30C: This is the average temp before your school gets air con

HEAT IS ON

SHOULD the Education Department build new schools such as Wentworth Point Public School without airconditioning? That question is being asked as Greater Sydney once again broke hot temperature records in January.

Full Report

OUR HOT SCHOOLS

Students need to learn in suitable surrounds

Hot classrooms put focus on school environments

Laura Sullivan

A HEALTH expert has called for more planning and consideration to be given to children’s learning environments.

In response to concerns about the lack of cooling systems in state schools, Sydney University professor Robyn Ewing, from the education and social work faculty, said being comfortable in class was just as important a consideration as eating breakfast.

But she said issues in school environments were not just about airconditioning. A lack of ventilation, playground spaces and overcrowding could also affect children’s learning. “It’s about creating the best conditions for our children,” she said.

With temperatures set to soar to 32C tomorrow, Opposition leader Luke Foley has struck out at the “magical numbers” — between 30-33C — that dictate what state schools are eligible for air conditioning.

Mr Foley was baffled when the new $22 million Wentworth Point Public School opened this month without airconditioning.

“Kids are back in schools that are overcrowded and hot. Students and teachers deserve to be in environments that are conducive to learning,” he said.

Schools with a January average temperature above 30C are eligible for air cooling under the NSW Department of Education’s policy.

Bureau of Meteorology’s senior climateologist, Agata Imielska said Sydney Olympic Park, about 4km from Wentworth Point, has seen four days of 40C temperatures this summer.

Education Minister Rob Stokes said a well-designed school on the waterfront was not a priority for airconditioning.

“Where there are extremes of temperatures we will provide mechanical heating and cooling,” he said. “However, good design,
natural light and ventilation is a much better, ecologically sustainable solution."

But Mr Foley said the government needed to sort out its priorities. "The billions it is spending knocking down and rebuilding two Sydney stadiums should go to schools and hospitals; they come first," he said.

**Newtown**

WHEN his daughter came home and complained about how hot her school was Craig Wilson launched a petition to stop the government roadblocks to getting airconditioning installed.

The Newtown North Public School P&C has raised enough money for a cooling system at the 135-year-old school but the Department of Education will not fund the installation – quoting the 30-33C funding model. The mean maximum January temperature at Newtown North Public School fell just short at 27.2C.

Mr Wilson said the school’s classrooms and hall could get very hot in summer and a comfortable school space was a realistic expectation.

He said the Department should work with the school P&Cs on a case-by-case basis.

"Health and safety is important to enable people to be productive"

Craig Wilson

Craig Wilson with daughter Juliette.