

# Protecting Public Schools

## Reviving Communities and Rebuilding Lives

### Summary

The Canberra Liberals will begin a program of community consultation with local school communities that have been affected by the Stanhope Government's school closure regime.

The Canberra Liberals will be writing to key stakeholders to invite them to discuss options for school re-openings. This will include former P&C Associations at:

- Flynn Primary,
- Cook Primary,
- Tharwa Primary and
- Hall Primary.

We will also write in similar terms to action groups associated with the closed schools.

The Canberra Liberals will also write to five peak groups:

- Save Our Schools,
- the Council of ACT Parents and Citizens Associations,
- the Canberra Preschool Society,
- the Australian Education Union (ACT Branch), and
- the Principals' Association.

In coming months we will be writing to the P&C Associations of all the schools that have closed, and to the representatives of schools which are scheduled for closure.

***Where there is strong support for revival of a school community, we will be directly consulting with all parents and residents in the relevant suburb to get their input.***

## Introduction

Labor's legacy to the ACT education system was to deliver the biggest ever program of school closures.

The Stanhope Government's *Towards 2020* has caused disruption and uncertainty in the government school system. Whole communities have been dislocated. Families have been affected at 23 schools:

- Children have been separated from life long friends.
- Teachers have been involuntarily reassigned to new schools while some positions in the education system have been cut altogether.
- Some families have had to sell homes or buy a second car to get access to a new school.

Many of the schools which were closed were primary schools. These children are often not able to safely walk to distant suburbs to get to a new school.

The token voucher given by the government to each kid from a closed school will not compensate them for the loss of a local and accessible public school.

## The Liberal approach to school closures

Upon election to Government, the Canberra Liberals will move to reopen schools closed by the Labor Party where this is feasible and where there is strong community support.

We will work with communities to determine the future of all schools using criteria based on educational, social, financial, demographic and environmental factors.

In December 2006, the Canberra Liberals made commitments to:

- cancel involuntary school closures and restructures scheduled for 2008 to 2010, where that is the desire of parents;
- create a \$10 million School Reinstatement Fund to help communities to re-open schools closed by the Stanhope Government in 2006 and 2007;
- guarantee that there will be no school closures initiated in the first term of a Liberal Government (2008-2012); and
- establish a Community Committee on the Future Direction of ACT Schools.

The data and evidence used by a Canberra Liberal Government to make decisions on the future of schools will all be made public.

By contrast the Stanhope government has suppressed the 'Functional Review' along with other secret information used to select schools for closure.

## Putting Public Schools Back on the Map

The Liberal Party will commit to working with communities to, wherever possible, reinstate schools already closed in 2006 and 2007 as a result of Labor's *Towards 2020*.

in consultation with the community, we will establish criteria (including educational, social, demographic, financial and environmental factors) for reopening schools. For a school reopening to be feasible, there must be demonstrated community support.

Consultation with parents and local communities will be in a form that each community wants. For instance, some communities may want a public meeting to resolve the debate, while others may want a plebiscite.

A Liberal Government will establish a \$10 million Schools Reinstatement Fund to reopen schools closed by the Stanhope Government which meet the agreed criteria. These one-off funds will come from savings in the 2009/2010 Budget, including from the capital works budget. In addition we will consult with the Commonwealth to seek a one-off capital injection to re-invest in ACT schools.

Schools that have already been closed include the following:

<b>High Schools</b>	<b>Primary Schools</b>	<b>Preschools</b>
Kambah High School	Cook Flynn Hall Melrose Mt Neighbour Rivett Tharwa Village Creek Weston Creek	Cook Giralang Macarthur McKellar Page Rivett The Causeway

## Cancellation of closures scheduled for December 2008

The clock is ticking for families in three more schools which will be closed in December. Higgins Primary and Holt Primary are soon due to be replaced by the new west Belconnen super school. And Isabella Plains preschool will be subsumed in a new "P-2" school.

We will conduct discussions with the Higgins and Holt P&C Associations about the future of their schools in the light of the building of the new West Belconnen "super school". If parents at those schools want to keep the old schools operational, then the Canberra Liberals will cancel the school closures if we are elected to government.

We will hold similar discussions with parents at Isabella Plains preschool.

Under a Liberal Government, parents will be genuinely included in a decision on whether to keep their schools operating as separate schools within the ACT public education system.

## Further Initiatives in relation to school closures

In addition to the above initiatives that relate directly to *Towards 2020*, a future Liberal government will take the following actions:

### **No school closures in 2008- 2012**


A Liberal Government would not initiate any school closures in its first term. (See comments above about the West Belconnen "super school").

### **Future Schools Committee**

A Liberal Government will establish a community committee to monitor the health of Canberra's public schools in terms of:

- current enrolments;
- future enrolments and general demography;
- the condition of buildings and other 'plant'; and

any other relevant considerations.



The Committee will be charged with identifying schools that may be facing problems such as declining enrolment and move to give these schools the assistance they need to deal with the problem before they become intractable.

The Committee will draw upon and further develop the Education (Community Consultation) Guidelines which were developed by a previous Liberal Government and the ACT Parents and Citizens' Council and until January 2005 were a part of the Education Act.

The Committee will be made up of community representatives with expertise in areas such as education, finance, demographics and planning.

It could seek advice from the Department of Education and Training, Treasury and other key policy areas in the ACT Government.

The Committee will make recommendations to the Minister for Education, based on the data mentioned above for specific measures to support and revitalise schools at risk of closure.

These recommendations would include specific targets, worked out with the community, to ensure the continued operation of ACT Government schools. The Committee will report annually to the ACT Legislative Assembly.