

Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by Dr John Kaye.

Second Reading

Dr JOHN KAYE [10.34 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This legislation responds to the urgent cries for help from the Gosford community, in particular, from the parents and teachers at Henry Kendall High School and Gosford Public School. The New South Wales Teachers Federation has made representations on behalf of teachers, as well as on its own behalf. The bill will stop the dash-for-cash sale at Gosford Public School and the transfer of students into very cramped conditions at Henry Kendall High School. These cramped conditions will interfere not only with the education of the students who are currently at Gosford Public School but also with the education of students at Henry Kendall High School, particularly secondary students with special needs. The Save Gosford Public School Bill 2011 will achieve these aims by prohibiting the relocation of Gosford Public School to the grounds of Henry Kendall High School, and ensuring that teachers, parents and the general community are notified and consulted—including a meeting with the Minister—before a decision is made on any alternative site for Gosford Public School. The bill requires the Minister to personally attend a meeting with the local community to discuss alternative sites and to consider their submissions before making any decision, and to permit Gosford Public School to continue to operate on its current site until an alternative site is found that is consistent with the other clauses of the proposed Act.

Many concerns have been raised about the plan—developed by the previous Government and enacted by this Government—to force a relocation of Gosford Public School to Henry Kendall High School. Principal among The Greens' concerns are that the Special Needs Unit at the high school will have to be moved to make way for the new primary school buildings. Rather than the promised state-of-the-art buildings with the latest equipment, the unit now will be situated in refurbished technology rooms in a building that is on the State's asbestos register. That is a less than satisfactory outcome, particularly for those students with mobility issues.

Our next concern is that two separate schools deserve two distinct sites. Gosford Public School and Henry Kendall High School are separate schools and it is inappropriate and unacceptable to locate a primary school and a high school on the one site. Further, the projected student enrolment will be 1,300 students. Those students will be educated in cramped and noisy classrooms. The playground area—which is crucial to the development of students—will be inadequate in size and location. The total size of the land of the two schools is 4.65 hectares. Section 3 (a) of the New South Wales Government's own Asset Management Directorate Site Procedures for New South Wales government schools as at 1 February 2008 states:

Primary school sites should be around three hectares in size, while six hectares is desirable for a secondary school.

If these two schools are located on the one site, according to the Government's own policy that site should be nine hectares in size. The site proposed is just over 55 per cent of the requirements. As a measure of the how cramped conditions will be on the proposed new site, in A block of Henry Kendall High School students from both Gosford Public School and

Henry Kendall High School will share one building, with primary school students on the top level and directly below them the secondary school science laboratories. The movement of students and the subsequent noise will impact on educational outcomes for both sets of students. Most importantly, the co-location will block forever any potential expansion of the schools. The local member, Mr Chris Holstein, stated some time ago that Gosford will attract about 10,000 new residents to the area because of the redevelopment that is taking place. That will put an additional burden on the public education system. A combined Gosford Public School and Henry Kendall High School site would not be able to cope. It would be too cramped to cater for such a growth in population.

This proposed merger has created a massive response from the community—from parents, teachers and community members. Since the announcement in June 2010 there have been protests, public meetings, a petition with in excess of 10,000 signatures and a letter-writing campaign. Every request to meet with the Minister has far been rejected. A survey conducted by the previous Government found that 77 per cent of parents were totally opposed to the relocation of Gosford Public School to the Henry Kendall High School site. Instead of an open consultation process to look at alternative sites for Gosford Public School, if it had to be moved, the previous Government and this Government conducted a behind-closed-doors review of alternative locations. The review was conducted without consultation and was cut short, without warning. No-one really knows the alternatives that were looked at, despite a large range of alternatives being put forward by the community.

The bill is important for the community of Gosford. Passing the bill through this Chamber will send a message to that community that this Parliament cares about the future of public education on the Central Coast. It will send a message that the Government cares about the concerns of parents with young children who want the security of knowing that high-quality primary and secondary education within the public system will be available as their children grow up. This bill is not just about education in Gosford. It is about the future of public education across the State. If this bill fails to be passed and the Government pushes ahead with its forced co-location of the two schools, then a nasty and dangerous precedent has been set.

In 2010 the Boston Consulting Group presented a report to the previous Government that suggested \$850 million in potential savings from forced school closures and forced mergers. Given that all governments are now driven by Treasury and Finance and Services, and given that the primary objective of government is not the delivery of high-quality services but the balancing of budget, Gosford Public School and Henry Kendall High School, and hundreds of schools like them around the State, will become an attractive target to a government that is fixated on the budget bottom line and not on the needs of the community.

If this bill is not passed and Gosford Public School is shoehorned into Henry Kendall High School, then every school in this State must be aware that it too may be on the chopping block and become part of a grab-for-cash land sale that is not in the interests of its community or public education. This co-location is being driven purely by budgetary reasons. It is not being driven by any sense of providing quality education or creating a better future for the students. The Parliament has an obligation to the Gosford community, and to like communities around New South Wales, to stand up and be counted. The Government must undo not only its errors but also the errors of its predecessor. The Government must begin genuine open consultation with the folk in Gosford.

This bill follows a textbook campaign to secure the future of the children of Gosford. I acknowledge the parents and citizens associations from Gosford Public School and Henry

Kendall High School. In particular, I acknowledge the extraordinary work done by Jackie Draper and Helen Vocalan, parents at Gosford Public School. They have put their lives on hold to battle not only for their own children but for the children of Gosford, New South Wales and Australia. This country is well served by the parents and citizens associations of this State, which battle for their public schools. It should not be that any government puts the future of any public school on the line in this way, but it is so. Because of parents like Jackie and Helen, and hundreds of others who have attended meetings, baked lamingtons and obtained 10,000 signatures on a petition, this bill is before the House today with an urgent plea for support.

I thank the New South Wales Teachers Federation, in particular, its Central Coast organiser, for its tireless work to protect the education of children and public education outcomes on the Central Coast. Importantly, this bill is a matter of conscience. Members should stand up to the Government. The Government needs to put a hold on this plan. The community should be consulted and a better outcome developed—one that may not be as financially advantageous to the Government in the short term but will serve the economic, social and justice needs for the future of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by the Hon. Lynda Voltz and set down as an order of the day for a future day.