

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA

Serving and empowering women through education and advocacy



2/12 Tollington Ave
Malvern East
VIC 3145

16 June 2014

The Hon Martin Dixon MP
Minister for Education
Parliament House
East Melbourne, VIC 3002

Dear Mr Dixon

Re: Need to think again on sale of closed schools

Graduate Women Victoria is one of the State and Territory Associations affiliated to the Australian Federation of Graduate Women. While our organisation has a particular focus on women's access to tertiary education, to which end we provide annual scholarships for disadvantaged postgraduate students from a fund that has a capital of over one million dollars, we are also committed to advocating for universally accessible and affordable quality education, for all at and all levels – early childhood, primary and secondary.

We are concerned by proposals in the current budget to sell off dozens of Victorian public schools closed during the period lasting from the initial closures of the Kennett government, through the intervening ALP government and into the time of the Napthine government, in which you serve as Minister for Education.

We note the current article in the *Age* by respected commentator on educational matters, Geoff Maslen, and concur with his opinion that:

faced with a surging population and with residents more conscious of infrastructure issues such as public transport, travel times and access to education facilities, closing schools that are now underutilised – but may not be in the future – could prove risky.

We would argue that selling the land and buildings of schools already closed carries similar risks. One of those risks is that the cost of land to build a new school to replace one earlier closed may well exceed any advantage gained from that earlier sale. We have already seen that the government has had to agree to build a new secondary school in the densely settled Prahran area in order to replace the one closed in 1996. Where the land for the new school is to be found and at what cost must be a major problem for the government (and ultimately the tax payer). A similar problem must beset the already promised second Albert Park Campus, or arise if the pressure for more schools in the Coburg area becomes irresistible.

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA (formerly AFUW Vic)

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<http://gradwomenvic.org.au/>

In 2006, you yourself, in opposition as Shadow Minister for Education, recognised that it was possible to make wrong decisions on the basis of speculation about future demographic movements. Surely it would be better for the government to find temporary revenue-raising uses for schools not temporarily in full demand than to dispose of these assets only in order to create later crises in school accessibility that need to be met by outlays in land acquisition and building well in excess of any original sales revenue.

We note the comments of Professor O'Connor on the capacity of private schools and some of the elite High Schools to attract students from wider areas and the need to plan to locate new schools for a wider catchment, but while we feel that his remarks may have some force in relation to secondary schools, we believe that it is imperative for every suburb to be well-served with accessible primary schools. Primary school children should not be obliged to travel long distances to school, whether on public transport or in private vehicles, thereby contributing to existing traffic pollution and congestion.

The existing increase in demand for primary public school places may well be exacerbated by the spectacularly rising costs of tertiary education under the Federal Government's present policies. The effect of this may be to reverse the drift of primary school students into private schools, making it all the more essential that the Victorian government does not recklessly dispose of its stock of land and buildings reserved for educational purposes.

We hope that you will urge the Premier to reconsider these proposed sales,

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Strauss AM
President, Graduate Women Victoria
Vice-President, International Federation of University Women

cc. The Hon James Merlino MP, Shadow Minister for Education