

31st March 2009

Submission to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Our family moved from Melbourne to Canberra in January 2003. We looked at a number of potential cities to bring up our children and chose Canberra due to the great facilities, ease of getting around and the business opportunities Canberra presented. Uppermost in our minds was the environment for our children. We felt that the primary school system here was unique, with smaller schools, in most suburbs, within walking distance for the family. It was very appealing. Beautiful little communities that seemed ideal for raising children, and for a few years we lived the dream. There were of course some difficulties for our children in resettling in a new state and a new school, making friends and adjusting. We were very fortunate that the Flynn community was so welcoming and assisted us greatly with the transition. We could see that many young families were moving to the area providing a great social hub for our children.

Having gone through so much to attain the lifestyle we were seeking for our family, it was devastating to face the prospect of the closure of our school. However, like so many other parents at the school, we put in additional hours to address the requirements of the 2020 Consultation in an attempt to save the school. A process we later discovered was a complete farce. The submission of the Flynn parents appears to have been completely ignored, none of the criteria addressed was taken into consideration by the government and no justification for the decision has been forthcoming. The only conclusion I can draw from that process is that the decision for the closure was made well ahead of the pretend consultation and our community was burdened with hours was additional work to provide some political window dressing for the Government to appear open to a real consultation process. I will forever wonder what the Government are hiding.

On top of the additional burden of the 2020 submission, the Government was trotting out proposals to change neighbouring schools to p-4, or p-2 and no guarantee that the nearest high school would remain open. We had to make decisions to send our children to schools that may or may not see them through their primary or secondary years, meaning the potential trauma of moving them again. I can't imagine that the Government are oblivious to the pressures that face families in rearing children, so they must simply be callous and uncaring to run the process the way they did. We worked tirelessly to save our school without realising there was no hope. Then we had to choose a new school for our children only 5 working days prior to the end of term, what sort of fool believes that 5 working days notice is adequate? We had to take time off work to look at other schools, meaning the loss of wages just before Christmas. Some of the schools were welcoming and many made it clear that they would take us because they had to, but they were not keen to have any more children at

the school. I certainly couldn't face the heartache of sending my children somewhere they weren't wanted. I didn't want to send them to a school that might change structure in the next few years either.

My children have been through enough. I thought we would be a part of the public school system in Canberra for their entire schooling but found myself in a situation where I saw no option but to send them to the private system, another financial burden we could ill afford. At least they would no longer be guinea pigs in the grand experiments with different school models. The really sad part about this is that with real consultation, a proper timeline and a more considered process, the changes to the school system might have been made without the hardship and financial burden that was forced on families.

Again our children had to face the social difficulties of making new friends, the pressure of getting to know a new school and trying to break into friendship groups that were already well established. It is heartbreaking to witness your children missing out on party invitations and other social outings because they are not yet known to other parents and have not been part of the community they have moved into. It is also difficult as a parent to become a part of established parent networks at new schools.

At the time we had to choose a new school, there were no schools nearby that didn't require our children to cross a major road. The Government would not provide any commitment on potential school crossings or bus services or anything that might make moving to a nearby school a safe and practical option for us. This meant we were faced with the additional financial commitment of purchasing a car just to drive our children to school. In the past we had managed quite well with one car as the children were able to walk or ride their bikes to school.

Not only did our children face the grief of losing their school, they also had to face the horror of watching it being packed up and pulled apart in front of them. Again, the callous act of an uncaring Government that couldn't even wait until the school shut before dismantling it. I used to think that one of the greatest challenges I would face as a parent was protecting my children from threats like the internet and other media, but it seems the ACT Government has been their greatest threat. My children now see Government as dishonest, subversive and mean. It is sad to see them so tainted, at such a young age, but it is better that they are aware of the world they face as I would not like them to be as naïve as I have been. I feel the school closure process was very un-Australian, the sort of sly, hidden tactics we might find in a dictatorship, not a democracy.

As I write this submission and dredge up all the heartache this process has caused, I again wonder whether I am wasting my time, "for a third time". The 2020 consultation farce was

draining, the Purdon process brushed over the feedback from the community to push the agenda of the Government and now we face a third round to the Standing Committee which I fear is also a grand waste of time. But our community is not one to give up easily and while there is hope, I will try.

My greatest hope in providing this submission is that there is some consideration given to building on the strength of our community. I would like to see the school re-opened as there is certainly a growing young population in Flynn and the surrounding suburbs. I would like to retain a community facility in at the site of the Flynn Primary school as there is nothing else in Flynn and I miss the extra activities that were provided at the school. I am concerned at the prospect of losing the only green space in the suburb where I can take the family to play cricket and football and fly kites etc. There is a great need for additional childcare facilities in the area that could also be addressed through use of the school facilities. If there was a good reason for the closure of the School, why won't the Government provide justification for the decision? Why do they need to hide the documentation that relates to the decision? Why won't they discuss options with the Flynn community?

I feel like I have just provided a 'victim impact statement' because the Flynn community have certainly been the victims in this process.

Regards,

Frances Wilson