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Calls to solve Carlingford West Public School traffic gridlock

Surging enrolments at a northwest Sydney school are exacerbating traffic already choking the suburb and the community is ramping up calls to tackle the crisis before tragedy strikes.

Joanne Vella

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Parramatta Council is elevating the community's concerns to the State Government about the traffic chaos engulfing Carlingford West Public School, where there are 1900 students, many crammed into 93 demountable classrooms, in an effort to avert a serious accident.

Georgina Valjak's motion to write to School Infrastructure NSW and the Planning Department to underline the problems was unanimously supported by the chamber this week.

The Felton Rd public school is near Cumberland, and James Ruse Agricultural high schools, which adds to the congestion but of chief concern is the safety of young children, most of whom are dropped off by their parents in cars that clog the streets that are surrounded by cul-de-sacs.

An incident involving a student occurred in June when police and ambulances rushed to Baker St, but fears are growing there will be a fatality at the "pressure cooker" location.

"It must be one of the most overcrowded school precincts in Sydney," Carlingford Community spokesman Mark Bernie said.



A soaring school population at Carlingford West Public School has compounded traffic. Picture: Jonathan Ng

"We see this every day. Every day we are amazed that there are not further car accidents or incidents with

children.

“How it’s not happening more frequently is just sheer good luck.”

In recent years, the overcrowded Carlingford West Public School’s enrolment cap has exploded from 550 to more than 1700 students, as parents are determined to enrol their children there largely because of its excellent NAPLAN results.

Cumberland High and James Ruse High have 738 and 835 students, respectively but Cumberland’s population is forecast to jump to 2040 students.

Cumberland and Carlingford West schools are earmarked for major state government upgrades. Under the project, three buildings up to four storeys for a capacity of 1610 students are planned for the primary school, while three blocks up to five levels are planned for Cumberland High, with many students coming from Telopea, which forecasts an influx of 10,000 residents.

A link road is planned between Dunmore Ave and Blenheim Rd as part of upgrades, but it has been

dismissed as “tinkering” and failing to address the crux of the problem, which sees children “darting between cars”.

“It will just redistribute existing traffic,” Cr Valjak said.



A view of Felton Rd west from Carlingford West Public School.

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“Even if they build the link road, it’s not going to do anything to stop the gridlock in the suburb.”

Cr Valjak feared the congestion, which reportedly led police to take 30 minutes to travel 300m on nearby Baker St, could lead to a tragedy.

“The real issue is the safety of the children,” she said.

“If you have an emergency, a vehicle would take 54 minutes (but) when out of school times, it would only take seven minutes.

“The roads were never designed to handle the current capacity, let alone the future capacity which is bringing the suburb to a standstill every school day during drop off and pick up times.”

Among the community’s suggestions is the “Rolls-Royce” option to connect Felton Rd, which is divided by the primary school, into one road.



Safety fears are heightened for students at Carlingford West Public School.
Picture: Jonathan Ng

Mr Bernie echoed opposition to the link road, saying it failed to fix traffic generated by the three schools and the 800 vehicle movements at Carlingford West daily.

“All of these are serviced by small cul-de-sacs and a labyrinth of small narrow streets — there are no east/west road connections,” he said.

But the Education Department has brought forward the construction of the link road and Cumberland High School carpark upgrade to begin this month after support from Transport for NSW and the council.

A department spokeswoman said one of the strategies was installing traffic lights at the Baker St and Pennant Hills Rd intersection as part of the BaptistCare redevelopment to help reduce congestion by improving traffic flows out of Baker St.

The community has rejected that solution as ineffective.

The spokeswoman said a meeting was held with Parramatta state Liberal MP Geoff Lee, councillors and the Education Department last week.

“We have considered feedback from the Carlingford community regarding traffic and transport concerns,” she said.

“We aim to mitigate any potential traffic impacts on the surrounding areas and support active modes of travel.”

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