

Radical Plans to Revamp School Infrastructure

New South Wales Minister of Education Rob Stokes has announced the creation of Education Infrastructure NSW, a delivery unit to drive and oversee the planning, supply and maintenance of NSW schools over 15 years.

This is in response to the chronic overcrowding in the state's public schools, with the Department of Education estimating that public school enrolments will grow 21% by 2031, the majority of which will be in Sydney. The plan may cost \$5 billion over the first decade.

P&C Federation President Susie Boyd commented "the creation of a new agency for education infrastructure is a welcoming sign that the government is taking school overcrowding seriously. The surging enrolment numbers in metropolitan areas and the staggering \$775 million maintenance backlog in government schools throughout the state has long been a major concern, and we are encouraged that the government now seems to be taking this on board."

However, some of the flagged proposals may dramatically change the way schools operate in their communities, and the government must tread carefully before embarking on something this radical.

"The devil will really be in the details" Ms Boyd said. "At the moment, there is little information of exactly what the government is planning, so we will have to wait for more details before fully judging this announcement."

Some initiatives reportedly being considered are partnerships with developers and councils, and replacing demountable classrooms with modular classroom blocks.

One factor that gives P&C Federation pause is the consideration of building larger schools on smaller sites. "We believe that catering for more students entails providing space for recreational play, and we would hope that efforts to tackle overcrowding would not lead to excessively reduced play space for our students", Ms Boyd said.

"The enormous increase in enrolments is something that requires carefully considered, out-of-the-box thinking. We will be in constant contact with the Mr Stokes to ensure our school communities get the best possible outcomes."

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Media Contact:

President Susie Boyd

0418 163 665

susie.boyd@pandc.org.au

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Locked Bag 40, GRANVILLE NSW 2142

Telephone: 1300 885 982

Fax: 1800 655 866

Website: www.pandc.org.au

ABN: 37 439 975 796