

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

REPORT

relating to the proposed

construction of a

TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

at

DARWIN. NORTHERN TERRITORY.

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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL. DARWIN, N.T.

REPORT

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
to which the House of Representatives referred for investigation and report
the question of the construction of a new Technical High School at Darwin,
Northern Territory, has the honour to report as follows:-

SECTION I. - INTRODUCTION.

Historical.

- 1. The Education Department of South Astralia, by virtue of an agreement with the Commonwealth Government, is responsible for the administration of educational services in the Northern Territory, in respect of staffing, curricula, teacher training, and the operation of the various schools generally. In these matters it maintains a close liaison with the Administrator of the Northern Territory. The Department of Territories is responsible for providing the necessary accommodation, equipment, etc., and meets the cost of education in the Northern Territory. Matters of policy are usually decided upon after consultation between the Administrator and the Minister or Director of Education in South Australia.
- 2. The need for a new high school in Darwin was first positively considered by the Administrator in 1947, when an area of approximately 3½ acres in Beagle street, in the vicinity of Beetson street, was allocated for the renrozso. Subsequent examination of the requirements for the school led to the conclusion that this site was inadequate, and the proposal was abandoned.

- In May, 1956, the Administrator invited Mr. J.S. Walker, the Superintendent of Technical Schools in South Australia to visit the northern Territory to inquire into the educational needs of the Territory, beyond the primary level, with special reference to technical education, including apprentice training. Mr. Walker's subsequent report was later made the hasis of official proposals by the Administrator to the Department of Territories, for the provision of more adequate facilities in Darwin. These proposals were modified after several attempts to reduce the cost of the project, and a submission was prepared for reference to the Public Works Committee.
- 4. The present school is in the same area as the primary school, and older pupils have to mix with young children in grounds which are inadequate for the purpose, while there is severe over-crowding in the sub-standard and unsuitable buildings.

SECTION II. - THE PRESENT PROPOSAL

The Building.

- a long range programme to provide for educational requirements up to university standard in the future. The proposal, referred to as Scheme 3, was developed after two previous schemes had been found too costly, and certain provisions, regarded as desirable, were relegated to a later stage. The plan indicates a three-storey building with two upper floors elevated on columns above the ground. The academic class rooms are to be located in this building, which is to be linked with the manual training block by a single floor administrative wing. The manual training block is also of single storey construction.
- 6. The school is to be located on what is known as the

 Vestey Hill site, which will provide space for the future stages of

 construction when more facilities become essential.

The Cost.

7. The estimated cost of the building was set down at £400,000,but was subsequently amended to £454,940, and the time necessary for construction was stated to be approximately two years.

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SECTION III. - THE COMMITTER'S INVESTIGATION.

General.

- 8. The Committee studied the proposal and took evidence from the officials of the Department of Works responsible for preparation of the submission to the Committee, in Melbourne, where evidence was also taken from the Superintendent of Technical Schools of South Australia. A visit was made to Darwin, where the proposal in connection with the Supreme Court building was also investigated. Thorough inspections were made of the proposed site, the site of the present school, and the buildings being used to carry on the educational work now. Opportunity was taken to view the whole establishment in operation, with the children in classes and at play.
- 9. Evidence was taken in Darwin from the Administrator, the Mayor, and public officials, as well as from representatives of associations concerned with the welfare of the children, and from others interested and in a position to inform the Committee on matters specially pertinent to the questions involved. Independent experts connected with the architectural, engineering, and medical aspects of the inquiry were also interviewed.

Need for the Building.

- 10. Ample evidence was submitted in great detail to emphasize the urgent need for new high school buildings in Darwin, and the Committee observed, during its inspections, the types of accommodation being used, and the crowded conditions being experienced there.
- 11. Overcrowded conditions. Overcrowding in the secondary schools in Darwin is excessive, and it has been allowed to reach a serious stage because building has been deferred on the understanding that a new school building plan was to be implemented. Playing areas have to be shared by the older pupils with younger children, in areas which are so confined that severe restrictions have to be placed upon the types of activities which can be pursued. Ball

games have to be prohibited. The school is at present divided by Wood street, which carries heavy traffic from the wharf up to the town area, and there is constant danger to children who have to move across the road at all times during the day. The effect of the trying tropical climate on people in crowdod conditions is an important pointer to the need for more accommodation, but this will be referred to in connection with the air-conditioning requirements.

- 12. Accommodation .-The most important consideration which concerned the education authorities was the actual housing of the children in suitable schoolrooms, and schedules were produced showing the number of students anticipated in the various sections of the school in the near future. Graphs and figures were also submitted to indicate the likely growth of population, and consequent school requirements up to 1964. The conclusions derived from the schedules are that, when the proposed Darwin High School opens, as it is hoped it will, in 1963, it will have an estimated minimum enrolment of 432 students. The accommodation will also be used at suitable times for adults and apprentices. It is considered that the enrolment could reach a maximum of 660 at this period, thus emphasizing the need for urgent construction of the first stage of the programme, and the pressing necessity to plan the next stage.
- 13. The present temporary buildings house 270 secondary boys and girls, at a cost of £10,000 a year, and it is now suggested as essential to build the proposed school for 500 pupils, followed by a second stage to house 300-500 students. There seems little doubt from the evidence that the Darwin population will continue to increase, and the graphs indicating the trend for the future seem to provide reasonable figures to work on.
- 14. Educational Stages required.— In March 1959 the
 Administrator considered that the development of the educational system
 in Darwin should be planned in three stages, consisting of (1) a technical
 high school providing academic and technical courses, (2) an academic
 high school alongoide the technical school, and conversion of the
 technical high school into a technical college to serve the entire greater
 Darwin area; and (3) a University college.

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- encouraged to become permanent residents of Darwin, higher educational facilities must be provided to cover the following needs as soon as possible: academic courses leading to matriculation at an Australian U diversity; junior technical courses for those who will not proceed to further academic study at a university; theoretical and practical courses of a vocational kind with special emphasis on the training of apprentices; and an adult education centre, providing opportunities for study and discussions in academic and home craft subjects, as well as leisure interest activities of a cultural kind.
- 16. Stage 2. When the expansion of Darwin requires the provision of additional accommodation for secondary students, there should be sufficient technical students to justify the separation of the academic and technical schools. At this stage a new academic high school should be built, and the Stage I building would become a purely technical college. The many advantages of such a programme were enumerated in the evidence.
- 17. <u>Stage 3.</u> It is considered that the erection of a university college to cater for the needs of between 100 to 200 undergraduates may be warranted by 1970, and this stage of development was taken into account when the needs for this area were being provided for.
- the present proposal the Committee considered it essential to ensure that any action taken now to provide school facilities should be of such a nature that it would facilitate the planning of the complete programme of foreseeable needs in this area. In this regard the evidence revealed some differences of opinion on the part of various authorities as to the most desirable course to be adopted in planning the functions of the buildings in the second stage of the scheme. These differences will have to be resolved at an early date, if satisfactory continuity is to be achieved in the proper development of educational needs for the future, and if designing is to proceed without delay in respect of the second building stage.

19. <u>Urgent need</u>.— The differences of opinion connected with the specific use of the future buildings do not affect in any way the unanimity of opinion that there is an urgent need for the proposal as planned at this stage, but in fact all witnesses expressed in the strongest terms their conviction that this school is required now, and their desire to say nothing which would himler the rapid construction of the proposed building. The Committee therefore agrees that there is an urgent need for the proposed high school and recommends that it be constructed as soon as possible.

The Building.

20. Floor space .-The present proposal aims to provide, in Stage I of the building programme, the essentials indicated in the first stage of the educational programme, though it has been necessary to pare down some major items in order to relate the total cost to the resources at the command of the Administration. The plans show a total usable floor area of 26,131 sq.ft., for the whole building, made up of Ground floor 9939 sq.ft., 1st floor 8336 sq.ft. and 2nd floor 7856 sq.ft. The design submitted to the Committee was the last of three schemes planned to provide the accommodation necessary for the purposes laid down. Scheme (I), which was to cost £541,200 was regarded as eminently suitable to meet the This figure was considered too high, and desired programme. a second scheme was produced which deleted some of the features, such as the Assembly Hall and some of the Craft accommodation. The estimated cost of Scheme (2) was £419,300 but it was also too expensive. The Scheme (3) now submitted, and originally estimated to cost £400,000, is the result of further planning and paring down of space. Further reference to the cost is made in a later section of this Report. this Scheme all the class room accommodation is contained in one 3-storey building with the two upper floors elevated on columns above the grounds. The ground floor is unenclosed and will provide a covered play space so essential in the Darwin climate first planned to serve in some measure as a substitute for the Assembly Hall, which would have to wait till the next stage of construction.

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- 21. The Main Academic Wing. The Main academic wing comprises a three storey block 222ft. long by 60ft. wide. The ground floor of this wing provides mainly for covered play area in between the columns supporting the building. The eastern end of ground floor is to house the library, main foyer and administrative section, while a laundry and washing area are at the western end.
- 22. The first floor contains the class rooms and common rooms, while the second floor provides for laboratories, science demonstration room, typing, dressmaking, drawing, and art rooms. A kitchen and practice flat are also situated on this floor.
- 23. The Trades Block.— This block is of one storey, and is separated from the Academic block by an open internal court and covered assembly area. It is 222ft. long by 36ft. wide, and provides workshops and stores for woodwork, metalwork, and electrical work.
- 24. The Administration block.— This block is a single storey building, 85ft. by 54 ft. joining the eastern ends of the Academic block and the Trades block. It connects the staff section and main foyer of the Academic block with air-conditioning plant rooms, girls' and boys' cloak rooms, prefects' rooms, and toilets. The covered assembly area at the rear of the Administration block has a tuckshop, and a dais with screen wall to enhance the facilities of this area for temporary use as an assembly hall.

Construction.

- 25. The main frame and floors will be of reinforced concrete; main internal partitions will be of pressed cement bricks, with some of the internal partitions being of timber frame, part glazed and sound insulated. The roof will be steel framed and sheeted with continuous heavy gauge galvanised steel trough roofing.
- 26. External walls will be of pressed cement bricks, faced on the east and west facedes with precast concrete panels finished with a white crushed quartz aggregate. The external south wall of the Library will have an applied mosaic mural as a feature. In order to assist economical and efficient air-conditioning of the building louvred sun screens have been designed in order to minimise thermal loads by restriction of sun

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penetration.

Design.

- 27. The plans and the model indicate that the proposed building will present an aesthetic appearance eminently suitable for the school purpose it is to portray. The mass of the main wing is complemented by the associated trades block and connecting administration section, while the covered areas and feature wall to the library add sufficient variation and interest. Independent witnesses all expressed appreciation of the design, and commendation for the careful and thoughtful planning as regards aspect. The Committee considers that the design is appropriate for its purpose and believes that it should result in a building which will stand out on its promontary site as a pleasing landmark in the area.
- 28. After inspecting the Lyncham High School in Canberra, the Committee gained the opinion that, while it is esgential to provide all reasonable modern conveniences to assist present day educational activities, it is possible to plan features which occupy large areas of space and use costly materials. It appeared that total expenditure would soar dangerously in a distant locality like Derwin if the planning is not limited to essentials, commensurate with adequate modern requirements. The Committee made extensive inquiries from various witnesses in the educational field, and, without exception, they agree that the planning of this project is neither lavish nor extravagant. It only remains, therefore, for the choice of materials to be carefully made, having in view the high cost of transporting materials to Darwin. The Committee feels that the residents of Darwin should be extended every encouragement in their activities in the rather difficult tropical climate, and special features are included with this in mind.
- 29. Extra facilities. During the inquiry it became apparent that the paring down of the total space, to meet a reduced total estimated cost, had resulted in the skimping of some facilities in the Trades block. The evidence shows that it is desirable to include in the plan some additional ablution facilities for the Trades Block, where

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students and particularly ongineering apprentices, would otherwise have
to walk a considerable distance in a dirty condition across the school to
reach the ablution facilities as planned.

- 30. The re-introduction of showers into the final planning of this block would be an easy matter, and the cost is estimated to be in the vicinity of £2,500. The Committee therefore, recommends that appropriate ablution facilities be included in these plans.
- great deal of evidence was submitted indicating many points of detail which can be dealt with more appropriately in the final planning of the proposal than at the present Committee stage. Many valuable suggestions were put forward in Melbourne, and by witnesses in Darwin experienced in the wants and requirements desirable in modern school activities. Ideas which might well add to the comfort of the students, and the completeness of the practical planning are contained in the evidence of those who have the interests of the students at heart, and the Committee recommends that special attention be given to the relative evidence, with a view to the inclusion of those suggestions which can be applied with benefit to the project, at the appropriate stage.

The Site.

- 32. A site was originally provided in Beagle street, where an area of $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres was available, and other possible locations were considered in making the most appropriate selection. It was decided that, in view of the limitations to size of those sites, it would be impracticable and unsound to erect the Darwin Technical School on the Beagle street site, when an additional academic high school and future university college buildings may have to be constructed before very long. The alternative was then considered of reserving the area known as Vesteys, at Bullocky Point, for present and future educational and associated cultural requirements.
- 33. While this area contains some most attractive and potentially valuable land for residential purposes, it is an ideal site for public and educational use. It is sufficiently level for building

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and drainage, is centrally situated in the area it will have to serve, and it provides adequate playing grounds at the foot of the hill for both high and technical pupils without affecting the total area which will be available for the general public. It is in proximity to the botanic gardens, and is also near the Mendil Beach, while it has the advantage of accessibility by existing roads.

34. Most of the old Vestey's buildings have now been demolished, but the concrete reservoir is to remain as an adjunct to the town water supply for the present. The Vestey area is therefore considered the best available site to satisfy future educational requirements, and the Committee recommends its development as suggested.

35. Master Plan .- The conflicting evidence in connection with the siting of the School in its relation to the foreshore reservation; the future use of adjoining areas for playing fields and recreation space; and the rapidly developing residential areas in this location, all tend to underline the strong recommendations made by the Committee in past references that a comprehensive Master Plan for the whole of Darwin is In the recent Darwin Supreme Court Report the Committee pointed required. out that the Stage 1 of a Master Plan, dealing with the central Administration section, was prepared following a report by Dr. Langer, but that Stage 2 of the plan, which is to deal with the residential development further out, was still not complete. When the High School is constructed, and the population continues to increase, the question of a definite and authoritative Master Plan will become increasingly important. Committee again recommends early attention to the completion of a Master Plan upon which citizens may rely with confidence in establishing homes and businesses.

36. Location of buildings. The proposal was planned to place the High School buildings on Bullocky Point, with an access road running close to the cliff edge, but separated from it by a fence to give protection from the 65 feet drop to sea level. This siting would give the school buildings a magnificent view over the Harbour, but the Chairman of the Town Planning Advisory Committee put forward some objections to this particular location. He submitted a sketch showing

that the school would project across the green belt which extends along the foreshore. This point of land is regarded as one that could be developed as a park and tourist area. It was suggested that the building should be located in a more central position on the site, about 400 feet back from the edge of the cliff. It was admitted that, if this course were adopted, it would place the school in line with the existing old concrete reservoir, which is rather unsightly and would impair the view. Some kind of screening would be necessary to hide it from view, and there was also the possibility that obstruction by the reservoir to winds flowing from a northerly direction would impair natural ventilation, if this alternative to airconditioning should be required on occasions.

37. The Committee inspected the site and studied the proposed location of the building in reference to the points under review: and it now recommends that the original location of the building on the site be changed, so that the school boundary shall be not less than 250 feet from the cliff. This position should allow the building to be constructed just clear of the reservoir, and with the required distance to the boundary for the entrance road.

The Assembly Hall.

- 38. The most contentious point in the inquiry arose in connection with the provision of an Assembly Hall, even although everyone was strongly in favour of it, and all regard it as an absolute necessity. An Assembly Hall was included in the original Scheme (1), but it was one of the items to be deferred, when Schemes (2) and (3) were designed in order to bring the cost within lower limits.
- 39. The Superintendent of Technical Schools, upon whose report the original scheme was based, recommended the present scheme (3) but only from sheer necessity, and in order to conform to the departmental view on costs. He deplored the loss of what he regarded as an essential feature of this multi-purpose school, and he was supported by much other evidence in regarding the roofing-over of part of the courtyard, to form an assembly area, as a very poor substitute for a properly equipped, air-conditioned assembly hall.

- 40. It was generally accepted that, apart from the purely educational uses of the Assembly Hall in such a school, an assembly hall does much to build up a unity in a school, and this is of very great importance. A hall is also essential for such activities as displays of school work, speech night, school concerts, dramatic work, and other aspects of community life which cannot be included now, simply because there are no facilities to do so.
- 41. Parents' Associations have a very important function in a school, and their representatives have stressed in evidence that an assembly hall would be of great assistance in working towards their objectives.
- 42. Adult education also is assuming a growing importance in Darwin, and an assembly hall will do much to encourage further growth, and to foster social activities of benefit to the school and the whole town.
- 43. The original scheme visualised an assembly hall to cater for the 500 children in the first stage, but, as it is estimated that the school population will reach this figure about the time it is expected to be ready for occupation, an urgent plea was made that an assembly hall should be included which would provide for both the first and second stages of this scheme. There seems little doubt that the growth of population will require planning of the second stage without delay, and an assembly hall of appropriate size will be required.
- the need for a considerably large assembly hall to serve both the first and second stage schools, whichever form they take. He pointed out, however, that it was not a question of whether an assembly hall is to be built, but when it is to be built in the first stage, or the second stage of this scheme. He stated that under existing conditions, if money were provided for the assembly hall in the first stage it could possibly involve deferring the building of some urgent primary schools in the Territory. He summarised his views by saying that, if the assembly hall were left out of the first

it would be possible to get by with a certain improvisation by the use of the covered space at ground level, as now planned. He would be happy, however to see the assembly hall included in the first stage, provided it did not involve dropping what is regarded as other more urgent work in the Territory.

45. The Committee studied all the evidence on this matter

carefully, and was impressed with the keen desire of the people of Darwin to further the work of the school, and to ensure that the present inadequate facilities were improved to such an extent that life in this isolated locality would be less difficult. The feeling was expressed that, in a distant, tropical situation, where education of children is a major problem for all families, nothing less than standards available in the southern states should be provided in Darwin. Members of the Committee were most sympathetic with this view, and they felt that the early provision of an assembly hall would go a long way to promote satisfaction with local school conditions, thus minimising the expensive necessity for sending children south for appropriate education.

46. Owing to the financial considerations involved, however, it was impossible to overlook the serious practical necessity for limiting expenditure, as visualised by the administration and the planners. After weighing the evidence, and conducting debate at considerable length, the Committee finally resolved that its recommendation should be for inclusion of a complete assembly hall in the first stage. The following extract from the Minutes of Proceedings shows the result of the debate:-

Moved by Mr. Fairhall, seconded by Senator Maher - That the Stage (1) plan of scheme (3), as submitted in this proposal by the Department, be adopted, but the Committee strongly urges that, as an Assembly Hall is essential to the proper conduct of secondary education in Darwin, there should be included, in this first stage, a complete Assembly Hall to accommodate 1000 children.

Debate ensued.

Senator Anderson moved an Amendment, seconded by Mr. Griffiths plan
That the Stage (1), of the Scheme (3), as submitted in
this proposal by the Department, be adopted, with the inclusion of a
complete Assembly Hall to accommodate 1000 children.

Debate ensued.

The Committee divided -

Aves (5) Noes (3)

Senator Anderson Senator O'Byrne Mr. Brimblecombe Mr. Griffiths Senator Maher Mr. Dean Mr. Fairhall

Mr. 0'Connor

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

Mr. O'Connor moved a further Amendment, seconded by Mr. Brimblecombe -

That the recommendation of the Committee be - That it is expedient to proceed with the original Scheme (1), as envisaged prior to the present departmental submission, and that further evidence be called to that end. Debate ensued.

The Committee divided -

Ayes (2) Noes (6)

Mr. Brimblecombe

Senator Anderson Senator Maher Senator O'Byrne Mr. Dean Mr. Fairhall Mr. Griffiths

And so it passed in the negative.

The First Amendment then became the Motion.

The Committee divided -

Ayes (4) Noes (4)

Senator Anderson Senator O'Byrne Mr. Brimblecombe Mr. Griffiths Senator Maher Mr. Dean Mr. Fairhall Mr. O'Connor

The Ayes and Noes being equal, the Chairman exercised his casting vote in favour of the Motion.

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

Technical Education.

47. It was stated in evidence that the Territory has to rely on skilled tradesmen in the main coming from outside to do the work. It is now aimed, by means of technical training of apprentices, to reach the stage where the Territory trains its own skilled workmen, who would live in the locality. The provision of technical training for apprentices in

the new school is therefore very important, and it is possible that the time devoted each week to technical school training of apprentices will be increased under the Ordinance. With this in mind the planning of the first stage of the proposal has placed some emphasis upon the necessity for the trades block, and the school will be a combined academic and technical establishment. In the second stage the numbers of students will have grown sufficiently to demand an additional school building, and it is proposed to make it an academic high school, while the building now proposed will become a more self contained technical college.

While a desirable emphasis is being placed upon the technical side of the training, the growing importance of academic work and later tertiary education appear to have given grounds for some difference of opinion opinion concerning the name which should be given to the proposed school. This is a matter which may well be left in the hands of the authorities for determination at the appropriate time, but the Committee points out that the views of witnesses, who have given thought to this matter, are contained in the evidence, and may be of assistance when required.

Cost.

- 49. At the outset it was stated that, subject to check by the Darwin Branch, the cost of the scheme (3) as submitted to the Committee, (forming the first stage of the educational programme envisaged) was provisionally estimated to be £400,000.
- 50. The Committee obtained further evidence from the Director of Works in Darwin, and a more detailed estimate of the cost of the proposal was submitted, as follows:-

Building work. comprising three-storied classroom

block, single-storey crafts block, and service block and assembly areas, together	
with covered ways, adjacent paving and	3 3
electrical work	295,782 16,603
Mechanical equipment Air-conditioning	109,980
Air-conditioning	109,900
	422,365
Additional work necessary -	0.700
Water services and fire hydrants	3,173
Access road and parking areas	9,359
Safety fencing	2,115
Sewerage connection	1,428
H/V Underground cabling	6,500
Contingencies	10,000
	£454,940

51. The difference in these two estimates gave the Committee some concern, and inquiries elicited the information that part of the difference was due to the estimate having been adjusted to provide for the recent increase in the basic wage, which it was anticipated would be applied to the Northern Territory in due course. It was also pointed out that, in making comparisons in connection with works in Darwin it should be realised that building costs in Darwin are currently at least 60 per cent greater than costs in Melbourne. Various items in the estimate of cost were scrutinised during the inquiry and taken into account when the Committee was making its recommendations. An approximate estimate was made for the Committee's guidance when considering the question of provision of an Assembly Hall, which was estimated at £100,000. The cost of airconditioning, estimated at £109,980 was shown to be 35% of the cost of the rest of the structure, and it is estimated that the cost of operating the air-conditioning plant will be £6,000 annually.

SECTION IV - THE COMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS.

Summary of Recommendations.

52. The following is a list of the Committee's conclusions in summary form only, arrived at after study of the proposely plans, model, and the evidence involved. The full recommendations are contained in the body of the Report, and may be referred to in the paragraphs quoted at the close of each of the following recommendations:

Paragraph.

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(1)	There is an urgent need for the High School, and it should be constructed as soon as possible.	19
(2)	The design is appropriate for its purpose, and it should result in a building which will stand out as a land mark on its promontary site.	27
(3)	Appropriate ablution facilities should be reintroduced into the trades block at an estimated cost of £2,500	30
(4)	Attention is drawn to the desirability of including many useful ideas, mentioned in the evidence, in the later stages of detail planning.	31
(5)	The Vestey's area, at Bullocky Point, is the best available site for the educational purposes envisaged.	34
(6)	It is highly desirable to complete the Master Plan, upon which citizens may rely with confidence in establishing homes and businesses.	35
(7)	The original location of the building on the site should be changed, so that the school boundary shall be not loss than 250 feet from the cliff	37
(8)	The Stage (1) plan, as submitted by the Dopartment, be adopted, with the inclusion of a complete Assembly Hell to accommodate 1.000 children.	46

(Allen Fairhall.)
Chairman.

Office of the Perliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Parliament House, Canberra, A.C.T.

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