

Ms Amanda Bresnan MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601
committeess@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Ms Bresnan

On behalf of Chapman Primary School P&C, I would like to provide this submission to the Standing Committee inquiry into school closures and reform of the ACT education system.

Prior to the *Towards 2020* implementation, Chapman Primary School was the government school for the priority enrolment area suburbs of Chapman and Stirling. Stirling families could also elect to attend Arawang Primary. Following the implementation of the school closures within the Weston Creek area (that is, Weston Creek and Rivett Primary Schools), Chapman Primary School also added Rivett to its Priority Enrolment Area suburbs. In the first year following the closure of these schools, the Chapman Primary School Community was required to absorb 30 new students within a school that was near or at its designated capacity.

In line with the terms of reference of the inquiry, we would like to put forward the points set out below.

1. The ACT Governments Towards 2020 policy, including demographic factors influencing regional planning in the delivery of educational services; configuration of school environments and educational outcomes; and reorganisation of the ACT school system thus far.

- Attending a larger school such as Chapman Primary has enabled students from smaller closed schools access to broader school based learning experiences e.g. broader range of sporting teams, access to group music programs such as band or orchestra, access to greater resources such as IT resources.
- Students now attending a larger school such as Chapman Primary have access to broader social networks and developing peer relationships. Children now have a greater chance of developing friendships with likeminded peers. There are also greater opportunities within programs such as Peer Support for a variety of social experiences purely due to the numbers of students within the school environment.
- Children attending a larger school have access to greater educational opportunities and outcomes. Attending Chapman Primary has allowed greater scope and flexibility for children to be supported and/or extended such as with differentiated learning programs and peer support. Children have a larger number of models within their day-to-day learning environments with whom to share their ideas and their learning, thus leading to greater outcomes and benchmarks for achievements.
- Chapman Primary has benefitted from new local children attending the school – Chapman Primary now encompasses Rivett families and these families have also brought with them an enthusiasm with being part of the larger school. Many Rivett families are involved in P&C activities and classroom programs, thus positively contributing towards the school as a whole community.
- There are probable benefits for teaching staff being in a larger school as well - staff in a larger school have a lesser individual burden for managing the myriad of extra roles required by teachers within a school (e.g. organising cross country, sports carnival, swimming carnival, swim school lessons etc) as these tasks are divided between a greater number of individuals. It is likely that staff in a larger school would have access to greater professional development opportunities through peer support and shared teaching.

- Another change of the *Towards 2020* was amalgamating Preschools with the Primary Schools. At Chapman, this formal linking of the two has strengthened the already excellent working arrangements that existed.

Impact:

- The initial impact on Chapman Primary School of the regional school closures under *Towards 2020* was 30 new students in the first year. As Chapman Primary School was near to capacity, the anticipated extra student numbers created an emergency response on reconfiguring classroom space. This resulted in a quick “bandaid” refurbishment of existing space to cope with the expected new numbers of students in the first year.
- Following the school closures, Chapman Preschool also increased its intake from the 75 students to the potential for 100 students.
- The school closures have resulted in larger numbers of students now in the early childhood years, with smaller numbers in Years 5 and 6. The current configuration of classrooms is not equipped to manage the cumulative and projected effect of these numbers of students over successive years moving through the preschool into the current primary school classrooms. Further stress will be placed on the current available physical space and resources. This means there will continue to be increased pressure on classroom spaces and thus the ability to continue to provide quality teaching for staff and students.
- Chapman Primary required, and still requires, additional classroom space to cope with the ongoing numbers. The initial refurbishment was a temporary measure and thus the quality of the build was inadequate. The quality of building needs to be revisited and then appropriate building programs put in place to meet the ongoing needs of the physical school environment.
- In the creation of the extra classes, basic equipment was available from closing schools. This equipment was often inadequate and of poor condition. Thus there is now a greater strain on the school budget to replenish and resource the new classrooms and teaching equipment needed.
- The current staff room space is now inadequate to support the number of teachers and special teaching assistants employed at Chapman Primary. This is another building area that requires addressing.
- There is an anomaly in the Weston Creek cluster with Stromlo High being a 6-10 school. Parents at Chapman Primary School strongly support a P-6 school model. Over the past 2 years, an average of only 4 students per year has opted to attend the Year 6 program at Stromlo High.

2. The impact of school consolidation and closures with a focus on community experiences and attitudes; student learning experiences; and financial, social and environmental impacts.

- There was an excellent transition process in place for children and families moving to Chapman Primary School as Chapman Primary School and closing school Principals were in constant communication and worked together to make the process as seamless as possible. Many visits to Chapman Primary were organised with teachers from the closing school accompanying the new children; children were given a free Chapman Primary School hat as a welcome gift; teachers and the principal made the extra effort to know the names of the new students and parents and welcomed and regularly communicated with new families by name; a welcome morning tea was arranged for the beginning of the new year; each year Chapman Primary also holds a Welcome Back concert and family picnic in the first few weeks of term. All these events helped to create a positive atmosphere from staff of welcome at the new school.
- One of the financial impacts for families moving to the new school was the cost of new uniforms - this was somewhat alleviated by the assistance the government provided through a one off payment to support the purchase cost of uniforms. This consideration should be available for all families who may be affected by school closures/amalgamations in the future.

- Over the last few years at Chapman Primary, there has been a need for a greater number of families to access financial support for the cost of school programs. Thus there may be a need for more funds to be budgeted for and allocated to this type of financial support in the future.
- There has been an impact on the amount of traffic around the school. More children attending the school and preschool has resulted in more people attempting to park around the school for Drop off and pick up times especially. This had been an issue; however over the last school holiday period some positive traffic rearrangements were made on the Streeton Drive side of the school. For example, the school crossing has now been moved to the school gate entrance instead of near the oval, drop off and pick up zones have been demarcated, parking limits set with new signs and line markings on the road.
- The limited parking at the school remains an issue especially for staff – as staff numbers have increased, the off street parking spaces at the school have not. There is no off street parking for parents, and there is limited off street “drop off” space available.
- Bus timetables have not matched school finishing times e.g. Route 26 from Perry Drive to Darwinia Terrace does not arrive at the school until near 3:30 pm. Thus some students may be waiting half an hour for a bus.

3. Community responses including: review of the consultation process, including how public submissions were considered and incorporated into the final reform package; views on the Education Amendment Bill 2008; interest expressed by school communities to re-open schools listed for closure; and the new uses for school facilities.

- The amended Education Bill 2008 appears to provide better opportunities for consultation re future school closures/amalgamations. By accessing “independent and comprehensive cost-benefit analyses” when considering school closures/amalgamations suggests greater consultation and evaluation will occur. This should help relieve some of the pressure and work load felt by small parent groups in attempting to generate a case for their schools. The amendments also suggest greater transparency in making accessible the reasons why certain decisions may be made in the future.

Please contact me if you have any questions about this submission.

Yours Sincerely

Vanessa Smith

On behalf of Chapman Primary School P&C

Postal Address: 273 Hindmarsh Drive, Rivett ACT 2611

Telephone: (02) 6288 7968

23 March 2009