

Neighbours' fury at school's plan

Joe Kelly

AUSTRALIA'S oldest independent school for girls is proud to be part of a closely knit community, but the neighbours of Sydney's St Catherine's are furious to have been denied a voice in the approval of two new buildings.

The eastern suburbs Anglican school received approval from the state government for the new classrooms, laboratories and studio on September 4 under the federal government's Building the Education Revolution program.

Danny Caretti, who owns a block of four units next door, blames the federal and state governments for rushing the BER process and isolating the interests of local communities.

He said residents would only receive two days' notice before the trucks rolled in to start construction.

"The federal government is trying to get this money out fast, the state government is trying to approve it quickly ... and it's been rushed," Mr Caretti said.

"We're furious. It means that we've got no say. We've got no control.



Sidelined: St Catherine's neighbours

There's no appeal. What can we do? Nothing."

Waverley mayor Sally Betts described the process by which schools could bypass local planning laws under the BER program as appalling.

"We do have a problem with the current process of granting or giving money to schools and rushing them through and taking the approval process out of council's hands," she said.

"That's really appalling because you just don't know if all the concerns of

residents are going to be addressed."

Headmistress Lynne Stone said the school had spoken extensively to residents and was aware of their concerns.

"We believe we've designed according to the concerns of our neighbours," Ms Stone said. "It's a very exciting educational development."

But this is little consolation to Mr Caretti's tenants, who took their concerns to the office of NSW Planning Minister Kristina Keneally after they were tipped off by a Waverley councillor in August.

"The trucks would have been rolling in here with two days' notice and I wouldn't have known what's happening," Mr Caretti said.

"Ultimately, the trucks are going to arrive and we've got to make decisions about how we're going to cope with it. The school wouldn't tell us anything."

Mr Caretti claimed the two- and three-storey buildings approved for the school did not conform with local planning laws. "They're putting up buildings they never would have done had they gone through council."