



**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 PETERSSON (Chair)
MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)
MR P CAIN**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 29 JUNE 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 1.30 pm.

BERGET, MS JENNIFER ANN, P&C representative, Garran Primary School
Parents & Citizens Committee

HAMLYN-HARRIS, MR CHARLES, Parent representative, Garran Primary
School Board

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the fourth public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure. The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region.

Today we will hear evidence from the Garran Primary School Board and P&C. 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 questions on notice, it would be useful if witnesses use these words: "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

Please be aware that today's proceedings are covered by parliamentary privilege, which not only 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 that is next to you.

Ms Berget: Yes.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that you have an opening statement that you would like to make.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Take it away.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to you today and to make a submission to this committee. Jennifer and I are here particularly to present the case for Garran Primary School. I think that our experience speaks to a lot of the terms of reference for this committee, specifically planning for future needs, the use of temporary facilities for school development, the provision of sporting facilities, and issues surrounding parking. Other things that I will add for Garran particularly are traffic issues.

Garran is an excellent example of the downside of taking an incremental and uncoordinated approach to school infrastructure development. We now have a village of demountable buildings taking up large swathes of the school open space, and

development that has been piecemeal in its approach over many years. The Garran situation is unusual—perhaps even unique—in that we share a frontage with the Canberra Hospital. When the school was first built in the 1960s, the hospital was not there. It was developed a few years later. I believe it was intended to be a regional hospital. It was called the Woden Valley Hospital at the time. It has now grown to become the major hospital for Canberra. Consequently, the hospital is growing at the rate of the ACT, which is possibly a much greater level of growth than you would expect in a suburb like Garran.

The impact of that development at the hospital is huge. As I say, we share a frontage. We share a suburban street as a frontage, which causes all sorts of trouble. Probably the greatest example is that the Garran Oval was taken over for the COVID surge centre last year, effectively taking away from the school its only bit of decent grassed, level playing ground. Of course, with our 11 demountable buildings, very little of the other good grassed areas of the school are available for outdoor play.

The other thing that Garran is very symptomatic of is the age of the buildings—over 50 years. They are now reaching the end of their useful life. Asbestos is clearly present; no doubt lead as well. As an example, even putting in some demountable buildings last year required a massive amount of work when it was discovered that there were asbestos irrigation pipes underneath the bit of playing ground that was being dug up.

What all of this means, in this kind of uncoordinated approach to development, is that it causes all sorts of difficulties from a management and operation point of view, and from a provision of education point of view. The increasing use of spaces by classes means that there is inadequate administrative space. The leadership team and the staff do not have anywhere to do ordinary planning or even effectively manage the school. There are no dedicated spaces for activities such as STEM, music and so forth, because there is always a lot of juggling around. Facilities like the library and the staffroom are being used for classes as well, and that takes away those individual uses, and for the staff as well.

I want to acknowledge that we have had very productive discussions with the Education Directorate and the Health Directorate because of the hospital impact over recent years, but we are very keen to see those discussions actually come to some kind of fruition at this stage.

I said that Garran is a good example of how piecemeal development is unsustainable economically, environmentally and in every other way—educationally. Garran is also a really good example, in that we have a fantastic community, a fantastic school, excellent staff and great kids. They are doing everything that they possibly can to provide the best education for the children. What they need now is that one extra little bit of commitment from government to develop the facilities so that the staff are not constantly distracted by trying to make things work in an inappropriate space and so that, at the end of the day, we are giving the children the sort of world-class education that a world-class city like Canberra should be providing.

THE CHAIR: I will lead off with some questions. I was hoping you could speak to what you think some of the solutions to these problems are. Garran is quite a small

site with growing infrastructure on certain sides and temporary infrastructure on one side. What does the future of Garran look like to you? Is it to go up, potentially?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I will start by talking about the orientation of the school and the relationship with the hospital, because that is quite a critical point. I mentioned parking and traffic, and a lot of that is exacerbated by that road frontage. One solution that we have given a lot of thought to is reorientating the school so that it actually faces in the opposite direction. That puts a solid boundary, if you like, along the hospital side. It gives the school a lot more access to other streets and other forms of access, car parking spaces and things like that. That would suggest a redevelopment of the school down at the other end of the site; also, yes, going up, I think.

The problem with demountable buildings is that they are, by their nature, single-storey, they take up a lot of extra land and there is a lot of wasted space. Some good two-storey buildings down at the other end of the school would probably go a long way towards resolving those issues. That would put the playing fields over towards the hospital as well, which would solve a lot of their problems, I would think.

MR CAIN: How old is the oldest demountable that you have?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: The oldest demountable goes back before my time.

Ms Berget: I think it is 22 years. We can potentially take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Around that time?

Ms Berget: I believe it is 22 years. I should say that I was a student at Garran Primary School, so I am quite familiar with the original demountable there, which I studied in. It is no longer there; it has been replaced.

MR CAIN: As you recall, when it was first put in place, was it with a sense of a time line or—

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I would have to let you know about that. With the first two demountables, I did not even realise they were demountables. They certainly go back before my time at Garran.

Ms Berget: Yes, they were definitely before our time. It was one of the things that I looked into, because I am conscious that there is a time line to the demountables. I believe it is around 25 years. Considering the number of demountables that Garran currently has and has had previously, how many times are we leaping in advance and what is the time line for the forward planning?

MR CAIN: What response have you had to that? There must be a concern that something that is a temporary classroom is there for so long. What is the response from the department to your concerns?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I am not sure that I can really speak to that, other than to say that we have had ongoing discussions with the department for many years. I have talked to the principal. She has been there for five years, and it has certainly been

going back for that long. She thinks maybe it is 10 years. It is one of those issues. We have been told on several occasions that the school was being prepared for development and it has not happened. Other priorities have taken over. How that works, I do not know.

Ms Berget: Certainly, from the parental perspective, rightly or wrongly, the community sees that when a demountable building is put in, that is permanent. That is the feeling or perspective from the community.

MR DAVIS: You raised a lot of things in your submission that are not dissimilar experiences to other schools of a similar size around the ACT, but the one thing that I think makes Garran primary particularly interesting for the committee is its proximity to the Canberra Hospital and how that is related to your accessibility.

I am curious about how conversations have gone with ACT Health. How engaged do you feel your school community has been in not just consultation in the broader sense, but in actually being active partners in making decisions with that campus and that site and how it relates to your school? Alternatively, have you found that you have just been told when things will happen? I am curious about how you found that consultation on what is happening at the hospital.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I think the consultation has been quite extensive. We are both members of the local government—

Ms Berget: Community reference group for the Canberra Hospital expansion.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: The local community reference group for the new expansion, the SPIRE development.

MR DAVIS: That group is of Garran residents, isn't it? That is separate from the school?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: It is the school, it is local businesses and it is Garran residents, yes. We meet with Multiplex, the Tait Network and Major Projects Canberra about once a month. We have been involved in that ever since that project first began. We have had a lot of discussion with them. I suppose our involvement with them began when the SPIRE development was first proposed, as it was such a major piece of infrastructure. We made submissions to them, and to the health and education ministers, along the lines that Garran needs to be looked at as a precinct rather than a hospital with a school next to it. It is a government precinct. It is education and health together. They impact on each other. When the hospital develops, the school gets more students.

We have also worked very closely with the people that are planning the master plan for the hospital campus, in an effort to get them to consider the whole precinct and to take responsibility for the impact they are having on the school through the hospital development. It is also about seeing how we can operate the school in such a way that it does not have an adverse impact on the hospital.

MR DAVIS: It sounds like, with both of you in that group that you are a part of, that,

as active members of the community, you have engaged both in the school by serving on the boards and P&Cs and in the hospital development. I understand if you are not able to comment in too much detail, but I wonder whether, regarding your point about the precinct, the health and education directorates have actually spoken to one another and collectively taken your feedback on board, rather than potentially siloing it? How have you found those conversations between the two directorates that you have been a part of?

Ms Berget: That is something that we have not been part of, obviously. To evaluate that and to draw a conclusion on that, we would need to have seen an end result on the matters that we have raised. That is not to say that it will not eventuate in future. It might be in train; we do not know. It is something that I cannot say that—

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: It is certainly something that we have encouraged as much as we can. We could probably only make anecdotal comments about things that people have said, along the lines of, “No, we’re only interested in the hospital; we’re not interested in the school.” As I said that is anecdotal and not of any great value.

We have taken our position, as members of the community and not being interested in siloing, to take every opportunity to say, “Hey, let’s not be siloed about this, and let’s look at it.” For example, at one of our community meetings, we were told that the master plan for the hospital was going to take a precinct approach; then, at a later meeting, we were told that it was not. As Jen says, it is hard to really know what is going on behind these things.

MR DAVIS: Was this what you were told by those running the consultations from Health or from Education?

Ms Berget: From the master planning team, but for Health.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: The master planning people, which is Health, isn’t it?

MR DAVIS: I see.

Ms Berget: My impression is that the precinct master plan approach has gone beyond the borders, then within the borders, then selectively in between. From the community’s perspective, we see there is so much benefit; there are great solutions that are achievable if we work together, talk to one another and think beyond those silos.

MR CAIN: With the loss of green space that you mentioned, where do the students actually play sport and have physical break activities now?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: The school has a playing field, so there is still open space within the school. It is quite a sloped site and it is in fairly poor condition. Jen and I have also been active on the school’s playground committee for some years. One of the things that we have been trying to do is to rehabilitate the playground to a certain extent. When you have 650 kids playing soccer on the same spot every day, it is very hard to grow grass. There are no really level well-grassed fields. Where there is grass, it is on a slope; and where it is a bit flatter, there is no grass left.

MR CAIN: What about the physical education classes?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: They use the space as best they can. There is a school hall and they can do indoor activities there. They run around the perimeter of the school and things like that.

MR CAIN: Again, what is the department's response to the encroaching of demountables and other green space losses?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I am not sure that I could speak to the department's response. We continue to put the case for demountables not to be the solution, because they are eating into the play space quite rapidly.

Ms Berget: Again, from the P&C perspective, the feedback that we have had from our children is that, certainly, with the last lot of demountables, it has curtailed and changed the way that they play. Certainly, for the younger kids, it is really hard for them to play soccer because there is not really the space for them to do it without interrupting the other areas of play. The feedback that other parents and I have had is that the demountables are taking that away from the students, and that is what they are feeling when they see more demountables.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: The other thing that has happened with the latest little bunch of demountables is that they have divided the school into junior and senior. It is in that middle section. That nice interaction between the younger kids and the older kids is not as easy now. For the younger kids, to get to the place where you can play a bit of soccer it is actually quite a long way. From a safety point of view and a supervision point of view, it is probably not so good.

MR CAIN: You mentioned a few times that you have put your case. I am interested in what response you are getting back.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: In the past I believe we have been told that the school had floated to the top, ready for some kind of major redevelopment. That was about three or four years ago, perhaps. At that time it did not go anywhere, because another priority had apparently taken over and it ceased to be floating to the top. We are hopeful that we might be getting back towards that stage at the moment. We have not had any official notification. Our policy has been to continue to take every opportunity to state the case for the school in the hope that next time it floats to the top, it stays there.

MR CAIN: We would be very interested in the progress of that.

THE CHAIR: Has access to green space been particularly problematic with the surge centre next door? Can I rightly assume that the school was using Garran Oval before the hospital was on it?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Yes.

Ms Berget: Very much so.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: The school has used Garran Oval for many years. It is a good, level place. There is room for several classes there at the same time. It is level, it is grassed and it is a safe playing environment.

THE CHAIR: Is that where kids played at lunchtime as well?

Ms Berget: Occasionally.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I believe there was supervision down there, so that they could play.

Ms Berget: But not always.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Not always.

Ms Berget: Again, when I was a student, even when the playground was fully irrigated, grassed and we only had one demountable building, we would still use that space on the oval because it was level and it was a great sporting facility.

THE CHAIR: In your submission, you talk about the lack of specific learning spaces for art, STEM and music. What effect do you think that has on the educational attainment of kids when they do not have access to those spaces?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Firstly, looking at it from the teachers' point of view, they find that it impacts on their ability to effectively teach the children, because they have to set things up and relocate stuff. Music is a subject that I am particularly keen on developing. For a music teacher, it is about having the instruments set up in a location so that they can bring the kids in and they can get straight into it, rather than constantly moving things around and trying to find spaces, or not even having the ability to use certain things. It really slows down the quality of the time and the commitment that they can put into each class. I would imagine it would be very similar for science and things like that, in terms of being able to set things up.

Another issue that Garran has is with the provision of after-school care, because there is not enough room for the demand. For example, the preschool is used as part of after-school care. The impact of that and having other people going through there means that they cannot set up spaces. They cannot prepare for the next day's classes for the kids. The flow-on impact is on the ability to get the most out of the educational time, because there is constant setting and resetting required.

Ms Berget: Some schools have an added small extra space or room for music teachers to come in, plan and do those sorts of things. Garran does not have that. That means there is no option for music classes; there is no option for piano classes. That option is completely removed. If you do not have those little additional spaces for that specialist opportunity to arise, then it does not exist.

MR DAVIS: I am curious about the public transport routes that you have experienced at your school. Obviously, having kids there for longer than they necessarily need to be will impact on maintenance and infrastructure. Have you found those have changed

recently, and have those been beneficial or have those been putting further pressure on the school?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Public transport?

MR DAVIS: Yes. If memory serves, Garran has a pretty decent chunk of kids who do not necessarily live in Garran who come to Garran Primary School.

Ms Berget: Yes.

MR DAVIS: I assume that a number of those involve parents who work at the hospital. I want to confirm whether anecdotally what I believe to be true is in fact factually true; if not, do you find there is a lot of pressure on the school infrastructure from the need to commute kids in and out of the school, since there are so many out-of-area kids?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I cannot speak about public transport, but you are right; there is a huge population of out-of-area children. Partly, we are a victim of our own success in that regard in that everyone wants their kids to go to Garran, for some reason. An awfully large number of them drive their children to school, whether they work at the hospital or not. Traffic and parking are a huge issue. The school has one driveway with a little turning circle where you can drop off two kids at a time. With 60 per cent, I think, of the school's 650 population coming in, and a lot of them being driven in, there are huge queues.

As to developments going on over at the hospital, the private hospital was under construction for years. When you have all of that going on and roadworks, it makes that situation so much worse. There is apparently an ACT code of some sort that refers to the number of parking and drop-off spots that there should be at each school. I think that, for Garran, it works out at 24 drop-off spots. I am not sure of that exact number, but there is a significant number of drop-off spots that should be required, whereas effectively we only have one or two. Also, that driveway is in the car park that is used by the staff. From a safety point of view, you cannot drop kids off anywhere else because they would be running across the road. They would be running past car parks and things like that.

MR DAVIS: In the preamble, perhaps I was not really clear enough about what I meant about public transport. That was my fault. Do you think that, based on the student population and where they come from, your school would be satisfied with the drop-off set-up that you currently have if there were better, more frequent and more accessible transportation routes; or do you feel that, in spite of that, what you have at your school is not sufficient and you require substantial changes to the pick-up and drop-off areas?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: I would say the latter.

MR DAVIS: The latter?

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: Yes. I do not know what proportion of the population of the school uses public transport, but I would think that—

Ms Berget: It is not that big, I do not think.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: we definitely need improvements in terms of the pick-up and drop-off.

Ms Berget: Again, anecdotally, from what I see and experience, a lot of kids walk and a lot of kids ride, which is fantastic. Garran is an active school. We want to encourage and support that. Again, in the hospital precinct, we want safe routes and wide-enough footpaths for this to occur. If the challenge does come with that interface with the hospital, it is about making sure that the kids have enough space between the moving traffic to do these things and safely get to school. That links in with what Charles said about reorientating the primary point of access to the school, so that the hospital does not have to worry so much about us and so that, from the perspective of the safety of the kids, we do not have to worry so much about delivery trucks, ambulances or other speeding vehicles.

MR DAVIS: In the spirit of active transport, does your school currently have enough spaces for all of the kids who ride their bikes to and from school to secure them?

Ms Berget: No. There is a good space. It is the same space that I had when I was riding my bike to school. At that point we had about 150 fewer students.

Mr Hamlyn-Harris: It does always seem to be very full.

Ms Berget: It is always full.

MR DAVIS: Your active transport demand exceeds your capacity, at least in terms of storing the bikes?

Ms Berget: Yes.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the Garran Primary School Board and P&C for your time this afternoon. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing when it is available, to check for accuracy. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today—and I think you have—could you please liaise with the committee secretary to provide answers? The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 2.01 pm.