

Social and Community Impact Statement

Alesco Senior College, Northlakes



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Establishing the Alesco Senior College Campus at Northlakes – 7 James Street Argentine.

Summary:

Alesco Senior College is an Alternative Secondary High School that began operation as a single standalone campus in 2002 at Cooks Hill, Newcastle. Since this time the School has been highly successful and in great demand, with more than 6 campuses operating around the Newcastle and Mid North Coast areas. Alesco is a highly sought after model of education that offers a smaller learning environment that encourages young people to participate in education and training that leads to a sustainable future. It offers students who have not found success in mainstream education the opportunity to complete their Higher School Certificate in a supportive environment which focuses on programs to meet young people's individual learning and wellbeing needs.

Demand for Project:

Alesco Northlakes is a small cohort of students (65) that prides itself on actively making positive contributions to the local community and providing lifelong learning and employment opportunities for young people. This community and surrounding communities are enthusiastic and eager for the establishment of the Northlakes Alesco campus. There is a strong need for schools like Alesco to exist especially in remote and economically disadvantaged areas like Northlakes and its surrounding suburbs; which include Argentine, Speers Point, Marmong Point and Booragul. These suburbs - postcode 2284 in 'the dropping off the edge 2015 report' fell into the high end of disadvantage due to the large scale of unskilled workers who live in these areas (Doherty, 2015). These results along with the research findings that one in four Australian students are dropping out of mainstream high schools before completing year 12 reinforce the need and benefit of such a school like Alesco in the Northlakes area.

'A study has found a quarter of Australian school students are not finishing Year 12, and that completion rates are much worse in remote and economically disadvantaged communities' (Longbottom, 2015).

Another contributing factor to the generational unemployment and economic disadvantage in the Northlakes area is the knocking down of the Cockle Creek Smelter in 2009 which saw close to 400 people lose their jobs. Alesco can identify the long term impacts that these issues have on young people and their struggle to maintain traditional schooling. Alesco provides opportunity to those young people who are at a cross roads and who could easily fall through the cracks and endure a life of disadvantage and great expenditure upon society.

'Almost one in five young Australians leave school early, and are likely to earn less, be more dependent on welfare and experience poorer health than those who finish Year 12' (Clarke, 2015)

Alesco is a part of changing the above statistics and provides hope for the young people of Lack Macquarie. The Alesco model creates young person centered pathways that ensure

completion of year 12 and a sustainable future where young people can go on to participate and contribute positively to society; and break the cycle of unemployment and social disadvantage.

Alesco takes into consideration the environmental, economic, and social impact of running a school in this area and acknowledges the social and community influences that exist.

Potential Positive Impacts:

- Expansion of the education choice within the Northlakes LGA and particularly for neighboring communities.
- Provision of a high quality, low or no fee education option that is inclusive and widely recognised as highly competent in the education of at risk and vulnerable young people.
- Provision of an education facility that specialises in individualised education and future pathways that will equip local students with the knowledge and skill to take up opportunities in the neighbouring employment hub (e.g retail and hospitality – Glendale shopping centre).
- An attractor for families as residents of developing housing estates in the area.
- Provision of a community hub that draws together the diverse communities of the area Toronto, Speers Point, Cardiff, Booragul, and Boolaroo etc. Potential flow-on community building impacts and general enhancement of community cohesion.
- Community access to new and substantial community facilities.
- Reduction in travel times for students currently travelling to mainstream or other alternative education providers in Newcastle. Subsequent benefits of those students having more time to participate in local community cultural, sporting and recreational activities.
- Alleviation of enrollment pressure on land locked schools in the Newcastle area.
- 15 academic staff (predominantly full-time jobs supported).
- Several office and maintenance support staff positions.
- Increase in local purchasing of office supplies, learning technology, food and beverage products, etc.
- Increased business for local services such as Bunnings and local shops in the Argentine and Glendale area.

Potential Negative Impacts:

- Traffic congestion at school opening and closing times.
- Possible heightened noise before, during and after school hours.

The risk of not proceeding with the development of this school in the Northlakes area will mean the community is limited in their secondary schooling options; namely Students seeking an alternative education that will still have to travel long distance to Newcastle daily and the risk of a gateway facility that draws diverse communities together will not eventuate.

Recommended Mitigation Strategies

As the major potential social impact associated with establishing the Alesco School at Argentine relates to traffic and noise the mitigations associated with those issues are recommended.

Further social impact mitigations recommended are:

1. Commence discussions with neighbouring agencies / organisations and Lack Macquarie Council about the possibility of partnering on a shared pathway / cycle way to lessen the potential for congestion.
2. Consult with other education providers, and local bus companies about staggering opening hours.

Conclusion:

Above addresses the need for a school like Alesco to exist and the positive contributions this will have for local communities and future generations, lessening the likelihood of school dropout and the issues that can be a result of this such as long term unemployment and disadvantage.

The potential negatives would be noise and the coming and going of young people to and from the campus. Because the school is situated across from the railway track, and that numbers are small and the young people are supervised; as well as required to uphold rules around respect for all persons within and outside of the school this shouldn't be a major concern or hinder the schools establishment. Alesco's existing campuses are proof of the success and positive influence the school has on young people's lives and community. Alesco aims to build long-lasting and positive relationships with their surrounding communities and if grievances where ever brought to the Principles attention they would do everything in their power to professionally and peacefully resolve the matter.

References:

Atwea website: <https://atwea.edu.au/about-alesco/>

Clarke, 2015; <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/australia-s-school-dropouts-why-we-need-to-intervene>

Doherty, 2015; <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/3237148/disadvantaged-suburb-labels-disputed/>

Longbottom, 2015; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-26/quarter-of-high-school-students-drop-out/6884578>