



## PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY

Refce: Petition No. 005

9 July 2017

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC  
Chairman  
Standing Committee on Environmental and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
Perth Western Australia 6000

Dear Mr Swinbourn and Members of the Standing Committee on Environmental and Public Affairs

### **Petition No. 005 - Opposing Education Central Plan for Perth Modern School**

Thankyou for your letter of 15th June 2017 in relation to the above. I am most grateful for the opportunity to communicate to the Standing Committee on behalf of the people who organised the Petition and the approximately 8,200 citizens of Western Australia who signed the Petition regarding the key issues raised therein. For the record, the matter of the Petition has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman). For the Committee's information the Perth Modernian Society Inc. of which I am the current President, is the alumni organisation representing former students and staff of Perth Modern School and has some 14,000 members.

Perth Modern School stakeholders including myself, greatly appreciate that the McGowan Government has reconsidered and abandoned its 'Education Central' plan which would have seen a radical change in the long-standing role of Perth Modern School as the State's only fully selective academic secondary school (please refer Public Thank You announcement 17 and 24 June 2017, [Attachment 1](#)).

However, the Petition's *raison d'être* is still relevant for further investigation, and I therefore submit brief supporting reasons below.

#### **1. Perth Modern School retains selective academic school status in its current location**

Whilst the McGowan Government's announcement on 13 June 2017 has delivered on this request, there is no legislative requirement to afford protection of this location to provide solely for selective academic schooling. The School Education Act 1999 (the Act) allows the Minister to 'assign a name and classification to,' however it also affords the capacity to 'change the name or classification of a government school (Division 1, Section 55). As such, Perth Modern School's status is vulnerable, and as the first co-educational government secondary school in Western Australia the history for now and into the future requires further investigation to ensure it is afforded such protection.

In addition, the Act does not specifically reference the need for selective academic secondary schooling, or gifted and talented education across primary and secondary schools. As Perth Modern School has admirably demonstrated, students with the assessed capacity can be nurtured and thrive to learn to their capacity at an accelerated rate. These specialised school learning opportunities require further investigation to ensure that Gifted and Talented schooling and programs as a continuing requirement of public education is safeguarded. Evidence to support this can be seen in the 2001 Senate Inquiry<sup>1</sup> where it recommended "Peak education policy documents such as the Adelaide Declaration or State/Territory equivalents, where they refer to special needs or individual differences, should make it clear that 'special needs' includes giftedness."

The demand for places in Gifted and Talented (GAT) programs across Western Australia continues to increase. In 2017, there were 3,500 year six students competing for the 500 program places available - only 2% of students will enter a GAT program. There is a need for further investigation to consider establishing an additional selective

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<sup>1</sup> Senate, Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business And Education References Committee, Reference: Education of Gifted and Talented Children, Report, Oct. 2001

academic program to cater for more students, as well as additional GAT programs. Please Refer [Attachment 2](#) - newspaper article (20/6/2017) titled 'Need for another Perth Mod'.

**2. A comprehensive and transparent consultation process is undertaken with all stakeholders to develop:**

- **evidence-based strategies for secondary school planning, including meeting the demand in Western suburbs (as a priority, but also in all metropolitan and country areas);**
- **principles to ensure student equity around health and well-being, and adequate access to onsite outdoor ground spaces for sport and recreation.**

Of high concern is that the 'Education Central' proposal was developed without any consultation with the Perth Modern School community. For future planning it is imperative that significant changes to education planning be undertaken with consultation with all relevant stakeholders. For this reason further investigation to establish how this can be achieved to safeguard student education is required. The politics which education is subjected to places significant stress on students and their families – whether it be changes to school status (e.g. closure of schools), funding promises at election time to address demand in overcrowded schools, or material changes in local catchment areas - to name just a few. Families wish to be heard through a proper process which accounts for students needs across the State, rather than political lobbying to achieve standards of education that should be equitably available across the State.

To illustrate this point, in September 2016, the WA Department of Education developed the Western Suburbs Secondary Schooling Plan ([Attachment 3](#)) to address the issue of overcrowding in secondary schools. This plan included the re-opening of City Beach High School. Parent action groups like [We Need a High School](#) lobbied the previous Government for change. The Education Department presumably tested many ideas and used growth based on ABS/WAPC data to develop the September 2016 plan. The 'Education Central' proposal significantly altered this strategy with very little evidence to support it when announced immediately prior to the 2017 State election campaign.

Since the McGowan Government's announcement on 13 June 2017 to retain Perth Modern School in Subiaco, the evidence to support the recently announced 'Inner City School (at Kitchener Park) appears to be based on data supporting inner suburb growth ([Attachment 4](#)). However, the student forecast data from the Grattan Institute suggests the Local Government Area of Stirling has by far the highest predicted growth over the next 10 years. I think it is self evident that planning for secondary school needs to be based on sound data, devoid of political promises which can drastically change the planning undertaken by the Department of Education without clear evidence. This type of action has ramifications for students and families, and was the direct cause of the *Save Perth Modern School* campaign, Feb. to June 2017.

As known, it is the well performing nature of specific public secondary schools which is driving demand for student enrolments. While population growth and perhaps urban infill growth can inform projected student enrolments, the number of families moving into these school catchment areas also continues. As illustrated in the recent newspaper article ([Attachment 5](#)) the catchment suburbs of Churchlands SHS and Shenton College show quicker turnover of real estate sales. As this continues, student enrolments rise and it is questionable if overcrowding can be successfully mitigated. Meanwhile, as funding continues to be injected to ease the schools with enrolment pressures, other secondary schools cannot be equitably funded and so these schools are continued to be seen as undesirable or not high performing. As such enrolment numbers continue to decline at some metro areas high schools, and without adequate student numbers the capacity to offer WACE/ATAR subjects decrease. In some cases there are secondary schools where funding to improve facilities is required but there lacks equity in funding allocation, and as stated previously has been subject to political promises from both sides of politics ([Attachment 6](#)).

'Education Central' was a proposal which offered no on-site outdoor ground spaces for sport and recreation. While not proceeding, it is highly concerning that no education policy exists to ensure minimum outdoor ground spaces for sport and recreation in schools. With evidence around designing spaces suited for secondary schools, see [11-18 Secondary School Play research project](#) (Scotland) and [International School Grounds Alliance](#) I feel that there needs to be recognition to ensure outdoor spaces enrich learning and well-being of children through ecological diversity. I strongly favour that planning for secondary schools should also include a requirement to mutually share facilities with local authority venues e.g. libraries, sports areas and even cafes, music/arts venues, and health/fitness facilities This would help to ensure community support for public education, and importantly, better value-for-money for taxpayers/ratepayers/the community.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People is soon to release the findings of report '[What children and young people are saying about school and learning.](#)' How this information is considered by Government and acted upon within the context of planning for schools would be useful for your Committee to consider.

The [21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative](#), a part of the Perth Modern School approach, provides over three decades of research to inform children's education. The skills children need to be successful in work and life beyond school include collaboration, communication, digital literacy, citizenship, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and productivity. Schools must consider learning environments that can foster the development of these skills. As

such, planning for the learning environment both indoors and outdoors is critical.

In summary there are many considerations of the Petition which as evidence indicates requires further consideration and investigation. I hope this information assists the Committee in concluding that an Inquiry is warranted, along the lines of that conducted by the Parliament of Victoria, Education and Training Committee, (Report: 'Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students' (ISBN 978-0-9871154-0-9, 978-0-9871154-1-6 Electronic) June 2012 See: [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/etc/Past\\_Inquiries/EGTS\\_Inquiry/Final\\_Report/Gifted\\_and\\_Talented\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/etc/Past_Inquiries/EGTS_Inquiry/Final_Report/Gifted_and_Talented_Final_Report.pdf) )

Unfortunately, I will be out of the State for the period 11 July - 31 August, so will most likely not be able to appear personally should such an invitation be presented. However in my absence if permissible I nominate **Mr Barrie Baker**, the immediate Past President of the Perth Modernian Society Inc. to appear on my behalf.

Yours sincerely

**Peter Farr**  
**President**  
**Perth Modernian Society Inc.**

Encl.