



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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UC HIGH SCHOOL
KALEEN

Parents & Citizens Association Inc

13 May 2021

Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Committee's inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure

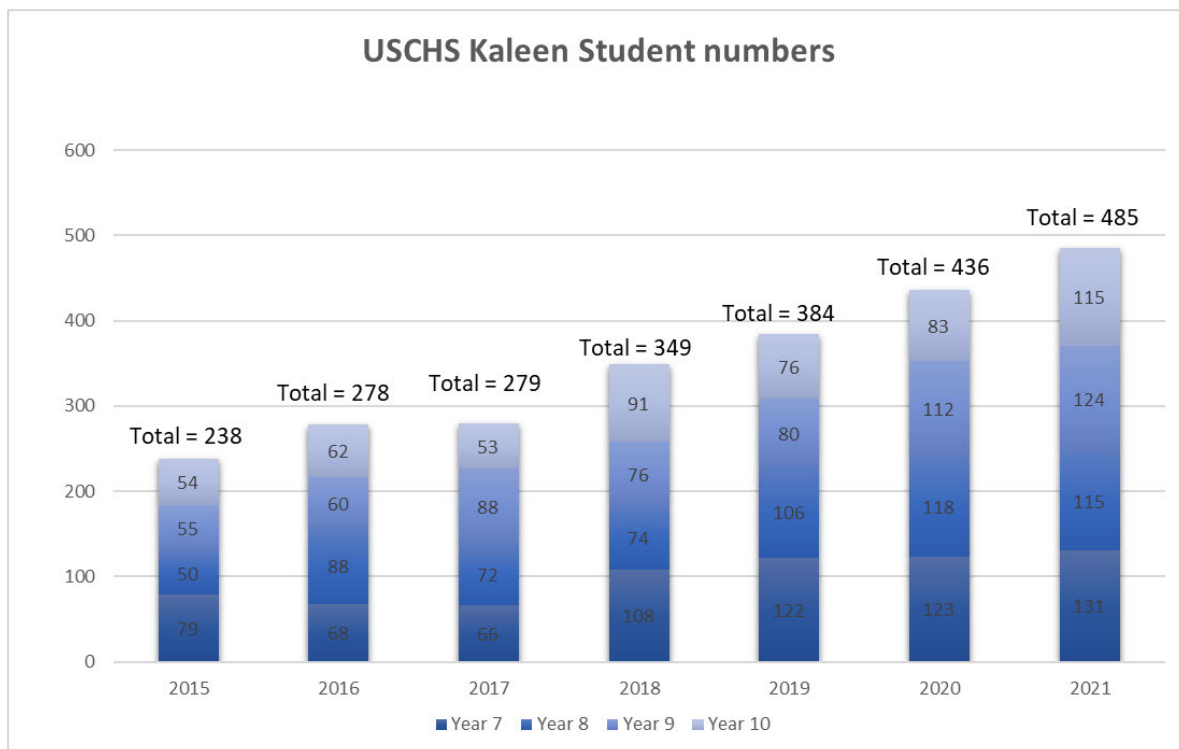
Submitted by UCHS Kaleen Parents and Citizens Association, [REDACTED]

Overall commentary

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the inquiry on the management of ACT school infrastructure. This submission is from the University of Canberra High School Kaleen Parents and Citizens Association, in partnership with the school executive. It focuses on those elements of the terms of reference that are particularly pressing at the school at this time. The relevance of the selected issues stems from a combination of issues, including:

- That school investments have been running down for many years, as a result of inadequate funding even to maintain existing infrastructure. Photos presented in response to Terms of Reference (e) attest to this.
- Recent and sustained growth in student numbers, meaning that significantly more pressure is being placed on the limited and inadequate infrastructure in place. The table and graph below this list shows the recent and sustained growth in student numbers which is leading to the current intense pressure on, and inadequacy of school infrastructure.
- Historically low socioeconomic status of the local community and families, meaning that voluntary contributions at UCHSK have been extremely low, and averaging under 10% per year. This has placed further financial constraints on potential investments within the school and has meant that the school has not even been able to maintain infrastructure let alone enhance it.

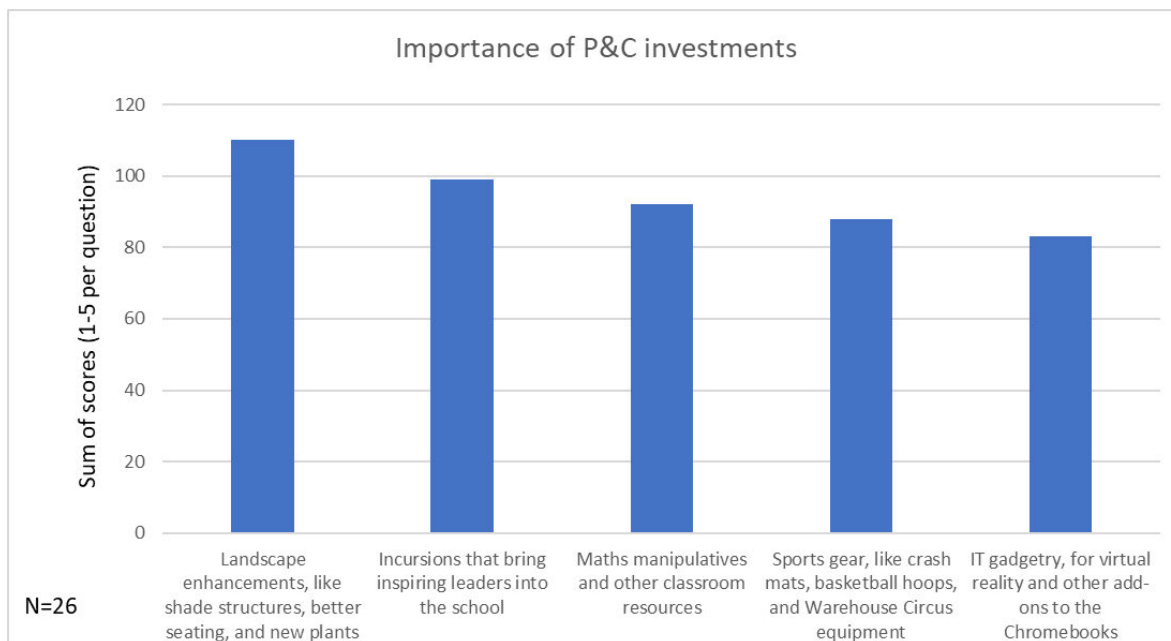
	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Total
2015	79	50	55	54	238
2016	68	88	60	62	278
2017	66	72	88	53	279
2018	108	74	76	91	349
2019	122	106	80	76	384
2020	123	118	112	83	436
2021	131	115	124	115	485



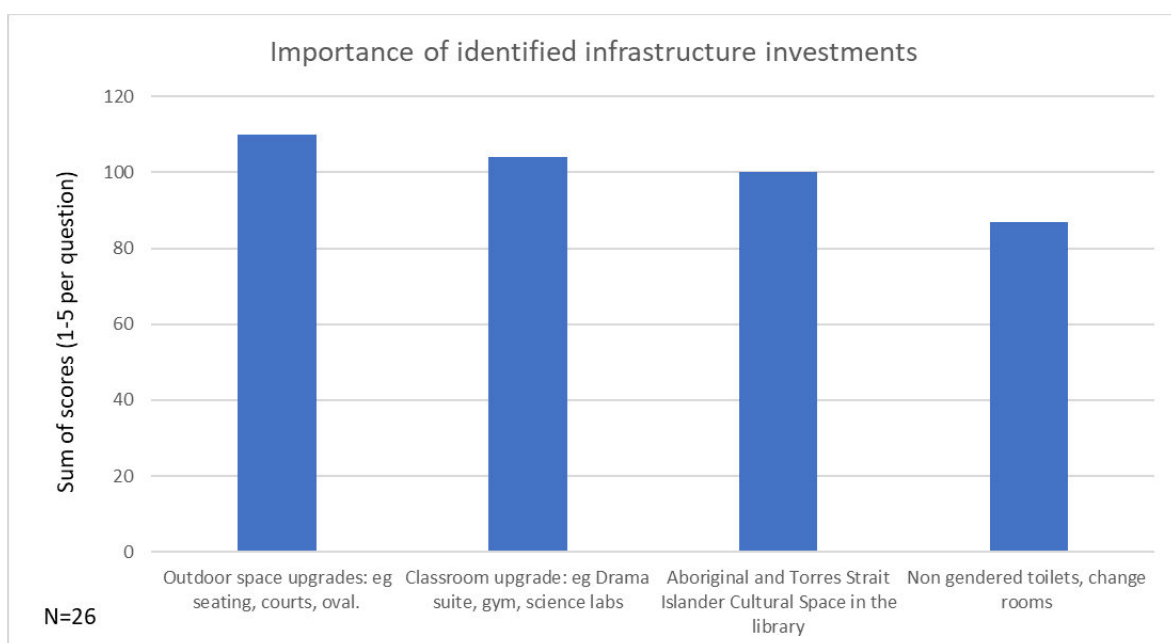
On the positive side, the school has recently been the recipient of a new fence, in keeping with similar infrastructure already in place in many other schools. For the first time, this has brought on new opportunities for investments that would improve infrastructure outdoors at the school, with a significantly reduced risk of vandalism. The school and P&C are working together to maximise this opportunity by targeting some of the available funding into these areas.

Despite the excitement generated by the infrastructure improvement opportunities afforded by the fence, it is worth noting that our view that all students have a right to learn in a school with decent infrastructure to support them. We literally ran sausage sizzles and cake stalls to pay for landscape features which should be fundamental to school environments. If our children had decent places to sit down to eat their lunch, and classroom essentials for maths, science, drama and physical education, then our fundraising could be spent on enhancements above and beyond the basics instead.

The P&C ran a survey to help inform our response to this inquiry. We distributed it through the P&C mailing list, school facebook page and through face-to-face interactions during a parent-teacher night. A total of 26 people completed the survey. Results are presented for the relevant sections below. One notable result is that although there is support for the P&C to invest in infrastructure, there are other ways that parents and citizens would also like us to be supporting the school, such as by bringing exciting speakers and events to the school for incursions that may also be beyond the school's capacity.



For our particular school, the survey suggested the following priorities for other infrastructure investments. Further details on responses to these ideas is provided under relevant sections below.



Responses to specific terms of reference

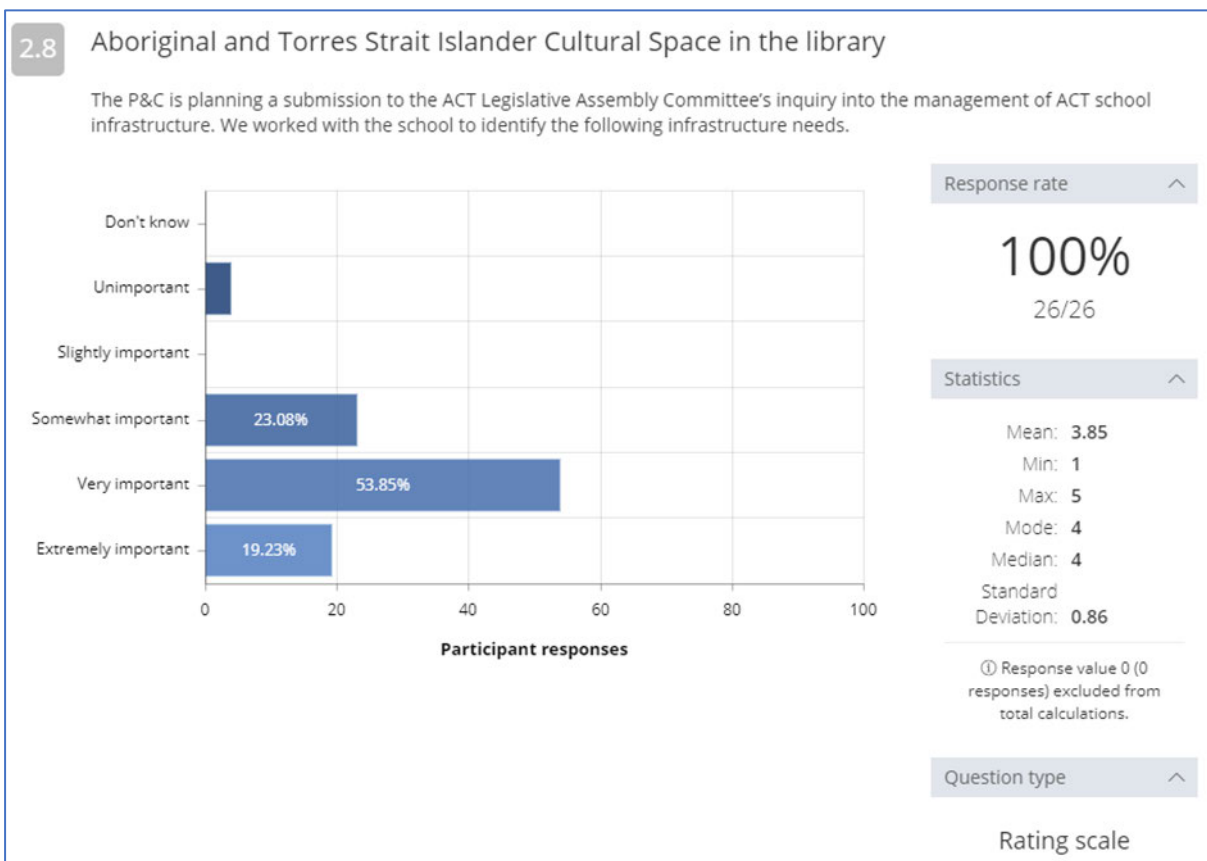
b) Planning for the ongoing maintenance of school facilities, including the process to identify and address current and future infrastructure needs in schools

It was surprising to many of us at UCHSK that we only learned of this Inquiry through the P&C president's attendance at the P&C May Council meeting. The low level of communication about the Inquiry parallels apparently poor cross-school analysis of needs. There are clear inconsistencies between schools, in the quality and age of infrastructure and no clear pathways for seeking to equalise opportunities for students between schools.

The P&C is aware that the UCHSK executive has identified major works in line with the stages articulated in the school Masterplan, developed in 2020. We are not sure of the process by which the Education Directorate considers such master plans and responds with funding for identified priorities. It seems important that such considerations would take account of the comparative quality, age and capacity of such infrastructure across schools in addition to considerations about future school student numbers.

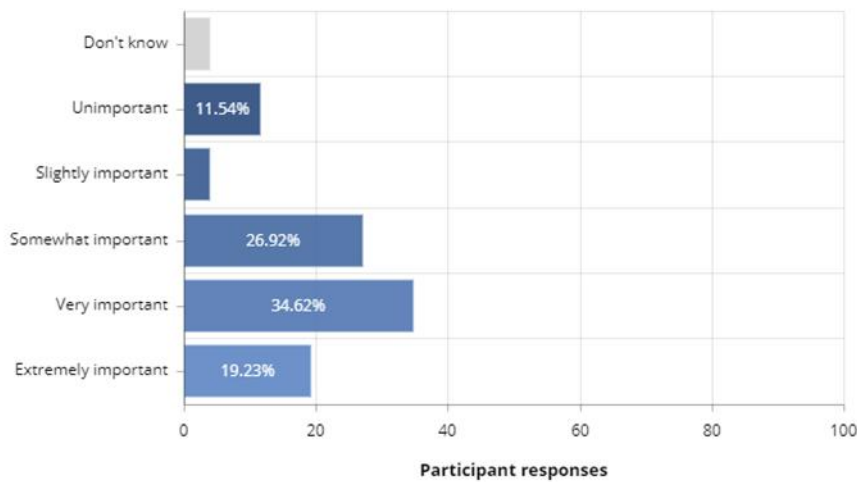
It is also important to plan for investments in infrastructure for novel needs which were not previously recognised. Two such needs that have been identified at UCHSK are as follows. The graphs below show that both of these emerging needs are generally considered to be very important:

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Cultural Space in the library which was considered very important by a majority of respondents, and
- Non gendered toilet improvements & non gendered change room development which was considered extremely or very important by a majority of respondents.



2.7 Non gendered toilets, change rooms

The P&C is planning a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Committee's inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure. We worked with the school to identify the following infrastructure needs.



Response rate ^

100%

26/26

Statistics ^

Mean: 3.48

Min: 1

Max: 5

Mode: 4

Median: 4

Standard
Deviation: 1.2

ⓘ Response value 0 (1 responses) excluded from total calculations.

Question type ^

Rating scale

c) 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

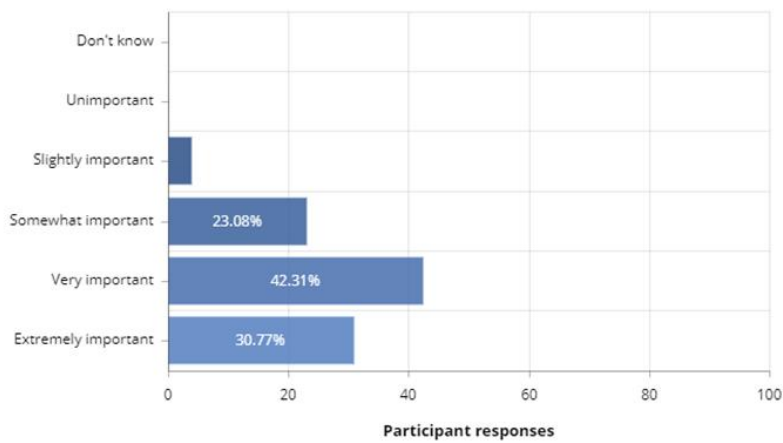
At a broad level, it would seem sensible to make use of high quality, temporary buildings for a proportion of school classroom needs. This may be helpful for managing the cyclical ebbs and flows of school-aged students in different areas.

It is also important that specialist spaces such as science laboratories, drama suites, sports facilities and front office areas in permanent buildings be upgraded as needed to maintain quality. It is also important that any temporary buildings be of a high quality so that schools with student populations that vary over time are not stuck for decades with poor quality classrooms.

The survey responses shown below demonstrate that classroom upgrades such as these are generally considered important.

2.4 Classroom upgrade: eg Drama suite, gym, science labs

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Response rate

100%

26/26

Statistics

Mean: 4

Min: 2

Max: 5

Mode: 4

Median: 4

Standard
Deviation: 0.83

ⓘ Response value 0 (0 responses) excluded from total calculations.

Question type

Rating scale

d) The adequacy of heating and cooling in schools

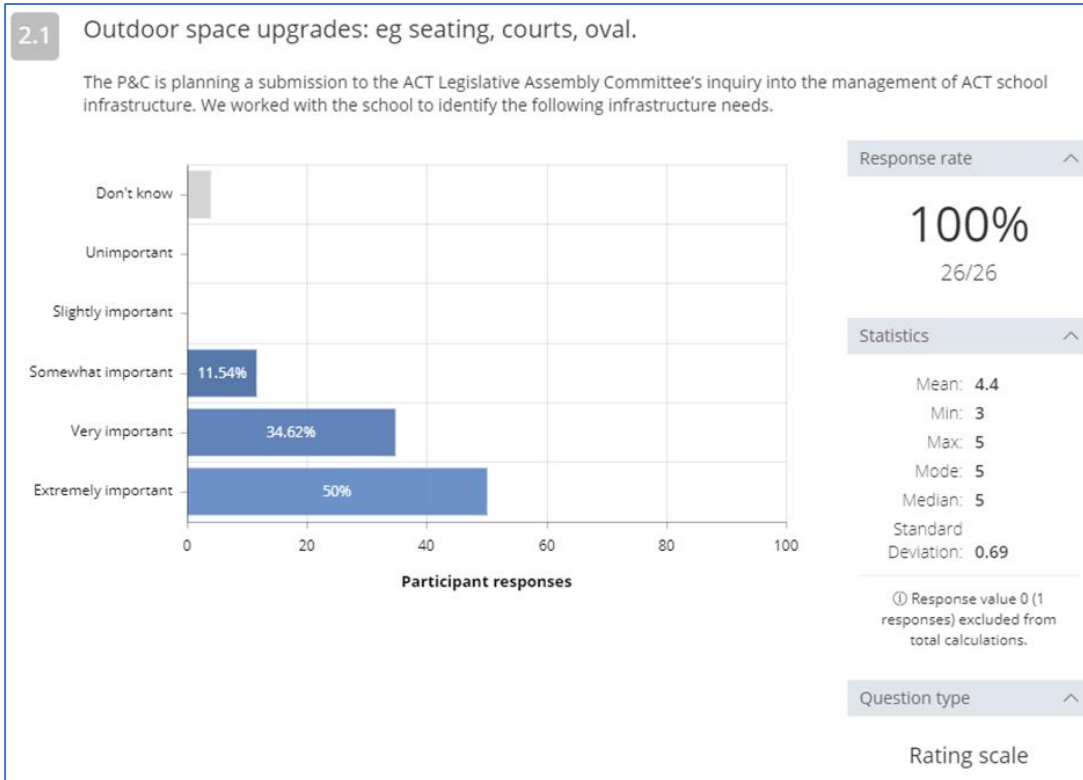
Investments in modern, sustainable design principles for heating and cooling have the potential to save energy and money over time. Retrofitting is needed in many older schools which lack thermal efficiencies. Students simply cannot stay physically well, and maintain their studies if they are too hot or too cold at school.

e) The demand for sporting facilities on school grounds and measures to address this demand

Our school is a good example of a facility in desperate need of significant, strategic investment in sporting facilities on the school grounds. This is a particular opportunity at the moment, since the installation of a new fence around the perimeter will reduce the amount of vandalism that occurs. For instance:

- There was previously no point in investing in the oval as vandals would regularly do 'donuts' on the unprotected space, ruining any work that was done. Now we have the opportunity to revitalise the school oval, by investing in water tanks to harvest rainwater, and new grass cover to improve the surface. This will provide hundreds of different sporting opportunities to the students.
- The local community lobbied hard for the only basketball courts with hoops to stay outside of the school fence. The courts that were left inside have no paint and no hoops and therefore cannot be used for matches. Now is the time for a refresh. However funds for this need to be traded off against other investments – even though the school had the right to have retained the existing courts within the fence.

Survey responses to these questions are in the graph below and suggest that an extremely high level of importance is attached to the improvement of outdoor spaces. The photos shown below provide further insight to the degree to which existing infrastructure has run down, and the reasons for the strong responses around the need for improvements to outdoor spaces.



Upgrades needed to outdoor seating – due to recent vandalism



These seats need fixing too



Water tanks needed to upgrade oval



Outdoor courts need re-development

f) Classroom design

The significant current growth in student numbers at UCHSK has meant that the design of some classroom areas at the school is no longer up to the job of providing quality education for the students. A number of our teaching spaces need improvements including:

- Acoustic improvements in our Drama/Dance suite
- A divider curtain for the gym to accommodate more classes
- Redevelopment of a number of old classrooms

g) The environmental sustainability of school infrastructure and facilities

Two environmental sustainability infrastructure issues were already mentioned above:

- The potential to install water harvesting infrastructure to support the re-development of school oval, and
- The need for energy efficient solutions to heating and cooling in school buildings.

In addition, sustainability considerations could feature in initiatives to improve landscaping in the school grounds. These areas provide good opportunities for the ACT government to make progress on its commitment to have 30% of Canberra's urban environment covered by a tree canopy or a tree canopy by 2045. Assistance to schools could include advice, planning and access to suitable rootstock for sustainable landscape plantings. Sustainable plantings could also make schools more resilient to climate change, by ensuring that they have green spaces available for shelter and to prevent heat islands during heatwaves and other extreme weather events. Water tanks and sprinkler systems mentioned earlier could also contribute to school safety during bushfire weather, and could enable schools to function as refuges when needed.