

Question on notice related to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Closure of Public Schools in NSW.

During in-camera proceedings on Thursday the 20th of August - before a Select Committee on the Closure of Public Schools, as part of a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Closure of Public Schools in NSW - I accepted a question on notice from the Hon Ben Franklin (MLC) regarding statistics on school enrolments in the Wollombi catchment area.

Having limited personal access to confidential details of individual students' addresses, I find myself leaning on the "statistical evidence" provided to parents and concerned members of the community by Mr Bryan Campbell (Director of Public Schools, NSW, Hunter Network).

Mr Campbell's figures changed regularly throughout the "consultative" process. Earlier in the year, Mr Campbell provided figures that indicated that IF out-of-area enrolments were NOT permitted, Laguna Public School would have had only 28 appropriately enrolled students and that Wollombi would have had 19.

However, at a Wollombi Community Meeting held at The Wollombi Community Hall on the 2nd of September, 2014, Mr Campbell was invited to speak. Losses of enrolments at Wollombi Public School to the private sector, due largely to the stress endured by families during the "consultation" process, together with families relocating within the valley, meant that at that community meeting on the 2nd of September, Mr Campbell's figures reflected that Laguna Public School would then have had 35 in-area enrolments to Wollombi's 16.

It is my understanding that even these figures are incorrect as Mr Campbell used a different geographical cut-off point from that indicated in the Department of Education's official map of gazetted public school catchment areas. If Mr Campbell had used the DEC's

map, Laguna would have lost at least 5 children from it's final figure to Wollombi's gain.

This was discussed in that public meeting on the 2nd of September, in the presence of Mr Campbell, to which he did not give a response. A request for a full copy of Mr Campbell's demographic studies was made, but no such study has ever been provided to the community. I would have thought that if a study had not been properly conducted, surely such a study must be disregarded in a decision as important as the closure of a public school.

One point regarding statistics and figures (one of many) that was not discussed during the consultative process was that Wollombi Public School had also lost possible enrolments to other schools outside Wollombi's catchment area, not just to Laguna. Children from Wollombi's catchment area were enrolled in Laguna Public School, but also Millfield Public School, Broke Public School and some public schools in the Cessnock area. Several other children in Wollombi's catchment area attended schools in the private sector and several large Wollombi families choose to home-school their children. If all of those children suddenly attended their LOCAL public school, as is their right, Wollombi's enrolment figures would easily have rivalled - or even surpassed - Laguna's.

Since the closure of Wollombi Public School, Laguna Public School has gained ALL of Wollombi's catchment area. The adjoining catchment areas of Millfield Public School and Broke Public School gained no expansion to their catchment areas. Hence, Laguna's new, expanded catchment area is vast.

It must be considered a real and present concern that, if every infant or primary aged child living in the now vast catchment area for Laguna Public School chose to attend their local public School (instead of enrolling out-of-area, or private-schooling, or home-schooling), Laguna Public School would not be able to accommodate all of the children. Especially since Laguna still accepts so many enrolments from out of its own catchment area. Yet another

demountable classroom would not fit on the steep slope upon which Laguna Public School sits.

There is no public transport in the Wollombi Valley for infants/primary aged children, so the distances needed to travel from the far reaches of Laguna's new expanded catchment need to be catered for by parents and caregivers. Fortunately, parents and caregivers are entitled to payments from Transport for NSW (Private Vehicle Conveyance) PVC. The subsidy is available to NSW residents where there is no public transport (government or private operators) available to transport a child.

The subsidy has never stipulated that it is available only to a child attending his or her LOCAL public school. Hence, Laguna-enrolled families from out-of-area locations as far away as Cessnock have, for many years - well before the closure of Wollombi Public School, been able to receive a subsidy for transporting each child to and from school. The subsidy allows for kilometres travelled to and from school plus the return trip for the drivers. So that equates to 4 trips - per day - per child - from perhaps 38-40 km away. When I brought this up with Mr Campbell, he stated that he hoped the DEC "never caught wind of that rot".

I hope that this letter provides the appropriate answers to the question given to me on notice.

Yours sincerely,
Parent C