



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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Mount Stromlo High School P&C

220 Badimara St
Waramanga ACT 2611



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Standing Committee on Education & Community Inclusion
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Dear Standing Committee on Education & Community Inclusion:

Mount Stromlo High School (MSHS) was built in 1969 and in a reflection of its age, has many issues relating to the management of school infrastructure, including, but not limited to, ageing buildings and equipment, damaged playgrounds, lead paint and asbestos materials throughout the school. In particular, the home economics (cooking classrooms) are in urgent need of upgrade to meet the expectations of a school providing 21st century skills.

Please find attached a detailed report on the urgent need for the home economics classrooms to be upgraded to meet safety, accessibility, environmental, vocational and curriculum needs.

Sincerely,



Anita Mack
President
Mount Stromlo High School P&C

Introduction

Mount Stromlo High School (MSHS) has an increasing student base, with a 20% rise in enrolments between 2017 and 2020. With enrolments expected to continue to rise, management of school capacity issues and effective classroom utilisation is imperative.

Built in 1969, many classrooms are still original to the school. The classrooms holding home economics are the original classrooms, and thus over 50-years in age. Not only are they insufficient for the modern needs of students, they are inefficient in terms of heating/cooling and other energy use. They provide a safety risk due to their lead paint and have accessibility issues for both staff and students with disabilities and other needs. In addition, they struggle to meet the general needs of students and have limited opportunities to extend their use to vocational learning.

There is an opportunity to fix the dilapidated infrastructure and its limitations, and in doing so, to provide best-practice facilities for the 21st century needs of students.

Safety

MSHS has been identified as a school containing both lead paint and asbestos. The current home economics classrooms have been identified as containing lead paint. While there is a monitoring program to ensure exposure is minimised and managed, priority is given to preschools and primary schools ([Education Directorate](#)). However, lead paint is a high risk when ingested – and a classroom which involves cooking and consumption of food increases the risk to students. This is of particular concern when the wooden facilities in the classrooms are original and pre-date the cessation of lead-based paints, particularly when *lead paint is typically found on timber surfaces including window frames, eaves and handrails, but it has also been found in storage, plant and equipment rooms* ([Education Directorate](#)).



Storage room (MSHS home economics classroom)

Accessibility

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992, through the Disability Standards for Education, requires education providers to take reasonable steps to ensure the student with disability can participate in education on the same basis as a student without disability ([ADCET](#)).

Due to the cooking classrooms not being upgraded over time, they pre-date modern considerations for accessibility. Bench heights, tap and sink access and lack of adaptive equipment are just some of the functional issues in the current facilities. In addition, the teaching and demonstration area is limited in terms of any student being able to easily listen and watch, let alone a student with a disability. For example, there is no provision for students with hearing or vision limitations.

Further to accessibility is the difficulty of being able to teach students who have religious or medical restrictions with food, as there is limited bench and storage space to adequately ensure safety and other food storage and preparation needs be met.



Bench heights, kitchen space and crowded storerooms limit accessibility for students and staff.



Teaching space

Environment

At present the classrooms for home economics don't provide the most efficient usage of space to reduce heating and cooling costs, and the equipment doesn't maximise energy efficiency. For example, the cooktops are solid style: *cooktops have a solid metal disk for each hotplate that's slower than all other types of cooktops to heat up and extremely slow to cool down. This also makes them the least*

controllable ([Choice](#)). For this reason, they are the least efficient cooktop style, which is why they are now very difficult to purchase ([Smarterhouse](#)).

The laundry for washing tea towels, tablecloths etc is housed alongside the kitchen classrooms and again is old and inefficient (it is also inaccessible for students and staff with accessibility needs).



Laundry

In the summer months, use of the ovens makes the space very hot and better ventilation and cooling would make the classrooms more energy efficient and comfortable for students to facilitate their learning.

Curriculum

Over five years ago there were multiple cooking subjects on offer to students in years 9 and 10 at MSHS, as many of these classes filled due to their popularity. Over time, with aging and outdated facilities, interest in cooking classes has decreased with the result some classes have been cancelled due to lack of interest. This has a significant impact on meeting curriculum needs to: *produce, prepare and consume healthy food and propose and evaluate responses to external influences on their ability to make healthy food choices. They critically analyse nutrition information from a range of sources* ([Australian Curriculum](#)).

There have been numerous studies that have proven the long term health benefits of teaching students cooking through their home economics classes: *The findings from this review support a positive relation between culinary interventions with children in schools and improvement in cooking skills, consumption of a healthy diet, and positive changes in anthropometric assessments* ([Curr Dev Nutr.](#) 2018 Jun; 2(6): nzy016.).

The current situation is not one that best serves the students of MSHS now and into the future. Updating the facilities and making better utilisation of space will allow better integration of theory and its application, through practical cooking and serving of food, allowing for adjustment of students' varying proficiency levels and individual learning needs (feeder school Arawang Primary has a professional kitchen and provides cooking lessons from a young age).

Provision of cooking lessons provide essential knowledge and skills that are a common entitlement for all students at MSHS. Better infrastructure will allow a greater emphasis on 21st century skills.

Vocational

Not all students progress to tertiary study. Up-to-date and appropriate facilities would allow students aspiring to a post-school commercial cookery apprenticeship to undertake academic and vocational learning that builds the skills and theoretical knowledge needed for entry to and successful completion of the required employment-based training.

Conclusion

In a peer reviewed study, it was found *that cooking programs may positively influence children's food-related preferences, attitudes, and behaviors* ([Prev Chronic Dis.](#) 2014; 11: E193.). There have been many other studies that have found cooking classes in school:

- Provide an important life skill
- Result in students more likely to eat what they prepare
- Encourage students to practice at home
- Change student's mindsets towards food
- Promote a healthy lifestyle
- Reduce future health issues (such as obesity)
- Saves money
- Opens students to considering cooking as a career.

With the current infrastructure of the MSHS home economics classrooms failing in safety, accessibility, environment, curriculum and vocational aspects, urgent attention and funding to facilitate an upgrade needs to be delivered.