

Members of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ACT Legislative Assembly
committees@act.gov.au
Attention: Sandra Lilburn

Re: Inquiry into School Closures and reform of the ACT Education System

Dear Members

This submission is in relation to the closure of Flynn Primary School.

We have been residents of Flynn for 28 years. Our two daughters attended Flynn Primary School for their entire primary school years. For our family, it was an outstanding experience. The Principal at the time was Bill Atkinson. He was supported by many well qualified and excellent teachers. We became involved in the community focused on school activities – fetes, barbecues, fund raising, sports events, bush dances and the P& C Committee.

Our girls walked to Flynn Primary School each day with their carer who lived in Flynn. Our day care mum was employed by us through the Belconnen Family Day Care Program and she minded several other children who attended Flynn Primary School. We were comforted in the knowledge that our girls didn't have to be driven anywhere to attend school and therefore, statistically, they were unlikely to be involved in any road accidents.

Our girls later attended Radford College and then University, before entering the workforce. We attribute those founding educational years at Flynn Primary School to their academic success at tertiary level.

We loved the association of Flynn Primary School with the founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and the bi-plane used as the logo for the school. One of our daughters has since become a Recreational Pilot.

Claire has been involved in the urban planning of Canberra since 1981 – firstly with the National Capital Development Commission; then the National Capital Authority; and now in private practice.

In 1990, Claire spent a year of her life (while also working full time) assisting Flynn Primary School to fend off its threatened closure by the first ACT Legislative Assembly. It was then a Liberal Government. We never thought we would live to see the closure of Flynn Primary School by a Labor Government – but here we have it.

We have provided further advice and assistance to the current Flynn P&C who so desperately tried to avoid the closure of Flynn Primary School last year. Flynn was one of the first schools to close – and had the shortest notice to prepare

itself for the battle ahead. It lost, and many parents and community members gave up the fight. Who could blame them?

However, a few tireless parents carried on, raised funds and mounted a legal challenge. They have limited resources to do so, and the reality is that they will never be able to defeat a Government who has made up its mind and implemented its decision.

It saddens us to see a perfectly designed and well maintained building at the heart of our suburb, vacant and unused.

The so-called “neighbourhood model” was used in the design of new suburbs in North Canberra from 1958 onwards. The model was borrowed from the UK and originally from the USA (Clarence Perry). The model was intended to maximize convenience and was based on the premise that school-to-home trips should not exceed half a mile (800 metres). The criteria for this was comfortable walking distance for a small child and that distance was based on the acceptance that it was reasonable to encourage children to walk for exercise and to ensure that children would not be exposed for too long to the elements of very hot or very wet weather.

The planning objectives of the neighbourhood model are safety and easy access; community focus; equity through even distribution of educational opportunities and facilities; and locational opportunities for multi-use of school buildings for community based activities such as churches, clubs, leisure groups, playgroups, meeting rooms and cultural pursuits.

Flynn (the suburb) was never provided with retail or community facilities, other than a pre-school and a primary school, at its physical “heart”. Rather, the structure of Flynn relies on additional convenient access to adjacent retail and community facilities within the suburbs of Charnwood and Melba, with underpass access points linked to Flynn’s pedestrian network. Consequently, the primary and pre-school, co-located with local playing fields and a neighbourhood park, ARE the only social focus of the neighbourhood of Flynn.

The arguments for the closure of Flynn are essentially economic, and as a post hoc rationalization, educational. Each ignores the social significance of the local school. Flynn Primary School should be retained as a primary educational facility of an appropriate size to serve its surrounding neighbourhood. Additional supporting community uses could occupy underused space within the school complex or adjacent undeveloped areas until required for educational use in the future. This is not a hard concept; it is a sustainable alternative to demolishing and redeveloping buildings which are otherwise economically viable and sound.

We write to support the separate submission of the Flynn P&C and would welcome the opportunity to address the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Claire, Paul, and Holly Middleton
84 Tillyard Drive
FLYNN ACT 2615

Ph: 62581841

Sally Middleton Graham
Unit 11
1-3 Dalley Street
Bondi Junction NSW 2022

Ph: 9388 9298