

straight Talk



hear every voice, know where you stand

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

Issues summary 4 – Targeted community consultation activities

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 targeted community

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consultation activities. These activities targeted particular groups that are harder to engage at a traditional community workshop setting including:

- **Council staff and councillors.**
- **Parents with an Aboriginal background.**
- **Secondary and primary school students.**
- **Future parents (i.e. parents that have children aged 11 years or under).**
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse parents of secondary and primary school students.**
- **Unengaged community members (i.e. people not directly connected to the inner Sydney area schools and without children currently attending a school) and without children currently in education.**

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.



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.

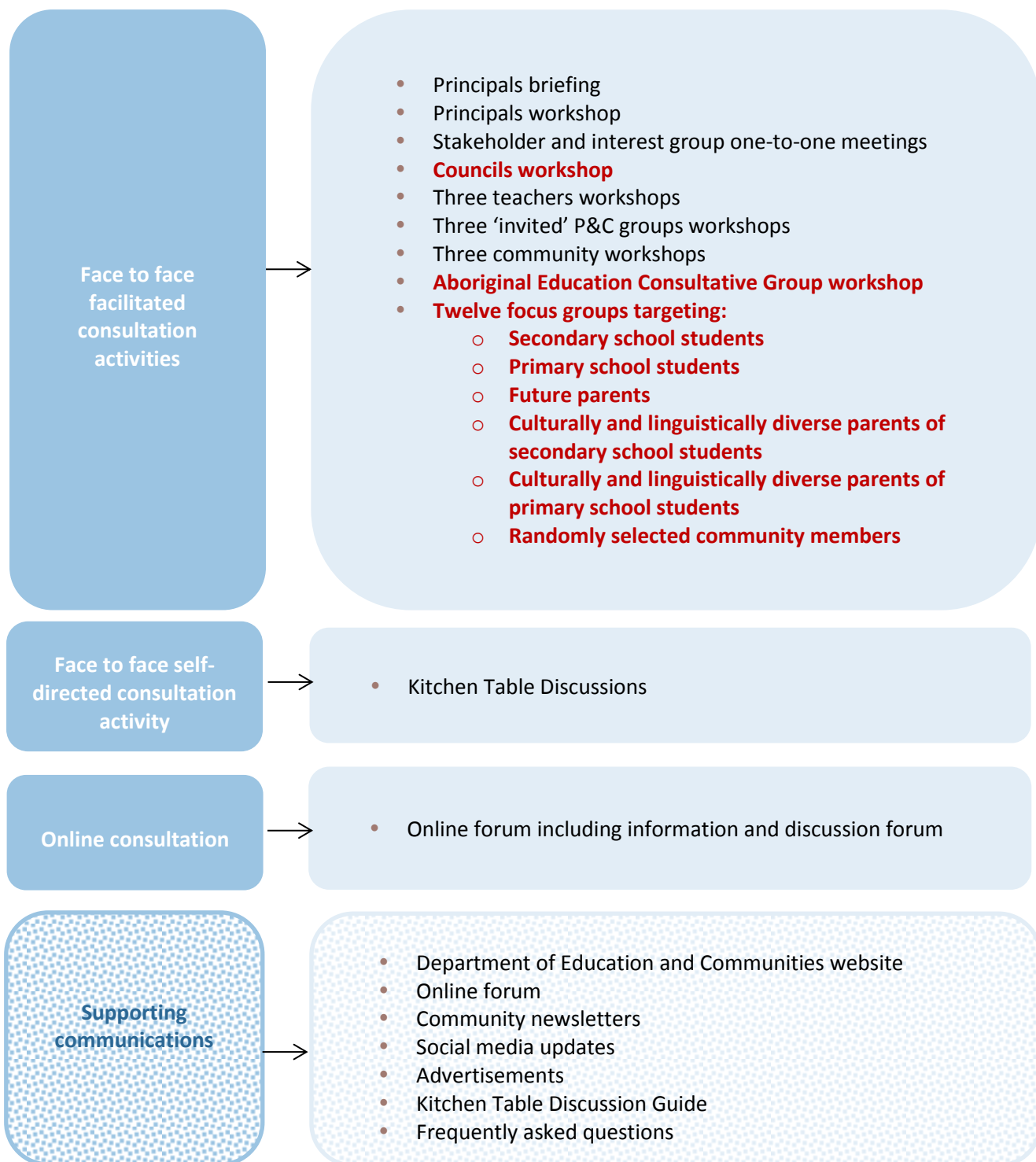
The objectives for consultation for planning for public secondary education in the inner Sydney area were to:

- 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**.



Activity details

Participants were recruited using a range of mechanisms to encourage a diverse range of hard to reach and unengaged community members to participate in the process.

Overall 104 people participated in one of the targeted community consultation activities.

Details of the activities are provided below.

Councils workshop

Invitations were sent by email from the Department's Communication and Engagement team to council officers and councillors of the City of Sydney, Marrickville, Leichhardt, Waverley and City of Botany Councils. The invitation invited council officers to forward the information to other interested officers.

Five council representatives chose to attend the workshop. These were from the City of Sydney Council, Marrickville Council, Leichardt and Waverly Councils.

Name	Date and Time	Location
Councils workshop	Monday 23 June 2014 2.30 - 4.30pm (2 hours)	Department of Education and Communities Bridge Street, Sydney

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group workshop

The Chair of the Inner City Schools Working Party initially liaised with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group prior to the commencement of the consultation process to canvass ideas about the best approach to engage with parents with an Aboriginal background. It was determined that the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group would work with the Department to organise a workshop for its members.

An invitation was sent by the President of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to their members. The invitation invited members to forward the information to parents with an Aboriginal background.

Two senior members of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group chose to attend the workshop.

Name	Date and Time	Location
Aboriginal Education Consultative Group workshop	Thursday 19 June 2014 4.00 - 6.00pm (2 hours)	Alexandria Park Community School Park Road, Alexandria

Whilst the number of parents with an Aboriginal background at this workshop was low, it is important to note that several other parents with an Aboriginal background participated in one of the community workshops.

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Secondary school and primary school students focus groups

The Chair of the Inner City Schools Working Party liaised with Principals in the Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Marrickville Principal Networks to identify schools to host secondary and primary school student focus groups. After liaison with each school, the schools below offered to host a focus group. Students for each focus group were identified by the school Principals who were asked to recruit up to 12 students from a mix of year groups and educational attainment.

Overall 37 students participated in one of the focus groups.

Name	Date and Time	Location
Secondary student focus group 1	Wednesday 18 June 2014 1.00 - 3.00pm (2 hours)	Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design Seaview Street, Dulwich Hill
Secondary student focus group 2	Thursday 26 June 2014 1.00 - 3.00pm (2 hours)	Alexandria Park Community School Mitchell Street, Alexandria
Primary student focus group 1	Thursday 19 June 2014 9.10 - 11.10am (2 hours)	Alexandria Park Community School Park Road, Alexandria
Primary student focus group 2	Wednesday 25 June 2014 9.30 - 11.30am (2 hours)	Bourke Street Public School Bourke Street, Surry Hills

Culturally and linguistically diverse parents focus groups

The Chair of the Inner City Schools Working Party liaised with Principals in the Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Marrickville Principal Networks to identify schools to host focus groups with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) parents. After liaison with each school, the schools below offered to host a focus group. Parents for each focus group were identified by the school Principals who were asked to recruit up to 12 parents that did not have English as their first language or who immigrated to Australia in the last two years.

Overall 23 people participated in one of the focus groups.

Name	Date and Time	Location
CALD focus group 1	Tuesday 24 June 2014 6.30 - 8.30pm (2hours)	Bourke Street Public School Bourke Street, Surry Hills
CALD focus group 2	Wednesday 25 May 2014 6.00 - 8.00pm (2hours)	Alexandria Park Community School Park Road, Alexandria

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CALD focus group 3	Thursday 26 May 2014 6.30 - 8.30pm (2hours)	Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design Seaview Street, Dulwich Hill
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Several parents with a culturally and linguistically diverse background participated in one of the community workshops.

Future parents and randomly selected wider community member focus groups

Independent recruitment specialists, Jetty Research, undertook the recruitment of future parents and the wider community by randomly telephoning households within the inner Sydney area.

In total 3652 calls were made, of these 43 people accepted the invitation to participate in one of the groups.

Straight Talk also separately contacted 20 pre-schools in the inner Sydney area to invite parents to the future parents focus group.

Overall 17 people participated in one of the three future parent focus groups and 20 people participated in one of the two randomly selected wider community member focus groups.

Name	Date and Time	Location
Future Parent Focus Group 1	Monday 16 June 2014 12.00 – 2.00pm (2 hours)	All groups were held at Sydney School of Mechanics Pitt Street, Sydney
Future Parent Focus Group 2	Monday 16 June 2014 6.30 – 8.30pm (2 hours)	
Future Parent Focus Group 3	Tuesday 17 June 2014 6.30 – 8.30pm (2 hours)	
Community Focus Group 1	Thursday 19 June 2014 4.30 – 6.30pm (2 hours)	
Community Focus Group 2	Thursday 19 June 2014 7:00 – 9:00pm (2 hours)	

Consultation activities approach

The workshops and focus groups were independently facilitated by Straight Talk.

Workshops

The workshops 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

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area. 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 discussing the 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.

Focus groups

Following some contextual information and whole group introductions the focus groups commenced with a presentation from a Straight Talk facilitator to show the projections for public secondary school demand in the inner Sydney area.



The focus group discussions allowed time to explore the options for managing short and medium to long term demand for secondary education in greater depth. Participants were presented with a range of option cards and not prompted on which topics to discuss. This allowed the facilitator to ask further exploratory questions to gather in-depth feedback on the options and other relevant topics such as the factors that influence parental school choice.



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 and focus groups. A summary of the key issues is included in the 'At a glance' section, with 'More detail' provided from page 11 onwards.

At a glance

<p>Short term</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve educational options and quality in preference to using transport to bring students to under-enrolled schools • Refurbish existing spaces in preference to using demountables • Reform or remove the selective school system • Promote the improved schools and give public schools a better brand • Enforce catchment boundaries but allow siblings to attend the same school • Improve links with local primary schools to encourage higher enrolments <p>Participant comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most popular short term solution across the groups was reforming or removing the selective high school system. Future parents, community members and CALD parents all felt strongly that the selective high school system was unfair and in need of major change • The use of demountables was generally viewed negatively by parent and community groups but students expressed no strong opinions and did not see demountables as a big problem • Parent, community and student groups were generally in favour of travel times under 30 minutes. There was also a preference for a single connection journey, preferably a dedicated school bus • Council representatives were more concerned about administration of out of school hours care services and felt that these had a big influence on enrolment choice • Parents with an Aboriginal background felt that school reputation and perception problems were important factors in shifting short term enrolment issues and the Department was not doing enough to improve this
<p>Medium to long term</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build one or two new schools; a vertical school is acceptable if there are sports facilities and open space close by for students • Either remove selective schools entirely or move one of the selective schools such as Sydney Boys and/or Girls to a location in the west (or an under-enrolled school) and use the vacated site for local students • Facilitate and encourage collaboration between high schools and other education institutions like universities, TAFE and 'partner' primary schools • Integrate planning new schools with other urban planning and improve long term enrolment projection methods

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<p>Medium to long term continued...</p>	<p>Participant comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new school was strongly preferred by parent and community groups, although there was little consensus about where a new school should go • Most participants nominated sites that were close to the centre of the city, although there were some suggestions for sites towards the east of Sydney and in areas of high growth such as Green Square • A vertical school was generally acceptable to the groups – four levels was a popular limit that groups placed on the height of school buildings, including the student groups • Aboriginal and CALD parents felt that subject choices need to expand to include vocational subjects and basic life skills
<p>Future demands</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the role of technology as a teaching tool and subject matter • Improve the quality of teaching by all means necessary – more funding, better incentives, allowing schools to directly hire, reward and fire teachers • Broaden secondary education to include character development, financial and life skills • Facilitate extra subject choice by allowing students and/or teachers to move between multiple schools <p>Participant comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing the way students are taught was a very popular response to this question across the groups, but there were many different ideas about how this should be done • Technology and virtual classrooms were common suggestions, as were more subject options, making school more relevant to the jobs of the future, linking schools to universities and industry and broadening the curriculum • There were also calls to improve teaching by increasing funding and allowing schools to reward or fire teachers based on merit and performance



In more detail

Councils workshop

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. The most common suggestion on this theme was around after school care – it was suggested that parents pick schools based on the availability of out of school hours care and that the Department should take full control and responsibility for out of school hours care as a way to influence enrolments. There were also suggestions that parents pick schools based on where siblings and friends are going, that Principals are a big factor in parental choice and that parental choice can be predicted by tracking from pre-schools to primary to secondary schools.

Representative comments:

- ‘The Department should have responsibility for out of school care – parents pick schools based on out of school care.’
- ‘The Department needs to plan for after hours – it is time for change.’
- ‘Many parents judge choice on sibling choice and friend's choices. This could mean being flexible with boundaries if you have larger groups of children.’

Planning and Modelling

Many of the suggestions were around how the Department plans for future enrolments and models enrolment projections. There were calls for more research into where enrolment demand will be, and better strategic planning by the Department in partnership with councils to plan for the growth.

Representative comments:

- ‘Needs to be planned strategically – up to now it has been easier. It is about cooperation – it’s not just the Department, it’s not just local government, it’s not public or primary.’
- ‘It is hard to judge increasing enrolments.’
- ‘Do some good quality qualitative research with a representative sample to do some really good modelling around population growth and see where the demand will be.’

Capital works

Investment in school infrastructure was another common theme. Participants suggested that sharing space and using it more creatively as a short term solution. It was suggested that some schools lack public space on the site, and that the Department needs to allow flexible space to support the new paradigm of schools becoming a community space. St Andrews and International Grammar School were given as examples of how limited space can be used well.

Representative comments:

- ‘There is a big move to schools becoming ‘community space and support’ – the Department needs to allow some flexible space.’
- ‘Be more creative around the use of space in schools.’

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- ‘Some schools lack open public space on the school site.’
- ‘It’s easier for the Department to have a conversation with schools about sharing space, rather than local governments only. The Department has much more influence.’
- ‘Some public school Principals don’t like the idea of sharing their space with the wider community.’

Collaboration

There were two comments or suggestions around better collaboration by and between public secondary schools. There are included below.

- ‘Having defined and sensible flows of children makes sense. Work with pre-schools that flow in to primary and then flow into secondary.’
- ‘The schools need to collaborate with schools and private schools – The Department can do more to encourage schools to share facilities.’

Other comments

There were two other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above. These are provided below.

- ‘How is changing learning habits important?’
- ‘Private schools are able to afford better transport options.’

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

Capital works

Most responses to this question were around possible sites for a new school. Suggested sites included:

- ‘Callan Park.’
- ‘Sydney Distance Education High School.’
- ‘Cleveland Street Intensive English High School – it looks like a heritage building though.’
- ‘Could some space be built at the ‘Open High School’ at Randwick – most of the study is done online. It’s a big space but it needs a bit of work. It would connect up with light rail. There is a special education school at the back too.’
- ‘Old tramsheds site at Leichhardt to make additional teaching spaces and theatre spaces.’
- ‘Several of the existing inner Sydney assets aren’t big enough.’

Apart from these site recommendations, there were two additional comments. These are included below.

- ‘A new school allows a change in teaching styles and approach.’
- ‘People are asking for out of school hours carers (OOSHers)’ – but the number of spaces for OOSHers is decreasing because there is a bigger requirement for ‘teaching space’.’

Planning

There were two comments around planning. They are included below.

- ‘Integrated planning is very hard.’

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- ‘Place based’ planning is essential.’

Other comments

There were two other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above. These are provided below.

- ‘Secondary college model - Leichhardt Council’s youth teams were supportive of ‘college’ model. Could that be done with some of the schools in the south?’
- ‘Mini-buses to station – options for using ‘community transport’ around school times.’



Aboriginal Education Consultative Group workshop

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

Poor perception of schools

Participants suggested that certain schools have a reputation and stigma attached to them and that the Department is not proactive enough in promoting school achievements.

Representative comments:

- 'Proper attempts to address the perception issue have never been undertaken.'
- 'Why doesn't the Department lend its support to school and community marketing efforts?'
- 'There is a distrust of the Department. They don't have a good track record of doing what they say they will.'

Integrating the school with the community

There were two comments on integrating the school more closely with the community. These are included below.

- 'Efforts should be made to make schools part of the community.'
- 'For Aboriginal people the school needs to be part of the culture. We have a collective culture and so the school needs to be integrated into that to keep people connected. A big challenge is the constant changing of people who are the face of the school. The Department could step up and give schools that necessary consistent face. There is a need to tap into existing Aboriginal community feeling.'

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

Welcoming and acknowledging Aboriginal students

There were a number of comments about making sure schools are a culturally safe and welcoming environment for Aboriginal students. These included retaining Aboriginal content in the curriculum, delivering an education that recognises Aboriginal culture and identity and making sure the leadership of the school is culturally sensitive to Aboriginal issues and understands the Aboriginal student cohort.

Representative Comments:

- 'Aboriginal people need to be able to see themselves and their culture in their school. It needs to be a culturally safe, welcoming environment and this needs to be visible in the buildings and grounds, curriculum, teachers and other staff.'
- 'Aboriginal parents want quality education that recognises their culture and identity for their children. Schools should not try to mould Aboriginal students into something they are not.'
- 'The Department should defend the inclusion of Aboriginal content in the curriculum.'



Diversity and support for alternative paths

There were three suggestions that the curriculum needs to be widened to include vocational and life skills and provide support for students in different circumstances – such as pregnancy. These are included below.

Representative Comments:

- ‘School should partner with TAFE and other vocational education options to give those who don’t love school a chance to connect with their broader community. Vocational training will give them the start of a job and, at the same time, provide insight into why school has value.’
- ‘Schools need to provide active support for all students no matter what lifestyle choices they make e.g. pregnancy. The school environment needs to encourage them to stay and get their education.’
- ‘The Department needs to allocate time for the teaching of social skills in class, e.g. how to dress yourself, go to a shop, boil a kettle and cook, call emergency services and use appropriate language.’

Other comments

- ‘Schools must adapt to the times and consider innovative solutions to problems.’

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?

Structure

It was suggested that schools should become a community hub in order to embed them in local Aboriginal communities. This involves using a model from country towns where the school is a ‘one stop shop’ for government services and thereby attracts involvement and attendance from the whole community.

Representative Comments:

- ‘Schools should adopt the country town model of having a one-stop-shop for all community related needs within the grounds e.g. healthcare services, Services NSW, Births, Deaths and Marriages and childcare. This would increase access to those services and encourage people to take care of themselves. It would turn the school into a meeting place and make it very attractive, especially for Aboriginal people.’
- ‘Within the grounds of schools there should also be resources for adult education. This would strengthen links within communities and families because they would be sharing an experience (learning) and would be able to meet up at lunch time and after school. The sites at JJ Cahill Memorial High School and Gardeners Road Public School could be merged to accommodate this kind of school.’
- ‘Schools should have nurses on site to deal with health issues. That will let teachers teach.’

Other comments

‘Stop referring to school as ‘school’ as the words ‘school’ and ‘schooling’ have negative connotations to Aboriginal people. ‘Education space’ could be a workable alternative.’

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Secondary and primary school students focus groups

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

What is the best thing about your school?

Popular answers included sports facilities and competitions, multiculturalism and the diversity of the student body, selective streams and OC. Other responses included the breadth of subjects taught, the academic challenge, having a small school, nice teachers and a K-12 school so that students didn't need to make friends again.

What would make transitions to high school easy?

Transitioning with friends was the most popular answer to this question. Also mentioned were anti-bullying programs, organised sports and games to facilitate friendships and an orientation week in the first week of high school.

What do you think of demountable classrooms?

Those who have experienced demountables find them fairly similar to other classrooms, only more cramped and lacking weather protection. The groups expressed no strong opinions about the idea of using demountables to expand schools and said they were a cheap option that would not make much difference to learning. Demountables lack the feelings of safety and permanence that other structures have and don't allow geographical 'blocks' of subjects within the school.

How far would you feel comfortable travelling to high school?

Most students felt that half an hour was the absolute maximum amount of time that students should be travelling to or from school. A minority of students who already used public transport felt that longer journeys were acceptable.

What subjects should high school teach?

Traditional subjects (English, science, mathematics) were seen as crucial for all career choices. Participants had a lot of confidence in the current subject mix they perceive high schools to offer. Some felt that students should be able to choose electives from the beginning of high school and start specialising earlier. Diversity of subjects was supported, as were sports, physical education and classes that were fun, for example ones that incorporate computer games.

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

If a new secondary school was constructed, what kind of school should it be?

There was a strong consensus that a new high school should be streamed with specialties for sport music or design and technology. Streaming should be done intelligently. Better to do it for each class (subject) than for one group of 'streamed' students who are advantaged for everything. Participants felt that extra-curricular activities should be offered at school e.g. drama, advanced science, creative writing, and vocational activities that are relevant to particular jobs.



What do you think of co-educational schools as opposed to single sex?

Participants (all students at co-educational primary schools) mostly felt that co-education schools were superior. Co-education enables all siblings to stay together, which is good for families, enables students to make friends with people of both genders, prepares students for the workforce and have more variety.

One student felt that single sex schools enable people to concentrate on making friends and working on school.

What do you think of college style schools?

Participants were not aware of the model and had trouble understanding it. They were generally against it and felt that the extra transition period when switching from junior high to senior high was the major negative.

What do you think of vertical schools?

Participants generally liked the idea of vertical schools up to four storeys. It was felt that any higher than this would make the lifts and stairways too busy. Corridors would need to be broad and free of bag hooks to prevent crowding.

Ideal school design activity

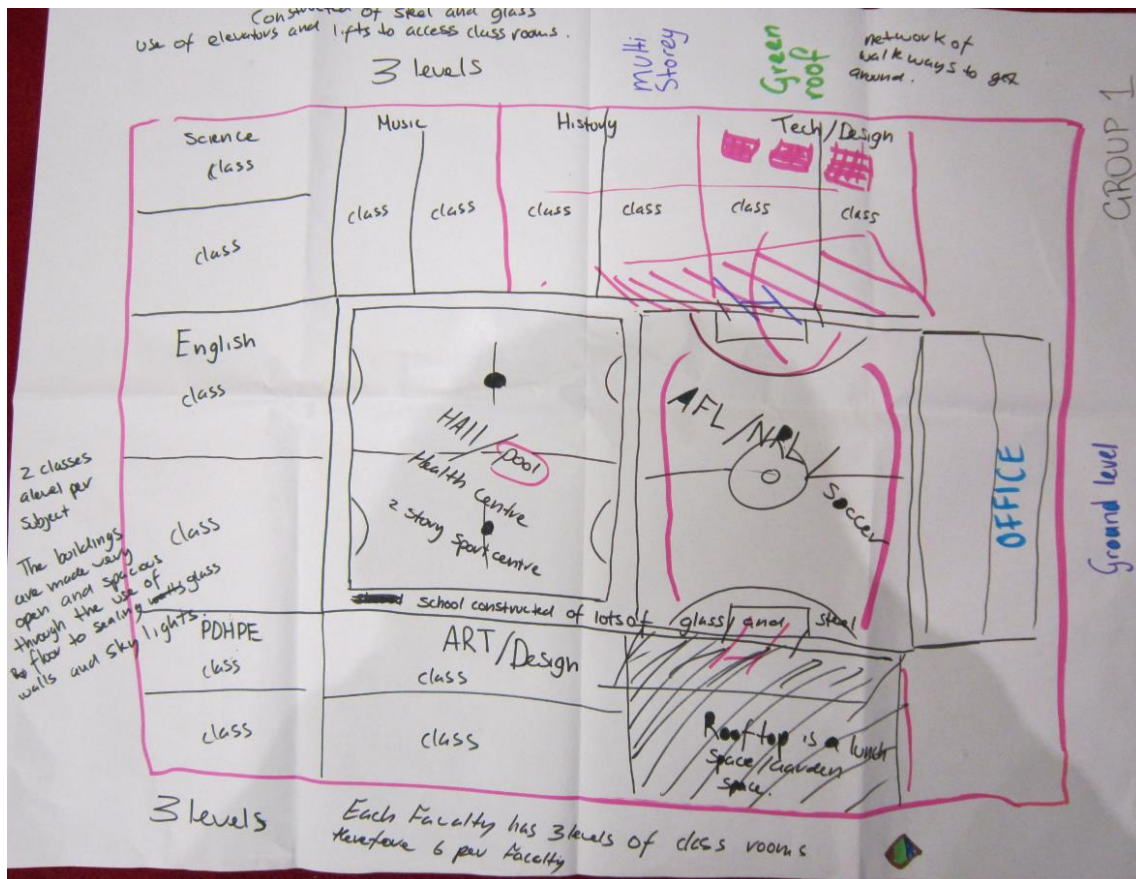
Participants were put into teams and asked to design their ideal schools. Common elements of designs included significant sports and recreation facilities, including sports fields, gyms, pools and open space as well as dedicated canteen facilities. The students generally designed classroom blocks with four storeys. Two of the designs included gardens with an educational purpose. The two designs that specified a location specified Marrickville and the inner city, respectively.

Some examples of the designs follow.



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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?

Participant comments are included verbatim below:

- 'Suitable for learning and friendly, supportive environment.'
- 'Good sports facilities – including pool – for exercise and swimming.'
- 'Good soccer field.'
- 'Lots of fun activities – extra-curricular.'

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- ‘Very good teachers.’
- ‘Diversity of subjects.’
- ‘Good support for homework.’
- ‘Art room and singing room.’
- ‘Big garden.’
- ‘It is vital to have sufficient toilet facilities.’
- ‘Open space is important at school because it makes you feel more comfortable and gives you room to run around. On wet days when we sit in the hall we feel very restricted.’
- ‘It is important to have a nearby proper assembly area for emergencies.’



Future parents focus groups

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

Capital works

Investment in school infrastructure was the most common theme. Much discussion focussed on demountables and their pros and cons. Some parents thought they were an acceptable solution, but only in the short term. Others thought they were unacceptable. There were concerns that demountables take up open space and that they are a second rate solution that might become permanent. It was suggested that refurbishing existing underutilised building space was a better short term solution.

Representative comments:

- 'Demountables are an option but to balance open space for other activities.'
- 'Ensure demountables are a short term solution only.'
- 'Do not promote second rate solutions – like installing demountables or pushing children into second rate schools.'

Administrative and policy changes

Changes to the Department's administration practices or policies were also commonly raised. Chiefly these revolved around changing the selective system to allow local students to attend. There were also suggestions to change school operating hours and to change catchment boundaries.

Representative comments:

- 'Selective schools need to allow for local kids. Selective schools have become too difficult to get into for your average child.'
- 'Perhaps boundaries should be based on place of work – that way parents can drop the children off.'
- 'Change school times and stagger start and finish times, morning and afternoon shift. This could give students options with extracurricular activities.'

Transport

Another popular set of responses to this question revolved around transport. There were numerous suggestions that students should have school provided students only buses, not mixed with the general public, that can transport children to school within 30 minutes. There were suggestions to have guards on buses during school commuting times and that being able to walk to school is the best option.

Representative comments:

- 'Allocated/dedicated school buses; don't want to drive and drop kids off, driving and congestion. Don't want students to change transport.'
- 'Safety is a key issue and not mixing with general public bus.'
- 'It is a great feeling to be close to a school where you can walk.'

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Enhance and expand educational offerings

Enhancing and expanding the educational offerings of schools was another common theme for suggestions. The parents spoke of their own concerns about sending their children to low performing schools. Some parents specified that they would send their children further away to get a better education.

Representative comments:

- ‘Travel as far as need be to for a quality education.’
- ‘Parents consider quality of school when choosing schools – so things like demountables or travelling long distances are negative solutions. Making a school more attractive in terms of education options would attract me.’
- ‘Increase educational offerings rather than making changes to grounds.’

Other comments

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

- ‘There is lots of capacity at some local schools because it isn’t very appealing to send your child there.’
- ‘I don’t want to send my child to a school that has a bad reputation. I don’t want kids growing up in a twisted reality of the world.’
- ‘Concern the Department will not think long term.’

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

Capital works

The vast majority of comments were on the theme of school assets, most of these were calling for a new school. The following sites were suggested:

- ‘We could link up primary schools and use the vacated premises for high schools.’
- ‘Domain car park.’
- ‘Partner with a Catholic school that has low numbers or lease the land from the Catholic school and use that land/building for a public school.’
- ‘Use Sydney Boys and Girls High Schools land and build a comprehensive school next door.’
- ‘National Arts Schools, Oxford Street (East Sydney Technical).’
- ‘Repurposing industrial space in Alexandria.’
- ‘We should be looking at underutilised buildings in the inner Sydney area.’
- ‘Domain and Botanical gardens are getting a new hotel, why can’t a new school be considered for that space?’
- ‘Multiple smaller schools. To reduce the distance that pupils have to travel.’
- ‘Somewhere in inner east area.’

There were also suggestions for what a new school should look like and how it could be done – a public-private partnership was suggested and there was support for vertical schools – as long as there is some open space adjacent to the school. There was also the suggestion that the Department’s assets need to be more flexible, not just teaching spaces or libraries.

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Representative Comments:

- 'A new school is not an option, we need a new school, the question should be where the school is located.'
- 'Build a new school. When deciding where to put it, the priority should be reinvigorating the Department's assets.'
- 'I'm not sure if one school will be enough.'

Administrative and policy changes

Suggestions that fell under this theme included changing the selective school system - moving a selective school to a new site (to allow a local school to operate at its existing site), also starting the selective schools later than Year 7. Selective schools were criticised for being disconnected from their local community. Other suggestions included changing catchment areas, including allowing for a second tier catchment area instead of a single boundary on each school and moving to campus type schools.

Representative Comments:

- 'Should be a focus on ensuring local schools are connected to their local community. Exclusively selective schools are disconnected from their community.'
- 'Move selective school populations to schools that are underutilised and use those spaces for local children.'
- 'Consider changing catchment boundaries so that they capture more local students. Perhaps have concentric boundaries so that students who are just outside the catchment area are given secondary preference – rather than just being lumped with everyone else in the state.'

Enhance and expand educational offerings

There were four suggestions for enhancing and expanding educational offerings. They are included below.

- 'Alexandria Park Community School, to invest in the curriculum and to change.'
- 'Streaming education.'
- 'Streaming takes opportunities away. An 'arts' or 'technology' specialised school pigeon holes a child when they should be exploring a range of subjects.'
- 'Would be nice to decrease class sizes.'

Planning

There were four suggestions around improving planning and future provisioning. They are included below.

- 'Department of Planning and Environment and the Department need to have an integrated plan.'
- 'Some areas are pushing development. They aren't taking responsibility.'
- 'When looking at new residential buildings and vacant blocks - is the balance of schools right?'
- 'Developers should provide additional classroom space dependent on additional population growth.'

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Collaboration

There were three suggestions for collaboration between educational institutions. They are included below.

- ‘Partnerships with tertiary institutions like TAFE to share their space.’
- ‘Could pupils move between different campuses for subjects – mathematics, science and English at one campus and then other subjects at another.’
- ‘Campus model – option. It keeps the size of a school smaller which is better for students.’

Promotion

There were two suggestions for promotion of schools. They are included below.

- ‘The Department should be saying the same message as private schools ... ‘whatever you want for your child, you can find it here.’ Schools should also be promoted as the message of comprehensiveness.’
- ‘The Department should be promoting the benefits of public schools. The best thing about them is diversity, you meet people from all walks of life. This is even more true of schools with partially selective streams.’

Other comments

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

- ‘Pupils spend all day in artificial light in high schools.’
- ‘Measures that we are using to solve a capacity system don’t just become measures to reduce cost.’

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?

Techniques

There were many suggestions for changing the way students are taught. Suggestions included better integration with universities and industry, improving teaching standards and attracting better candidates to the teaching profession, widening the curricula to include financial literacy and confidence and resilience building. Video conferencing and online learning were criticised.

Representative Comments:

- ‘Could a university model work? Like larger lectures and smaller tutor groups. Using devices to listen to lectures and have tutors accessible. Year 11 and 12 students could manage their own learning, the requirements for teaching space will reduce and it equips students with the skills they need.’
- ‘Teachers are the most important part of the education system and we have to make sure they are supported, challenged and held accountable. We should incentivise people who wouldn’t ordinarily consider teaching to move in to teaching.’
- ‘Anything that gives children the opportunity to be more resilient and confident.’

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Structure

There were a number of suggestions around changing the structure of the schooling system, including adopting a campus style model, possibly including splitting the schools based on year groups and combining the same year groups from different schools together to increase subject choice, extending selective streaming to all schools and having teachers serve multiple schools to increase subject choice.

Representative Comments:

- ‘Invest in campus style education and consider splitting and creating a middle school that meets the needs of different age groups. Gives greater flexibility to starting hours and linking in with partners with TAFE and other organisations.’
- ‘Like the idea of going to a few different schools. It makes children more sociable. Throwing some children out of their comfort zone is great.’
- ‘Extend curriculum diversity by having roaming teachers for subjects – e.g. highest level mathematics, languages. Teaching could be conducted by a mixture of classroom interaction and video conferencing.’

Capital works

There were three suggestions surrounding school assets. They are included below.

- ‘Want a city of Sydney school that meets the needs of a city experience and to use the resources of the city such as the Art Gallery and Museum.’
- ‘School design should be innovative. Vertical schools are viable, so long as there is space for sports fields and active play very close by.’
- ‘Do not sell any education assets. All of them will be needed.’

Funding

There were two suggestions on school funding – both about increasing investment in teachers. They are included below.

- ‘Need to invest in quality teachers (performance review for parents to give feedback every year on the teacher and Principal).’
- ‘Teachers should be rewarded for good performance with pay incentives etc. MySchool only drives anxieties about the NAPLAN exams and does not encourage stellar teaching.’

Collaboration

There were two suggestions on collaboration between educational institutions. They are included below.

- ‘Creating connections and partnership between schools and universities.’
- ‘To consider connecting and partnering with TAFE and universities in the city.’



Question 4 What are the important factors when deciding what school to send your children to?

Additional time was spent at the parent focus groups exploring the factors that influence school choice. The main factors identified were:

- Student body reputation.
- Academic reputation.
- Distance and transport.
- Buildings and grounds.

Student body reputation

The composition and reputation of the student body was the most popular theme for factors affecting parent's school choice. Parents expressed a desire to send their children to a school with a diversity of students but not one where there are behavioural issues – drugs were nominated as one concern. Uniform and presentation of students outside of their schools make an impact. Word of mouth from other parents was nominated as an important source for information on student body reputations.

Representative Comments:

- 'My ideal school is a great comprehensive with diverse cohort.'
- 'Students and teachers make reputations. Rough schools can be survived if there is support from the management.'
- 'Student population – who the friends will be? Socioeconomic factors – are there likely to be drugs?'

Academic reputation

The next most popular theme for factors affecting parent's school choice was the academic reputation of the school. The schools results in the Higher School Certificate and those reflected on the My School website were nominated as important sources. Curriculum selection was also nominated as important.

Representative Comments:

- 'Results – via the My School website.'
- 'Higher School Certificate results.'
- 'Reputation. Few participants had heard of certain schools in the inner Sydney area. Not having heard of them is a red flag – assumption they want to keep a low profile because they have things to hide.'
- 'Discouraging teaching to the NAPLAN.'

Distance and transport

The distance to a school and how easy it is for students to access it is another important factor for parents in school choice. Parents nominated 45 minutes as an upper limit on travel times, as well as the distance to school, and the amenity of going to school within the community where you live. It was suggested that the relative ease and connectedness of a journey was more important than the distance or travel time.

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Representative Comments:

- ‘Travel times – 45 minutes maximum. It is essential that no transfer is needed. Good educational offerings make longer travel times seem worthwhile.’
- ‘Direct transport options.’
- ‘Distance to school.’

Buildings and grounds

There were two responses that buildings and grounds influenced parent’s school choices. They are included below.

- ‘Good grounds and facilities – spaces that are pleasant to be in and provide a campus feel. Vertical schools without readily accessible green spaces are unattractive for that reason.’
- ‘Natural light and open space.’

Other comments

There were three other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above. These are provided below.

- ‘Don’t feel there are options to compare. We have been told one option.’
- ‘Size – 1200 students seems huge.’
- ‘Educational offerings and school culture trump all. Selective streams make schools attractive.’



Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) parents focus groups

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

Administrative and policy changes

Changes to the Department's administration practices or policies was a very popular theme for this question. There were many comments against the selective school system as it currently stands with calls to make all schools partially selective, locally selective or to abolish the selective system altogether. There were calls to enforce catchment boundaries, but introduce a two-tier, concentric boundary system and to allow siblings to attend the same school without regard to boundaries, even at selective schools. There were some calls to homogenise the system and think more strategically across the school network rather than at an individual school level, to restrict or remove choices and create a fairer more standard system. There was a suggestion for a split school day as is currently implemented in Greece, and for classes to rotate through different rooms.

Representative comments:

- 'Selective high schools should favour local students. Selective high schools should be zoned as well, so still selective but the competition is only with other local students – not every student in Sydney.'
- 'Change catchment boundaries to force stubborn people to attend their local school.'
- 'High school should be less about parent choice, the system should support the children so that they can make the transition to high school with friends. There should be less diversity so parents get less hung up on choosing an 'academic' school or a 'Christian' school.'

Capital works

Investment in school infrastructure was another common theme. Participants were specifically asked their opinions of demountables, which garnered the majority of comments. The consensus amongst participants was that demountables were not a good solution, and should only be used if absolutely necessary and on a temporary basis (there were some concerns that demountables often become permanent). However, one participant didn't think demountables mattered that much. Participants were not against refurbishment but were wary of losing the existing special uses for non-teaching spaces. There was one comment that additional facilities make schools more attractive for parents and that a local public secondary school had insufficient facilities – specifically laboratories, classrooms and an insufficient library.

Representative comments:

- 'Demountables only in schools that can afford to give up the space.'
- 'Use demountables for storage space and revitalise the spaces currently used for storage within main buildings.'
- 'Refurbishment - yes, but not at the expense of art-rooms, special use rooms – don't remove space that is integral to the school to make a generic teaching space.'

Enhance and expand educational offerings

Enhancing and expanding the educational offerings of schools was another common theme for suggestions. These chiefly revolved around the use of virtual classrooms – it was felt that these

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represented an opportunity to use resources more effectively but that they were also a challenge in keeping students engaged and in monitoring their participation and performance. There were also comments that streaming worked well for some children whilst others need a quality comprehensive education.

Representative comments:

- ‘Older children don’t need to be in classrooms to learn – they could access lessons via technology while sitting at local libraries (or in other government space/in educational facilities) – using the laptops they have from the government.’
- ‘Monitoring student development and progress [for virtual classrooms] would be an issue.’
- ‘Streaming - really important for my older child – it fitted his interests, and it was also in our local school. For my other son, a really solid comprehensive education is important.’

Transport

There were a number of suggestions surrounding transport in response to this question. Parents preferred for their children to be able to walk to a local school or to catch a single form of public transport, preferably a bus, and with a travel time of no more than 30 minutes. Dedicated buses and even bus stops for school students only were strongly preferred on safety grounds. It was suggested that the lack of local schools in the inner Sydney area meant that changes to catchments wouldn’t make a difference. There was also a suggestion there is a large enough student body, an active P&C can influence government to get the transport options into place.

- ‘Students should take no longer than half an hour to get to school.’
- ‘The Department should have a policy that says children should only be able to travel so far – it’s ridiculous that kids are travelling over an hour to go to school, even to go to selective schools.’
- ‘Dedicated school bus stops as well as buses.’

Influencing parent choice

There were some comments on influencing parent choice of schools. Participants suggested that reputation was important, along with the composition of the student body (diversity/non-selective preferred) as well as co-educational schools and after school care being important. Parents were also asked about what influences a school’s reputation. These responses are summarised below.

Components of a school’s reputation:

- Discipline.
- Academic results.
- Educational offerings and resources.
- Streaming.

How a reputation is formed:

- Word of mouth.
- Public relations.
- Whether a school is seen to be trying to improve.
- NAPLAN ranking.
- Links between high schools and local primaries.

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Representative comments:

- 'I want a well-rounded education for my child – not selective, because she will be surrounded by people who are all the same.'
- 'Reputation of schools is preventing people from going to that school – Department should work with schools to improve their image and reputation.'
- 'When choosing the school, I don't just consider the education my children will be getting.'

Other comments

There were two other comments that didn't fit into one of the themes above. These are provided below.

- 'I want to see a strategic plan or where schools are going.'
- 'I like the partnering idea – feeding into universities if they were on site.'

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

Capital works

The most popular response was around school infrastructure – building a new school and what it might look like as well as some significant support for other options like building more teaching space on existing school sites. Participants were asked specifically where a new school might go. Suggested sites included:

- 'Somewhere closer to the east of the city.'
- 'Should be around here (centre of city).'
- 'Alexandria Park is not in this area, I don't travel that way – I wouldn't want my daughter travelling that way.'
- 'Consider vertical schools to keep it around city centre.'
- 'Old government block in Waterloo – next to Potters Paints. Looks large enough for a vertical school.'
- 'Pitt Street, Redfern – old South Sydney hospital.'
- 'Old Rosebery hospital – right in the middle of the growth area.'
- 'Use space near Moore Park.'
- 'Use older buildings – warehouses.'
- 'Warehouses are a very expensive option.'
- 'St Peters factory space – Sydney Park possibly.'
- 'Needs to be near a train station – needs to have good transport links.'
- 'Maybe near Ultimo-Pyrmont.'
- 'Wentworth Park.'

Some groups were also asked how high a vertical school should be:

- 'One grade per floor.'
- '6 storeys is acceptable.'
- '4/5 would be enough.'
- 'A very good option – but not 20 storeys.'

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- ‘There is only one decision – to construct a new school.’
- ‘Need to make sure that the site has existing transport infrastructure.’
- ‘Add extensions to existing schools rather than building new schools – they need critical mass so they can actually run the selective streams that will attract the students, and increases the offerings that the schools are able to offer their students.’

Enhance and expand educational offerings

There were some comments on the way education is delivered – the NSW system was contrasted with China, where there are larger classes (50-70 students) and students are expected to take more responsibility for their learning – students who aren’t performing seek tutoring outside of school. It was felt that this model wouldn’t work in the Australian culture.

Administrative and policy changes

There were three suggestions on the theme of administrative and policy changes. They are included below.

- ‘Selective schools have problems interacting with the community because students have come from everywhere and their parents don’t live nearby.’
- ‘Selective schools lack diversity of students and of views (especially about education).’
- ‘School is about community spirit, that’s hard to get with non-local students.’

Other comments

There were four other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above. These are provided below.

- ‘Why doesn’t the Department work to attract international students? They are a good source of funds for the Department of Education. Those funds can be used to refurbish schools.’
- ‘People living in Surry Hills like the diversity here.’
- ‘Having to pay for tertiary education will attract more people to the public school.’
- ‘Building schools closer to the universities enables the school to forge links with the universities – like Bourke Street Public School does with Sydney Boys and Girls High Schools, simply because they are located nearby to each other.’

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?

Techniques

The vast majority of responses were around classroom activities and the curriculum. There were comments that the curriculum needs to broaden to include a range of life skills and to equip students with the ability to cope with the adult world. This included equipping students with psychological and financial management skills, increasing work experience and links with industry, community work, more vocational training, and more flexibility for students to change their mind about specialisations. There were comments that school wasn’t preparing students for the internet age and that schools need to improve discipline and respect. There were also calls to improve the quality of teaching and to increase the effective teaching of languages.

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Representative comments:

- ‘Present options for post-school that aren’t all focussed on getting on to tertiary – that give students training for a vocational career or an academic one. Whatever they want. Pathways to apprenticeships and internships.’
- ‘There should be more teaching of life skills - dealing with difficulty, managing money, doing job interviews, and looking after yourself when you live out of home.’
- ‘Public schools have a reputation – some – of a lack of discipline, it needs to be standardised. It seems to me like some public schools promote school as optional, that uniform is not a big deal etc. They need to be prepared for the workforce, and be disciplined enough to meet an employer’s expectation.’
- ‘Languages essential for future work which is coming more global – monolingual mindset keeping us in the dark ages – as a subject they are so undervalued.’

Structure

There were some suggestions around changing the way schools are structured and run. Some suggestions were around improving teaching – it was suggested that teachers should receive merit based pay, that schools should have autonomy in hiring and firing teachers, that teachers should be better paid in general and that teachers should be able to receive on the job training. There were some concerns around schools getting bigger and that teaching quality and student engagement could fall as a result. There was a suggestion that schools should be more engaged with their communities and a suggestion for government funded international scholarships for senior students.

Representative comments:

- ‘Schools should have autonomy with who teaches at the school.’
- ‘Teaching needs more money so that skilled people are attracted to the profession – pay scales should be based on the teacher’s qualifications.’
- ‘Schools getting bigger – fear of students getting lost in institutions – community connections help people feel like they still belong.’



Randomly selected community members focus groups

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

Administrative and policy changes

Changes to the Department's administration practices or policies was the most popular theme for responses to this question. Chiefly these revolved around making the system 'fairer' in various ways. This included removing the selective system or forcing selective schools to take local students, moving or incentivising the movement of good teachers to schools with low enrolments and removing autonomous decision making from schools because this creates inequalities.

Representative comments:

- 'Create an even playing field to sort the numbers.'
- 'No more selective schools. All schools need to become the same. A level playing field.'
- 'Devolution has been the process government is supporting – this means schools make their own decisions. That is forcing schools to compete with each other. In that devolution it creates inequality.'

Influencing parent choice

Influencing parent choice was a very popular theme for this question. Participants suggested that the Department make more of an effort to promote schools and give them a good 'brand'. It was suggested that the Department is 'hands off' in spelling out school performance and this allows gossip and rumour to dominate how a school is perceived. Concerns raised included safety, academic performance, class sizes, travel times and discipline. Other factors that were raised included the quality of the Principal and teacher quality. One participant suggested that people have already lost faith in the public system.

Representative comments:

- 'The reason schools fail is because the Department gives no explanation of the different schools. People have to rely on word of mouth and entrenched reputations. The Department needs to consider how they can brand schools.'
- 'I tutor primary school children. They have concern that class sizes are too big at public schools and that children have to travel too far to get to some of them.'
- 'The gossip at the school gate influences school choice.'

Transport

There were a number of suggestions surrounding transport in response to this question. There were some suggestions that secondary students are mature enough to travel long distances and that kids used to travel much further for school. 45 minutes was suggested as the maximum travel time. It was additionally suggested that the number of connections in a journey is the main concern over and above total time.

Representative comments:

- 'Kids used to travel much further.'
- 'It is acceptable to travel no more than 45 minutes.'
- 'Transport connections are more important than distance.'

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Capital works

Investment in school infrastructure was another common theme. There was a consensus that demountables are a poor solution, and suspicion that once built there demountables would stay for years. There was concern that demountables consume playground space. One participant felt that it was inappropriate to use demountables whilst there is sufficient teaching space which isn't being utilised.

Representative comments:

- 'Demountables might reduce the amount of open space – they often get put on playground space or car parks.'
- 'Demountables just stay there. It isn't a very good short term solution.'
- 'Something needs to be done. You shouldn't put demountables on some areas if you have plenty of teaching spaces elsewhere. It doesn't make sense. It would be silly not to utilise what is there.'

Enhance and expand educational offerings

Enhancing and expanding the educational offerings of schools was another common theme for suggestions. These included specialising and streaming and improving the quality of state education in general and teacher quality in particular.

Representative comments:

- 'Something needs to happen across the board – one school can't have specialisation and others not. Perhaps every school should offer a streamed option. It is what a lot of us grew up with.'
- 'Streaming is one way to make it look more attractive but people will only travel a certain distance.'
- 'Teacher quality is very important. Quality teachers want to teach at the good schools.'

Other comments

There were two other comments that didn't fit into one of the themes above – these are provided below.

- 'Schools are always going to be on the other side of time.'
- 'People in independent schools are better than other schools.'

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

Capital works

The overwhelming response to this question was around school infrastructure – specifically, building a new school. Suggested sites included:

- Marrickville High School site.
- Cleveland Street Intensive English High School.
- Link new school with the redevelopment of Central Station.
- Bridge Street.
- Alexandria and Zetland would be a good location.

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- You don't need to build it in older established suburbs. Build a school in the up and coming growth areas. They will have access to good transport.
- Build a school on the train line.
- Bondi Junction.
- Anzac Parade.
- Existing sites already owned by the Department.
- Barangaroo.
- Italian Forum in Leichhardt.
- Somewhere central.

In addition to potential sites or areas where a new school might go, there were suggestions that the school should have open space, that a vertical school is acceptable and that it needs to be near transport.

Representative Comments:

- 'Need a new school.'
- 'Vertical high school ok – as long as there are facilities around the high school that can help with the lack of space. At the school I went to we had to get buses to use other facilities.'
- 'The school should be located where the demand is – i.e. in line with population boundaries for each LGA.'

Collaboration

Collaboration between educational institutions was another theme for responses to this question. There were suggestions to link primary and secondary schools, have schools co-share facilities with TAFE on a day/night basis and create stronger links between secondary schools and universities.

Representative Comments:

- 'Connecting primary schools and high schools is important. It is nice to have the same people.'
- 'Co-share buildings – use the TAFE as a school in the day and a TAFE at night.'
- 'Connections with universities would bring the profile of the school up! It also prepares students for their life ahead. You could get students started with certain courses.'

Administrative and policy changes

There were three suggestions that fell under this theme. They are included below.

- 'I think it is wrong that local kids cannot go to selective schools.'
- 'Change policy so that children from out of area cannot go to the school. The out-of-towners might have a problem with that but they are stopping our local children, going to local schools and building a local community.'
- 'With the catchment area you could take from inner east and west.'

Other comments

There were eight other comments that didn't fit into one of the themes above and are provided below.

- 'Assimilation – mixing cultures is a good thing.'
- 'Try and learn about what has been going wrong in school.'
- 'Rebranding schools – change the names. Group schools. Give them new Indigenous names.'

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- ‘Change will happen.’
- ‘It is selfish if people want to live in the inner Sydney and assume their kids will be able to go to school there.’
- ‘It is difficult to get apartment blocks built in some of the inner Sydney areas.’
- ‘Education could cooperate more with the Department of Transport to organise better transport. Parents could pay to have kids in a mini-bus?’
- ‘Selective schools have good teachers.’

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?

Techniques

Changing the way students are taught was the most popular response to this question. There were conflicting suggestions on vocational education (for and against increasing the focus on future work skills). There were suggestions that the school system doesn’t prepare students for university or for other options after school and that the curriculum should be broader. There was a call for better teachers.

Representative comments:

- ‘The gap from high school to university is huge.’
- ‘A career focussed and integrated education system with options for all.’
- ‘Children are expected to know what subjects to do by Year 8. Need to teach kids that there is a variety of possible options.’

Structure

Another popular response theme was around changing the way the education system is structured. There were suggestions that the system is not currently good enough to attract good teachers, that some schools should be specialised, and that apprenticeships should be integrated back into the school system.

Representative comments:

- ‘Create a system that is respected. Teachers need to be inspired to inspire teachers.’
- ‘Have some specialised schools.’
- ‘There is an expectation that kids stay on through to Higher School Certificate – it does not cater for everyone. That is something that needs to be looked at.’

Other comments

There were three other comments that didn’t fit into one of the themes above. These are provided below.

- ‘TAFE has been destroyed.’
- ‘Younger generation feel more pressure. There is a lot more competition and pressure for people now. People will be less inclined to go into the public system.’
- ‘TAFE should send information to schools and speak to secondary school children.’

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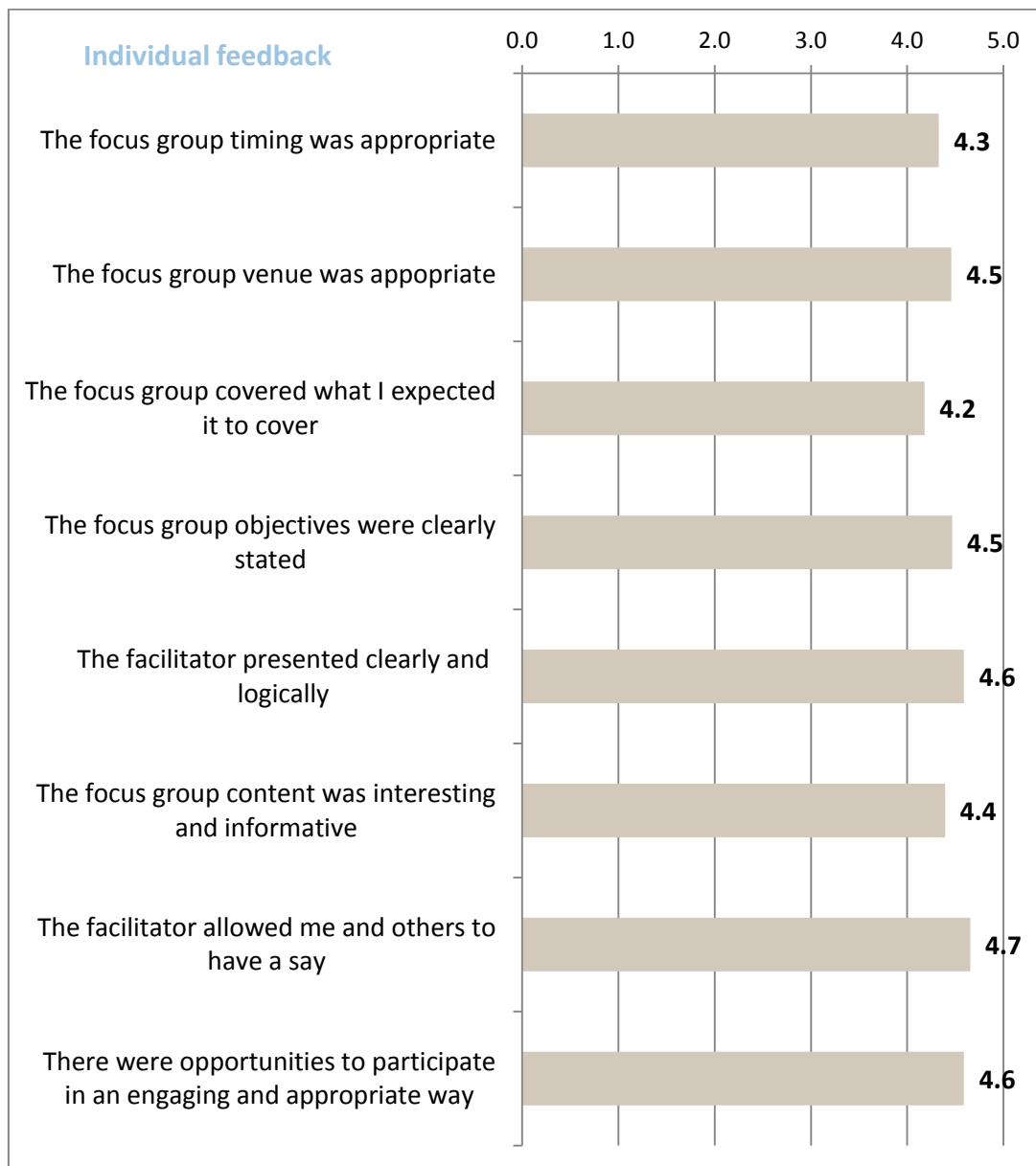
Individual feedback

Feedback form analysis

At the end of the parent and community focus groups individual feedback was obtained using a feedback form to explore participant satisfaction with the focus groups including suggestions about how the session might be improved. All of the 60 participants in these groups provided feedback at the end of the focus group session:

- 17 participants in the future parent focus groups.
- 20 participants in the randomly selected community focus groups.
- 23 participants in the CALD parent focus groups.

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 focus groups but were particularly impressed by the opportunities they were afforded 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 4.2 – 4.7, with the majority of scores being 4.5 and above.

Improvements

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

- 'Perhaps summarising strong/agreed points raised may provide more clarity over understanding the relevant issues to arrive at collective outcomes.'
- 'I thought the focus group functioned well with a diverse group of people.'
- 'If the participants can know what to discuss before coming the discussion would be better.'
- 'No, I think it was appropriate for the discussion.'
- 'Continued focus groups with community members and parents / potential parents – their opinions are crucial as it is going to affect them directly.'
- 'All conducted in a very positive way.'
- 'Provide online website or forum or meet-up to discuss issues at any time.'
- 'Really it was very well done and all of the group seemed free to talk. I was happy with it.'
- 'Maybe could have been a little longer.'
- 'Put forward a few more concrete options.'
- 'No, all good.'
- 'Could send out information prior so have a chance to consider material.'
- 'Would be good to see how feedback is recorded to ensure there are no misunderstandings.'
- 'I think some issues should be addressed in more detail, in particular, the issue of resources.'
- 'Would have liked to have had more in-depth, factual information about the high schools that are relevant to us.'
- 'Monitor focus groups more frequently.'
- 'Maybe have visual aids for the groups displayed computers.'
- 'More people would have been nice.'

When asked if they had any additional comments about the project, participants mentioned the following:

- 'It is difficult to remain on course with the topic when people diverge with their own personal agenda – otherwise interesting.'
- 'I hope that in future people outside of the working party will be able to input further ideas so that ideas continue to grow.'
- 'Will be interesting to see how the Department responds to the information that is gathered in these sessions!'
- 'Was very informative.'
- 'Very interesting and needed also in eastern suburbs.'
- 'Let's keep it going. Often these discussions happen and no action is achieved.'
- 'Not yet.'



- ‘Don’t let sectional interests have too much say – I don’t know whether this project has the problem, but I always get concerned at how things get skewed.’
- ‘Very important, very valuable, very informative.’
- ‘Good, positive, inclusive discussion.’
- ‘In regards to the timing of the focus groups, I think it’s a shame that the situation (overcrowding of high schools, schools at full capacity etc.) got this far before these discussions were initiated!’
- ‘Thank you for opportunity to provide feedback.’
- ‘It is great to see the conversation about this topic being started.’
- ‘I hope they listen to what we say!’
- It would be good to have updated information and follow up focus groups held after a certain time period so that consultation doesn’t stop here.’
- ‘Very interested in the outcome as I feel quite passionate about education in a broad and holistic sense.’
- ‘I would like to hear about the space available for special needs children – as there is only one other inner city special needs school for K-6 students.’
- ‘1) Build new school and 2) increase number of the students in one class.’

