



Murwillumbah Education Campus – Social Impact Assessment

ADDENDUM IN RESPONSE TO STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS - AUGUST 2022

This Addendum

A State Significant Development (SSD) application for a new Murwillumbah Education Campus (MEC) was lodged in April 2022. The SSD package included a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) report.

The SSD was placed on public exhibition from Tuesday 26 April until Monday 23 May 2022. A total of 13 public submissions were received during the exhibition period.

Some of these submissions identified the potential impacts on students of moving from smaller schools to merged schools at the campus. These potential impacts were discussed in the SIA report and a series of measures were identified to help mitigate these impacts.

Since the SIA was initially authored in April 2022, the two principals who will lead the merged primary and high schools at the campus have been appointed and taken up their roles. The principals have been conducting a range of planning activities and measures to prepare staff, students and families for the transition to the campus in late 2024.

The purpose of this Addendum is to:

- Provide an overview of the planning initiatives being implemented by the new MEC educational leadership team
- Review these initiatives against the recommendations of the SIA report to determine how they contribute to addressing the social impacts identified in the SIA report.

This Supplement was prepared following the below methodology:

- Review of community submissions summary
- Online interview with the principals that will lead the primary school (PS) and high school (HS) at the MEC (19 July 2022)
- Review of additional material provided by the NSW Department of Education.

Initiatives

1. Familiar team for school communities

In public submissions, some concerns were raised about the potential negative impact on students of moving from smaller schools to a larger campus, including a less personal environment.

It was noted during the interview with principals, that families who have only known a smaller school, will indeed expect a school environment where children are known and therefore all activities conducted by the new principals seek to build a future community, where everyone is known including students, staff and parents.

The two new principals are both from Murwillumbah. The new primary school principal is the former Murwillumbah East PS principal. The new HS principal is the former Murwillumbah High School principal. They have both been in their roles for a few

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years and are known in their respective school communities. The new principals work with the existing staff across all four schools. After having prepared a strategic roadmap, both principals and all school staff are now contributing to the future MEC, via various working and user groups, meetings and reporting sessions, curriculum building.

Both new principals are present across all schools at various times of the week, and available via multiple channels (e.g. at school, over the phone, information hubs). They attend all Parents & Citizens (P&C) meetings. By providing multiple communication avenues, the new principals ensure they are visible and accessible to children and their families, providing familiar faces, reassurance and opportunities for positive discussions, as well as questions and suggestions. It was reported that general feedback has softened since community concerns around the announcement, with school community members now investing time and interest in the project.

Many teachers currently working in Murwillumbah schools have also taught in larger schools and operate in much the same manner in either type of school (e.g. would know all children by name). Teachers also go across schools and get to know children across sites. As identified in the SIA, class sizes at the schools at the campus will be consistent with NSW Department of Education student to teacher ratios.

Relevant social impacts identified in the SIA report and addressed by the above initiatives include:

- *Changing school may result in stress and costs for school communities*
- *Engagement to date has provided opportunities for school communities to experience a feeling of involvement and contribute to the future identity of the campus*
- *A larger school size is unlikely to negatively impact educational performance however there are concerns that should be addressed by adequate communication*
- *Parts of the school communities perceive a lack of consultation to date with an ensued lack of trust.*

2. Education team coordination

As part of planning a new campus, the campus principals have developed a strategic school readiness roadmap which has been shared with staff. Over the past six months, there have been frequent combined staff development days, meetings and workshops with staff from all other schools, building the future curriculum with teachers collaborating to align subjects. Student and parent representatives have also been invited to participate in some of these activities to share their priorities and perspective on teaching, learning and student wellbeing approaches.

As part of the planning process, the educational team remains cautious of not overloading staff. Timing is critical before the school opens end of 2024, and there will be a need to plan ahead to release staff from current positions to new ones, and recruit for vacant positions.

It was reported that staff are showing high levels of collaboration across all schools. Staff are engaged in the process and are progressing well, with constructive commitments to identify opportunities for school communities to connect.

Relevant social impacts identified in the SIA report and addressed by the above:

- *Changing school may result in stress and costs for school communities.*

3. Joint culture

A working party is currently being established across all four schools for families to be part of educational and operational aspects of the new school e.g. vision, uniforms, logos. Parents and students' representatives attend staff development days. Opening ceremonies are planned. Progress as well as general activities and photos are communicated via existing school communication channels that are already known e.g. newsletters, project updates via principals, Facebook pages. This contributes to creating a combined school feeling and school family.

To prepare for the new MEC, a range of joint activities are organised involving children from both primary schools or both high schools:

- Primary school children: trip to Canberra with joint transport, ball games, joint classroom work, Poetry in the Park, K-2 writing program (children buddied up to write each other a letter followed by playground activities)

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- High school children: combined swimming/athletics carnivals, transition days, gala days, combined units of work with students coming together to showcase work, student leadership groups, students moving across school sites.

Children are getting to know each other across all schools, with mostly separate activities for primary school students and high school students.

An engagement process was conducted in 2021-2022 to select a name for the new school. While the new name was not able to be shared during the interview, it was described that the process involved stakeholders and the broader school community via a school naming survey that received hundreds of responses.

Relevant social impacts identified in the SIA report and addressed by the above:

- *Potential risk of reduced sense of belonging/pride for students*
- *Changing school may result in stress and costs for school communities*
- *Engagement to date has provided opportunities for school communities to experience a feeling of involvement and contribute to the future identity of the campus*
- *There may be some new costs and adjustments for the MHS community*
- *Limited impact on existing social networks, and potential increased social network opportunities for school communities.*

4. Flexible spaces

There were concerns expressed in some public submissions regarding the educational benefit of the proposed campus model.

One of the benefits that the department is targeting through development of the new schools at the campus, is providing students and teachers from all public schools in Murwillumbah with access to new, flexible learning environments that better support contemporary teaching approaches. The teaching spaces that will be provided at the campus will be different to traditional classrooms in that they are generally more spacious, have flexible furniture, and can adapt to accommodate different group sizes, learning activities and teaching practices.

To familiarise school communities with collaborative teaching and learning, prototypes of flexible spaces are being established in all existing schools. At this stage principals did not report any concerns from school communities.

The SIA had originally recommended adequate training for teachers to deliver this new type of pedagogy, however the campus principals described that existing teachers already practise this type of pedagogy and are familiar with good practice and student needs. The campus principals believe that bringing together the schools offers opportunities for pedagogical innovation and collaboration between staff to continue enhancing their teaching practices.

Relevant social impacts identified in the SIA report and addressed by the above:

- *Flexible learning spaces may be associated with positive student wellbeing and educational outcomes, improved student engagement and autonomy, and ability to collaborate.*

5. Specific supports

Wellbeing teams in existing schools are coming together to build a joint vision. Operational user groups have been established to focus on inclusion for children with additional educational and support needs. Wellbeing staff are working together to identify children who may have chosen to leave their school due to a specific individual problem (noting that with the new MEC, there will not be a second choice of public school in Murwillumbah). Wellbeing staff are conducting interviews with these children, working with their families to identify issues, solutions, and restorative practices where required.

Relevant social impacts identified in the SIA report and addressed by the above:

- *The wellbeing of students from more vulnerable groups may be more impacted than others by a larger school.*

6. Temporary school

The campus principals are currently working to prepare for the co-location of Murwillumbah High School (MHS) and Wollumbin High School (WHS) on the WHS site from the beginning of 2023. This temporary high school arrangement will be supported by additional temporary infrastructure provided by SINSWs. An orientation program for students who will be entering Year 7 in 2023 is already underway with students attending a number of 'transition days' at WHS. Parent information sessions have also

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been scheduled for August and November 2022. Some elements remain that require attention and/or communication by SINSW e.g. required upgrade of Wollumbin HS (WHS), public transport arrangements, uniforms, and will be finalised in the coming months.

Once completed, this may address the following social impacts identified in the SIA report:

- *There may be some new costs and adjustments for the MHS community*
- *Temporary relocation to WHS may create anxieties associated with changing school environment for the MHS community, as well as potentially WHS community that will need to adapt too*
- *Temporary relocation to WHS may provide an opportunity to start building a joint school culture ahead of the transition to the new MEC.*

7. Shared uses

There are existing shared agreements in place at existing schools. This will be looked at in future stages to better understand community needs, as identified in the SIA report.

Summary

The principals who have been appointed to lead the combined primary and high school at the MEC are leading a range of initiatives involving the broad school community including staff, students and their families. Many of these initiatives were identified or are similar to mitigation or enhancement measures recommended in the SIA report. These initiatives contribute to addressing the following social impacts identified in the SIA report:

- *Changing school may result in stress and costs for school communities*
- *Engagement to date has provided opportunities for school communities to experience a feeling of involvement and contribute to the future identity of the campus*
- *A larger school size is unlikely to negatively impact educational performance however there are concerns that should be addressed by adequate communication*
- *Parts of the school communities perceive a lack of consultation to date with an ensued lack of trust*
- *Potential risk of reduced sense of belonging/pride for students*
- *There may be some new costs and adjustments for the MHS community*
- *Limited impact on existing social networks, and potential increased social network opportunities for school communities*
- *Flexible learning spaces may be associated with positive student wellbeing and educational outcomes, improved student engagement and autonomy, and ability to collaborate*
- *The wellbeing of students from more vulnerable groups may be more impacted than others by a larger school*
- *Temporary relocation to WHS may create anxieties associated with changing school environment for the MHS community, as well as potentially WHS community that will need to adapt too*
- *Temporary relocation to WHS may provide an opportunity to start building a joint school culture ahead of the transition to the new MEC.*

A number of other mitigation/enhancement measures identified in the SIA report were not discussed during the interview with the new principals. This include measures not typically considered at this stage of the school planning process, measures that are not the responsibility of the future educational team or school, or measures that are currently being considered as part of detailed design.

Sophie Le Mauff
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