

# GOOD NEIGHBOUR GUIDE

A short guide  
for principals on  
engaging the  
community in capital  
works projects at  
your school



## Capital works projects are an exciting time for both your school and local community.

Experience tells us that the school community and your school neighbours want to know when you are planning any physical changes to your school. Any capital works, large or small, may disrupt, shock or surprise students, parents, staff and neighbours. By informing and preparing relevant people in your school and local communities, you can achieve a more positive experience and outcome. To minimise misunderstandings or angst, the following guide (tried and tested) can help you deliver your message in a meaningful and successful manner.

## Identifying affected and interested parties

Many people may be affected by a capital works project at your school. It is important to identify relevant parties and decide whether they need to be contacted, how you will do so, and what you will tell them. Make an assessment as to who may be directly and indirectly affected by the project and accompanying works, particularly those with neighbouring properties.

There are the obvious groups – students, families and staff – who need to be informed. There are also other groups who may be affected and should be engaged as early as possible in order to make alternative arrangements.

### Students and families

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Students and families are your most engaged stakeholders and will be interested in changes to the school. They need to be informed of changes to the school to manage any risks regarding health and safety, impact on the teaching and learning program, and access to the school. Clear and precise information is vital, as is a positive tone to the message. Consider which students and families could be “champions” for your project and encourage them to maintain an active interest in the project, even during difficult times. Be aware of special needs regarding inclusion and access and be ready to identify solutions to possible issues.

### Staff

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Staff are often the first point of contact for parents and students, so they should have a good understanding of the proposed works and feel comfortable discussing the project in general terms. Any queries beyond general information should be referred to you, as the Principal, you are the main point of contact regarding capital works.

Concerns from staff about health and safety, impact on the teaching and learning program, and access to the school need to be addressed and resolved at a staff level before the project begins.

## Neighbours

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Neighbours need special consideration at the planning stage. Once you are clear about the scope of the project, you should consider if the changes to your school site will directly or indirectly create inconvenience to your neighbours. If the answer is yes, have a conversation early in the planning process, to make sure you understand their issues and have the greatest opportunity to redress them, at minimal inconvenience to your planning. At a minimum, neighbours should be forewarned of construction work at the school especially if it occurs outside normal school hours. For example, will it be noisy or dusty, will the works affect parking & traffic, or interrupt their daily life? Notify them of any changes to the school that may affect their homes, such as new, permanent or relocatable buildings, that may block views or cast shadows (into backyards), or is the project removing trees or other landscaping that provide privacy and noise barriers to neighbours. If you think your neighbours will be negatively impacted and you are worried about having a constructive conversation, let your project manager know and we will get you some support.

Consider which neighbours should be contacted, some works will only impact on your closest neighbours, while others may affect a whole street.

If the works at your school include the removal of asbestos, it is crucial to inform your neighbours of the works and the safety measures in place to ensure the works are carried out in line with stringent OH&S requirements. Neighbours will be highly agitated if they see contractors wearing hazard protection clothing and they haven't been informed.

## Site hirers / community groups

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Groups using the school facilities for community activities should be informed of any works that may impact on their use (either temporarily during construction or permanently). Consider the effect of changes to; access, restrictions to parking, changes to facilities such as toilets and change rooms, and reduction in evening lighting. Community groups should be given ample time to find alternative facilities, if necessary, and to contact their own members in a timely manner.

## Emergency services / Cleaners / Deliveries / Post / Recycling and rubbish collection

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Be aware of how the project may affect access to your school and buildings. If major changes occur to street access, contact relevant services to ensure smooth transition for the duration of the project.

## Types of concerns

Community members can raise a range of concerns. They could include concerns about: interruption to the teaching & learning program, changes to school timetable, access to the school, health and safety, security, or even the impact of a new building on the liveability of the area.

The following is a possible, but not exhaustive, list of concerns.

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- Interruption to learning
- Interruption to teaching program
- Health & safety concerns (dust, noise, asbestos, stress)
- Workers on the school grounds
- Emergency vehicle access
- Parking
- Traffic
- Public transport
- Foot traffic
- Bicycle access
- Deliveries
- Pick up zones
- Start & end times of school & work
- Safety fencing
- Safety signs
- Impacting views from neighbouring properties or buildings that will overlook neighbour backyards/windows
- Overshadowing neighbour properties
- Tree removal & planting

## How and when to contact community members

Each project will have its own timeline and schedule of works. Setting up a clear timeline of contact dates will help you keep track of who to contact, the means of contact and timeliness of information sharing.

### Things to remember:

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- Share the plans early
- Be open to feedback
- Be clear about the logistics
- Be the point of contact
- Use a range of methods of communication to ensure the message is received
- Ask for help early if you think your community is concerned.

You may need to use a range of methods of communication to ensure that the message is received.

### Consider:

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- School newsletter
- SMS
- School social media such as Facebook
- Email
- Letter drop (particularly to neighbours)
- Staff meetings
- Parent information sessions
- Small face to face meetings with neighbours to talk through the plans

### Helpful hints:

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- Eliminate surprises with your relevant stakeholders
- Provide bi-monthly or quarterly updates depending on interest and impact of the school project. Your staff, parent and local resident groups or enquiries are a good indicator of how often you need to provide updates.
- Keeping your stakeholders informed also helps build excitement and acceptance of the positive changes at the school.
- Refer to Q&As and suggested key messages and templates provided.
- Any concerns, contact VSBA directly on:
  - Email **vsba@edumail.vic.gov.au**
  - Phone **1800 896 950**

## Timeline for contacting groups

Timelines, scope of works and 'project phases' of a redevelopment can vary from project to project; this guide will help you know who to contact when.

PHASE OF PROJECT	COMMUNICATION
<b>Funding announcement – once officially announced by the DET or Minister</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents, school council, reception, teaching and admin staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Architect appointment – once official</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above</li> </ul>
<b> Renders, sketches or masterplan created – get guidance from project team or see your provisional planner of what and when you can share images of school project designs/sketches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until endorsed by VSBA/DET you may only share the early stages with the school council.</li> <li>Once officially endorsed by VSBA/DET you may share with the school and local communities as identified in your assessment.</li> <li>Depending on the design e.g. gym where noise or lighting factors may be a concern for neighbours, you may need to share design with local residents and businesses based in the periphery (direct perimeter of school fence line).</li> <li>Call your VSBA Project Manager or 1800 896 950 for guidance if you think residents may have design or construction concerns, such as lighting, overshadowing or noise factors.</li> </ul>
<b>Sod turn event to begin construction</b> <b>If signage is introduced on the fence line, you will hear from the VSBA directly.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you are asked to participate or support a ministerial/media event, DET/VSBA will provide detailed instructions.</li> <li>Post event, you may share approved photos/key messages - seek guidance from the relevant DET/VSBA team.</li> </ul>
<b>Builder or contractor appointment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide 'heads up' communications, such as estimated timeframe of when construction begins and will be completed, and who can be contacted regarding any concerns. Use your list of interested and affected parties to decide who should be contacted.</li> <li>Projects of \$200,000 or more are promoted on the VSBA website and updates, photos or renders/images are usually displayed with a project timeline. This is also a good source of information for parents.</li> </ul>
<b>Under construction or redevelopment phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See above</li> </ul>

<p><b>Construction impacts of redevelopment (e.g. dust, noise, traffic management impacts)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common sense notification of school and community members – see your checklist</li> <li>• Depending on the type of traffic management concerns during construction where e.g. staff carpark may be reduced or closed, student pedestrian traffic is redirected, eliminate surprises and prepare parents, students and staff of impacts.</li> <li>• If any permanent traffic / pedestrian access is changed permanently and you are not sure where to navigate enquiries, speak to your project manager or region for guidance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>If demolition of old building or asbestos removal required.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VSBA will provide guidance if asbestos related works are required</li> <li>• Note: any asbestos removal is done after hours or during school holidays.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Practical completion of the project – opening of buildings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of the Minister of Education or the local Minister of Parliament could be in contact with your school to deliver a media event.</li> <li>• Build excitement of completion in the newsletter</li> <li>• Share with the community who have been impacted during building works.</li> </ul>



## Letters

Attached are templates and examples of letters that may assist in engaging with your community. You may choose to use the whole letter or extract relevant points.

### Templates

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Template 1	General building works
Template 2	Traffic and parking
Template 3	Invitation to information session
Template 4	Good Neighbour Checklist

### Examples

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Example 1	Families - a detailed letter about work to be undertaken and the impact it will have.
Example 2	Neighbours – a short, specific letter about work to be undertaken and the impact it will have
Example 3	Families/Neighbours – a detailed letter with reference to an attached Q&A
Example 4	A sample FAQ sheet

### Helpful links

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<a href="#"><u>School Communications Toolkit</u></a>	The School Communications Toolkit includes advice for dealing with the media and managing issues, and cheat sheets for using social media.
<a href="#"><u>Education State Key Messages</u></a>	This page lists the Education State overarching messages that may help focus and link your news to the community to the larger picture of schooling in Victoria.

If your school construction issues aren't covered by the examples above and you have a real concern about communicating with your community, please talk to your Project Manager in the VSBA and send an email to the Manager, Community Engagement. We will give you a call and provide individual advice on how to proceed.

#### [Victorian School Building Authority](#)

Email [\*\*vsba@edumail.vic.gov.au\*\*](mailto:vsba@edumail.vic.gov.au)

Phone **1800 896 950**

# TEMPLATE 1

## General Building Works

*<insert school letterhead>*

Dear Resident,

As you may be aware ..... School is being upgraded.

The \$..... Victorian Government project will modernise our school to support contemporary teaching practices and equip children with the lifelong learning skills needed in the 21st century.

We expect to begin construction works at the school (*over the school holidays/in the next two weeks...*) The work is expected to be completed within <insert time frame>.

The works will mostly occur inside the school building. We will endeavour to minimise disruptions to traffic and the impact of noise and dust.

If you have any queries or concern about the works, please contact me on tel. .... or email .....

Yours sincerely,

*<Principal>*

## TEMPLATE 2

### Traffic and Parking

*<insert school letterhead>*

Dear Resident,

As you may be aware ..... School is being upgraded.

The \$..... Victorian Government project will modernise our school to support contemporary teaching practices and equip children with the lifelong learning skills needed in the 21st century.

We expect to begin construction works at the school (*over the school holidays/in the next two weeks...*). The work is expected to be completed within (*three months*).

Please note, traffic and parking will be impacted during construction. We'll have parking restrictions and traffic management measures in place during the project, which will mean:

*<insert relevant restrictions i.e.>*

- (*no parking in the school grounds during school hours (8am – 4pm) except for two disabled parking bays which will be available via the main school entrance along Marchant Avenue*)
- (*school drop-off will be available, before 8am only, using a one-way traffic*).

The (*builders / local council*) have created a traffic management plan to minimise any inconvenience for local residents.

If you have any queries or concern about the works, please contact me on tel. .... or email .....

Yours sincerely,

*<Principal>*

## TEMPLATE 3

## Invitation to Information Session

*<insert school letterhead>*

Dear Families

As you may be aware ..... School is being upgraded.

The \$..... Victorian Government project will modernise our school to support contemporary teaching practices and equip children with the lifelong learning skills needed in the 21st century.

*(Insert brief description of what is being built or modernized and what it means for your school)*

The development is going to make a significant and exciting difference to our school, so I encourage you to come along to the information session to learn more.

Date:

Location:

Regards,

*<Principal>*

## TEMPLATE 4

## Good Neighbour Checklist

- Organise a team to support you during this process (spread the load and ensure someone can answer queries on your behalf)
- Inform the school council
- Inform staff
- Inform families
- Inform Emergency Services
- Inform site hirers
- Inform cleaners
- Inform Australia Post and delivery companies
- Inform rubbish collection
- Inform neighbours
- Follow up information
- Q&A document

## EXAMPLE 1 Families

### Works Notification

#### **Works Notification**

Dear Parent / Carer,

We are upgrading and modernising Upwey High School.

The project will deliver a new stadium, flexible learning spaces and multipurpose facilities for the school's sports, music and performing arts programs. These new facilities will help provide world-leading education for secondary students at Upwey.

The stadium and multipurpose spaces will also be available for the wider community to use outside of school hours.

We're starting demolition this month, with construction works to follow soon.

We'll have parking restrictions and traffic management measures in place during the project, which will mean:

- no parking in the school grounds during school hours (8am – 4pm) except for two disabled parking bays which will be available via the main school entrance along Marchant Avenue
- school drop-off will be available, before 8am only, using a one-way traffic system

During weekends and outside of school hours, a parking area will be available for people using the existing gymnasium. It will operate using the same one-way traffic system.

Pedestrian access may be limited at key stages of construction to ensure public safety.

If you have any questions about the project please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Regards,

<Principal>

## EXAMPLE 2 Neighbours

### Works Notification

#### **Works notification**

Dear Resident,

We upgrading and modernising Upwey High School.

The project will deliver a new stadium, flexible learning spaces and multipurpose facilities for the school's sports, music and performing arts programs. These new facilities will help provide world-leading education for secondary students at Upwey.

The stadium and multipurpose spaces will also be available for the wider community to use outside of school hours.

We're starting demolition this month, with construction works to follow soon.

Pedestrian access may be limited at key stages of construction to ensure public safety.

If you have any questions about the project please do not hesitate to contact us on 03 8565 5412.

Yours sincerely,

<Principal>

## EXAMPLE 3 Families / Neighbours

### Construction

<insert school letterhead>

#### **Construction at Kilmore Primary School**

Dear Local Resident,

As you may be aware, we are upgrading Kilmore Primary School with a new building for the junior school.

This much-needed facility will be located on the northwest corner of the site, replacing part of the current sports field. The new building will be two storeys with a rooftop outdoor learning space, so it will change the visual profile of the corner. The adjoining bin and mail enclosure will be retained, but some construction along that perimeter will be required to replace part of the fence.

Traffic and parking will also be impacted during construction, which is scheduled to begin in September and should last approximately 14 months. The builders have created a traffic management plan to minimise any inconvenience for local residents.

We want to make sure that you are aware of how and when this project will affect you. We hope the attached Q&As will answer your questions, however if we have missed something or you would like more detail, please contact the school.

Lastly, to ensure that all local residents are across the details of the construction and its impacts, we would be happy to run an in-person information session. If you are interested in attending, please email the school.

Kind regards,

<Principal>



## EXAMPLE 4

### A Sample FAQ Sheet

#### Frequently Asked Questions

*(These answers are a guide only and are to be updated for your specific situation)*

#### **What is happening?**

Our school is getting an upgrade! The Department of Education and Training has invested \$200,000 towards the design and construction a new performing arts centre. After consultation with the school council and local council, we have decided that our current canteen block will be expanded to include this exciting new development.

#### **Why is this project happening?**

Arts and culture are important elements of childhood development. For the past eight years our school has hired out the municipality town hall for our performing arts programs though we have long recognised the need for our own facilities. The development of an on-site performing arts centre will reduce travel time for our students, will enable more personalised programs to be curated and will reduce ongoing financial costs for our school and parents.

#### **How long will the <upgrade/development> take?**

Demolition is scheduled to commence mid-April 2019. Construction will happen in two stages to minimise disruption to student learning. Stage one will be completed in late May, 2019. Stage two is scheduled to be completed during the school holidays at the end of Term 3.

#### **What impacts will construction have on learning?**

For the safety of our students, the oval and adjoining playground will be inaccessible during construction. We are working with council to move our sports and recreational activities to <park name> during this period. Parents will be notified by the school of these changes through letters and updates in the school newsletter. No other interruptions are expected.

#### **What safety precautions are being taken during construction?**

We take the safety of our students and school community very seriously. To limit disruptions to our neighbours, construction will only be occurring during school hours and will be strictly guided by our project manager. We anticipate increased dust and noise during this period and, as such, will be closing the adjacent car park and re-routing school pathways during this phase.

## A Sample FAQ Sheet (cont.)

Safety fences and signs are being erected and the site will be regularly monitored to ensure the ongoing safety of our whole school community. Due to the works occurring on the northern end of the site, workers will be not entering the school grounds at any time.

### **How will pick up zones and school access be affected?**

We will have parking restrictions and traffic management measures in place during construction. The <builders/council> have created a traffic management plan to minimise any inconvenience for families and local residents.

The main entrance to the school will be moved to <street name> at the eastern side of the block. As such, school drop-off will be available before 8am only, using one-way traffic. Public transport stops will remain unchanged.

### **Will any trees or native plants be removed?**

Our architects have worked closely with council to limit the amount of disruptions to the existing trees and vegetation. However, in order for the best facilities to be provided to our students, three trees will be removed from the western edge of the school. Upon completion of construction, six new native trees will be planted around the new facility to increase shade, colour and life to our school.

### **How will the <new building> impact school neighbours' properties?**

Our new, two-storey building will create more shade for our western-side neighbours for a few hours in the morning. Air-conditioning and ventilation units have been moved away from the school's boundaries to limit noise and to provide a more aesthetically pleasing view into the school. If you have any further concerns, please contact <school contact name>.

### **Who is the architect <and/or> builder?**

<Architect name> is an award-winning architect firm who has been working with the school council to provide a design catered to our specific needs. <Builder name> will be undertaking our building works in line with these plans and under the guidance of the VSBA.

### **How can I stay up-to-date on the project?**

We will be providing regular updates in our school newsletter and across our school's Facebook page. Our project is also being tracked on the VSBA website. Here you can find updates, photos or renders/ images with a project timeline <only if project is over \$200,000>.