This discussion paper is the result of on-going interest in the future of public education provision in Tamworth city and its environs. It reflects concerns expressed by the community regarding school enrolment imbalances within the city and surrounding areas. Principals from the four secondary schools in Tamworth as well as representatives from the local Primary Principals' Association have participated in the consultation for this paper. Information is also drawn from a Demographic Study “The Tamworth Solution” prepared in 2004 by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training Assets Management Unit and from “Population Change in the New England North West Region, Discussion Paper, January 2005” prepared by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources.

Possibilities

This discussion paper seeks to stimulate discussion and planning for public education in the Tamworth area to ensure a dynamic, world-class and comprehensive provision of educational opportunities. It incorporates consideration of local primary public schools (PS), central schools (CS), high schools (HS) and schools for specific purposes (SSP).

Demographic context

From the early 1990s, the total population of the Tamworth urban area has remained comparatively stable at around 35 500 people. In the decade between the 1991 and 2001 censuses, the characteristics of the population exhibited the ageing trend that is a feature of the Australian population in general.

The 2001 Census identified that there are now more people aged over 55 years (8,325) than there are aged under 15 years (8,030 children). The age profile of the population at the 2001 Census illustrates:
• the declining number of people in the younger age groups
• the outmigration of school leavers in their late teens
• the ‘bulge’ of 40-55 year old baby boomers
• the sustained numbers and longevity of people aged over 60 (177 aged in their 90s and 5 persons aged over 100 years old).

At the 1991 Census there were 12,054 occupied private dwellings in the former Tamworth Local Government Area (LGA) indicating an occupancy ratio of 2.76 persons per dwelling. By 2001, additional new housing increased the number of private dwellings to 13,375, however the occupancy ratio had decreased to 2.51 persons per occupied dwelling. Despite an increase of over 1,300 dwellings, there was a population increase of only 287 persons over the last decade (the total increase was in the female population).

**Tamworth’s future growth**

Future economic growth or new residential development will not necessarily be reflected in significant population growth. Even if new housing generates an average of three persons per household, this number will be counterbalanced by continuing population declines in more established, older areas of the city to depress the overall total population increase.

The Transport and Population Data Centre of Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) recently published longer term population projections for each major region within NSW. Some of the major findings were:

• coastal NSW is anticipated to grow at a fast rate through migration of retirees
• Sydney's population will also increase
• the Northern Statistical Division which includes Tamworth (like the rest of inland NSW) is likely to experience only negligible growth but significant changes in age distribution: the population aged under 15 years is expected to decline by 23% and further ageing is likely to result in a quarter of the total population being aged over 65 years by 2031
• the population trends for Tamworth are atypical for the region with a projected growth of 5%.

**School enrolment trends**

There has been a decline in the number of school aged children in the Tamworth area. This is consistent with the static but ageing total population in Tamworth city.

Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data from 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001 indicate that the total number of children enrolled in primary schools had been
increasing between 1986 and 1996. Over the next five year period, enrolments declined so that totals were as low in 2001 as they had been in 1986. (Table 1)

Total secondary school enrolments declined markedly between 1986 and 1991 and were relatively stable over the next ten years. (Table 2)

(Source - Demographic Study, The Tamworth Solution)
Table 1
The enrolment pattern has not been consistent across the schools so that in terms of particular schools, enrolment trends could be summarised into the following categories:

1. **In decline**
   - Tamworth Public School
   - Tamworth West Public School
   - Hillvue Public School
   - Tamworth High School
   - Peel High School

2. **Steady**
   - Oxley Vale Public School
   - Timbumburi Public School
   - Tamworth South Public School
   - Oxley High School

3. **Increasing**
   - Westdale Public School
   - Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School

In the larger Tamworth area there are also a large number of very small schools which are also in decline. Only Tintinhull PS has shown growth after a period of decline.

In total primary and total secondary enrolments, there has been a consistent increase in both the number and proportion of students attending non-government schools. The non-government sector is enrolling an increasing number and an increasing proportion of students from a diminishing total pool of students.

The pattern of growth and decline in the public schools does not necessarily match the areas of population and housing growth and decline in the city. Some of this unevenness can be explained by public perceptions of various schools.

**Patterns of Enrolment**
For increasing numbers of people education is assuming the status of a commodity - reflecting choice, values, lifestyle and aspirations.

As well as the choice between government and non-government schooling there are also choices within the government system because of the surplus capacity and proximity of many schools. A detailed location analysis of government primary school students’ residential addresses and choice of school destinations was undertaken in 2003. Contrary to what would normally be anticipated, where local school catchment boundaries are in place, the outcome of the analysis of these existing trends indicated that there is no apparent pattern to which school a child attends.

Of the 2,772 government primary school students in the study, only 1,429 students (51.6%) attended their designated local public school. Even at suburban street level, it was not uncommon to have children who were residing in the same street who were dispersing to three, four or even five different school destinations. (Table 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location Analysis of Tamworth LGA Government primary school students by residential address and school destination 2003</th>
<th>Go to school at:</th>
<th>Hillvue PS</th>
<th>Oxley Vale PS</th>
<th>Tamworth PS</th>
<th>Tamworth South PS</th>
<th>Tamworth West PS</th>
<th>Timbumburi PS</th>
<th>Westdale PS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live in:</td>
<td></td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Vale PS</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>South PS</td>
<td>West PS</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillvue PS</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>642</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxley Vale PS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>415</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamworth PS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>439</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Tamworth West PS</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>189</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timbumburi PS</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>97</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westdale PS</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
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<td>TOTAL T4 '03 enrol</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>2772</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source - Demographic Study, The Tamworth Solution)
Table 3

In general, students from within Tamworth Public School’s drawing area attended their designated local school (78%) and students living in Timbumburi Public School drawing area attended their local school (69%). By contrast 34% of students resident in Hillvue Public School drawing area attended Hillvue Public School as local enrolments and 30% of the 189 students within the Tamworth West Public School drawing area attend Tamworth West Public School.

Eighty-five percent of the total Year 6 enrolments in the seven Tamworth primary schools progress in the government system to any of the four Tamworth high schools.
Government School Sites and Facilities Provision

There are seven primary schools, four secondary schools and two schools for specific purposes that cater for the former Tamworth City area. In addition the Department of Education and Training (DET) owns three vacant school sites in Calala and South Tamworth. There are two central schools at Barraba and Manilla catering for students from Kindergarten to Year 12, and 13 smaller primary schools surrounding Tamworth city that cater for between 9 students (Limbri Public School) and 207 students (Kootingal Public School).

One of the reasons that school students have such flexibility in the selection of a school to attend is that there is surplus permanent accommodation capacity across the city for both the level of the current student enrolments and for the anticipated future level of student enrolments.

Currently there is a greater supply of permanent teaching spaces in Tamworth public schools than there is demand for teaching spaces. Based on current utilisation rates and the DET’s accommodation formulae, there is permanent secondary accommodation for around 3,500 high school students. It is projected that in the order of 600 spare secondary student spaces will be available (equating to 33 surplus classrooms or 17% of the current permanent capacity).

However, it should be noted that because of the age of the buildings, many of these spare teaching spaces may require expensive upgrading in the near future in order to suit modern teaching requirements.
Possible scenarios for the future delivery of Public Education in Tamworth

The following scenarios have been prepared to guide the community consultation process. It should not be assumed that any one of these is a preferred position. Indeed the consultation process may suggest alternatives or even that the status quo remain.

Scenario 1
K-12 + SSP Collegiate Model

- Construction of a new Kindergarten-Year 12 campus at the Goonoo Goonoo site incorporating School for Special Purposes (SSP) facilities for Bullimbal SSP.
- This scenario would necessitate the sale of the current Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School sites.

Comments
- the collegiate could be established in stages eg, the building of the Bullimbal SSP facility at the Goonoo Goonoo site could be the first stage immediately alleviating the leasing situation
- the sale of the Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School sites would support the building of the new facilities at the Goonoo Goonoo site
- there is a possibility of including a pre-school facility
- other government and non-government agencies could be approached to have a presence at this site to establish a Community Learning Facility.
- There exists a sense of urgency to improve the facilities currently provided at Bullimbal SSP.
- All girls in Year 7-12 would continue to enjoy a choice of three public schools, with boys (with the addition of Farrer Memorial Agricultural HS) would enjoy a choice of four public schools.
**Scenario 2**

K-10 (or K-9) Collegiate + Senior Secondary + SSP Model

- Construction of a new Kindergarten-Year 10 campus at the Goonoo Goonoo site incorporating SSP facilities for Bullimbal SSP.
- Peel High School site becomes a Years 11-12 or 10-12 campus with a tertiary presence through a partnership with both the University of New England and New England TAFE pending consultation with these two institutions.
- Sale of the Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School sites.

**Comments.**

- the collegiate could be established in stages eg, the building of the Bullimbal SSP facility at the Goonoo Goonoo site could be the first stage immediately alleviating the leasing situation
- the sale of the Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School sites would support the building of the new facilities at the Goonoo Goonoo site.
- A senior school (adult learning environment) at Peel would provide boys with a choice of three high quality public schools for later years instruction with the reorganised Peel, Oxley High School and Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School continuing to provide Years 7-12. Girls would enjoy a choice of two public schools for later years instruction.
- both a university and TAFE presence would enhance learning opportunities for senior students at the current Peel site.
- All students in Years 7-9 (or 10) would continue to enjoy a choice of two public schools, i.e. Oxley High School and the new Goonoo Goonoo school, while boys (with the addition of Farrer Memorial Agricultural HS) would enjoy a choice of three.
Scenario 3
K-10 (or K-9) + Senior Secondary Model

- Construction of a new K-10 (or K-9) campus at the Goonoo Goonoo site.
- Peel High School site becomes a Years 11-12 or 10-12 campus with a tertiary presence through a partnership with both the University of New England and New England TAFE pending consultation with these two institutions.
- Incorporating Bullimbal SSP into the Westdale Public School site in Gunnedah Road or adjacent to the Oxley High School Site with a newly-built facility.
- Sale of the Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School sites.

Comments

- the construction of a new facility for Bullimbal SSP at the Westdale Primary School site or adjacent to Oxley High School would be the first stage immediately alleviating the leasing situation.
- the sale of the Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School sites would support the building of the new facilities at the Goonoo Goonoo site.
- a university and TAFE presence enhances learning opportunities for senior students.
- All students in Years 7-9 (or 10) would continue to enjoy a choice of two public schools, i.e. Oxley High School and the new Goonoo Goonoo school, while boys (with the addition of Farrer Memorial Agricultural HS) would enjoy a choice of three.
- A senior school (adult learning environment) at Peel would provide boys with a choice of three high quality public schools for later years instruction with the reorganised Peel, Oxley High School and Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School continuing to provide Years 7-12. Girls would enjoy a choice of two public schools for later years instruction.
**Scenario 4**

7-10 (or 7-9) + Senior Secondary Model

- Current Tamworth West students relocated to Tamworth Public School, Hillvue Public School or Westdale Public School where adequate space exists.
- Refurbishment of the current Tamworth High School site to accommodate a 7-10 (or 7-9) secondary school.
- Peel High School site becomes a Years 11-12 (or 10-12) campus with a tertiary presence through a partnership with the both the University of New England and New England TAFE pending consultation with these two institutions.
- Rebuilding of Bullimbal SSP at the Westdale Public School site in Gunnedah Rd or adjacent to Oxley High School
- Sale of the Tamworth West Public School site as well as extra land adjacent to Tamworth High School.
- Sale of the Goonoo Goonoo site.

**Comments**

- The number of students currently at Tamworth West is quite small as is the number of students for whom Tamworth West is their closest school.
- Tamworth High School is in urgent need of refurbishment.
- All students in Years 7 - 9 (or 10) would continue to enjoy a choice of two public schools, i.e. Oxley High School and the refurbished Tamworth High School, while boys (with the addition of Farrer Memorial Agricultural HS) would enjoy a choice of three.
- A senior school (adult learning environment) at Peel would provide boys with a choice of three high quality public schools for later years instruction with the reorganised Peel, Oxley High School and Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School continuing to provide Years 7-12. Girls would enjoy a choice of two public schools for later years instruction.
- A university and TAFE presence enhances learning opportunities for senior students.
**Scenario 5**  
**Upgrade and/or rebuild existing facilities**
- Incorporate Bullimbal SSP into the Westdale Public School site in Gunnedah Road or adjacent to the Oxley High School Site with a new purpose-built facility.
- Renovate or completely rebuild Tamworth West Public School on the existing site.
- Upgrade Tamworth High School.
- Sale of the Goonoo Goonoo site.

**Comments**
- This proposal minimises school closures and/or relocations
- the construction of a new facility for Bullimbal SSP at the Westdale Primary School site or adjacent to Oxley High School would be the first stage immediately alleviating the leasing situation.
- Renovating or rebuilding Tamworth West Public School and upgrading Tamworth High School on their existing sites provides an improved learning environment whilst retaining the schools’ identities.

**Concluding Remarks**

The educational scene in and around the city of Tamworth has changed dramatically over the past few years and will continue to do so.

The current configuration of the public school facilities in the Tamworth area may not necessarily continue to serve the community in the best possible manner.

This paper acknowledges the need to do things differently in order to best meet the educational needs of Tamworth students over the next 15 years.

It is an opportunity for community discussions and deliberations that will guide the development of a world class public education provision.
References:

Demographic Study, The Tamworth Solution – NSW Department of Education and Training Assets Management Unit 2004

Population Change in the New England North West Region Discussion Paper, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, January 2005

Excellence and Innovation, A consultation with the community of NSW on public education and training, 2004