

## **Proposed boundary fence for Aranda Primary School**

### ***'What We Heard'* report: Engagement with the school community**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Education Directorate sought the views of the Aranda Primary School community, on a proposed boundary fence around the school.

School fences are one of a number of ways to help keep children safe on school grounds. They are also effective in helping to mitigate vandalism at schools after hours.

**Schools are shared community assets and proposed designs would include gates to allow the community to access sections of the school grounds including the kindergarten undercover playground and bike track, after hours, on weekends and during school holidays.**

The proposal has strong support from the Aranda School staff and leadership.

A fence would:

- reduce the possibility of students absconding from the school grounds. Any student leaving the school grounds without supervision is exposed to significant risks including busy and dangerous roads.
- limit the risk of external dangers e.g., trespassers, dogs, etc.
- reduce the risk and frequency of physical hazards being left on grounds after-hours.
- assist in managing the increase in vandalism being experienced by the school, which has damaged school grounds and resulted in significant costs to remedy.

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

The Education Directorate invited Aranda Primary School parents and carers to share their thoughts on a proposed boundary fence at the school through a short survey during the period 2 to 16 December 2022.

The Directorate then hosted an in-person Open House at Aranda Primary School on 28 March 2023, and an online session on 5 April 2023. These sessions were designed to provide current parents, carers, and students from the school the opportunity to ask questions, gather information and provide feedback on the proposal.

This engagement was held ahead of broader engagement with the wider Aranda community. Although the two communities overlap, the Education Directorate always seeks to engage with its school community ahead of the broader community.

**Following this engagement, the Education Directorate will discuss findings with the school, P&C and Board.**

**If a decision to build a fence is made, the school and community will be able to provide further feedback on matters such as after-hours and weekend access to school grounds, the fence location, and the aesthetics. With all opportunities we work to balance both the needs of the school alongside the wider community.**

## THE SURVEY

Purpose of the survey:

- Understand the school community's level of support for a boundary fence at Aranda Primary School.
- Outline for the school community the reasons the school is seeking a fence.
- Understand and address the concerns and questions the school community has regarding a potential fence.
- Assist the Education Directorate in planning further communication and engagement with the school community.
- Assist in planning for the broader community engagement.

The staff at Aranda Primary School and the school board strongly support the boundary fence. Staff interest is primarily to mitigate risks to student safety, students absconding as well as to protect school infrastructure from vandalism.

Ensuring continued, easy community access outside of school hours is a vital consideration for a school boundary fence and the placement of access gates to ensure this.

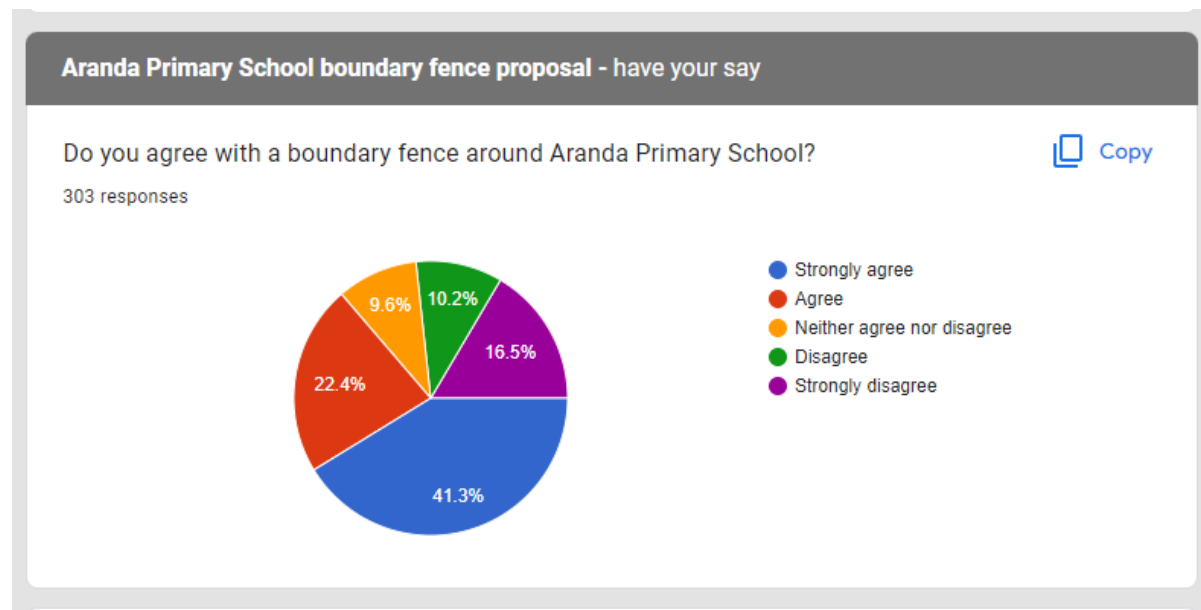
**The proposed design includes gates to allow the community to access sections of the school grounds, including the kindergarten undercover playground and bike track after-hours, on weekends and during school holidays.**

The Education Directorate has been working closely with the school and the P&C on this project, including seeking their input and advice on the proposed community engagement process. Feedback received through each step in the engagement process has helped shape subsequent steps in the process.

## WHO WE ENGAGED

The survey was targeted to parents and carers of current students at Aranda Primary School. It was disseminated by the school via email to its list of parent/carer contacts for current students. Every student at Aranda Primary School has a contact on the list.

## WHAT WE HEARD



The survey results showed that 63.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal and 9.6% neither agreed nor disagreed. More than a quarter of respondents (26.7%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal. The Education Directorate undertook to work closely with the school community to better understand these concerns through the next steps in the engagement process.

## Key insights

### Safety

- There is strong support from the school community to improve the safety of students and support the wellbeing of school staff.
- There is strong support that a fence would help mitigate the risk of students absconding from school.
- Feedback showed that people wanted to ensure safety was the priority in the communications surrounding the fence, not vandalism.
- The school community wants evidence regarding how fences increase safety e.g., from other schools' experience of fence installations.

### Community access

1. There is strong support from community to keep school grounds, particularly the bike track and basketball court, reasonably accessible outside of school hours on evenings and weekends.
2. Some concerns were raised over how community access would be managed.
3. There was also some concern that the oval adjacent to the school on Banaga Place will be fenced off from community. (However, it is important to note that the scope of this project does not extend to the oval.)
4. The school community wants to ensure any fence is visually unobtrusive.

### Funding

5. There was some concern over funding and how a boundary fence might impact the school budget. It is important to note that the project would be funded by the Education Directorate which has an allocated budget for infrastructure upgrades and security improvements.

## Feedback provided in the free-text section of the survey

The survey provided a free-text box for respondents to provide feedback comments. The themes of responses aligned with the themes provided in previous feedback, including some 60 questions posed by the P&C and answered by the Education Directorate via FAQs published on the school's website.

Themes included: support of the fence on safety grounds (47 comments); concerns about community access to the grounds after hours and on weekends (40 comments – a mix of those agreeing/disagreeing with the proposal); philosophical objections to school fences (17); in support on inclusion grounds (4); seeking data to support the proposal (7); seeking the Directorate to make the decision (2); concerns about the process (3); support on the grounds of staff wellbeing (4); and visual presentation (4).

The results of the survey were published on the [school's website](#).

## HOW THE SURVEY RESULTS INFORMED THE ENGAGEMENT NEXT STEPS

Feedback from the survey indicated a need for further engagement with the school community and the P&C prior to moving forward with broader community engagement.

The Education Directorate met with the school executive and the P&C through February and March 2023 to collaborate on the next steps in the process. It was agreed that the Education Directorate would host an Open House session for the school community, with a format designed in collaboration with the P&C.

It was also agreed that an online version of the Open House would also be made available to those who could not attend the in-person event. An invitation to the Open House sessions was extended to parents, carers, and students via the P&C (on email and Facebook) and the school's communications channels (newsletter, email, and Seesaw) and via the school website.

## THE OPEN HOUSE SESSIONS

Aims:

- To gather feedback from the school community to inform the decision regarding:
  - a) whether to build a boundary fence at Aranda Primary School and
  - b) if a boundary fence were to be built, what it could look like in terms of location, access, appearance etc.
- To provide answers to questions and address concerns the school community might have about the proposal.

Format of the session:

- An Open House was held in-person in the school hall from 5pm - 8pm on Tuesday 28 March.
- Members of the school community were invited to drop-in to the Open House any time during that time period, and to stay for as long or as short a time as they would each like.

- The school hall was set up with seven information stations placed around the room – one each for the Board, the P&C, the staff, the ‘case for’ the fence, the ‘case against’ the fence, ‘how to make a fence look nicer’, and the ‘project parameters’ (discussion about negotiables such as exact location and access points, and non-negotiables such as technical safety requirements).
- There were around 50 attendees over the course of the evening.
- Attendees were invited to circulate among the various information stations, and to discuss each aspect of the boundary fence proposal, gather information and provide feedback.
- An online Open House was held on Wednesday 5 April from 12.15pm - 1pm, accommodating 3 attendees from the parent/carer community who had been unable to attend the in-person event.

How feedback was gathered:

- Each information station was provided with a flipchart on an easel and large-size Post-it notes upon which people were invited to write their responses to the issue being explored by that table and attach them to the flipchart.
- Education Directorate staff members circulated among the tables to assist attendees with providing feedback.
- At the exit, attendees were given the opportunity to provide feedback about the Open House session itself, via placing a dot on a graph with the axes ‘Quality of information: low / medium / high’ + ‘Quality of discussion: low / medium / high’.
- Feedback from the in-person and online Open House sessions is summarised below.

Summary of feedback gathered:

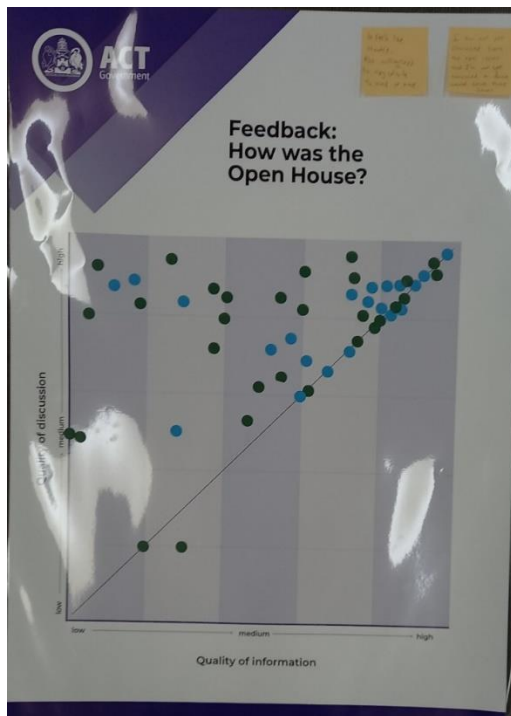
Information station name + question	Representatives	Feedback themes	Comments
Aranda staff perspective: What would it mean to staff to have a boundary fence?	Principal, deputy principals + staff members	A lot of support for the proposal, including for child safety, inclusivity and to support teachers to do their jobs.	The staff at Aranda Primary School strongly support the boundary fence. Staff interest is primarily to mitigate risks to student safety, students absconding as well as to protect school infrastructure from vandalism.
Project parameters: If a fence were to be built,	Representatives from Infrastructure	Design layout. Aesthetics.	Ensuring continued, easy community access outside of school hours is a vital

what's negotiable and what's non-negotiable in terms of its design, including public access to school grounds?	and Capital Works, Education Directorate	Psychological impact on students. Access – how will gates work? Good support for the proposal. 'Don't cut through the play area.'	consideration for a school boundary fence and placement of gate access to ensure this.
What are the reasons for having a fence?	Principals from other ACT public schools that have fences/been through this engagement process + representative from Infrastructure and Capital Works, Education Directorate	Most feedback supports the proposal on safety grounds. Others asked for data to support the proposal, and to have holes in the existing fence fixed.	One of the contributions is from a parent whose child has absconded and wants a fence on safety grounds.
What are the reasons for not having a fence?	Local resident and three current parents	We have not been provided with data as evidence to support the need for a fence. Philosophical objections to fences. What other solutions might there be? Speculation that a fence would make students less resilient.	Overwhelmingly, feedback looks at two points: Seeking data about child-safety incidents to support the need for a fence; and concerns about community access to school grounds after-hours and on weekends. Some valuable research carried out by this group was displayed on eight posters showing locked school grounds on a public holiday weekend, which raises the important question of how fenced schools might fail to provide for community access.
Kids' activity table: What could be done to make a fence look nicer?	Lids 4 Kids – a charity of a school parent	Lots of love for this table. Suggestions were to add shrubbery and some colour.	Any additions to a fence would need not to void the warranty.
P&C	P&C representatives	Community access is a concern. One contribution notes that the P&C brochure does not include the perspective of	The P&C have stated that they are neutral on the boundary fence proposal and indicated in the past it cannot support the



		parents who are happy with the process. Some seeking data to support the proposal. A couple questioning the validity of the survey, including (inaccurately) that 40% of parents did not receive it.	proposal without knowing how the school community feels about it.
Board	Board representatives	Community access is a concern. Supported on safety grounds. Where is the data to support the need?	The school board strongly supports the boundary fence.
Online Open House	School parents	The risk-assessment is not good enough. We want data to support the case. We are concerned about after-hours access.	

It was pleasing to note that the 'dots graph' feedback at the exit door, about how attendees valued the Open House itself, trended to the very positive, particularly regarding the quality of discussion (axes are X: 'Quality of information' and Y: 'Quality of discussion'). See below.



## FEEDBACK FROM THE OPEN HOUSE SESSIONS

### Key insights from the Open House sessions

#### Safety

- There is support for a boundary fence for student safety and to help mitigate the risk of students absconding from school.
- There is support for a boundary fence to support the wellbeing of school staff and to help them to do their job.
- There was feedback that the school should consider other measures to keep students safe, in place of a boundary fence.

#### Data

- There are calls for data about incidences of absconding and other threats to student safety to prove the school's case for a fence.
- It is important to note that the Directorate considers data received from the school in regard to safety when making any decision.

#### Community access

- There is support to keep school grounds accessible outside of school hours on evenings and weekends, particularly the bike track and basketball court.
- There are concerns about how community access to school grounds would be managed if it were fenced, with research evidence provided of various fenced school grounds having been locked and inaccessible over the March 2023 public holiday weekend.
- It is important to note that community access is of importance to the Directorate and would be a key consideration when engaging more broadly.

#### Communications and engagement process

- There was some concern about the communications and engagement process, including that the survey did not reach a sufficient number of parents/carers. It is important to note that all Aranda students have parent/carer contacts on the school email list to which the survey was sent.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Throughout this process a number of questions were received by the community. Every piece of feedback received has been reviewed and a comprehensive set of Frequently Asked Questions has been made available on the [Aranda Primary School website](#).

## NEXT STEPS

The Education Directorate considered the results of the engagement and feedback/incidents from the school before recommending whether the proposal should proceed. A meeting was held with the school, the Board and P&C in April 2023 to discuss next steps.

The Education Directorate decided to proceed with construction of a boundary fence at Aranda Primary School, following a two-week period of community consultation on the proposed fence design.

### Key timings

**2-16 December 2022:** The Education Directorate surveyed parents and carers on their thoughts about the proposed boundary fence.

**February-March 2023:** The Education Directorate met with the P&C and school to collaborate on next steps in the process.

**28 March 2023 & 5 April 2023:** ‘Open House’ information and feedback-gathering sessions were hosted by the Education Directorate at the school and online for the school community (parents and carers of current students).

### WE ARE HERE

**April 2023:** During the school holidays, this ‘What We Heard’ report is finalised. Considering this report, an initial recommendation is made by the Directorate on whether the fence should go ahead, and next steps for engagement with the school and the local community.

After the school holidays, the Directorate discusses this report and the Directorate’s recommendation with the school leadership, Board and P&C.

**Mid-June 2023:** This report is published on the school website, including the next steps in the process. Engagement commences with the Aranda community for a period of two weeks. Community will be asked for their feedback on the proposal for a boundary fence, including fence line, appearance, access, etc.

**Early July:** Directorate to finalise designs and produce a final version of the ‘What We Heard’ report incorporating community feedback.

**Mid-July:** The Directorate’s project team to provide a community update advising of the final design and the construction timeline.



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