

I am a concerned parish member of the Our Lady of the Angels parish who currently has children in our local Catholic high schools and would be appalled if this proposal for Santa Sophia Catholic College is approved in our community.

Schools are a place where children can develop both mentally and physically and require certain spaces both indoor and outdoor for learning and stimulation.

I have outlined a number of points below which I believe make the proposed development an unsuitable site for a Catholic high school.

Suitability of site – the site is not suitable for the proposed development on the basis that:

- Current provision for a Catholic high school has commenced at Box Hill. The site at Box Hill has been earmarked for a Catholic high school for many years and provision for that high school has begun. The parish community is supportive of a school based at Box Hill which has 20 hectares of land which can be used for student activities.
- Our community is a semi rural based community used to wide open spaces, but also acknowledge that our community has more condensed living in up to three story apartments. 'High rise' living is necessary and useful for many residents, but it is not practical in a school environment when there is the opportunity at the current site for open air and abundant space. At the current Box Hill site, students are able to inhale fresh air, see and hear the Australian bush around them. The benefit of having access to this type of open space can be calming and reassuring during stressful times.
- There is growing evidence that people can derive substantial mental health benefits from being exposed to a natural environment¹. Our children need good mental health to excel at their education, this can be provided in the 20 hectare environment at Box Hill that has already been zoned for a Catholic high school.
- The closeness of the site to the proposed Gables Shopping Centre will cause conflict between students and those wanting to access the shopping centre due to the size of the student population needing to move in and out of the site at 9am and 3pm.
- It is not appropriate to provide constant access to a shopping centre to high school students as it enforces commercialism and may provide a need for some students to over spend in order to please a need or friendship group and cause mental, financial and social problems.

Public interest – the proposed development is not in the public interest on the basis that:

- The proposed development does not have any outdoor space for recreational and sporting use and therefore would be reliant on open public space.
- The use of public space for sporting facilities could be a detriment to the community who could be deterred from using the open public space if they see high school children already using it. This may cause a rift in the community between residents and the Catholic high school. It is essential for the success of any high school to be held in high esteem by the community. The definition of a 'good school' can be defined as one where the school itself is

¹ <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/letter/articles/vh-letter-46-great-outdoors-and-health-equity>

seen as part of the local community². This can not happen if the school is not seen to add to the local community, but rather inhibited by its use of local community recreational and sporting fields.

- Without recreational and sporting fields the proposed development would have a reduced interaction between neighbouring schools as the ability to acquire and use public space is not reliable.
- The current location for the Catholic high school at Box Hill has 20 hectares of open space which is ample room for sporting fields and will be open to neighbouring school competitions as dedicated space can be used.

Traffic and parking - the proposed development will result in high traffic and parking difficulties because:

- The proposed development will add significant increase in traffic flow to the surrounding area, especially during the times of 9am and 3pm where 2,000 students will be moving to and from school.
- There is no known bus, train or metro station at the site, which inherently means an extremely high use of cars as the only mode of transport. This is especially true in the beginning stages of the school when public transport is still being proposed depending on need. It can be at this beginning stage that opinions on high use of cars and movement of students can be interpreted as negative by the community, again putting the risk of social cohesion between the school and the community at risk. The current site at Box Hill does not have this same risk as, even at the beginning, if there is high car use, the site is for the school only and not affected by other areas of the community as local open spaces and shopping centres.
- No dedicated school parking provides high risk to children safety. With only 10 proposed kiss and drop spaces, parents of the early learning centre and those of younger primary years of Kindergarten to Year 2 have no dedicated parking areas to ensure children are taken in to the grounds of the school and settled appropriately.
- Similarly, with only 10 proposed kiss and drop spaces, children with special needs are not being catered for. There are many instances in schools where certain children need settling in classrooms and without a carer able to park safely for an extended period of time, this provides high risk to the special needs child.
- Further, even high school children with major works, large instruments and other activities may need access to a car park. A dedicated school car park is essential for the smooth running of a 'good school'. The current Box Hill site, has ample parking and drop off facilities.
- There is no provision for visitor parking which means there will be limited attendance by parents at school functions. Parental involvement in schools is essential to the development of the child and relationship with parents. Parental participation is important because it sends the message to students that the adults in their lives--both teachers and parents--believe in the importance of education and are willing to make time to support students'

² Dr David Zyngier <http://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/what-makes-a-good-school-what-makes-a-good-teacher/>

educational experiences and efforts.³ Further, parental involvement at school is essential for the school to understand home dynamics and be able to react if required.

- It is well known that parents being an active role in discussing, monitoring and supporting their child's learning, increases the educational and social impact for the child⁴. Therefore it is essential that any new school have parking available for the attendance of parents at school events.

Children's safety - the proposed development does not address children's safety because:

- While this submission to remove the proposed development is focussed on the proposed development of the high school there are other components in the proposed development that I am also against, which includes the development of an early learning centre. If there is no dedicated parking, how is a parent expected to drop off and settle a child in the early learning centre?
- With only 10 kiss and drop zones for 2000 students, would ultimately force both parents and children to find other arrangements which could be considered unsafe, including the 'ducking out' between cars and young children crossing roads alone.
- There are no open spaces to evacuate 2000 students plus staff, except the shared open space, which could be occupied by members of the community, plus children will need to cross a road to get there.

Amenities: the proposal doesn't address the need for children to have different learning spaces:

- As the proposal is a fully indoor space, there is no space for recess and lunch time sporting activities. It is well known children require time for physical activity. Physical activity is vital for a child's development and lays the foundation for a healthy and active life.⁵
- Schools need to be promoting physical activity. Physical activity promotes physical and psychological health and well-being during childhood and that participation in regular physical activity may increase the probability that children will become active adults.⁶
- While some schools may not have access to both hard and grass areas for unrestricted access and play, why would we start a school with these restrictions when such space can be found in the current Box Hill site?
- Due to the proposal being predominately indoors there is a lack of solar access. It is widely known that access to bright light and the sun makes a positive impact on our moods and mental health.⁷ We want our children to be in the best learning environment and providing ample access to sunlight, especially during recess and lunch, may increase their mental health and decrease anxiety. The current site at Box Hill has ample access to sunlight and outdoors.

³https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education_futures/2016/06/the_five_attributes_of_successful_schools.htm

⁴ Dr David Zyngier <http://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/what-makes-a-good-school-what-makes-a-good-teacher/>

⁵ <https://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au/teachers-childcare/physical-activity.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.playaustralia.org.au>

⁷ <https://www.sunsprite.com/sun-facts/bright-light/>

- Having space and natural light should be an absolute given in a school building. It should be welcoming and uplifting, providing a sense of ownership and pride for pupils and staff.⁸ It is obvious that the physical environment has an impact, both positively and negatively, on staff and students mood and mental health.
- There is more to a school than just classrooms. The need for external dedicated space is a requirement in today's learning environment. For example, tending a garden offers students a chance to shape their environment and participate in the natural transformation of seed to plant.⁹ This can not be achieved just from a text book or the many technological advances, it is necessary for understanding of soil by touching it, experiencing trees grow and a flowers petals unfold.
- Providing innovative quality play spaces would mean more children would spend more time active and outdoors.¹⁰ It does not make sense to not start a school with innovative equipment to expand both minds and bodies.

Future expansion: the proposal doesn't allow for future expansion:

- The Gables and surrounding suburbs is a known high development site. Once this development is complete there is no room for further expansion as the site is limited by its boundaries.
- The current site at Box Hill is on 20 hectares with ample room for expansion and improvement.

I strongly believe that the development proposal for a Catholic high school in the confines of an indoor space is not appropriate for today's educational standards and a more interactive, outdoor space is already provided by the site at Box Hill.

⁸ <https://educationbusinessuk.net/features/what-makes-good-school-building>

⁹ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/07/24/five-steps-for-building-a-better-school.html>

¹⁰ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-best-playgrounds-for-f_b_298553