



Strengthening the future provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area

Newsletter 3, 3 September 2014

Consultation update

On 16 May 2014 the Inner City Schools Working Party launched its community consultation on the provision of public secondary education in inner Sydney to assist the Department of Education and Communities in its ongoing consideration of public education.

The consultation was conducted over six weeks and was designed to allow multiple opportunities for stakeholder and community input on three consultation questions:

1. Options for managing public secondary educational needs in the short term (1-4 years).
2. Options for managing public secondary educational needs in the medium to long term (5-10 years).
3. The best way to create public secondary schools that meet current and future educational demands in a highly urbanised environment with finite resources.

Straight Talk has reviewed, collated, coded and analysed all feedback from the consultation. This final community newsletter summarises the consultation outcomes.

Consultation promotion

The consultation was promoted in a number of ways:

- Emails and newsletters were distributed by Principals, teachers, P&C representatives and community groups.
- Information was posted on the Department's and NSW Public Schools websites.
- Information was provided at all face to face activities.
- Media releases and advertisements were issued to local and national media.

- Regular 'tweets' on the Department's Twitter page.
- The Secretary's update on the Department's website.

Consultation reach

Over 600 individuals from a large and diverse range of inner Sydney school communities participated in workshops, focus groups, Kitchen Table Discussions and/or on the online forum as part of the consultation.

Some participants were so committed to providing feedback that they shared their ideas in multiple ways – some attended more than one face to face activity, whilst others also chose to participate in the online forum and/or a Kitchen Table Discussion.

While the consultation was intended to provide the Department with guidance on the types of options the community think are viable, rather than 'votes' for each idea, the significant number of participants in the process, allows the Department to be confident that all possible options have been considered.

Briefings

The Department briefed a range of stakeholders to provide them with a background to the consultation and information on opportunities for participation. Briefings included:

- Local members and councillor one to one briefings.
- A briefing for Principals from the Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Marrickville Principals Networks.
- A briefing for the local and national media.
- Local stakeholder group briefings including the NSW Teachers Federation, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and Community of Local Options for Secondary Education (CLOSE).



Workshops

Workshops provided an opportunity for the Department to provide contextual information and projections on demand and capacity before participants discussed the consultation questions in detail in small groups.

261 individuals participated in one of the 12 consultation workshops including:

- 44 Principals and teachers from the 101 schools invited participated in one of the four 'Principals and teachers' workshops.
- 37 representatives from the 20 P&C groups invited to participate in one of the three 'invited' P&C workshops.
- 173 community members who attended one of the three community workshops.
- Five council representatives from the City of Sydney, Marrickville, Leichhardt and Waverley Councils who participated in the Councils workshop.
- Two parents with an Aboriginal background attended the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group workshop.

Focus groups

Focus groups provided an opportunity to explore the consultation questions with a smaller group of participants who were selected to represent members of the community who are traditionally harder to engage.

97 individuals participated in one of the 12 consultation focus groups including:

- 37 secondary and primary school students in one of the four focus groups.

- 23 culturally and linguistically diverse parents in one of the three focus groups.
- 17 'future parents' in one of the three focus groups.
- 20 members of the wider community in one of the two focus groups.

Kitchen Table Discussions

The Kitchen Table Discussion process provided an additional 'self-directed' face to face opportunity to participate in the consultation process. A guide provided the discussion host and participants with the necessary contextual information to have a structured discussion with a group of colleagues, family, neighbours, community members and friends.

Overall, more than 150 individuals participated in one of the 14 discussions held around the inner Sydney area. Over 680 Kitchen Table Discussion Guides were viewed during the consultation in either hard copy or electronically on the website.

Online forum

The online forum was designed to allow participants to comment on a series of discussion questions. It provided the functionality for participants to respond to other participant's comments, as well indicate their level of agreement with other comments by clicking the 'agree', and 'disagree' buttons under comments.

There were 586 comments on the discussion forum from 98 individual participants. Some participants made frequent contributions. Over 4,000 individuals visited the site and 539 individuals viewed a document in the online document library.



Consultation outcomes

Short term

Consultation Question 1: Some public secondary schools are operating below capacity and others face pressure from increased student numbers. Any long term decisions are going to take time to implement. What should be done in the short term (1-4 year period)?

Ideas that were noted on multiple occasions during the consultation included:

- Improve the marketing of public education to change the perception of public schools.
- Invest in the refurbishment and maintenance of existing facilities to create classroom space rather than use demountables.
- Invest in the school buildings, review educational offerings and improve teaching quality at schools with lower enrolments.
- Tighten policies to reduce the number of out of area enrolments and better enforce catchment boundaries.
- Create stronger school networks to encourage schools to work more closely together.
- Strengthen school links with other pre-secondary ('partner' primary schools) and post-secondary (TAFE and universities) educational establishments.
- Standardise school offerings.
- Introduce a 'local intake' stream at selective schools.
- Replicate the educational approach and offerings at schools that are performing well at schools with lower enrolments.

- Consider moving to a 'two-shift' approach to make better use of the existing available classroom space.
- Focus on providing 'local schools' (schools within easy access that don't require multiple changes on public transport).
- Plan now for the construction of a new public secondary school.

Medium to long term

Consultation Question 2: What do you think are the best options for addressing the longer term situation (5-10 year period)?

The majority of ideas raised as short term solutions were also considered to be suitable options to improve the provision of public secondary education in the longer term. Other ideas applicable to the longer term that were noted on multiple occasions during the consultation included:

- Construct a new public secondary school in the inner city and/or areas of high residential growth. The majority of participants agreed with the concept of a vertical school on the proviso that sufficient open space is available close by. A large number of suggestions on where a new public secondary school might be located were provided.
- Refurbish and expand (build up) existing public secondary education school sites and/or buy adjacent sites to provide for future expansion.
- Better collaborate with the Department of Planning and Environment to improve longer term enrolment projections and school asset provision.



Future demands

Consultation Question 3: What ideas do you have for helping to create public secondary schools that meet the demands of a modern education system and prepare students for their lives ahead?

- Focus on making all schools public, local, co-educational secondary comprehensive schools.
- Move to a 'college' model for some of the inner Sydney public secondary schools.
- Integrate the use of virtual teaching for some subjects to reduce the need for physical classroom space.
- Practice innovative teaching styles such as inquiry based learning.
- Improve teaching quality by increasing funding, providing better pay and incentives, increasing teaching entry requirements and allowing schools more freedom in hiring and firing.
- Provide better information for parents to help with school choice such as information on school policies, catchments and offerings.
- Broaden the curriculum to include character development, financial and life skills.
- Facilitate extra subject choice by allowing students and/or teachers to move between schools.

Issues summary documents

A series of more detailed issues summaries have been posted online at www.dec.nsw.gov.au/sydneyhsconsultation to summarise the outcomes of individual components of the consultation.

Issues summaries include:

- Issues summary 1 – Principals and teachers workshops
- Issues summary 2 – 'Invited' P&C representatives workshops
- Issues summary 3 – Community workshops
- Issues summary 4 – Targeted community consultation activities
- Issues summary 5 – Written feedback (including feedback from the Kitchen Table Discussions and online forum).

Next steps

The Department expresses its appreciation to everyone who participated in the consultation, particularly those who helped organise or host a consultation activity. The success of the consultation process in reaching a large and diverse range of the inner Sydney schools community has been largely because of the strength of our local school networks.

The Department will consider the feedback documented in the issues summaries, in addition to its needs and capacity analyses to help shape its recommendations about how to strengthen the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area.

For more information and updates on the Working Party's recommendations continue to visit www.dec.nsw.gov.au/sydneyhsconsultation

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