30th March 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Santa Sophia Catholic College

I am writing in Favour of the proposal for the new Santa Sophia Catholic College proposed for the Gables at Box Hill.

As a parent of a child currently attending the Santa Sophia makeshift site at Schofields, I am eagerly awaiting the construction & completion of the new State of the art facility proposed for 2021.

I am fully aware that there has been much negativity towards this development. I hope that this negativity has not stemmed from other issues & manifested itself into something that seems to have lost its way. I hope that there are no other agendas at play whereby people’s views may have been clouded & not really taken properly into account the real issue of the school & more to the point our children & the teachers.

I understand that many people were & still are upset & disappointed at the Senior executives & hierarchy of the Catholic Diocese. In particular in the way that they handled the release of information about the new school site now being in the Gables & no longer proposed for Terry Rd.

To find out the way that we did with no consultation was a slap in the face for us all. At some point maybe there will need to be a review and the actions of some be held to account in the way the whole community was shut out.

However, this is a totally separate issue & should not be confused with the new school. The school should have no bearing on any other matter or issue.

We need this school for our children. Our children & teachers need the school which should be our main focus & priority.

Things are the way they are & will not change anytime soon. So, we can either choose to accept them or not. The choice is our as parents.

I for one have chosen to accept them as have many other parents. I will do whatever it takes to ensure that my children have a school to go to. The children should be our main focus & the new Santa Sophia school will give them every opportunity that they deserve for their future.

We do not need to be playing politics & further disadvantaging our children & teachers at this time.

They love their school & teachers & I know for a fact that all the children that are currently enrolled and the many others that are listed to enrol are all super excited & looking forward to the new school opening in 2021. There is no real reason to further delay this.

Yes, I understand that the school was earmarked to go on the Terry Rd site. The construction of this school may have been in the traditional mould with what some of us grew up with, whereby large parcels of land were required. This would have taken considerable time to construct, it would have also required for the construction to be undertaken in various stages & may have cost considerably more overall.

I too was against this development initially. However, I took a step back & having considered all the relevant information available & as a parent of a child starting high school, I changed my view about this development & its location.

Irrespective of where the school goes, there will always be issues. If it was to stay on Terry Rd, this too would have had significant issues, in particular traffic. Being a major thoroughfare Rd whereby it would have connected Windsor Rd to Old Pitt Town Rd, all the residential development around it with cars trying to get in & out of their homes not to mention the many hundreds of units proposed for the area as well as the business park & commercial premises earmarked for this area.

At least in the Gables, the roads will be wider & proper traffic protocol has been significantly scrutinised for the school.

The school & our children should be our main priority & focus & nothing else.

It is also clear that the majority of the negative submission have been repetitive in their issues put forward & with no real reason as to why the school should not be allowed under proper planning principles.

Submission have also been made by some people out of area & some with no direct link to the school or student going to the school or have any intention of sending students to the school.

I believe that as far as the school & planning goes, all the requirements have been met & adhered to. All requested information & more has been provided as required by the planning department in order to satisfy, appease & be fully compliant withal all parts of the planning process.

One of the main arguments & objections has been about the proposed traffic issues.

As previously mentioned, there will be no more traffic issues than those that may currently exist at other schools. As many parents may know, traffic issues around the current Our Lady of the Angels & Ironbark Ridge school sites are horrific, especially during the peak period times of drop off & pick up. These issues are only going to continually get worse over time as these schools grow. Yet I do not hear anyone arguing to close these schools down.

Current schools in the area are already at capacity, in particular our high schools. So, at a time where development is forging ahead with the construction of thousands of new homes & residential dwellings, unfortunately infrastructure is not keeping up with demand.

Our children need proper schools to be taught in & not just makeshift temporary sites.

With the State Government having no immediate intentions to build any new schools within the current Box Hill precinct or its surrounding areas means that there is a shortage & real need for new schools NOW.

We have to face reality that the current school model being adopted by the CEDP whereby going up rather than out seems to be the way of the future. It also provides the opportunity for these schools to be fully constructed in their entirety & operational from the beginning, whereby saving time & potentially money.

There is no legal obligation on the CEDP or anyone for that matter to construct anything nor is it obligated to build on the Terry Rd site. Yes, this may have been purchased some time ago with the view at some point in the future to look at building a school. This may still be the case at some time.

However, this has no bearing on a decision that may be made moving forward now. Irrespective of what anybody make think, there is no obligation or commitment to build. Nobody can make someone do something that do not want to. Commercial propositions present themselves on a daily basis & things can change accordingly. It seems for whatever reason another more feasible opportunity presented itself which the CEDP chose to take up for the immediate future.

We as parents have a clear choice.

* We can either choose to send our children to Santa Sophia or not send them to Santa Sophia. This is everyone’s right.
* We have an obligation to our children, to provide the best possible opportunities we can for them.
* We need to look at and provide the best schooling options possible – we get one chance as parents at this & with the new Santa Sophia Catholic College they will have a state-of-the-art facility.
* I also believe that all necessary measures & provisions to provide a safe environment & learning place for our children have been undertaken & adhered to. This site offers no more challenges that may already exist at other schools. I believe that this is a major & fundamental issue has been taken seriously undertaken & considered during the planning process.
* We also need to keep in mind our teachers. Santa Sophia currently has an incredible group of dedicated teachers led by their Principal Mr De Vries who is continually on the front foot with new ideas & best teaching practices. Always putting the children & his staff first. They too deserve the opportunity to continue to teach our children in a facility that will allow them to do this as much as our children do.

This is what we should be looking at & talking about & not about why it isn’t going on Terry Rd.

It does not matter where the school is. Bricks & mortar do not create the school, it’s the leadership & the teaching that really counts.

The curriculum is the curriculum irrespective of which school our children may go to, whether public or private. However, how it is taught is what differentiates one school from the other. The teachers & the teaching at Santa Sophia is second to none.

I know that my child for one is very happy with Santa Sophia & is looking forward to the new school opening soon. He eagerly wakes up every morning & looks forward to going to school. He like his teachers & peers alike. He loves going to school. The building does not make the school, its what’s inside the school that counts.

As a parent of a current Santa Sophia high school student & I therefore respectfully request that the new Santa Sophia Catholic College be allowed to go ahead in its entirety with no further delays.

Parents have a clear choice. They can either choose to send their children to the new school or not.

Nobody is forcing anyone to do anything that they do not want to do.

I ask, all those people opposing this development, “**what is your alternative? “**

If there is no school at the Gables & with no clear appetite or proposal for anything to be built in the immediate future on Terry Rd or by Government, “**where will our children go**?”

I sincerely hope that common sense prevails at a time when schools are desperately needed.

Please do not let the future of our children be overshadowed by any other agenda that may be at play.

Our children are our future & as parents we need to do everything, we can to provide them with the best possible opportunities.

So please allow the school to go ahead & let them learn in a Happy & state of the art environment that we can all be proud of.

Its times like this that we need to put our best foot forward & unite together. The decisions that we make today will have a significant impact on our children both now & in the future.

I for one am fully supportive of the new school & cannot wait for it to open.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely Yours

George Giovas JP