

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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(Weston Creek Citizens Council Inc. – Reg. No. A2637)

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Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister

Possible School Closures in Weston Creek

At its regular monthly meeting held on Wednesday 24 May 2006, the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) discussed, among other things, community reaction to possible school closures in Weston Creek. In making these comments the WCCC is aware that other Community Councils and people involved with schools in other districts have already made comments on possible school closures which may affect them. The policy of the Weston Creek Community Council is not to make any public comment until it has had time to consult with the people of Weston Creek and the first opportunity to do this occurred last Wednesday.

The following points are some of the many comments that were made to the meeting.

A parent from Rivett Primary School was concerned that, while a lot of publicity had been given to the small size of the school, it had not been given enough public recognition for the valuable program it runs for children with special needs, particularly those with autism. Without any doubt this is an important program and it is one that other schools are unlikely to want to take over because of the difficulties involved in running such a program.

The parent also commented that the special needs program produced many benefits for other children within the school by providing leadership training and peer support activities as well as benefiting the children with special needs. This is not always appreciated by parents whose children go to schools without such programs.

As well as the special needs program Rivett Primary School had let out its premises for the Noah's Ark Resource Centre and the Warehouse Circus. The latter program was a popular program which is suitable for small schools because the children learn basic circus skills as part of their exercise program. All in all Rivett Primary School had been as active as other schools in making good use of the school site, earning extra revenue and providing suitable programs for its size compared to other smaller-sized schools which had received the lion's share of recent positive media publicity.

Other Weston Creek cluster schools represented at the meeting also indicated that they were pursuing similar programs to increase the viability of their schools.

A general comment was that Weston Creek was a popular area for working parents to enroll children so that nearby resident grandparents could care for children after school. Grandparents were also available to go to the school during the day should the need arise. School closures in Weston Creek could affect these child care arrangements and cause great inconvenience. One parent said that fifty per cent of enrolled children were out of area possibly for this reason.

The meeting was concerned that should school closures proceed in Weston Creek, the ACT Government would not arrange public transport to take children to other schools. It was felt that the present bus network in Weston Creek was inadequate for school needs since there is no regular day-time bus route which crosses Hindmarsh Drive. This means that some children would have to travel via the Woden Interchange which is too dangerous for small children and even children in the first years of high school.

There were many comments made about the school closures that occurred in 1991, when Weston Creek bore the brunt of the closures, and that any future school closures should be shared equally with other districts rather than focussed on Weston Creek. The WCCC is also aware of two community based organizations which would be prepared to share premises with existing schools in Weston Creek or which would be happy to rent vacated schools at the current rate for non-profit organizations. Both of these organizations are valued by the community for the work they do. The meeting noted that this solution was being used by a number of schools outside Weston Creek.

The proposed development of the Molonglo Valley north of Weston Creek may mean that school closures within our district are premature. The meeting understood that in developing Molonglo the Government said it would use existing infrastructure as much as possible which would mean utilising schools in Weston Creek as much as possible.

The meeting expressed the wish that the Government should take these comments into account in making its budget decisions and that it engages in genuine public consultation on possible school closures.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Jeff Carl
Chairperson
Weston Creek Community Council