an upgrade must be continued with at all costs, and that no other solution can be entertained, even if it is better and even if it is cheaper. With the Chief Minister, when he gets his ministry together after an election, one of the main points he makes is, “We’ve got to deliver on our promises,” and I think it is a great thing that he does that. But I am sure he does not mean, “We have to deliver on our promises, and only what we’ve promised, even if a better result becomes clear to us.”<sup>59</sup>

- 2.37. The Committee sought information about what options were presented to government as part of the business case for upgrading the LHS gymnasium, apart from the double gymnasium outlined in the 2022 design brief.<sup>60</sup> In response to a question taken on notice, the Minister confirmed this information could not be provided ‘as it is subject to Cabinet-in-confidence requirements.’<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Mr John Nakkam, Executive Branch Manager, Asset Management and Delivery, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 32.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 3; Rob Emanuel, *Submission 10*, p 2; Mr José Roberston, President, Lyneham High School Parents and Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 7.

<sup>55</sup> Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 3.

<sup>56</sup> Lyneham High School Parents and Citizens Association, *Submission 8*, p 3.

<sup>57</sup> Rob Emanuel, *Submission 10*, p 3.

<sup>58</sup> Rob Emanuel, *Submission 10*, p 2.

<sup>59</sup> Mr José Robertson, President, Lyneham High School Parents and Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 7.

<sup>60</sup> Miss Laura Nuttall MLA, Ms Chiaka Barry MLA, Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, pp 33–36, 45–46.

<sup>61</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *answer to QTON 4*, 4 November 2025 (received 18 November 2025), p 2.

- 2.38. During the hearing, officials indicated that the only option presented to the school community prior to the 2024–25 ACT Budget decision was for a new gym as outlined in the 2022 design brief:

I do not believe that the directorate had articulated to the school which specific options it was considering, other than having conversations around an option that included increased capacity in the existing gym, which would require replacement of the gym—delivery of a new gym... The directorate developed a range of options. I do not believe that it presented information to staff that articulated the specifics of those options, other than the project brief that was shared with the principal.<sup>62</sup>

- 2.39. ACT Parents acknowledged the work of the LHS P&C in advocating for new gymnasium facilities, however cautioned that a system-wide approach to infrastructure funding was needed to ensure it is allocated where it is most needed:

While individual schools may rightly campaign for upgrades, the ACT Government must prioritise:

- Safety, accessibility, and essential maintenance across all schools.
- Addressing capacity pressures as school populations grow.
- Ensuring equitable distribution of resources and infrastructure upgrades, across the whole ACT public education system based on need.<sup>63</sup>

- 2.40. The ACT Government highlighted the diversity of its public school infrastructure, which requires ‘investment in both new and renewed infrastructure to meet modern learning and workplace needs.’<sup>64</sup> The Minister spoke to the financial considerations that contribute to these investment decisions noting:

... it is a decision based on data and evidence, and it is based on need as well, which we have to consider across all our schools to ensure that the budget meets the needs of all our schools, and it has to be done over a number of years.<sup>65</sup>

- 2.41. The Minister acknowledged the school community’s disappointment and advised that the decision to upgrade the LHS gymnasium ‘does not mean that a new gymnasium will never happen at Lyneham; it is just not the project going ahead in this budget.’<sup>66</sup>

### Committee comment

- 2.42. While the Committee acknowledges the ACT Government’s advice that several options were considered in addition to a new double court gymnasium at LHS, it was not provided with detail as to the nature of these options or the level of feasibility and design work

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<sup>62</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 38.

<sup>63</sup> ACT Parents, *Submission 5*, p 4.

<sup>64</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 36.

<sup>66</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 36.

undertaken prior to the funding announced in the 2024–25 ACT Budget. The only option described in detail, including in the available documents, was a new double gymnasium.

- 2.43. Acknowledging the finite nature of the budget, the Committee considers it is important that school infrastructure projects meet the key needs identified by the community. Failing to do so may lead to a perception that funding decisions are made merely to meet election commitments. The Committee heard from the community that this was the case for the announced upgrades for the LHS gymnasium, and is concerned by the prospect of public resources being used to meet an election commitment in a way that produces a poor community outcome.
- 2.44. The Committee is concerned that the announced upgrade to the existing LHS gymnasium does not address the single court size constraints identified by the community, and appears to have been decided upon not because it meets community needs but because it fits within the funding bucket allocated to the project by Cabinet.
- 2.45. The Committee is of the view that further consideration should be given to the scope of the LHS gymnasium project to ensure it is an efficient use of public funds and avoids the need for further upgrades in the near future.

## **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government reconsider its decision to reduce the scope of works at Lyneham High School from the double gymnasium designed and briefed in 2022, taking into account:

- the current non-compliance of the Lyneham High School gym with modern building codes;
- the needs of students and staff using the gym safely for physical education and wet weather contingencies;
- the benefits of being able to hold whole-of-school assemblies;
- the demand of indoor, competition-standard sports and recreation facilities in the Inner North;
- the inadequacy of the current capacity formula for determining gymnasium use and need for expansion; and
- evidence provided to the Committee indicating that investing in significant upgrades to the existing gym, given its insufficient size, would be an inefficient and inappropriate use of public funds.

### 3. Consultation

- 3.1. Evidence before the Committee explored the framework and frequency of consultation with the Lyneham High School (LHS) Leadership and Board, and the impact this had on the community's expectations for a replacement gymnasium.<sup>67</sup>
- 3.2. The ACT Government advised that Education Directorate officials consulted with the school Leadership as part of the development of the LHS New Gymnasium Design and Master Planning Project. These discussions with the school centred on 'what might be possible and the development of indicative options.'<sup>68</sup> The ACT Government advised it considered that this 'feasibility and design work would inform an investment decision through the 2024–25 Budget process.'<sup>69</sup>
- 3.3. The Committee heard from witnesses that they were unaware of other options being explored, believing that the upgrade discussed was for a replacement gymnasium.<sup>70</sup> Former Principal Rob Emanuel advised that during his tenure his discussions with the directorate were 'always around a new building on a new footprint.'<sup>71</sup> He noted that discussions with the directorate between October 2021 and the finalisation of the design brief in April 2022 had created an expectation that the project involved the build of a new double gymnasium:

That design brief in April 2022... is really clear about what the community needed. Infrastructure and capital works people have gone through the whole process, up to the point of a whole functional brief, including architectural drawings. It is essentially ready to go. Approve the expenditure and we could put it out for tender and start building. That indicates to me that the department of education is very much on board with the fact that it is desperately needed by the school. It is about the priority decision-making of the Treasury around whether they will fund it.<sup>72</sup>

- 3.4. Officials advised that the feasibility and design work, including the engagement of specialist services and architects, was a necessary part of developing options for consideration by government:<sup>73</sup>

At that point, in 2022, no decision had been made on the scope of works and no decision had been made on investment either. The work that occurred, including feasibility and the design brief...is necessary to develop, to a reasonable level of detail and depth, what a concept could include, what the cost implications might be and whether it is, in fact, feasible to deliver such an option at the school. That

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Mr José Robertson, President, Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, pp 3–4.

<sup>68</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 7.

<sup>69</sup> ACT Government, *Submission 9*, p 7.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Mr Rob Emanuel, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 13; Shasta Bignell, *Submission 7*, p 2; Jamie Bell, *Submission 6*, p 3.

<sup>71</sup> Mr Rob Emanuel, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 13.

<sup>72</sup> Mr Rob Emanuel, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 10.

<sup>73</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 37.

is necessary because, otherwise, there is a risk that we could get too far down the road and government could even make a commitment to deliver something that turns out could not be delivered at a site, because of constraints like ecological factors or lack of developable land available, and that sort of thing.<sup>74</sup>

- 3.5. The Committee heard that Education Directorate records indicate officials had raised in conversations that the design brief for a double court gymnasium ‘was indicative and subject to further decisions.’<sup>75</sup> However, officials acknowledged the need for clear communication to enhance community understanding of the process:

We acknowledge that the directorate could have done more to manage expectations and understanding about this process—that it was exploring options; it was not a commitment to a particular option. It is something we have to balance all the time: understanding a school’s needs and engaging people in potential options, and being clear about decisions coming through the government process...The things that we certainly take from the feedback from stakeholders is to look at how we manage those processes and how we manage expectations and be clear about what the conversation is about and the process for a decision.<sup>76</sup>

- 3.6. ACT Parents also noted that upfront identification of the project and approval stages should frame a discussion with school communities:

Consultation with school communities is an essential part of planning infrastructure projects. Parents, carers, staff, and students have valuable insights into how facilities are used and what is needed to support learning and wellbeing. However, consultation must be managed carefully to avoid creating unrealistic expectations. It must be clear from the outset which elements of a project have been formally approved, and which are only being explored, and equally clear who is responsible for making the final decision. While Directorate staff may progress design work or feasibility studies, many major projects require Government and Cabinet approval.<sup>77</sup>

- 3.7. Concerns about the frequency of communication with the school community were also raised with the Committee.<sup>78</sup> José Robertson, President of the LHS P&C, advised he received correspondence from the Minister on 27 June 2024 advising that \$5.746 million had been allocated to refurbish and modernise the gymnasium.<sup>79</sup> The correspondence indicated that a representative from the Education Directorate would be in contact to

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<sup>74</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 37.

<sup>75</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 38.

<sup>76</sup> Ms Jo Wood, Director-General, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 37.

<sup>77</sup> ACT Parents, *Submission 5*, p 4.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Mr José Robertson, President, Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 4; LHS P&C, *Submission 8*, p 2.

<sup>79</sup> Mr José Robertson, President, Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, pp 2–3.

discuss needs and the program of works.<sup>80</sup> Mr Robertson advised that the LHS P&C not been contacted since that time, and that his only engagement with the Education Directorate since was at meetings organised by ACT Parents, where he provided questions.<sup>81</sup>

- 3.8. The Minister advised that further consultation would occur with the community about the scope of the announced upgrades,<sup>82</sup> with officials confirming an update was provided to the school in early term 4, 2025.<sup>83</sup>

### Committee comment

- 3.9. The Committee acknowledges the ACT Government’s advice that at the time the April 2022 design brief was shared with LHS leadership a decision had not been made by government as to the scope and feasibility of the upgrades to the LHS gym. However, this was not clearly articulated to the school.
- 3.10. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Committee was unable to obtain information on what other options to upgrade the LHS gymnasium were under consideration ahead of the 2024–25 ACT Budget announcement. Based on the evidence available, there was no indication to the LHS community that multiple upgrade options were actively being pursued through the same design and feasibility process that had occurred for the double gymnasium option. In these circumstances, the Committee considers it was reasonable for the school community to conclude that the double court gymnasium was the project that would be delivered at LHS.
- 3.11. Future consultation on school infrastructure projects should include greater clarity about the range of options under consideration, the status of feasibility and design works, and the stages of approval required. This, combined with more frequent project updates to school communities, will help to manage expectations and minimise community surprise at budget decisions.

### Finding 3

The Committee finds that the ACT Government failed to make it clear to the Lyneham High School Principal and Leadership that the construction of a new double gymnasium, as detailed in the April 2022 ‘Lyneham High School New Gymnasium Design and Master Planning Project Brief’, was not guaranteed at that time.

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<sup>80</sup> Mr José Robertson, President, Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 3.

<sup>81</sup> Mr José Robertson, President, Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, pp 37–38.

<sup>83</sup> Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2025, p 47.

#### **Finding 4**

The Committee finds there was insufficient evidence presented to the Lyneham High School Leadership and community prior to the ACT Government's decision on the scope of works in the 2024–25 ACT Budget to refute the community of the belief that ACT Labor's election commitment was to build a new double gymnasium.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that, in any consultation with school communities on potential capital works upgrades, all options under consideration are shared with the community unless a final decision has already been made to select one option over others.

## **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1. The Committee would like to thank everyone who contributed to this inquiry by attending the public hearing and making submissions.
- 4.2. The Committee makes three recommendations and four findings.

Mr Thomas Emerson MLA  
Chair  
11 February 2026

## Appendix A: Submissions

No.	Submission by	Received	Published
1	Theo Knott	09/09/2025	16/10/2025
2	Badminton ACT	11/09/2025	16/10/2025
3	Mary Rahman	11/09/2025	16/10/2025
4	Grace Foulds	11/09/2025	16/10/2025
5	ACT Parents	12/09/2025	16/10/2025
6	Jamie Bell	12/09/2025	16/10/2025
7	Shasta Bignell	12/09/2025	16/10/2025
8	Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association	12/09/2025	16/10/2025
9	ACT Government	23/09/2025	16/10/2025
10	Rob Emanuel	23/09/2025	16/10/2025
11	Basketball ACT	26/09/2025	16/10/2025

# Appendix B: Witnesses

Tuesday 4 November 2025

## Private capacity

Mr Shasta Ransom Bignell

Mr Rob Emanuel

## Organisation

### **Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association**

Mr José Robertson, President

### **Basketball ACT**

Ms Nicole Bowles, Chief Executive Officer

## ACT Government

### **Ms Yvette Berry, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood**

#### **Education Directorate**

- Ms Jo Wood, Director-General
- Ms Vanessa Attridge, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure
- Mr Michael Crowther, Acting Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy and Reform
- Mr John Nakkan, Executive Branch Manager, Asset Management and Delivery

## Appendix C: Questions Taken on Notice

No.	Date	Asked of	Subject	Response received
1	04/11/2025	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Gymnasium costs	18/11/2025
2	04/11/2025	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	School hire fee schedule	20/11/2025
3	04/11/2025	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	School satisfaction survey	18/11/2025
4	04/11/2025	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Options and recommendations to government	18/11/2025
5	04/11/2025	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Cost of a new Lyneham High School gymnasium	18/11/2025

## Appendix D: Gender distribution of witnesses

Beginning in April 2023, in response to an audit by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Committees are collecting information on the gender of witnesses. The aim is to determine whether committee inquiries are meeting the needs, and allowing the participation of, a range of genders in the community. Participation is voluntary and there are no set responses.

Gender indication	Total
Female	4
Male	5
Non-binary	0
Gender neutral	0
No data	0