

# straight Talk

*hear every voice, know where you stand*



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

Issues summary 1 – Principals and teachers workshops

August 2014

# 1 Background

The inner Sydney area and its surrounds are experiencing urban renewal through the construction of new infill housing developments, the movement of families back into inner Sydney and increasing numbers of families remaining in the area.

As a consequence, the growth in the number of school-aged children living in inner Sydney will place increasing pressure on public education services in the area.

NSW Department of Education and Communities (the Department) is responsible for planning for and reviewing public education to ensure it meets the needs of students in relation to both educational offerings of schools and the learning environment. Needs and capacity analyses are undertaken on an ongoing basis to assist in strengthening the future provision of public education across the State.

In late 2012 the establishment of the Inner City Schools Working Party was announced to assist the Department with its ongoing review of public primary and secondary education in the inner Sydney area. The initial task of the Working Party was to consider the public education needs for growing numbers of primary-aged school students in the Ultimo/Pymont area. The Working Party recommended that a new school be built in the area.

Membership of the Working Party was reconfigured at the end of 2013 for its new focus on considering demand and possible options for addressing the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area. Membership of the Working Party includes senior Departmental officers with educational, assets and communications expertise and selected secondary school Principals.

Initial needs and capacity analyses identified that in the:

- Short term there are some schools in the area with higher enrolments than others and that there is additional teaching and learning space available within the majority of existing public secondary schools; and
- Longer term there is a shortage of teaching and learning spaces to meet the projected demand.

On 16 May 2014 the Inner City Schools Working Party launched its six week community consultation period to gain community feedback on the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area to assist the Department in its ongoing consideration of public education.

The consultation was designed using a variety of strategies to encourage as wide a range of individuals, stakeholder group members and the general community to explore and provide input on possible educational solutions for addressing the predicted growth in the number of public secondary school-aged children living in inner Sydney including:

- Principals, teachers, 'invited' P&C representatives and primary and secondary school students;
- NSW Teachers Federation, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), local interest groups; and
- The broader inner Sydney community.

**This is one of a series of issues summaries that presents the outcomes of the community consultation. The focus of this issues summary is the outcomes of the Principals and teachers workshops.**

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The Department will consider the feedback from the community consultation, along with the needs and capacity analyses, to help shape its recommendations on how to strengthen the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area.

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# 2 Approach

## Consultation purpose and objectives

The consultation was designed to seek community input on three discussion areas:

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.

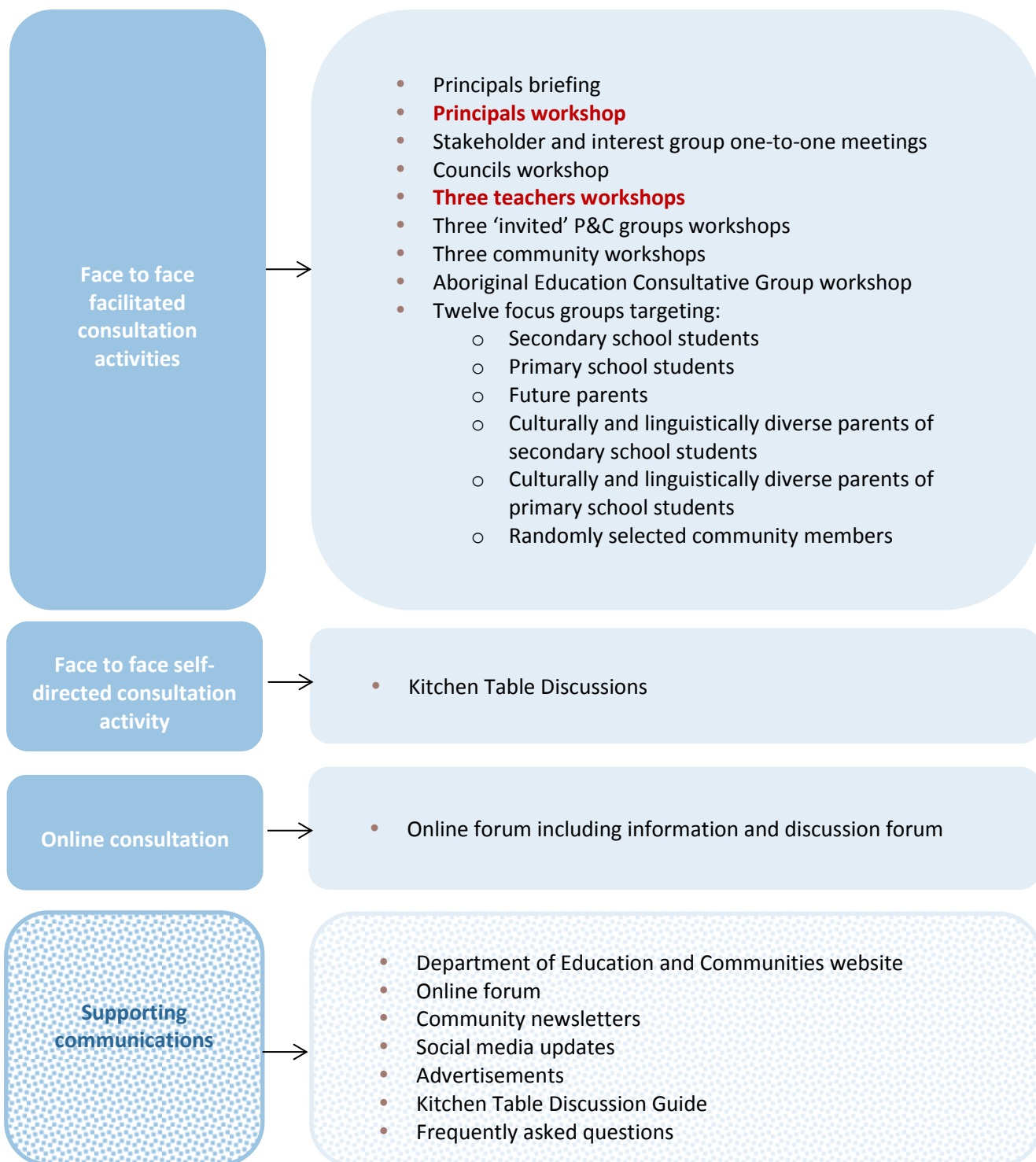
The objectives for consultation for planning for public secondary education in the inner Sydney area were to:

- Introduce the consultation process and invite participation from stakeholder groups and people who had an interest.
- Provide a number of different ways in which stakeholder groups and the community could participate in consultation activities.
- Facilitate feedback and consultation from key stakeholder groups and the community so that the full range of issues, concerns and ideas could be heard and considered.
- Ensure that the conversation about planning for public secondary education in the inner Sydney area was broadly representative of wider community expectations and priorities.
- Identify and acknowledge the breadth of issues, concerns and ideas and demonstrate the challenges for the Department in considering and weighing up each option.
- Provide feedback to participants, stakeholder groups and the wider community on what was raised, how it was considered and how it influenced the final recommendations.



## Consultation activities

There was a wide range of opportunities for stakeholders and the wider community to participate.



This issues summary presents the outcomes of the activities highlighted in **red**.



## Workshop details

Principals and teachers from the 101 schools in the Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Marrickville Principals networks were invited to attend a workshop. Invitations were sent by email from the Chair of the Inner City Schools Working Party (Director, Public Schools NSW Port Jackson Principals Network) to the Principals. Principals were asked to forward workshop details to their staff. The invitation invited Principals and teachers to forward the information to any interested public school colleagues who may also like to participate regardless of whether they belonged to one of the three target networks.

Teachers were given three dates to choose from, depending on their personal preference for date and location. Principals were invited to attend a separate workshop.

Overall 44 Principals and teachers attended one of the workshops.

Details of the workshops are provided below.

Name	Date and Time	Location
Teachers workshop 1	Monday 26 May 2014 4.00 - 6.00pm (2hours)	Sydney Secondary College – Leichhardt Campus Balmain Road, Leichhardt
Teachers workshop 2	Tuesday 27 May 2014 4.00 - 6.00pm (2hours)	Sydney Secondary College – Leichhardt Campus Balmain Road, Leichhardt
Teachers workshop 3	Wednesday 28 May 2014 4.00 - 6.00pm (2hours)	Alexandria Park Community School Park Street, Alexandria
Principals workshop	Friday 29 May 2014 1.30 - 3.30pm (2 hours)	St George Rowing Club Levy Street, Wolli Creek

## Workshop approach

The workshops were independently facilitated by Straight Talk.

Each event commenced with an introduction by a member of the Inner City Schools Working Party to provide the context, followed by input from an officer from the Department's Assets planning group showing the projections for public secondary school demand in the inner Sydney area. Generally following this input Department representatives left the workshop to ensure all participants felt at ease giving their honest and open opinions.

The majority of the workshop time was spent working in small groups or as one group where numbers were small, to discuss the three consultation questions in depth:

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.

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Unless time was limited, small groups were given the opportunity to feed their ideas back to all workshop participants to enable an understanding of the synergies and differences in ideas and possible solutions raised.



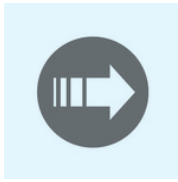
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# 3 Issues analysis

Feedback has been collated, analysed and coded to enable an understanding of the key issues, opportunities and solutions raised at the workshops. A summary of the key issues is included in the 'At a glance' section, with 'More detail' provided from page 8 onwards.

## At a glance

<p><b>Short term</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market public education to parents directly and compete with non-government schools for students</li> <li>• Invest in refurbishment and maintenance of existing facilities, including cosmetic maintenance that has emblematic significance to students and parents</li> <li>• Tighten restrictions on out of area enrolments</li> <li>• Give every school a selective stream or remove them all entirely</li> <li>• Have schools collaborate with each other, universities and TAFE to pool resources and increase teaching capacity and quality</li> <li>• Target educational enhancements to the schools with lower enrolments</li> </ul>
<p><b>Medium to long term</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a new school in the inner city or extensively expand and refurbish existing schools</li> <li>• Change the existing boundaries for catchments</li> <li>• Tighten enrolment criteria for out of area schools</li> <li>• Phase out selective high schools</li> <li>• Change school hours by creating a '2 shift day' 8am-1pm and 12pm-5pm</li> </ul>
<p><b>Future demands</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase funding</li> <li>• Move away from 'factory style' schooling to other techniques like inquiry based learning</li> <li>• Create more multi-campus, amalgamated schools</li> <li>• Use flexible learning spaces and technology to overcome capacity constraints</li> </ul>

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## In more detail

### Question 1: What should be done in the short term (1-4 year period)?

#### Influencing parent choice

Influencing parent choice was a very popular theme for this question. Participants suggested that the Department should do more to promote public education by advertising and marketing public schools as a quality product. Besides marketing public education in general (and suggestions that the public education 'brand' is not perceived as well as it could be), it was suggested that public schools should be marketed specifically to parents' needs – the Department should find out why people send their children to non-government schools and compete with non-government school marketing.

Representative comments:

- 'Teachers Federation run advertisements showing pride – but not the Department.'
- 'Parents seek certain types of public education (mostly selective) – hence the need for marketing to showcase that public education is more than what they think it is.'
- 'Public schools need dedicated marketing teams to compete with non-government schools that have these teams.'

#### Capital works

Investment in school infrastructure was another common theme. Participants suggested refurbishment of existing infrastructure, especially existing spaces and under-utilised non-teaching spaces so they could be used as teaching spaces. Aesthetic improvements were also suggested. According to some participants, parents pay a lot of attention to the maintenance and appearance of facilities when making school choices. One out of the box solution was to solve short term enrolment problems with a school on water, a 'floating school'.

Representative comments:

- 'Refurbish under-utilised building spaces to teaching spaces.'
- 'School aesthetics. The Department is slow at responding to maintenance issues. The broken window effect (where one broken window left unrepaired sends the message that vandalism is tolerated in this environment) is very evident in public schools.'
- 'Develop and build schools that people want to send their kids to'.

#### Administrative and policy changes

Changes to the Department's administration practices or policies were also commonly raised. Chiefly these revolved around a perception that some public schools (particularly those with selective students or streams) were outcompeting others and that steps should be taken to address this. On the one hand, reducing parent choice by redrawing and enforcing school boundaries was suggested, whilst on the other, steps to equalise the 'pull factor' of selective schools were suggested. These included forcing wholly selective schools to take on some comprehensive students, giving all schools a selective stream, or alternatively, looking at whether removing selective streams would be a better option – with questions asked on what research supports retaining them. There was a suggestion that once enrolments are equalised, teachers might not like having less space and larger classes. Making school hours more flexible was also suggested.

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Representative comments:

- ‘Restore local enrolments and remove out of area enrolments.’
- ‘Selective schools promote a perception in the community that selective schools have ‘better’ teachers.’
- ‘Need to support comprehensive education – concerns about the education system we are creating that values higher marks over creating independent learners. Either invest in comprehensive education or give all schools a selective program to differentiate each school.’

## Collaboration

Another strong theme was increased collaboration by and between public secondary schools. Suggestions included aligning primary schools with high schools and strengthening transition programs, schools pooling together to share space and resources in a ‘campus model’, forging links with universities and other tertiary options and conscientiously amalgamating schools with different socio-economic student profiles in order to neutralise ‘stigma’ issues.

Representative comments:

- ‘Our primary school didn’t have the best reputation. Staff who are keen to grow the school have put in a transition program - there are around seven visits to the school over the school year so new students are comfortable when joining the school – a similar system in schools with lower enrolments might work.’
- ‘Align to other institutions/organisations such as universities.’
- ‘Concerns about the socio-economic profile of students can be an issue – break this stigma by amalgamating schools.’

## Enhance and expand educational offerings

Enhancing and expanding the educational offerings of schools was another common theme for suggestions. These included creating specialist disciplines for schools with lower intakes, like making them a ‘sustainability school’. Targeting enhancements to the schools struggling with enrolments, and improving technology including tele-learning technology to reduce space demands and improve teaching.

Representative comments:

- ‘Changing boundaries alone won’t solve the problem, needs to be supported in various ways included refurbishment, special programs, extra-curricular offerings and additional resources.’
- ‘Enhance educational offerings in less popular schools.’
- ‘All high schools should have partially selective streams. Gives parents the belief that they are getting something special.’

## Transport

There was a small number of suggestions surrounding transport in response to this question. There were suggestions to remove the transport subsidy for students not going to local schools, or to arrange buses to take students to under enrolled schools.



## Other comments

Other comments that didn't fit into one of the themes above are provided below.

- 'Newtown Performing Arts High School is limited size-wise.'
- 'Some schools don't have the best reputations.'
- 'P&C groups have a huge influence in parental choice of schools – parents hear stories on the grapevine.'
- 'There is a poor perception of 'underpopulated' schools – needs addressing.'

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

Although the answers to this question had the same themes as the answers for Question 1 (dealing with the shorter term), there was much more emphasis on capital works, specifically on building a new school and where it could go/how it would work. There was also a much smaller emphasis on influencing parent choices. Capital works and administrative and policy changes constituted the bulk of the feedback for this question, with other themes playing a relatively minor role.

## Capital works

There were numerous suggestions to build a new school, and several potential sites. There were also suggestions for a boarding school, and calls to improve the long term aesthetics of existing schools and refurbish/stabilise them before building a new school. There was concern that a new school could reduce enrolments at existing schools.

Suggested new sites included:

- Petersham TAFE .
- Vaucluse High School site (reopen).
- Bridge Street.
- Alexandria Park Oval (expansion).
- A new building in Newtown.
- Cleveland Street Intensive English High School (dissolve/move existing school).

Representative Comments:

- 'Need to build an inner city high school.'
- 'A new school is needed to accommodate the growth in population in the Sydney and Leichhardt LGAs.'
- 'Refurbish, stabilise existing local high schools before building new schools.'

## Administrative and policy changes

Suggestions that fell under this theme included changing the existing boundaries, tightening enrolment criteria for non-local schools, phasing out selective high schools and changing school hours, specifically by creating a "2 shift day" 8am-1pm and 12pm-5pm.

Representative Comments:

- 'Change the existing boundaries.'
- 'Enrolment policies – rethink criteria for non-local students, we should be promoting local school enrolments.'

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- ‘Split the school day – have one group of children between 8 and 1 and another group 12 and 5? – this has worked well in the United States.’

## Transport

There were some suggestions around using transport as a long term solution. These included improving transport links like bike paths, including light rail as a transport option but suggestions also included restricting subsidised transport to local schools only. There was the suggestion that when students travel to schools that are far away, they are not part of the school ‘community’.

## Enhance and expand educational offerings

Suggestions included using online learning facilities, open ended teaching spaces and utilising existing non-teaching spaces.

## Collaboration

Suggestions included strengthening the links between schools, building a stronger relationship with the local community and creating a campus style school for some of the high schools in the Marrickville area.

## Influencing parent choice

Suggestions included addressing prejudice in the parent community and conducting a well-funded campaign supporting the benefits of public education for everyone.

## Other comments

Other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above are provided below.

- ‘Changing culture in schools is not easy.’
- ‘Consider what the real issues are for schools that include the whole community, not just the noisy minority.’
- ‘Gap in inner east.’
- ‘Community consultation on direction for schools with lower enrolments.’
- ‘Green Square and Victoria Park - situation will be ugly in a couple of years and needs to be managed now.’
- ‘Impose development levy to support building schools. Means educational and green spaces will be introduced into communities.’

## 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?

There was a mix of new themes in response to this question as well as some familiar themes from the earlier two questions. There were more suggestions around changing the structure of the education system as a whole as well as more focus on funding and teacher investment. There were still calls for a new school as well as collaboration with other educational institutions.

## Funding

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There were many suggestions that funding to schools should be increased, particularly to teachers to allow them to improve their skills. There was also a suggestion that schools with lower enrolments should get extra funding on a 'needs basis'.

## Structure

There were some suggestions to change the fundamental structure of schooling – to move away from the 'factory style' schooling with bells for breaks, to use inquiry based learning, to rely less on exams for progress assessment and monitoring and to use a college model with a separate Year 11 and 12 more extensively.

## Techniques

In a similar vein to the structure theme, there were some suggestions to use innovative teaching techniques within the classroom, including using flexible learning spaces to encourage creative and critical thinking, investing in technology and not teaching to tests as well as following the Finland modern education system as a model.

## Capital works

Suggestions under this theme included calls for more investment in facilities to raise the aesthetics of existing schools, calls for a new school in Surry Hills, and a suggestion to use demountables to meet enrolment demand.

## Collaboration

There were additional calls to integrate schools more with other institutions and the wider community, including the University of Technology Sydney , TAFE and introducing weekend and evening community schools.

## Other comments

Other comments that didn't fit into one of the themes above are provided below.

- 'Introduce business managers for high schools – Principals shouldn't be making business decisions.'
- 'Promote public education.'
- 'The Government should be a proud provider of public education that leads educational practice.'
- 'Promote public education to university students.'
- 'Provide alternative pathways and programs for disengaged students –
  - They will need facilities to be successful
  - Work with community links
  - Charitable organisations, OASIS, Learning Links.'
- 'Encourage the mixing of students from different cultural backgrounds.'



## Individual feedback

### Feedback form analysis

At the end of each workshop individual feedback was obtained using a feedback form to explore participant satisfaction with the workshop including suggestions about how the session might be improved. Of 44 participants, 34 completed the feedback form.

Overall there was a very high level of satisfaction with the workshop process. This is demonstrated by the graph below.



Participants were complimentary about all aspects of the workshop but were particularly impressed by the opportunities to have their say, the clear workshop objectives and the facilitator's clear and logical presentation.



The average ratings for all the statements were all above 4 in a 5 point rating scale where 5 equalled 'strongly agree' and 1 'strongly disagree' and there was very little deviation. The scores ranged from 4.3 – 4.4, with the majority of scores at 4.3.

## Improvements

When asked whether they had any suggestions about how the workshop could have been improved participants mentioned the following.

- 'Thank you very much for the opportunity. Also, thanks to Alexandria Park Community School P&C for catering. Wonderful!'
- 'I thought it was a good and fair process.'
- 'Wasn't very clear about the discussion guide. Was informed via email so the information wasn't clear for me. Thanks for great facilitation. Catering was excellent.'
- 'Pity more people were not here. Thank you for listening.'
- 'More notice about the workshops might have increased attendance.'
- 'Structure was good as it was.'
- 'I couldn't hear the facilitator. Use a microphone.'
- 'Lots of opportunity for people to have their say.'
- 'Thank you.'
- 'Change tables after each question to get more cross views.'
- 'No but good job.'

