

From:
To: [Environment and Public Affairs Committee:](#)
Subject: Education Central Inquiry
Date: Saturday, 3 June 2017 9:15:56 PM

Hon. Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chairman, Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament of Western Australia, Legislative Council
GPO Box A11
Perth WA 6837

Dear Mr Swinbourn,

I write to you as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, in regards to the petition you recently received from Mr Peter Farr, President of the Perth Modernian Society, and Mr Andrews Stevens, President of the Perth Modern School P&C Association. The petition strongly opposes the government's proposal to build a high-rise building in the CBD (known as Education Central) and to move the students of Perth Modern School into the top floors of that building in 2020. This petition has been signed by almost 6,500 residents across all parts of Western Australia - from north and south of the river as well as from both metropolitan and rural areas.

I urge you to please listen to the residents who have signed this petition and initiate a comprehensive review into the Education Central proposal. I collected almost 200 of the signatures on the petition, and found that an overwhelmingly majority of the people I spoke to could not believe that the government was planning to go ahead with this ill-conceived idea. In fact, most of them had not heard about it until I began explaining the issues. I respectfully disagree with the Premier, who has stated publicly (on multiple occasions) that the government has a "mandate" to go ahead with the proposal. The proposal surprised everyone from the Perth Modern School community (including the teachers), as well as Scitech staff, when it was published in the Sunday Times on 29th January 2017, just six weeks out from the election. I don't believe that the election was won on this particular issue, which most people didn't even know about.

I find it difficult to understand how such an expensive and risky project can just go ahead without any planning, costing, or indeed, consultation with stakeholders. It has now been twelve weeks since the election, yet the government has still not opened up the lines of communication. I have written to various ministers on multiple occasions and have not had my specific concerns addressed. Even though there has been very strong public opposition to the proposal, it seems as though the government is persisting with implementing their plan, which will destroy Perth Modern School as we know it.

Of course, the issue is much wider than just Perth Modern School. It also impacts on all of the families who live in the western suburbs, who are currently dealing with the issue of severe overcrowding at Churchlands SHS and Shenton College. I really don't wish to enter into a political argument, but the Liberal government had developed their solution before the election. Their plan was to re-open City Beach SHS, as well as provide funding to expand Churchlands SHS, Shenton College, Carine SHS and Mt Lawley SHS. According to the then Education Minister, Mr Peter Collier, this plan was developed over many years, with the input of all of the primary and high school communities as well as Education Department staff. The current Education Minister, Ms Sue Ellery, has been unable to provide evidence of any planning or costings for this alternate solution, nor has she been able to show that any consultation has occurred with relevant stakeholders. All I ask is that the issue be subjected to an independent inquiry to ensure that the solution settled upon focusses on the best educational outcomes of all of the children, after taking into account all relevant factors.

As a parent of a year 7 child currently studying at Perth Modern School, I am seriously concerned about the health, safety and security of the children if the proposal were to go ahead, not to mention the practicalities of having 1,500 students in a high-rise building in the center of the CBD. In particular:

UNSUITABLE LOCATION

1. The location being proposed by the government is, in my opinion, not a suitable location for a high school. It is in a section of the city that is already very congested, and having an extra 1,500 students in that vicinity will cause further congestion.
2. The proposed site is directly adjacent to Northbridge, which is a well-known high crime area. It's common for there to be aggressive and abusive people in that part of the city, not to mention access to drugs and alcohol. I am concerned with how children, some as young as 10, would handle being caught up in dangerous situations on their way to or from school.
3. Ms Ellery, has in the past been concerned about the environment that surrounds a school. "If students from Highgate Primary School want to cross the road to go to the park, they have to cross the very busy Bulwer Street. At that park across the road there are from time to time antisocial activities, let me call them that, around the toilet blocks. We would not necessarily want little kids walking over there for sport, or, if they did, additional staff would need to stand around the toilet blocks so that the kids were not stepping on syringes or whatever else happens there from time to time
([http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/bbb9c6e264e34ca948258087002613f9/\\$FILE/C39%20S1%2020160914%20p5893b-5910a.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/bbb9c6e264e34ca948258087002613f9/$FILE/C39%20S1%2020160914%20p5893b-5910a.pdf)).

Why is the government not concerned about this issue in relation to Education Central?

4. Ms Ellery has also spoken about her concerns around children and their exposure to alcohol. In November 2016 she said 'The only point on which I disagree with Hon Helen Morton is the point that this is not about stopping people from drinking. I actually think it is about stopping young people from starting to drink earlier. ...It is about making sure that young people do not start drinking any earlier than they should.'
([http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/28bf982d187168b5482580dc002ed7b7/\\$FILE/C39+S1+20161110+ep7803b-7811a.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/28bf982d187168b5482580dc002ed7b7/$FILE/C39+S1+20161110+ep7803b-7811a.pdf)).

Education Central would be located right next to Northbridge, with it's multitude of clubs and pubs - the probability of the children being exposed to alcohol/drugs at this location would, I imagine, be much higher than at other government high schools. Again, why does the government not seem to be concerned about young children being exposed to alcohol (and drugs) in close proximity to their school?

SAFETY AND SECURITY

5. Will it be possible to safely evacuate 1,500 children from the top of a high-rise building in case of fire or other emergency? How long will it take them to walk down the stairs, and what procedures will be put in place for children in wheelchairs? I'm sure the last thing anyone wants to see is an incident that results in children being seriously injured or worse.
6. I'm also concerned about the security of the children in a mixed-use building. The annual number of visitors to Scitech is estimated at around

315,000 and it's my understanding that the government hope to increase this further in the future. How can the government ensure the safety of the children with so many strangers using the same building? It's not just about Scitech, it's also the unknown businesses that will be occupying the middle floors of Education Central. Presumably there will be a separate entrance for the school, and perhaps some sort of swipe cards to enter the lifts, but what's to stop an unknown person following the children into the school? Will everyone in the building be required to have a Working With Children card?

7. Many students arrive at school early and many stay late after school for extra curricular activities (eg. debating, music practice, sports). I'm concerned about the safety and security of these students in the proposed location (see paragraphs above relating to the unsuitability of having a school located right next to Northbridge) at times of the day when there are not many adults around to supervise them.

COST

8. What costings have been produced to determine if the state can afford Education Central? It seems excessive to be spending \$40 million on this building **plus** a further \$13 million per year in rent. Over just 20 years, this adds up to \$260 million, and I imagine that the government would want the school to last longer than 20 years. At a time when the state finances are dire, there must be more cost-effective ways of solving the problem of overcrowding in western suburb schools, particularly as the government wouldn't even own the building at the end of it.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

9. The Education Central plans that have been released allow for the children to have access to the roof space at recess and lunchtime. It concerns me that the government considers this to be a suitable outdoor space for children - how will it be possible to grow grass, bushes or trees in an often windy, hot environment? I don't think that even the high-end hotels are able to provide their guests with green open spaces on the roofs of their buildings.

It has been estimated that roof space will be approximately one quarter the size of the current Perth Modern School oval. This brings up questions in terms of equity of access to green open spaces for all children in government schools. In an era where we are facing high levels of childhood obesity and mental health issues, surely putting 1,500 children into a high-rise building with limited access to physical activities is not wise?

10. Even if the children do not have access to suitable outdoor areas during breaks, surely they will be required to undertake Physical Education classes? How exactly will these classes be run? Will they be exclusively held inside a gymnasium? If not, then I assume the children will need to be taken by bus to nearby ovals for Phys Ed lessons. I believe that the closest green space is Langley Park, a 20 minute walk away (and probably not much less by bus if you take into account the city traffic). Where will the buses be able to load/unload the children and equipment in such a congested part of the city? How long will it take to bus the children there, and will there be sufficient time for any actual physical activity if the children have to be back at school for their next lesson?

LOGISTICS

11. The logistics of the daily drop-off and pick-up of students is also a strong concern. Not all students travel by public transport. Many are dropped off by parents on their way to/from work. Having the school located in the middle of the CBD will bring a substantial volume of extra traffic into the city, and it is unclear whether there will even be space for the parents to park their car while their child unloads the car. Obviously there won't be a car park built as part of the high-rise building, as it is being built above the Busport. Even if there was a "kiss-n-ride" style arrangement available, I can imagine many cars lined up in the morning and afternoon waiting for children to get in and out of cars. This is not ideal, and contrary to the current trend of trying to get cars out of cities.
12. How long will it take for 1,500 children to ascend to the top floors in the morning and descend in the afternoon? Given that they all carry large, heavy school bags, and some carry instrument cases or sports equipment, how many children would fit in the elevator at any one time? How many elevators will there be, and how many trips would be required to get all of the children safely to the top? How long will the kids need to wait until the next lift is available? I can imagine a certain amount of hustling and bustling to get into the next lift. What extra staff will be needed to police this every day?
13. Perth Modern School currently operates a large music program and many students have to carry large and heavy instruments to school multiple times a week. They often practice before and after school. How would this location be able to accommodate the numerous school concerts that are presented by the music students? Currently, the auditorium accommodates several hundred family members and we use the basketball courts and concourse to manage the parking situation. With a lack of ground space at this location, where will family members be able to park? Will they have to resort to paying high City of Perth parking fees to attend their child's concerts?
14. What about school camps and sports carnivals? I'm not sure how many buses would be needed to transport 1,500 students to the HBF Stadium for a swimming carnival, or Perry Lakes for an athletics carnival, but there were four buses in evidence to transport 220 year 7 students to their camp a few weeks ago. Even without that amount of luggage to transport, and even if you could fit 100 students on a bus (which I think might be a bit high), you would need 15 buses to take the school to the annual swimming and athletics carnivals. Imagine that many buses lining Roe St, William St and/or Wellington St first thing in the morning!

Aside from these issues, I'm saddened that the history and long traditions of the school will be lost. The support of the Modernians will not continue and the links to the school's history will be severed. Currently, I believe that the alumni support 55 children with their fees, school uniforms, excursions, etc. These are children with strong academic skills who would otherwise not be able to attend the school, and it is sad to think that these children may not have the opportunity to reach their full potential otherwise.

Please, Mr Chairman, there is no need to disrupt the present and future students of Perth Modern School, which has proved itself time and time again to be a shining jewel in the crown of public education in Western Australia. I don't know what it is about the school that works so well - perhaps it's the unique mix of committed educators, students, curriculum, the link to the history of the school, the support of the Modernians, or perhaps all of these with a little bit of magic thrown in. Whatever it is, it works. Perth Modern consistently delivers students who have had a strong, well-rounded education - not just in the academic sense, but in terms of sporting success and with strong community mindedness. It has produced leaders in many fields and has returned to the community everything it has been given by the government in spades.

Once again, I urge you to please seriously consider this issue, and order an independent review into secondary school overcrowding which has as its mission to achieve the best educational outcomes for the children, not the best political outcome for whichever party happens to be in power.

Many thanks for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Gabriela Lawrence