



The Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP
Minister for Education



Mr David Blunt
Clerk of the Parliaments
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

MT16/31

Dear Mr Blunt

Please find attached the Government response to the report of the inquiry into the closure of public schools in New South Wales by the Select Committee on the Closure of Public Schools in New South Wales for tabling in the Legislative Council.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Piccoli MP
Minister for Education

3 MAR 2016

*Received this day 7 March 2016 at
9.35 am on behalf of the Clerk of
the Parliaments*

Government response to the Legislative Council Report on the Closure of Public Schools in New South Wales

<p>Recommendation 1 That the NSW Department of Education make publicly available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence base it uses to support its assertions about educational outcomes and small schools. • The criteria it uses to determine when a small school is placed in review. 	<p>Response Accepted Next steps: The NSW Department of Education will consult with representatives from the NSW Primary Principals Association, the NSW Secondary Principals Council, the NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Federation of P&Cs to review and update the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence to support potential changes to educational provisions • Criteria used to determine that local consultation should be considered.
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the NSW Department of Education act with honesty and good faith by informing parents at the earliest possible stage when it intends to close a school. 	<p>Response Accepted Next steps: The NSW Department of Education will consult with representatives from the NSW Primary Principals Association, the NSW Secondary Principals Council, the NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Federation of P&Cs to review and update step 6 of the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School Consultative Group is informed that closure will be recommended by the Executive Director.
<p>Recommendation 3 That the NSW Department of Education amend the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require the Director and Principal to consider at Stage 1 any strategies to boost enrolments and, should they identify any such strategies, to not proceed to step 2 until those strategies have been developed and implemented • Insert at step 6 a new dot point requiring the School Consultative Group to consider strategies to boost enrolments and should such strategies be identified, to not proceed with the process of closure until such strategies have been developed and implemented. 	<p>Response Accepted Next steps: The NSW Department of Education will consult with representatives from the NSW Primary Principals Association, the NSW Secondary Principals Council, the NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Federation of P&Cs to review and update steps 2 and 6 of the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> so that strategies to boost enrolments are implemented at stage 1 and step 6.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4 That, in the interest of transparency and integrity of process, the NSW Department of Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully consider the purpose of its <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i>, specifically, whether they are intended to facilitate consultation with parents and other stakeholders that genuinely influences the decision about a school's future, or alternatively, to facilitate stakeholders' transition towards acceptance after a decision has been made • If the intended purpose is to facilitate transition, change the language of the Protocols to reflect this • If the intention is that consultation be genuine, adapt the Protocols to enable this from an earlier stage. 	<p>Response Accepted Next Steps: The NSW Department of Education will consult with representatives from the NSW Primary Principals Association, the NSW Secondary Principals Council, the NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Federation of P&Cs to review the purpose of the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> and make appropriate amendments to clarify purpose.</p>

<p>Recommendation 5 That the NSW Department of Education develop and publish on its website an action plan on the organisational culture surrounding school closures with particular reference to the need to be respectful and understanding towards parents.</p>	<p>Response Accepted. Next steps: The updated <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> will be publicly available on the Department's internet website.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6 That the Deputy Secretary, NSW Department of Education, be required to provide appropriate support, information, and resources to facilitate the consultation process at step 6 of the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i>.</p>	<p>Response Accepted. Next steps: The Department will accept enhancements to step 6 of the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> to ensure these processes are appropriately resourced to facilitate local consultation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7 That the NSW Department of Education make the following refinements to the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i>, to further improve consultation and transparency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a requirement that local government be consulted at the earliest possible stage, and also at step 6 • Enhance consultation with local community members at step 6 • Introduce requirements for formal record keeping of school consultative groups and school closure review committees. 	<p>Response Accepted Next steps: The NSW Department of Education will consult with representatives from the NSW Primary Principals Association, the NSW Secondary Principals Council, the NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Federation of P&Cs to review and update step 6 of the <i>Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered</i> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widen and enhance local consultation • Introduce record keeping requirements.
<p>Recommendation 8 That, in the interests of transparency and robust decision making about the future of individual schools, the NSW Department of Education formally review its processes for considering demographic trends at the local level and likely events and planning decisions that will influence enrolment numbers.</p>	<p>Response Accepted. Subject to a formal review of the consideration of demographic trends at the local level and likely events and planning decisions that influence enrolment numbers. Next steps: The Director, Demography and Planning, NSW Department of Education, will provide accurate enrolment and planning at stage 1 and step 6.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9 That the Minister for Education reverse his decision to close Martins Creek Public School at the end of 2015 to enable the student with complex needs to complete his primary schooling there.</p>	<p>Response Accepted. Martins Creek Public School will take enrolments for the 2016 school year and will remain operational until the end of 2019.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10 That the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, or an alternative government agency independent of the NSW Department of Education, engage an external, independent body to audit the Department of Education's process of handling the complaints made by parents of Wollombi and Martins Creek Public Schools. If any complaints handling process is found to be flawed, the relevant complaint(s) should be independently reinvestigated.</p>	<p>Response Not Accepted. The NSW Department of Education's management of complaints in relation to Martins Creek Public School and Wollombi Public School has been the subject of a thorough independent external review by the NSW Ombudsman's Office who found no issue with the Department's complaint management in these matters.</p>