

No space for bilingual preschool

By Meredith Clisby

A BILINGUAL preschool is being conducted out of a primary school in Queanbeyan because there is no space available for it in Canberra.

The Australian Indonesian Language Schools Association (Ailisa), a voluntary, not-for-profit educational program, has tried to find a home in the ACT since it was established in June 2009.

President Ken Griffiths contacted *The Chronicle* after reading last week's story about Member for Ginninderra Mary Porter's push for more bilingual schools in Canberra.

He said he'd had a difficult time attempting to get a location for the preschool.

"I actually emailed 31 separate primary schools last year and asked them for any spare space, but I didn't have any luck," he said.

"What we really want is space in one of these closed primary schools.

"The thing is, the response [from the ACT Government] is 'sorry, we

can't help you' - we're 110th on the list."

Mr Griffiths said while he was grateful to the school for allowing them the space it was a disadvantage the preschool had to be in NSW.

"Because we're here it's a bit of a drawback for families in Canberra," he said.

"Basically our membership is based in Canberra."

He said he had been interested in the closed primary school site at McKellar but had been told it had already been allocated to another service.

"I've been trying to negotiate with the very people who have been in charge of it and it's just remained closed and unused, which seems a real shame," he said.

"We're an educational institution, we're languages, we're Indonesian which is one of the four priorities in the Federal Government language program - so give us some accelerated priority."

Mr Griffiths said the association

wanted to eventually run a K-12 Indonesian/English bilingual school.

A spokesman from Mary Porter's office said she would meet with representatives from Ailisa and would see what she could do to help their preschool find a place in Canberra.

He said while Ms Porter's motion was in support of the government investigating the possibility of a further K-12 bilingual school, the MLA was generally supportive of bilingual education.

A government spokesman said although the ACT Government was not obliged to house non-government preschool operators, they could assist operators with accommodation at ACT public schools or government premises if space was available.

"In relation to the use of ACT public school facilities, priority must always be given to the educational needs of students of that school," he said.



Teacher Anne Kusumawardhani reads to preschoolers Fateema, Aliya, Aisyah, Lulu, Alfie and William at their current home in Queanbeyan South Public School.

ACTILES