

School Given the Opportunity to Survive and Thrive

Parents, students, staff, as well as friends and supporters of Sophia Mundi Steiner School today applauded the Planning Minister, Matthew Guy, for granting the School approval to build essential classrooms and a relocated a playground within the Abbotsford Convent precinct.

“It is a huge relief to tell our senior students that they are now secure in continuing on at the School and will be able to take up the International Baccalaureate Diploma,” says school parent, Leslie Arnott. “Our first endeavour will be to refurbish the disused swimming pool into a wonderful community space, not only for the students use but also for the general public. It’s great that we’re able to offer this space for our children as well as share it with the rest of the community”.

The School has been in a race against time to secure classroom space after its previous site was sold off by the Melbourne Catholic Archdiocese to make way for another inner city apartment complex. After investigating over 20 possible sites in and around Collingwood, the School finally found a solution through consultation with the Abbotsford Convent Foundation (ACF) and the Collingwood Children’s Farm, with the support of Heritage Victoria.

“It’s heartening to know that our school now has a secure future”, says Jennifer West, school principal. “This planning approval helps keep educational diversity viable, active and vibrant within the Collingwood/Abbotsford area. I understand this to be a key policy initiative of the Baillieu government”.

Current state MP (and former City of Yarra mayor), Jane Garrett, is relieved that a solution has been found. “I’ve been working with the School and the families from my electorate of Brunswick for some time now and am pleased that the School has been able to offer a win-win solution for the entire community”, says Ms Garrett. “If the school hadn’t been allowed to open up the old disused pool as a community facility, the area would have remained under lock and key indefinitely.”

The planning approval will benefit the community in several ways including creating a playground, basket ball courts and community meeting space, all of which be available for community use outside school hours. “The first part of the project is creating the new community area,” commented the School’s Chairman of the Board, Robin Dexter, “We will continue working with the Abbotsford Convent and the Children’s Farm to minimise the impact of the site works and get it completed in the shortest possible timeframe.” The Nuns Walk, a historical walk linking the Convent and the surrounding farmland, will also be opened again.

Sophia Mundi has been in Abbotsford for 25 years and is a strong supporter of the community. As a founding tenant within the Convent precinct the school invested \$2m to refurbish the once derelict Convent buildings that it presently rents from the ACF. “It was an investment that was important in securing the survival of the Convent in its early years of development”, says Dexter. “Our School can now thrive with no further barriers, especially with the introduction of an International Baccalaureate program for the high school.”

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