



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure](#))

Members:

MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)

MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)

MR P CAIN

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 13 JULY 2021

Acting secretary to the committee:

Dr C Regan (Ph: 620 50142)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 1.32 pm.

KARLSSON, MS TIFFANY, Board Chair, Lyneham Primary School Board

TILLEY, MS TINA, President, Mount Stromlo High School Parents and Citizens Association

SEXTON, MS JENNIFER, University of Canberra High School Kaleen School Parents and Citizens Association

WILD-RIVER, MS SU, University of Canberra High School Kaleen School Parents and Citizens Association

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the sixth public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure. Before we go further, the committee acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee acknowledges and respects their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We also acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

During the proceedings today we will hear evidence from the following organisations: Lyneham Primary School Board, Mount Stromlo High School Parents and Citizens Association and University of Canberra High School Kaleen Parents and Citizens Association.

There are a few housekeeping matters that I wish to draw to your attention. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed and published by Hansard. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice it would be useful for everyone if you just say, "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help us afterwards.

Please be aware that today's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege, which provides protection to witnesses but also obliges them to tell the truth. The provision of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter and all participants today are reminded of this. Please ensure that you have read and understood the pink privilege statement. If I can get each of you to acknowledge that you have read the pink sheet next to you? It would have been sent to you.

Ms Tilley: Yes.

Ms Karlsson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There are some opening statements. We will start with Ms Karlsson.

Ms Karlsson: Thank you for the opportunity to attend today. In the three years I have been on the Lyneham Primary School Board it has become quite clear that the most significant risks for the school involve capacity and building maintenance. The building was built in 1959 and is obviously a very ageing building. Further, with the development of more high-density living in the school priority area, the pressure on the school is definitely increasing.

The school and the board, I am really keen to say, appreciate their cooperative working relationship with the Education Directorate, and the individuals we deal with are particularly lovely and we appreciate everything they are doing for us. However, we consider that the system and the processes surrounding it in terms of the capacity and maintenance issues are not supporting them or the school as we might like. I am keen to set out two major ongoing issues that we think would benefit from having more processes and structures in place and would therefore lead to a more proactive and less reactive approach to the school capacity and maintenance issues.

Firstly, to take the capacity issues, there are three sub-issues within this area. The first is the way that the government is calculating Lyneham's capacity. We have here a plan. This is the footprint of the Lyneham Primary School. The way the school has calculated the capacity—and I am not sure if you can see from there—is that all the little green dots are calculated at 25 students per classroom. The directorate has used that 25 students per classroom as an average of the actual requirements.

The way the capacity has been allocated to Lyneham Primary School does not actually reflect the reality of what is required for the different age groups that go into those classrooms. For example, the ACT government policy says for kindy to year 3 and preschools there must be only 22 students per classroom, as the capacity, and for students in years 4 to 6 there can be 30 students. What has been done in terms of our footprint is that has been averaged out to 25 per classroom.

However, more than half and probably closer to three-quarters of the Lyneham Primary School classrooms are actually kindy to year 3 and there are composite classrooms for years three to four. That means most of the classrooms here actually need to have 22 students in them. The way the capacity has been calculated does not reflect the actuality of the children that are in that classroom, if that makes sense. It is like the capacity requirements are not being complied with because they are being applied as an average and not what the children actually sitting in those classrooms look like.

We have written to the minister several times about this issue. We have received responses in the past but not in recent times. When we wrote in 2019 the response came back with a utilisation rate that would have been 81 per cent in 2020 but the calculations have been based, as I said, on the erroneous representation of what the actual classrooms are. The letter also said that in the next decade the utilisation rate would not exceed 86 per cent. However, on our calculations, because students need to be at 22, not the 25, we are already over that at the moment. That is the first sub-issue in terms of capacity that the government's own requirements are not being actually applied in practice in terms of our capacity issues.

The second issue is that in our floorplan the specialist learning places have been included. We consider this is an issue because, for example, the science room, the dance room and the French room have all been included in those capacity figures.

For the first time last year, the French room was converted into an actual classroom. Some of the issues there are that, firstly, the students are losing their specialist immersive French learning space, which is problematic because the children then do

not have that; the teachers have to travel around from room to room.

Some of the other issues there—and one of our daughters is in that classroom—are that it was never intended to be a full-time classroom space. It is very dark, for one. There are obvious WHS issues with having children in a space which is not meant to be a full-time classroom. There are no internal windows, for example, leading to the outside. It is just an internal room, very dark, only meant to have students in there for a few hours a day while they are doing their French class and then going back to their normal classroom. Because our capacity figures have been calculated as they have been, we have been losing those specialist spaces. We no longer have that specialist French classroom.

The space is also isolated from the rest of the school. You will see in this plan these are all the classrooms around there. The former French classroom, where one of our children is, is over here and is isolated from the rest of the actual classrooms. It is near the dance studio and the science room which are meant to be the specialist temporary rooms.

It is also accessible to the public. You have the midwifery clients coming into that area; you are having people walk past to get to that specialist dance space where you have different classes like Taekwondo and different things going on. It is physically isolated from the rest of the school. It is accessible to the public, which I think is problematic in that anyone can walk in and open the accessible door; they do not have to go past the front office which you have to walk past to get to the rest of the classrooms. which I think is highly problematic.

I think there is a safety issue there. Anyone can walk in and, at worst, snatch a small child. At best, it is probably not great having small children being able to run out. These are six-year-olds. I feel there is a safety issue in terms of converting some of those specialist spaces that are away from the rest of the school into classrooms.

THE CHAIR: In the interest of time, Ms Karlsson, could you potentially wrap it up in a couple of moments?

Ms Karlsson: Yes. There is so much to talk about in this space. Some of the other issues are that, for example, the dance studio next to the French classroom received commonwealth government funding in the Building the Education Revolution in 2009; so it is joint state and commonwealth funding. That is also calculated in the capacity. The science room, the dance room and the French room are all counted as rooms that can be converted into classroom space. I think, at best, it is bad faith to count rooms that have been funded for specific purposes—it has got springboards in there so that it can be used for dancing—to count them as rooms that can be easily converted into classroom space.

The second key issue that I want to mention is the building maintenance issue, so the building is over 60 years old. It is past its end of life. Specific issues have included windows and doors with drafts, cracking walls, lead paint, asbestos, old and ripped carpets, cracked walls, flammable cladding, broken blinds, and unhygienic bathrooms that no amount of cleaning can fix. While the directorate has spent some money recently on this—and we are really thankful—there is an overarching issue here that

the issues are not being consistently addressed and no amount of communication from the school board or the school itself is remedying those.

There is no current building condition report, which is quite concerning given that you would expect any building, particularly one past its end of life, should have a building maintenance plan. We only have a partial plan from 2013 that only related to fire. We have no plan for the building itself, which I think is quite risky in terms of risk management.

Some of these issues are raised as overarching issues. There is the lack of proactive management of the building and capacity issues. We are constantly chasing up these issues and there is no clear way to get money and there is no clear plan to proactively address the issues. Secondly, there is the lack of engagement or responsiveness in terms of the issues that we are raising. It is also, thirdly, an alarming approach to risk management to just sort of hope for the best and not proactively manage an ageing building. And fourthly, it is clear that these are not isolated issues to Lyneham. The whole inner north, as far as we have been talking to other schools, is experiencing similar issues.

In terms of recommendations, we are really keen to see some proactive management of ACT buildings and capacity and to have internal policies lining up in terms of capacity actually relating to the reality of the school and not to lose specialist learning spaces. We think a review would be really quite beneficial in terms of capacity and also how building maintenance issues are being addressed. Rather than trying to chase up issues for resolution, we need to have some kind of forward plan working and also some clear communications from the directorate in terms of the real risks that we think are being posed to the children in the ACT system.

THE CHAIR: I am going to need to jump in because we have only got a set amount of time. That map you brought, could the committee have a copy of that?

Ms Karlsson: Yes, sure.

THE CHAIR: Ms Tilley, an opening statement.

Ms Tilley: I recently joined the P&C. This is a new space for me. I just want to make a brief opening statement. I concur with a lot of the issues that Tiffany has outlined and also agree with the support that the department of education generally provides to the school. But there are issues primarily around infrastructure management.

Mount Stromlo High School has an increasing student base, with a 20 per cent rise in enrolments between 2017 and 2020, and enrolments are expected to continue to rise over the next couple of years, anticipating a 20 per cent capacity increase. Management of the school capacity issues and effective classroom utilisation are imperative to us.

Built in 1969, the Mount Stromlo High School has many classrooms that are still in the original 1969 state. Therefore, they are in excess of 50 years old. Not only are they insufficient for the modern needs of students today, they are inefficient in terms of heating, cooling and other energy use. They also provide a safety risk due to the lead

paint and have accessibility issues for staff and students with disabilities and other needs. In addition, they struggle to meet the general needs of students and have limited opportunities to extend their use to vocational learning. There is an opportunity to fix the dilapidated infrastructure and its limitations and, in doing so, provide best-practice facilities for 21st century needs of students.

The Mount Stromlo High School is identified as a school containing both lead paint and asbestos and the current home economics classrooms have been identified as containing lead paint. Also there is a monitoring program to ensure the exposure is minimised and managed. Priority is given to preschools and primary schools and that is directly from the Education Directorate itself. However, lead paint is a high risk when it is ingested, and a classroom that involves cooking and consumption of food increases the risk to students.

This is of particular concern when the wooden facilities in the classrooms are original and pre-date the cessation of lead-based paints, particularly when lead paint is found on timber surfaces, including the window frames, eaves and handrails. It has also been found in the storage plant and equipment rooms, as advised by the Education Directorate, for the Mount Stromlo High School.

There are a range of accessibility issues because the cooking classrooms have not been updated or maintained over time. They pre-date modern considerations for accessibility, bench types, taps, sink access, types of adaptive equipment. They are just some of the functional issues that are facing the current facilities.

In addition, the teaching and demonstration area is limited in terms of students being able to easily listen and watch, let alone a student with a disability. For example, there is no provision for students with hearing or vision impairments. Further to accessibility and the difficulty of being able to teach students who have religious or medical restrictions with food, there is limited bench and storage space to adequately ensure safety and other food storage and preparation needs are being met.

The use of space, heating and cooling costs, and the equipment that is used are well dated. They are 50 years old. They are not efficient. They operate at different temperatures and rates and it makes it challenging. There were multiple cooking subjects on offer at the school and, obviously, they have been reduced over time because it is just not attractive.

There is a real focus for vocational opportunities wanting to be explored by the high school because not a lot of students progress to tertiary study. Up-to-date and appropriate facilities would allow students aspiring for post-school commercial cookery apprenticeships to undertake academic and vocational learning at the school, which just cannot be accommodated.

In conclusion, I would like to say that a peer review study has found that cooking programs usually positively influence children's food-related preferences, attitudes and behaviours. And there have been many other studies that have found cooking classes in school provide an important life skill, resulting in students more likely to eat what they are preparing, encouraging students to practise at home, changing students' mindsets towards food, promoting healthy living and lifestyles. It saves

money and opens student to considering cooking as a career.

Within the current infrastructure, the Mount Stromlo High School home economics classrooms are failing in safety, accessibility, environment, curriculum and vocational aspects. They need urgent attention and funding to facilitate an upgrade being delivered and the Mount Stromlo High School is not identified in any of the department of education programs for expansion or development from an infrastructure perspective at all. The last capital works or infrastructure support for the school was in excess of two years ago, and that was for some bathrooms that were upgraded because they were in the same state—in excess of 50 years old. They need help.

THE CHAIR: Ms Wild-River.

Ms Wild-River: I am a member of this school's board and I am a delegate at the ACT council of P&C associations. Thank you for the standing committee inquiry into the management of the ACT school infrastructure and for the opportunity to provide a submission and to appear today here as a witness. I will start by affirming that all my contributions to this inquiry are purely in my private capacity as a mother of a student at the University of Canberra High School Kaleen, which I am going to refer to as Kaleen high. It makes so much more sense. I am the current president of the Kaleen high parents and citizens association, which I am going to call the P&C.

My statement is in three parts. First, I will present perspective on the importance of adequate infrastructure for all ACT public schools. Second, I will outline the particular infrastructure priorities of Kaleen high. Finally, I will argue for additional resources to urgently be provided to ACT's older, growing schools.

My first point is the importance of school infrastructure for all public schools. In this, we strongly endorse the other submissions to the inquiry and, in particular, the submission by the ACT Council of P&C Associations. The Kaleen High School P&C is a strong supporter of the ACT government's belief that every child deserves a great education and the life chances that flow from it.

We recognise that education currently makes up a significant 23 per cent of the ACT government's budget, and we see the benefits that our children receive from this in the form of quality teachers who genuinely care for them and provide excellent educational experiences. We understand that Canberra's public schools numbers have increased 26 per cent since 2010 to around 49,000.

We understand that budgets are limited; so choices need to be made in rolling out funds for existing, expanding and new schools. We also recognise the significant challenges involved in planning for the long term so that investments made now will deliver over decades as school-age populations ebb and flow in different catchments. We respect the different school infrastructure investment priorities across Canberra, and I am aware of the magnitude of funds involved.

The ACT government infrastructure plan shows that \$85 million has been budgeted for new schools at Throsby and Molonglo Valley; \$48 million for four schools in Gungahlin; \$18 million to replace roofs of six schools; and \$18 million to renew

Campbell Primary School. That is an investment of \$169 million at 14 schools and, at a very blunt average across those 14 schools, suggests about \$12 million being invested in each of those. Please understand that UC Kaleen P&C accepts the need for those significant infrastructure upgrades at a small number of schools and applauds the ACT government's investments.

However, the budget of \$76 million, or an average of \$300,000 per school for each of the remaining 248 schools, seems really small in comparison. These funds have been budgeted for renewal of classrooms, toilets, changerooms, gardens, heating and cooling, et cetera, across all the remaining ACT schools and it is 40 times less per school than the average investment in the new and expanding schools mentioned earlier.

Taking account of all this, Kaleen high P&C's overarching message to the inquiry is that more investment is needed overall in school infrastructure and we would urge the standing committee to take that message forward.

Moving to the specific case of Kaleen high—and I will reiterate some of the key points from our individual submission—like the other two have mentioned, ours is a very old school, having been built in the 1970s. You have got a 50s, 60s and 70s here—a little trifecta for you! Much of the school infrastructure is very old, reflecting the long life it has already had.

Population growth is strong and sustained in Kaleen. Student numbers have more than doubled in the last seven years, expanding from just 238 in 2015, to 485 in 2021, and early enrolments for 2022 suggest our student population will continue to increase in the foreseeable future. This is all the more likely because the new, surrounding suburbs of Crace and Lawson within our catchment have brought new populations but no new schools and their high-school-aged children will look to Kaleen high, so long as its reputation as a quality option can be developed and maintained.

With this school population forecast, I understand that in 2022 every learning space will be scheduled for teaching activities at all times. This lack of redundancy in school infrastructure will mean that there are no viable backup options if any problems are experienced with classroom spaces or the people within them, and, in Kaleen's case, we actually welcome people with different needs. My son tells me that there are shutdowns on a regular basis because of difficult behaviour from students. What do they do if there is nowhere to go? It is really tough; there is just nowhere spare.

Funding for all the school's needs is extremely limited. Historically, the low socio-economic status of the local families has meant that voluntary contributions at Kaleen high have been extremely low, averaging under 10 per cent per year. This has placed further financial constraints on potential investments within the school and it has meant that the school has not even been able to maintain infrastructure, let alone enhance it.

The P&C has the greatest admiration for the school's ingenuity in achieving a quality presentation with such limited funds and, for this, we owe much to the excellent facilities manager, who is also a builder. Because of that, we can actually deal with things like lead paint and difficulties like that. We have been able to actually recover

and present some really good features of the school within our available budget.

The school's internal infrastructure planning takes account of all those challenges, as well as our low expectations for any significant infrastructure boost in coming years. We are not holding our breath. For instance, the school is exploring cost-effective solutions to the pressure on classroom spaces in its masterplan, which we developed last year. This includes proposals such as installing separator screens in the drama labs and the gymnasium to allow multiple classes in those areas at the same time but it is obvious that that means there will only be half the space available for the people using those.

We are very grateful for the recent investments in a fence around the school, as we can now work to improve outside areas without fear of vandalism. The local community lobbied hard for Kaleen's only basketball courts with hoops to stay outside the school fence. I am not sure but I think Kaleen high has Kaleen, Crace and Lawson's only basketball hoops. They are outside the school fence. We have got the funniest shaped fence design that you will see. It has got these little divots out of it. The courts that were left inside have no paint and no hoops and, therefore, cannot be used for matches. The courts are a high priority for me because my son loves to play, and so I was devastated to learn recently that the cost to reinstate the courts within the school fence is estimated at \$100,000 each. It is clear to me that the basketball courts are well down the list of infrastructure priorities and I cannot see them being fixed while my son attends the school.

Similar choices need to be made in providing for other interests, including the school's circus, music, cooking technology and agricultural programs which each have potentially budding champions among the student body. Improvements could also be made to infrastructure for science and other core subjects. Beyond student needs, I understand there is simply not enough space for the administrative staff and other staff needs.

The P&C has been working actively towards improvements in partnership with the school administration. We recently ran a survey which showed that parents and students support P&C investments in landscape enhancements, incursions, classroom resources, sports gear, IT gadgetry, and we included the results in our submission.

As a result of the strong support for landscape enhancements, the P&C and school have agreed to co-invest in improving the space at the rear of the school near the canteen. The P&C is investing \$5,000 that we raised through sausage sizzles, cake stalls and other fundraising in outdoor infrastructure, including new seeding and bubblers. The school administration has agreed to more than match that. We said just \$5,001 would be fine; that would meet the obligation.

I want to reflect for a moment on the importance of diverse infrastructure in high school contexts in particular. As all of you must know, young people go through extremely significant changes in the high school years, physically, emotionally and in their sense of self. I keep looking at the clock. I am getting there. These are the first years when students choose their own electives and begin establishing their future sense of professional identity. This process involves testing and rejecting some choices that they come into high school thinking, "That is me," and also discovering

and unexpectedly embracing others.

In the high school years, the challenge of ensuring that every child has access to great infrastructure requires schools to present multiple high quality choices. At Kaleen high it is disappointing that the school simply does not have the funds to enhance the offerings in any of these areas but only to attempt to maintain the breadth of choices.

I close this second part of my presentation as an interested party brazenly calling for increased infrastructure investment at Kaleen high school in particular because, as a mother, I wish that my son could sit and eat at recess and lunchtime and play basketball and then go back into his classes refreshed and ready to be presented with a range of innovative ideas for his future.

To close my presentation, I will make the link between my high-level call for additional funding for school infrastructure across Canberra and my specific call for more funds for Kaleen high. In this section, which is really short, I note that Kaleen can be seen as belonging to an identifiable group of ageing, resource-poor and growing schools across the ACT, particularly high schools. It seems that the subgroup of schools could be a particular focus for infrastructure planning investments.

I do not have access to all the budget estimates that you do, but I find it mindboggling to compare the multi-million-dollar investments being made in new schools with our own school's \$10,000 joint P&C school administration investment challenge. In our case, the difficult choice was whether to prioritise lunch-time seating for an extra five to 20 people over either one bubbler or two bubblers to keep them hydrated.

For older, growing schools, it seems that what is needed is similar to the roof replacement and fencing programs, which provide a significant boosting of particular areas. A good program would lift old schools to an acceptable standard so that their students and staff have an equal level of comfort and opportunity to those who are lucky enough to attend ACT's newest schools. This would require a significant one-off investment for schools whose infrastructure is run down or inadequate. Following that, ongoing investments could be used to maintain and enhance in selected strategic areas.

In closing, this submission calls for increased spending on school infrastructure and for a particular focus on improving infrastructure of older growing schools which need it most. Thanks for your time.

THE CHAIR: We will take turns in asking questions. We will go down the line. You might get an open question where everyone can chime in or you might get a very specific question to you and your school. If committee members are interested in your answer you might get supplementary questions. I will lead off. How do your schools and school communities identify priority infrastructure projects? Does anyone want to chime in first?

Ms Wild-River: I am happy to take that. There was a master planning process, which I understand was done in a lot of schools, and the P&C had the opportunity to be involved in that and then we would be able to provide input to that. But the school mostly looked at its assets with that kind of high-level administrative knowledge of

the budgets and availability. There was an openness to being able to contribute to that through the P&C and it has certainly been done strategically at that school level.

THE CHAIR: Is that the same in your school, Tina?

Ms Tilley: Yes. I am not familiar with how the schools do their asset planning or estate management at all. I would have to take that question on notice. I do know that the business manager of the school has made regular submissions seeking upgrades or capital work support, and they have either been ignored or just not contacted.

THE CHAIR: There are two parts to the question: there is the school and the school community, because sometimes the P&C might have a different priority to what the school says. But I am interested in takes on both aspects.

Ms Wild-River: We certainly saw a gap, but not a problematic one. We ran the survey, and I worked with the principal to design the survey questions. The survey was very much done for this submission and for this inquiry. We did sort of separate into infrastructure things and other things that we might be interested in.

The school community are interested in some things that are not infrastructure, and they include things like the incursions and the like, maths manipulatives and things they can use in classes. There was an element where some people had preferences for those kinds of activity-based things. But mostly it was a very big overlap and a really strong degree of common ground in the things that the school had identified.

There tend to be some big lumpy investments that are beyond the scope of being able to imagine as a parent and it is hard to think, “Yes, what we really need is more space for the administrative staff.” We did not get anybody voting for that. That was really highly important. I am sure that it is.

Ms Karlsson: From the Lyneham perspective, the P&C has obviously been focused on those things that directly affect children, like the unhygienic senior boys bathrooms, when you walk into the school and you can see the paint falling off and trip hazards with carpet that is 50 years old et cetera. The P&C is obviously looking at the things that are affecting their children on a day-to-day basis.

As a board, we are also looking at the strategic risk for the school. Obviously not having a building condition report for the last decade or so means that we are quite focused on legal liability and risk and injury WHS issues for both the students and the staff and visitors to the school. We have, as a board, taken that higher level, overarching perspective as well, but also the general maintenance issues that are very much a concern to the whole school community.

MR DAVIS: Just following on from Mr Pettersson’s question which was around how school communities identify their priority investments for infrastructure, once you have identified them how does the P&C in particular make the directorate aware that that is a priority for you? I am interested in the series of events. Do you find the directorate is proactive and engages directly with the P&C and instigates a relationship? Do you find it is very reactive? I am interested in any of your takes on that.

Ms Karlsson: A lot of the recommendations and the things I was talking about were that we struggle to get engagement from the directorate. When we do get engagement they are perfectly lovely and attempt to help us, but our issue is that a lot of our letters and emails to the directorate and the minister go unanswered. Our latest letter to the minister in March this year was following up on the previous letters we had sent that did not address the capacity and maintenance issues that we had put to her. In terms of the answers that we get, they are either not directly answering our question or we do not get responses. We have a decade's worth of logs of representations the school board and the school itself have made to the directorate and the minister, and either partial or no responses.

Just to go to your original question, I feel like Lyneham primary is beyond the point of being even able to be aspirational in terms of here are some great things that we might love to have in our school in terms of infrastructure. We are just trying to alleviate risk and have a building that is not going to injure the children. When you have got a building that is that old—we do not have a building maintenance plan, we have children in rooms that should not be rooms, we have had afters areas converted into tiny classrooms—I feel like Lyneham primary is more in survival mode for having a building that can actually be there for children and not harm anyone rather than thinking aspirationally into the future.

That would be a nice point to be at. When I heard that question I thought, “Wouldn't it be nice to be at that point?” But our school is so far behind that in terms of being able to have the maintenance and the proactive responses to dealing with our school that that just seems like a happy place to be able to think about those things. We are trying to not injure children, I feel, at this point.

Ms Wild-River: If I could just take that as well, I had heard that the Council of P&C Associations provides good access; so I joined that this year when I became president. I had not really taken any notice of it until then. At the last meeting some senior executives from the Education Directorate came along and did a long presentation and stayed for about an hour of questions and really seemed to be listening. That does seem to be one avenue that works.

We are all doing volunteer positions on top of jobs, and the fact that I have had to join the P&C president role with the P&C council, just to be a functional president of the P&C, this year is just too much. I will not possibly be able to do that for two years running. I just cannot manage it. I have had to give up everything else that I have been doing as a volunteer, which is a shame. It is a big ask to actually do that proactive work to get involved.

Ms Tilley: As I said, I have only been the president of the Mount Stromlo High School P&C for about five weeks. So I am very, very new to this space. But the engagement we have is directly with our principal, who is very engaged with us, which is really good. We do not have any direct communication with the Education Directorate other than to seek workshops for parents, for teachers or for students, through the school principal.

MR CAIN: There have been some schools present to us whose individual P&Cs have

engaged with the department directly, not just through the blanket organisation or through the principal. There does seem to be perhaps a need for as many lines of inquiry and consultation to be opened as possible to improve what would appear to be pretty unsatisfactory outcomes.

Ms Wild-River: That is a really interesting point. I do not know if it was a question. But if it was, could I answer?

MR CAIN: Yes.

Ms Wild-River: I will pretend it is a question.

MR CAIN: You may turn it into a question.

Ms Wild-River: It is just, I guess, going back to that point about the volunteer kind of nature of this and the kind of essential nature of school infrastructure and of school quality environments. The reason I point out the sausage sizzle and the cake stalls is very much because when I have described to my family and friends that we are wanting to have sausage sizzles to build chairs for kids to sit on at lunch time they are appalled. They are like, “How can that be the case that we have to do sausage sizzles for people to be able to sit down? That should be provided; people should have that in their schools.” You have no idea how hard it is to run a sausage sizzle and it was really disturbing to me how much work was involved in the most recent one. You are probably laughing, but it is true.

THE CHAIR: I think we are laughing because we have run some sausage sizzles.

Ms Wild-River: It would be better if we could have the infrastructure that we need and get back to a similar quality around the place and then do fundraising for fun stuff and for positive additions that we can really use to stimulate learning. Using it for seeding and for bubblers just seems like it is not a very good cost-benefit analysis on that one.

Ms Karlsson: I agree with that. We are at the point where we are currently losing facilities, we are losing specialist teaching spaces, we are losing afters spaces, because they have all been counted in the capacity calculations. We just do not want to lose any more of our current specialist teaching spaces that we have for children. Being able to expand would be great but we are just trying to fit the children that we have into the school.

We are already seeing a detriment to our children’s learning, because, for example, the French space has been lost so that you do not have that immersive experience. The dance studio that has partially been funded by commonwealth money is the next to go and then the science lab. The quality of children’s education is already being affected by the way the directorate has been calculating capacity and including those spaces in.

I think we need to get to a point where we can actually preserve what already exists and manage the capacity issue proactively so that we do not have any more of those losses, because it is already affecting our children in the ACT.

MR DAVIS: My question is for Ms Karlsson but I am more than happy for anyone else to contribute. As a pupil at a former ageing school that was subsequently closed, I am very sympathetic to the plight of ageing schools. As the oldest school here, that is what I want to focus on. It is not only the oldest school here but also, as you pointed out in your opening statement, an area that is quite landlocked where there is greater medium and high-density residential development. It is a bold question, but is it time to bite the bullet and accept that Lyneham primary needs a brand new building?

Ms Karlsson: If you are willing to fund a brand-new school, that would be an amazing thing. I know part of the reason that we have been really keen on getting that building maintenance report is so that we can see where are we at in the lifecycle of this building. I propose that it is past its useful life and it does need a new building. However, if we did have a plan that did recognise, “Here are the issues. We will fix this lead paint, we will fix this carpet, we will fix the buildings that have cracks in them and drafts coming in windows,” it would give some hope that the school could continue on. But in the absence of that kind of proactive management of the building it is hard to see how it should keep going the way it is.

I cannot speak for the school, the board or the P&C, but I just feel like there needs to be some solution in terms of managing either the building we have got or a plan for a future building so that there are no ongoing issues like we have been experiencing for at least the last decade.

MR DAVIS: If I could ask just a quick supplementary of Ms Karlsson and then I am more than happy for anyone else to contribute, given what I said in my preamble that you are obviously challenged by the population increases in the area and the type of development that is happening, what do you imagine the view would be of the Lyneham primary community if the decision was made not only that there needs to be a new school but that it was a multi-story school in an effort to protect what I understand to be relatively limited green space in the area?

Ms Karlsson: It is not something that I have discussed with the other parents or the board. I feel like we would just need to go back to the principles of what is it the school needs to keep the children safe and to have sufficient classroom space and sufficient specialist space. I think the form that that takes would be a question that would need to be answered after that. But I think if the children’s safety and capacity issues and building maintenance issues are addressed then that is something that the community would look at.

MR DAVIS: More broadly to the panel, if anyone has a view—I know it is quite a bold question—is it time that you need new schools as well or are you confident that, with the right plan, the infrastructure you have currently can be maintained?

Ms Wild-River: I am happy to take that but Ms Karlsson’s answer about needing to check these answers with the community really applies to mine as well. My initial sense is Kaleen high is still a really good building and a really well-built school in a good place. But it probably needs some high-quality, temporary buildings. With the ebbs and flows that you get over decades—I do not know nearly enough about it—it does look to me like that is a good option for the ACT to be able to expand schools with high-quality, new infrastructure and then consider things that might actually be

able to be moved to other schools that need it in other times.

But the difficulty of doing that is the threat to the specialist learning spaces and if you load up additional standard classrooms then you still have an expanded population putting pressure on all those specialist areas too. Somehow you have to strike a balance with that solution to ensure maybe bringing in a new kitchen area, or band area, or sports facility or hall. There are some other special needs that would need to be thought about in that too. What do you think, Jennifer? Do we need to replace the whole school yet?

Ms Sexton: No, definitely not.

MR DAVIS: That is good to get on the record.

Ms Karlsson: I should have mentioned that we already have a first floor at Lyneham primary.

MR DAVIS: My mistake, I have not visited Lyneham primary; there you go.

Ms Karlsson: You should come for a visit. We would be very happy to show you around.

MR DAVIS: I was working off the assumption that it was a one-storey school. How embarrassing. Obviously I am not a member for Kurrajong.

Ms Wild-River: You are doing a good job.

MR DAVIS: Ms Tilley, did you have anything you wanted to add on that point?

Ms Tilley: I am probably of the same view as the Kaleen High School representative. I think the Mount Stromlo High School buildings are not completely broken; they just need attention. And there needs to be an effective state management program broadly across the high schools, especially ageing ones, to give some guidelines even around decision-making on what gets prioritised over another because it is disappointing to hear that there are such significant funds to a very small number of schools and then everyone else is getting the drips and the drabs. It just does not seem right—balanced.

Ms Wild-River: Yes. It is not cost effective in a way, is it?

Ms Tilley: The older something gets, the harder it is going to be to repair something or the more damage there the longer it is left unattended to. When you have, as we have, cooking facilities and classrooms that are in excess of 50 years old with nothing done to them, there are literally tiles falling off the walls and roof.

MR DAVIS: I suppose that was the very context of the question that I asked Ms Karlsson originally. The government has a growth and renewal strategy for public housing. And I was alluding to the argument: is it time for something similar to our particularly older schools where it does seem, from the evidence you provided today, an awful lot of money is spent just keeping the place safe? Is it in fact time to look at that investment compared to biting the bullet, as I used the analogy, and just saying

we need to pony up the dough for a brand new school?

Ms Karlsson: That is part of what I mentioned at the start in my opening statement in terms of what we are really keen on is the proactive management of the building so that we can work together with the directorate to have great buildings where our kids can do great learning. But at the moment it is just reactive and trying to feed into different opportunities that come up to fix things or reactively deal with capacity issues. We have been trying to be proactive as a school and a board to deal with the capacity, the maintenance issues and all that.

But what we are really hungry for is a really proactive approach to buildings, particularly so that we know that they are getting the attention they deserve. And when we see things like the capacity figures not lining up with what is actually happening day to day, it makes us concerned that no-one else is really looking at what is needed to keep the school operating safely with the best outcomes.

MR CAIN: I have just two particular questions with respect to Lyneham and the boys bathroom and also with respect to Mount Stromlo and the home economics classroom. If these were commercial operations like a cafe or whatever you would question whether they would be allowed to operate. Have they been evaluated for their health and safety levels so that it is actually a safe environment for students to be in?

Ms Karlsson: No. That is what we would be keen to see in the building maintenance report. There are a lot of things that we, just looking at them, feel are unsafe. But we do not have that plan. We do not have that proactive plan that we think needs to happen in terms of the ongoing regular assessment of buildings and things. It is an issue; it is part of our trying to raise issues once they have already become an issue, rather than proactively managing them.

MR CAIN: On the boys bathroom, have you had a particular response from the department about dealing with that?

Ms Karlsson: No.

MR CAIN: And with respect to the home economics room?

Ms Tilley: Not that I am aware of.

MR CAIN: And I am not sure if Kaleen highlighted any.

Ms Wild-River: The basketball courts.

MR CAIN: You found something.

Ms Wild-River: But that is purely parochial and I am putting it down lower than everything else. We did have a big issue recently with the circus program and with safety around the circus program and that has required some investment. What I presented was many different specialty areas at our high school, each of which has passionate advocates and all of which are inadequate. The kitchen is okay, the band room is okay, the circus is okay—just—and if anything threatens them then they are

at risk as a whole program; so it is really touch and go as to being able to continue to provide a good learning environment.

With the circus program, for instance, there was a safety issue identified and they just said that for a while nobody can do anything above 1.5 metres, I think it was, which basically wrote off 80 per cent of what they did, and they had to look at cancelling the program because it just was not viable. Then we had students that were devastated. We solved it, but it was tough.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank each of you for being here today. I particularly thank the Lyneham Primary School Board, the Mount Stromlo High School Parents and Citizens Association and the UC High School Kaleen Parents and Citizens Association for making their submissions. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing when it is available to check for accuracy. The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 2.24 pm.