

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Your local voice

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11 April 2003

Ms Flo Carey
Board Chair
The Canberra College
Woden Campus
Launceston Street
PHILLIP ACT 2606

Dear Ms Carey

RE: Review of *The Canberra College* – Weston Campus.

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) has been actively involved in Weston Creek as a consultation conduit for the local community since 1991. Over the past 18 months, we have discussed issues surrounding *The Canberra College* on a number of occasions in open public meetings. We have actively supported your Principal's efforts in his community consultation in Weston Creek.

The WCCC is a non-political, voluntary lobby group representing the residents of Weston Creek and is an informed, active and pragmatic contributor to public debates in Weston Creek. Our website (www.wccc.com.au) has further details about the WCCC.

In Weston Creek access to our remaining community facilities is an issue of great concern to local residents. Over the last decade or so, our community has witnessed the closure or merger of two Government Primary Schools, a Government High School and a Government College.

The WCCC therefore is presenting this submission to the School Board covering issues of concern to the community in the management of the Stirling site. Barry Woolacott has attended WCCC meetings in 2002, and again in both February and March 2003 to discuss some concerns.

The WCCC hopes that the review undertaken by the College Board reflects and addresses the concerns of residents and puts in front of Government the agenda of the people of the district.

Yours sincerely
(signed)

Jeff Carl
Chairperson, Weston Creek Community Council.

**Submission of the
Weston Creek Community Council
to the
Review of the management of
The Canberra College – Weston Campus (Stirling site)**

OVERVIEW

1. The WCCC has gleaned a large amount of information from various meetings which considered issues in respect of the Stirling site as a secondary education facility. These date back to the early 1990s when Bill Wood was Education Minister (when Holder High School was closed) and continue through to Education Ministers Bill Stefaniak, Simon Corbell and Katy Gallagher.
2. Concerns were expressed at WCCC meetings that the amalgamation of schools at the senior secondary level had the potential to become an unviable proposition, particularly where a twin campus arrangement is chosen and the campuses are located some distance from each other. This has proved correct. It was not possible, under the direction that the then College Board took with support of the ACT Department of Education to run a two campus College. Apparently, resources have been continually withdrawn from the Stirling site, accelerating the fall in enrolments.
3. A number of speakers at WCCC meetings have continually reinforced the point that “students voted with their feet and went to the Phillip site”. This appears to be the case in the statistics however it might not reflect the true situation in that very little incentive was offered – nor resources allocated - to students/teachers to use the Stirling site. Whilst free bus travel between the campuses was offered, it has proved to be a logistical nightmare for the students and has acted as a disincentive. Also, ACTION bus routes have meant that it is easier for students to travel directly from Duffy to the Phillip site than it is to travel from Duffy to the Stirling site. This shortcoming, whilst frequently raised, has never been adequately addressed by ACTION nor the Department of Education.
4. In November 2001 the then Education Minister Bill Stefaniak advised residents of Weston Creek that the Government would not close schools. In 2002 with Education Minister Simon Corbell, it was again reinforced that the Government would not close schools - but it depends on the management decisions of a school board on how they best manage the educational assets they are responsible for.
5. Given that the Stirling site now has little prospect of attracting substantial numbers of college students in the near-to-medium future, the question that now needs to be addressed is "How it can be salvaged for the community?"

CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

6. The new Centre for Teaching and Learning Technology (CTLT), which we understand will have 15 to 20 permanent staff and be headed by Philip Arthur, will take over a vast area in the school. The \$2 million capital works upgrade is expected to commence in June 2003. It is hoped that this action will remove some of the neglected appearance from the facility. It is also a concern that the works program will see the removal of the school hall and lecture theatre which may be needed if the school returns to being a College (see paragraph 20).
7. The CTLT will take the space of the original library on the first floor – removing valuable space from potential community use.
8. The number of teaching professionals visiting the site each day is not known, however this movement from the O'Connell Centre in Griffith is welcomed – at least based on the limited information divulged by Government as to the operating budget of the facility. There appears to be little in the way of information on the on-going budget allocation for the facility in the out years.

CANBERRA COLLEGE STUDENTS

9. It is understood that 88 Canberra College students use the Stirling site three days a week for IT classes. This occurs because there is a 'bulge' in the age cohort that needs five IT classrooms and only four are at the Woden Site. This "bulge" will work its way through the college population so that in less than two years The Canberra College school population will have no need to use the Stirling site during the day. This will also be accelerated by the College not taking enrolments which will exceed its physical capacity at the Woden Site – tactfully reducing the population of the campus.
10. There were suggestions raised by the local community in early 2002 that the Stirling site could become a centre for talented and gifted college students pursuing a science, maths or IT major, for example. It was proposed that such a facility would house 180-240 students who would complete all of their subjects on the site. Some members of our community feel that there is a demand for this proposal and it would not have interrupted the operation of the Brain Gym nor the Eclipse Program currently being operated on the site. The WCCC is not aware of any serious investigations being undertaken to determine the feasibility or otherwise of such a proposal.

THE ECLIPSE PROGRAM

11. There is also a high school group of 30 students who use the campus - the Eclipse program. The WCCC understands that the Eclipse program is focussed more on students with behavioural problems and other difficulties and has a different focus to the School Without Walls program formerly located at the Stirling site. This group we believe will continue to utilise some of the facilities of the site irrespective of any other uses.

THE BRAIN GYM

12. The Weston Creek community has actively supported Adult and Community Education (ACE) at the Stirling site for numerous years, as evidenced by the long-term success of the Brain Gym. The Canberra College have benefited from substantial profits from The Canberra College Community Association who manage the Brain Gym. We believe that it is critical that The Canberra College continue to actively support the Brain Gym at the Stirling site, particularly as the Stirling site is the only ACE location offering day-time classes which have proved popular with our community.
13. We are extremely concerned that when the Canberra College no longer requires the Stirling site for day students the assets, which are used by both the day college and the Brain Gym, will be removed and no longer available to the Brain Gym. The Brain Gym has no assets of its own, although profits from Brain Gym operations have been used to purchase equipment and facilities for the benefit of college students.
14. In addition the WCCC is aware of a number of organisations who would like to lease space in the building. These are community/educational providers who need classrooms and/or office accommodation. The WCCC respectfully suggests to the School Board and the Minister that if any lessees are selected they do not compete with the Brain Gym activities. Such organisations who provide educational services may not be fully exposed to national competition policy guidelines which requires them to reflect the true cost of them supplying educational services.

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY LIBRARY

15. Ever since the WCCC was founded, residents have continually asked for a library. Indeed, this requirement was raised as recently as the Council's February 2003 meeting. Two years ago rooms in the Stirling site were proposed for such a use. This was included in draft ACT Government Budget material. However when the electronic library was considered, as submitted by the WCCC, the suggestion was taken up by the ACT Library Service, but the library service has been located in Gungahlin.
16. Recent developments in electronic books and the advantages that they have over conventional printed books means that an electronic library can be established cheaply and would require little storage space and few staff.
17. Subsequent Education Ministers have been continually reminded of the need for such a facility; to have an ACT Government Library co-located with a College Library as occurs at Lake Tuggeranong College for example. The Stirling site is ideal for such a facility. The ground floor west wing is underutilised and readily able to be converted into a community/public library with little renovation. It has separate access, direct ground floor accessibility and is of a size which is greater than the small current temporary library, although not as large as the library space surrendered to the Centre for Teaching and Learning Technology (CTLT). Alternatively, should the existing motor maintenance building no longer be required, the WCCC suggests that this building with its ground-floor location and direct access from the street could also be considered as a possible library site.

18. The impact on the Weston Creek community of a public library facility, with internet access and co-located with a College would bring people and vitality to a site which is in need of such an injection of learning and enthusiasm.

BUILDING AVAILABILITY – ALTERNATE USERS

19. The WCCC understands that there are various organisations in Canberra who would gladly take over the whole lease for the complete Stirling site and convert the buildings for other uses. These uses may not be compatible with the ongoing co-location of the Brain Gym and our community would lose access to a very valuable community asset.

POST BUSHFIRE RECONSTRUCTION

20. The hypothetical proposals to establish a large residential development in the Stromlo Forest area can not be used to justify an ongoing commitment to maintain the Stirling site in its current neglected state. Any residential development in this area is at least 3-5 years away and the community wants action on the College campus in the near term.

SUMMARY

21. As mentioned previously, the Weston Creek community have lost significant educational resources over the past decade. They do not want to lose another facility, especially one that houses the popular Brain Gym. The community's priorities are to:
 - maintain the site as a College campus of perhaps 180-240 students with adequate resources and teachers based at the Campus.
 - welcome the CTLT to part of the site.
 - continue the Brain Gym operations in the refurbished Stirling site.
 - establish a community/college library with ground floor external access which is part of the ACT Library Service.
 - allow non-competing, compatible leases for the spare space in the buildings to inject an on-going daily use of the buildings.
