



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure

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Sections of this submission have been redacted at the
request of the submitter.

Submission to the inquiry by the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion into the management of infrastructure in ACT schools – 1 May 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your inquiry into the management of infrastructure in ACT schools. I have two children in ACT public schools - one at high school and one at [REDACTED] primary school [REDACTED]. I have been an active and involved parent and volunteer for many years including as a P&C Committee member, ACT P&C Council delegate and school Board parent representative. This submission summarises my observations and experiences of the management of infrastructure at older ACT public schools since my eldest child started pre-school in 2012. I have included quotes from my children and photos for reference.

1. The current state of school infrastructure in the ACT

- Major inconsistencies in the quality and quantity of school infrastructure between and within suburbs and regions
- Aging ill-equipped buildings and facilities in desperate need of upgrade and/or repair and maintenance – for example:
 - classrooms, hallways and outdoor undercover walkways that leak continuously when it rains
 - rotten ceilings and walls and mouldy carpet from ongoing water-damage
 - inadequate or non-existent lighting
 - inadequate drainage on outdoor undercover concrete pathways so water pools in large puddles rather than draining when it rains
 - outdoor drink dispensers with broken covers and exposed pipes
 - water drains without safety covers
 - broken/damaged doors.
- Learning spaces and facilities that are inaccessible to students with various mobility levels, including:
 - buildings without bathroom facilities, lifts or sliding doors
 - retro-fitted modifications that require excessive energy and time.
- Lack of engaging outdoor play spaces including no flat outdoor areas (grassed or paved), inadequate shade, and playground equipment that is old and inaccessible
- Decaying sporting facilities such as netball and basketball courts that have uneven sloping surfaces and rusty broken equipment
- Lack of purpose-built or dedicated spaces for specialist subjects such as music, science, arts/drama, cooking or technology
- Boundary fences that limit community access to school grounds and sporting facilities
- Old and inadequate bathroom facilities including no toilets for male staff or visitors (men have to use disabled toilet facilities), bathrooms with cracked/broken/missing tiles on the walls and floor, absent or cracked silicone, and 'old style' manual turn on / off variety taps that leak water constantly
- Ongoing traffic and car park safety issues – for example, students and families having to cross a road/carpark within school grounds to exit the front gate
- Lack of transparency around government planning and decision making in relation to school infrastructure
- Inadequate mechanisms for addressing infrastructures issues that span the responsibilities of two or more government departments

- Principals and school executives doing their best to manage student needs and parent/carer expectations, despite a government bureaucracy that does not seem to appreciate the ‘on the ground’ reality of schools.

2. How school infrastructure in the ACT can be improved

- Institute transparent government planning and decision making
- Fully resource/fund the upgrade/modernisation of older schools to ensure learning, teaching and play environments are safe, accessible, functional, comfortable and engaging and that students have all they need to learn in a variety of domains – for example, through:
 - adding dedicated/purpose-built spaces and facilities for specialised subjects such as music, technology, drama/arts, science and food technology
 - creating flexible teaching/learning spaces (eg through operable walls between classrooms and between indoor and outdoor spaces)
- Fully resource/fund works to ensure schools are accessible to students with various mobility levels
- Properly resource/fund schools to be community ‘hubs’
- Update the current policy to permanently exclude purpose-built specialist spaces from school capacity calculations
- Institute consultation with school communities including parents/carers to determine infrastructure needs and priorities
- Develop long term plans (say, 10 years) for upgrading/modernising school facilities and grounds for all older schools
- Fully resource/fund school maintenance budgets to reflect the reality that maintenance and repair costs increase as schools age
- Provide air conditioning with HEPA filtration in every school
- Add more deliberate and safer bike/foot paths in the streets immediately surrounding schools to encourage walking and/or riding to/from school
- Remove all hazardous materials
- Enhance traffic flow solutions and provide adequate car parking

3. Planning for the ongoing maintenance of school facilities, including the process to identify and address current and future infrastructure needs in schools

- Is there ongoing need-assessment and planning for maintenance of school facilities ?! If there is, it is not apparent to parents and carers like myself. I’ve never been asked for my views, despite being an actively engaged parent and volunteer including a P&C Committee member, a school Board member and ACT P&C Council delegate. Other than community-generated initiatives, our family has never been asked, either by our school or the Directorate, to contribute to any infrastructure needs assessments or planning processes for either of my kid’s schools. Despite trying for many years to understand how ACT school infrastructure is funded, it remains a mysterious ‘black hole’ to me - constant badgering, being a "squeaky wheel" or the "loudest voice in the room", and negative media coverage sometimes seem to create some activity! Need-assessment and planning for maintenance appears to be an adhoc process. I believe the Directorate periodically invites schools to submit applications based on 'themes' (e.g. for carparks, sports facilities, lighting, outdoor areas etc), however I am guessing. No one has ever been able to adequately explain how this works – and this is not for want of asking.

4. **The management of capacity issues in schools, including the use of temporary facilities for schools running above capacity and the plans for schools running below capacity**
 - It is not clear to parents how capacity is calculated or managed in older schools. If there is a 'system' it appears contradictory and subject to change at the whim of the Minister or Directorate.
5. **The adequacy of heating and cooling systems in schools**
 - Most older schools have poor to non-existent cooling and heating - for example, one of my children's classrooms has recorded an inside temperature of 36 degrees.
6. **Classroom design**
 - I'm not aware of any classroom design in older schools – in fact, I'm not sure I know what this means for older schools.
7. **The environmental sustainability of school infrastructure and facilities**
 - As far as I'm aware there is no environmental sustainability of school infrastructure and facilities in older schools.

Here are some quotes from my children:

- "The toilets are disgusting, I never use them, I hold on until I get home"
- "The locks on the toilet doors don't work so you have to hold the door with your foot."
- "The sinks in the toilets are falling off the walls literally."
- "The toilets in the Hall stink"
- "They took the old playground [monkey bars, swinging bridge, slide, climbing frame] away and replaced it with a 'rock garden', which is actually just some gravel - how is that meant to be fun?"
- "There's graffiti and swear words all over the playground, especially the slide."
- "If you go on the monkey bars, you get paint bits on your hands and it hurts."
- "The water always drips through the roof and makes big puddles [on the outdoor undercover walkway] so it's hard to get past when it's raining."
- "They planted some trees on the only grass [in the school grounds] that is sort of flat, so now it's hard to even play soccer or anything like that at recess and lunchtime".
- "Some kids hurt themselves at the cross country because they fell over because they had to start the race near a hole".
- "Our classroom is always too cold or too hot."
- "All we have to play on [in the school grounds] is the junior playground and the old dead tree, the rest is just grass and some rocks."
- "We never play in the sand pit. Only the little kids do because they are so desperate. The sand is hard and horrible and there's always sticks and rocks in it."
- "The [outdoor bench] seats used to have backs on them, but some kids broke them, so they just took all the backs away."
- "When it rains we have to just stay in our classroom because there's nowhere to go. The teachers put buckets around to catch the rain inside".
- "The steps keep breaking off and they keep trying to fix them, but it never works".
- "They built a new bike shed, said everyone should ride their bikes, and now the shed is too small for our bikes."
- "All the old bubblers have leaves and stinky black water in them."