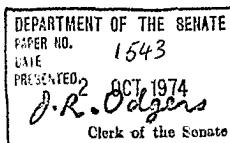


1974



THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of an

AREA SCHOOL

at

Yirrkala

Northern Territory

(SECOND REPORT OF 1974)

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

YIRRKALA AREA SCHOOL
NORTHERN TERRITORY

R E P O R T

By resolution on 7 March 1974, the House of Representatives referred to the previous Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament, the proposal to construct an area school, comprising primary, secondary and pre-schools at Yirrkala, Northern Territory.

That Committee appointed a Sectional Committee which inspected the site and existing school buildings and conducted a public hearing at Yirrkala on 28 March 1974. Evidence was given by representatives of the Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Construction and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. A number of Aboriginals associated with local community organizations, the Headmaster of the Yirrkala School and an Aboriginal teaching aide also gave evidence.

The dissolution of the Twenty-eighth Parliament on 11 April 1974 caused the reference to lapse and the proposal was subsequently referred to the present Committee by the House of Representatives on 30 July 1974 for investigation and report to the Parliament.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal referred to the Committee is for the construction of a school planned to accommodate 250 primary, 60 secondary and 50 pre-school students from Yirrkala Aboriginal township, Northern Territory and surrounding district. The school is planned to be completed in time for occupancy during the 1976 school year and may be constructed in two stages, depending on enrolments at the time of calling tenders.
2. The proposal when referred to the previous Committee was estimated to cost \$4.3 million, \$3.85 million for stage 1 and \$1.45 million for Stage 2.
3. When the proposal was referred to the present Committee, the estimated cost was \$5.00 million; \$4.472 million for Stage 1 and \$1.528 million for Stage 2.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

4. The present Committee decided that certain aspects of the proposal warranted further investigation and the public hearing was re-opened at Canberra on 21 August 1974 and further evidence was given by representatives of the Department of Education and the Department of Housing and Construction.
5. The Committee's proceedings will be printed as Minutes of Evidence.

THE NEED

6. Present Policy Following a Government decision to improve facilities in Aboriginal schools and remove discrepancies in the standard of Territorial education facilities, a five year programme to upgrade these schools has been approved. Yirrkala area school is the first project of the five year programme.
7. Yirrkala Area School The existing school was established at Yirrkala by the Methodist Overseas Mission in 1934. Yirrkala is a coastal township located on the north-eastern extremity of Arnhem Land. The Government

took over the administration of the school in 1966 because of difficulty in obtaining teaching staff. Although the school has the same basic educational goals as other schools, emphasis is placed on a minimum of interference with the transmission of Aboriginal culture and on cultivating pride and dignity in being an Aboriginal. A bi-lingual education programme was commenced at the beginning of 1974 with classes at the pre-school and infants levels.

8. Existing Facilities The existing school is made up of a number of substandard timber buildings originally built by the Methodist Mission, together with transportable classrooms since provided by the Government. The manual arts facilities are located in a metal sheeted building about half a mile from the rest of the school. The pre-school is situated on a residential block some distance from the school.

9. The buildings are substandard in terms of size and services and are in a very poor state of repair. Many of the facilities normally found in community schools are lacking.

10. Population Trends The Committee noted from the Department of Education's submission that it was not possible to supply precise population projections at Yirrkala, but informal projections indicated that the population is relatively stable with only a marginal rate of growth. During the hearing at Yirrkala the representative of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs informed the Committee that the Yirrkala Aboriginal population has a high birthrate and a substantially lower deathrate than the Aboriginal population as a whole. There is every indication this trend will continue and he forecast a steady natural increase in population of 4.1% per annum. In addition, the net result from migration in other areas of Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt, particularly since 1967, has favoured Yirrkala.

11. In recent months, however, there has been a movement of some tribal groups to establish small communities away from Yirrkala and this has led to a reduction in the number of students attending the existing school. The drift is not peculiar to Yirrkala and applies right across the northern part of the Northern Territory and has presented new problems. It is considered that the drift is due to a number of factors:

- (i) the Aboriginals desire to be re-established in their traditional areas and believe that they would have a more secure tenure on tribal areas if they were actually living on the land in question;
- (ii) they are concerned that their own culture is not being passed on to their children and, in addition;
- (iii) they have a natural desire, which is understandable, to have their children, particularly the younger ones, with them on the outstations.

12. The Committee noted that the drift could be influenced by the recommendations of the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission whose second report was imminent during the initial deliberations of the previous Committee. This report was subsequently released early in May 1974 and commented (at paragraph 391) "How strong this trend to return to traditional land will prove to be, can only be a matter of speculation". Further evidence taken by the Committee on 21 August 1974 indicated that the movement to the outstations was unlikely to be of a permanent nature and could be regarded as a passing phase.

13. School Enrolments During 1973, enrolments at the school varied between 268 and 333 from a school age population of 351. The latest available figures show an enrolment of 249 from a school age population of 289 with a variable attendance averaging 200.

14. Reasons for this variable attendance include the movement of children between outstations and the Yirrkala township, the early marriage of young girls, a lack of parental encouragement and the awareness by parents that attendance at school has in the past not been compulsory. Some improvements in attendance may flow from continuing consultation with the Aboriginal Council and the establishment of a local education committee at Yirrkala.

15. Effect of Outstation Movement The representative of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs considers the decrease in school age population to be due mainly to the outstation movement. He predicted that up to 109 school age children could be located at outstations within two years if schooling is made available at these localities. However, he also predicted that the school age population at Yirrkala would be between 360 and 390 in ten years time, taking into consideration the rate of population growth and migration factors which favour Yirrkala.

16. The Department of Education believes that any fall-off in enrolments due to the drift to the outstations is likely to be at the lower strata of the school and that secondary enrolments should increase with the introduction of a fourth post-primary year in 1974.

17. The Committee were informed that the Government is reluctant to reduce the planned capacity of the new school because of the uncertainty as to the permanency of the outstation movement.

18. Alternative to One Stage Construction In order to prevent over provision of facilities, the Department of Education considers that some sections of the school could be constructed later as a possible Stage 2 development if there is a clear indication at the time of calling tenders that the numbers of school age children at Yirrkala do not justify the full

building programme. The Committee were advised that the design developed by the Department of Housing and Construction will readily permit such a staged construction.

19. The sections proposed for Stage 2 are the infants building and the second pre-school unit.

20. The interim effects of this staging would be a loss of five teaching areas (including the pre-school) and the school would lose its specialised kindergarten area and the relationship of infants and pre-school areas. The capacity of the school would be reduced by at least 100 students to approximately 260.

21. The Committee were advised that any further reduction in the size of the school would mean destroying the concept of the mix of facilities developed for the project to meet the educational needs of the Yirrkala community.

22. Committee's Conclusion The Committee concluded that the existing school facilities at Yirrkala are unsatisfactory and that there is a need for new, permanent facilities to meet the secondary, primary and pre-school needs of the area. The Committee consider that the infants building and the second pre-school unit should be deferred to a possible Stage 2 construction if population factors at the time of calling tenders do not justify the complete building programme.

THE PROPOSED SCHOOL

23. In February 1973, the Australian Government decided that all governmental education in the Northern Territory, including education in Aboriginal communities, should become the responsibility of the one authority, the Department of Education. Education in Aboriginal communities was formerly administered by the Department of the Interior.

24. Yirrkala area school is planned to be part of a school system controlled by an Education Authority which is a division of the Department of Education based in Darwin. All teaching staff will be members of the Commonwealth Teaching Service.

25. Planning Outline The proposed school is designed for the education of secondary, primary and pre-school pupils in a number of relatively small, linked buildings. This will reduce the institutional appearance and provide each learning area with direct access to outside areas.

26. It is envisaged that the new facilities will also be used extensively for adult education programmes and for community activities generally. The school will provide post-primary and pre-vocational courses.

27. The school will also serve as a community education centre and because of this, the buildings have been arranged in such a way that the different elements are self-contained to allow them to be used separately while achieving an overall integrated complex.

28. The plan provides a group of single storey buildings interconnected by covered walkways. Each building, excluding the multi-purpose/luncheon area will have perimeter verandah access.

29. The accommodation requirements of the school fall into clearly defined elements of administration, library/resource centre, pre-school, infant department, primary department, secondary department, art/craft and domestic science complex, manual arts area, and multi-purpose/luncheon area.

30. The facilities that will be most frequently used by the community outside normal school hours are the library/resource centre, multi-purpose and luncheon area, manual arts area, art/craft and domestic science complex and sporting facilities.

31. The school administration adjoins the main entrance and is relatively central to all departments. It will accommodate clerical and administrative staff and will include a staff lounge, toilets, female rest room, students sick rooms and facilities for duplicating and storage.
32. The Deputy Principal will be accommodated in the Primary Department and the Infants Mistress in the Infant Section of the school.
33. The library/resource centre will be located away from noisy areas but readily accessible from all parts of the school and will be available for community use outside school hours. It will contain essential book collections as well as audio-visual aids associated with the audio-visual theatrette and language laboratory.
34. The pre-school will be of standard Northern Territory design but with the roof form modified to suit the design concept.
35. Infant and Primary Departments will be accommodated in adjacent buildings closely linked with covered walkways.
36. Internal layouts will be similar to existing urban community schools. Open space learning areas and single teacher classrooms will provide for flexibility and adaptation of space to help promote teaching. To support the open teaching space, teachers' rooms, store rooms, practical work areas and fully enclosed special activities rooms will be provided within each learning suite.
37. Because of the relatively isolated location of the school, extra storage will be provided.
38. Separate craft rooms are replaced by small wet areas with each classroom. Large practical work areas for each learning suite will be provided.

39. Open learning areas and classrooms open onto verandahs where infant and primary children will be able to undertake project assignments and other activities out of doors.

40. The secondary department will form a self-contained unit consisting of two partially closed classrooms, a tutorial room, a science laboratory and a commercial studies area, all located off a central activities/circulation area.

41. Ancillary areas will include store rooms and staff facilities.

42. The art/craft complex will cater for most art and craft activities within the school. Facilities will provide for home economics, drawing and manual trades plus rooms for staff and storage. Elements of the art/craft complex will be as open as practicable but self-contained with their own separate access and outdoor work areas.

43. Outdoor work areas will be used for formal outdoor art/craft activities and for teaching of traditional Aboriginal forms of art, crafts and cooking.

44. This complex will also serve the pre-vocational and manual training courses which will be offered and provide adult education facilities for the community.

45. A multi-purpose and luncheon area will be used for general assembly purposes, physical education, dancing and general community activities including film projection at night.

46. A general purpose room/stage and music room will be provided in this area. Other facilities will include change rooms, a sports store, a property store and a small canteen with food preparation facilities serving into a covered lunch area.

47. The multi-purpose and luncheon area will be the focal point of the school and be readily accessible from all sections of the school.

48. Design The design will be based on a separate department basis and will provide a group of single storey buildings interconnected by covered walkways. Each building, excluding the multi-purpose/luncheon area, will have perimeter verandah access. The school will be designed to blend in with its predominantly rural surroundings.

49. The Committee expressed doubts as to the present concept of the school with particular emphasis on the design which appeared somewhat extravagant. The Committee were assured, however, that the architectural concepts put forward are essentially simple and permit the use of the most economical and practical building materials. It was not possible to further economise without reducing the standard of the building below an acceptable level for the educational programme.

50. Site The site comprises blocks 1, 2 and 3 on the Yirrkala town plan and is at present undeveloped. The area of land is approximately 4.6 hectares, surrounded on three sides by formed roads and on the fourth by undeveloped land reserved for recreation purposes. It is Crown Land and forms part of an Aboriginal reserve. The frontage of the site to Rankine Road is 230 metres and to Balrama Road 218 metres.

51. The Committee agree that the site selected is suitable.

52. Siting of the buildings has been determined on site and environmental conditions and to suit functional relationships. The buildings will be located on the level area of the site which will be terraced to minimise site works.

53. Orientation of the buildings will be of no major importance due to the extensive shading to be provided by the external verandahs of all buildings.

CONSTRUCTION

54. Construction and Materials For reasons of economy and transportability, a modular form of construction is to be adopted for all buildings. The spans and centres of the steel portal frames will be to one basic set of dimensions. External walls will be locally manufactured concrete masonry. Roofs will be 'Colorbond' corrugated iron. Windows and doors will be aluminium framed with tinted glass. Exposed timber and steel will be painted.

55. All internal walls, except where required structurally, will be of non-load bearing type. For added flexibility some internal walls will be designed as lightweight partitions capable of removal or relocation. Acoustically treated folding partitions will be provided in some special situations to enable rooms to be readily converted into larger or smaller teaching spaces.

56. Floor finishes will be in accordance with the uses of particular areas. Experimentation with floor finishes such as soft backed vinyl wall to wall carpet and loose carpets will be carried out in this school by agreement between the Departments of Education, Aboriginal Affairs and Housing and Construction.

57. Acoustic Treatment Acoustic treatment will be provided to reduce the general noise level and to maintain intelligibility in all teaching areas. To achieve this, walls, floors and ceilings will be treated as necessary. Special activities rooms will be acoustically separated from the rest of the building.

58. Furniture and Fittings All movable fittings, furniture and school equipment will be supplied by the Department of Education and the cost of these is not included in the estimate shown in this report.

59. Built-in fitments such as shelving, benches and cupboards are included in the work.

60. Engineering Services Mechanical services include air conditioning, exhaust ventilation, hot water, incinerator, reticulated chilled drinking water and L.P. gas outlets.

61. Conditioned air will be circulated to all normally occupied areas except the manual arts block and the pre-school. The system will be adjusted to avoid unduly low temperatures in order to reduce thermal stress during movement in and out of doors. The Committee had some reservations about the use of air conditioning but were informed that it has been established practice to air condition schools in humid areas. Experience had shown that air conditioning facilitates learning by providing greater comfort and reducing fatigue and that Aboriginal students were not averse to it.

62. Electrical power will be from the Yirrkala community reticulation system. To provide for this and other demands of the community, the capacity of the existing electricity supply system will be increased and the reticulation reconstructed. The Committee were advised that studies on the possible utilisation of solar hot water services were being conducted.

63. Water Supply and Sewerage Water will be obtained from the town supply and storage tanks of the required capacity will be installed to ensure adequate reserves for fire fighting and other needs.

64. Sewerage will be connected to septic tanks.

65. Siting and Landscaping Design Site layout will provide access roads, parking areas, bus bay, covered walkways, two basketball courts, a tennis practice wall and a sealed assembly/play area.

66. Suitable indigenous vegetation will be retained wherever possible and selected areas between the buildings and surrounding roads will be planted with tropical trees and shrubs. An Aboriginal dance area is to be provided in the shallow gully and retained as a natural bush setting with suitable clearing provided for performances. Courtyards and areas in front of the school will be grassed. Some areas of the site will be left undeveloped to allow students to develop them in their own way.

67. Fire Protection A thermal fire detection and alarm system will be installed. Hose reels and portable fire extinguishers will be provided inside the buildings and fire hydrants and hoses outside.

68. Committee's Conclusion The Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference with the proviso that it be constructed in two stages if required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

69. The environmental impact study, presented as evidence to the Committee, indicated that no detrimental environmental effects or controversial aspects will be encountered as a result of the proposed school building project.

ESTIMATE OF COST

70. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee on 30 July 1974 was \$5.0 million made up as follows:

<u>Stage 1</u>	\$	\$
Building work (including \$31,000 funds reservation)	3,191,000	
Electrical services	254,000	
Mechanical services	775,000	
Hydraulic services	67,000	
Civil Works	185,000	
		4,472,000

\$ \$

Stage 2

Building work (including \$4,000 funds reservation)	434,000
Electrical services	26,000
Mechanical services	65,000
Hydraulic services	3,000
Civil works	-
	528,000
	<hr/>
	5,000,000
	<hr/>

71. The Committee noted that the final cost of both stages could rise to \$6 million when tenders are called if present escalation rates continue.

PROGRAMME

72. Preparation of contract documents and the invitation of tenders is expected to take until December 1974.

73. It is expected that if the school is constructed as one stage, it will take two years to complete.

74. The completion of Stage 2 would depend on the local school age population reaching the required level to commit stage 2 to construction.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

75. Assistance with Aboriginal Labour Having noted a willingness of the Aboriginal community at Yirrkala to be involved with the actual construction of the school, the Committee were pleased to note that it is basic policy of the Department of Housing and Construction to have maximum involvement of Aborigines in whatever form that can be organized in building projects no matter where the projects are located.

76. Other Educational Facilities in the Area The town of Nhulunbuy, about 15 kms to the north-west of Yirrkala has an area school and pre-school catering for the needs of the children within that town. Approximately 20 kms to the south-west of Yirrkala, Dhupuma College is located. This college provides for Aboriginal students from all over north-eastern Arnhem Land to complete the final year of primary school (Grade 7) and to reside at the college whilst attending high school classes at the Nhulunbuy area school.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

77. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers.

	<u>Paragraph</u>
1. THE COMMITTEE CONCLUDED THAT THE EXISTING SCHOOL FACILITIES AT YIRRKALA ARE UNSATISFACTORY.	22
2. THERE IS A NEED FOR NEW PERMANENT FACILITIES TO MEET THE SECONDARY, PRIMARY AND PRE-SCHOOL NEEDS OF THE AREA.	22
3. THE COMMITTEE CONSIDER THAT THE INFANTS BUILDING AND THE SECOND PRE-SCHOOL UNIT SHOULD BE DEFERRED TO A POSSIBLE STAGE 2 CONSTRUCTION IF POPULATION FACTORS AT THE TIME OF CALLING TENDERS DO NOT JUSTIFY THE COMPLETE BUILDING PROGRAMME.	22

Paragraph

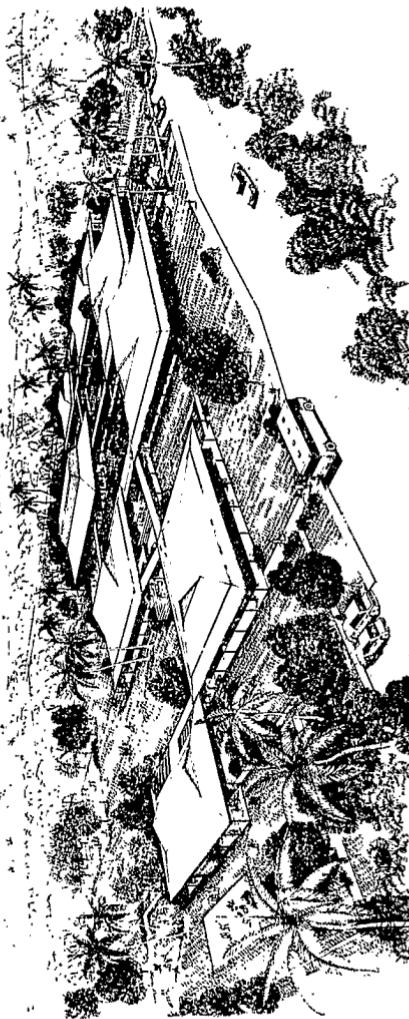
4.	THE SITE SELECTED IS SUITABLE.	51
5.	THE COMMITTEE RECOMMEND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE WITH THE PROVISO THAT IT BE CONSTRUCTED IN TWO STAGES IF REQUIRED.	68
6.	THE ESTIMATED COST OF THE WORK WHEN REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE WAS \$5 MILLION.	70



(L.K. JOHNSON)
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA.

19 September 1974.



YIRRKALA AREA SCHOOL N.T.