

Submission
No 39

INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 18/08/2015

Partially Confidential

Submission for Parliamentary Inquiry: “Closure of public schools in NSW”

Preamble:

It is the right and obligation of the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) to continuously monitor and assess the educational provisions and outcomes for student needs across NSW. In fact, it would be remiss on their part not to. However, it is not appropriate, to lower students educational outcomes, support first-time teaching principals who are off class more than half of their teaching time for the entire year - effectively providing a crèche service while receiving all the training required for personal reward, including Principal Accreditation; to deny learning support to those in need, disengage parents, disenfranchise the community, cycle temporary staff in order to find the most malleable and amenable support for the Relieving Principals crèche service, dissuade prospective enrolments and to drive students and parents away. This has been the experience at Wollombi Public School (WPS). My submission will focus on the conduct of certain DEC officials and the flawed processes used by the DEC to achieve a predetermined outcome through a purely tokenistic community charade. I will also try to express the trail of destruction left in the DEC's wake.

As there is no obligation on the Minister to adopt any of the committee's recommendations, I feel to some extent that this inquiry, no matter how honourable the committee's intentions, may not be the mechanism to fully achieve accountability and change. Nothing short of a Royal Commission will expose what we felt was corruption under the ED's leadership, administrating a Machiavellian plan, delivered by a malevolent AD and implemented by a self career motivated Relieving Principal. There are many seemingly small points in this submission, or dots as I prefer to call them, which when joined make up the bigger picture of what really occurred and what we experienced as parents throughout 2014.

To the many dedicated and wonderful educators, whom I believe the Executive Director (ED), Area Director (AD) and Relieving Principal (RP) are definitely not, please note that the comments contained within this submission bear no reflection on your dedication and wonderful work as truly great educators. Having had discussions at length with the above three individuals, they do not believe, nor support small schools. In fact they have *never* worked in a truly small school!

Background: The Seven-Year Itch:

Nestled in the picturesque Hunter Valley on land gifted by the community for educational purposes, lies the beautiful, historic heritage listed Wollombi Public School (WPS). The school has provided quality education in the Wollombi Valley for 162 years, well actually 161 as last year cannot be included.....

Our family has been associated with WPS for the past 9 years. Our eldest commenced there in 2007, completing year 6 in 2013.

In 2007 the DEC attempted to close the school. This, we believe, is the beginning of a seven-year period of a DEC induced “cloud of closure” over WPS. During that 7-year period the DEC revolved 5 principals through WPS none of which were merit selected and, some of which we believe, discouraged new enrolments, and carried the mandate to close the school.

It is rumoured that the Schools Educational Director, (SED) had installed an Acting Principal in August 2007 to close WPS. The SED called a meeting and intimated at the possibility of the school closing by the end of 2007. There was much public outcry and, at the meeting organised by the SED to deliver that decision, it was seemingly reversed. In March 2009, a new vibrant Relieving Principal was in place, and the school immediately began to grow that year. In the following year (2010), there were 5 new enrolments. Then for some inexplicable reason, the SED decided to advertise the position in April that year. By early 2010, the SED had formulated plans for WPS once it was closed. Meanwhile, forming a nearby school and in parallel to this, was a very close relationship between the LPS Principal and the SED which saw LPS procure an unprecedented agreement to accept out of area enrolments (OOA) unchallenged, much to the detriment and eventual demise of WPS.

The Relieving Principal was displaced by an application for an “incentive transfer”. As stipulated by the rules this applicant could not be denied the position. We believe this Principal came with good intentions, but as seen in the call for papers, was subjected to Department plans that did not include the growth of WPS. This scenario, we believe, had way-laid the SED’s plans to close WPS for an alternative plan had already devised.

Under this Principals leadership the school stabilised and even grew until late 2011 when two families had a falling out, ultimately costing the school 6 students. Such can be the way in small communities, causing numbers to fluctuate greatly. Oddly for a small school, the Principal was advised by the Department not to intervene.

In April 2013, the ED and Relieving AD visited the school parents sighting their concerns for the educational outcomes of the children, particularly the social aspect. Parents explained that they were happy with the educational outcomes and that within this community we were able to provide all the additional social interactions both within and external to the school. The ED raised shackles and said this is the Departments responsibility not the parents! When asked if was going to close the school, said, “At the moment there is no political will to close the school”.

These events galvanised the principal and parents who embarked upon seeking assistance on how to grow WPS. By June we had acquired 2 additional students with 3 prospective enrolments in the near future.

Suddenly, November 1 was D-day for WPS parents. At the request of the Relieving AD WPS parents and staff met with , where announced that as the Principal was leaving at the end of the year, and as we had low enrolments, the school was going to close, “worst case scenario the school could close at the end of the year”. Tears flowed. One family, who had moved from Sydney with the intent of schooling their 5 children at WPS, was devastated

and in tears, as were the other parents and staff. From here on in the Department changed documentation and its stance about closing the school. The reason it would seem was that the DEC believed that in November 2013 Laguna Public School (LPS) had picked up its skirt and snuck up to within 8kms of WPS! It has actually been there since LPS came into existence 141 years ago! Yet this was to form the main thrust of their reasoning for closing WPS.

The 2013 Fact sheet supplied indicated a clear objective by the ED to close WPS at the start of 2014. *(Please see attachment: Fact Sheet 2013)*

It was through media attention and community action that this scenario was turned around and suddenly there would be a Consultative Process commencing in 2014. This was to be a tokenistic process. Purely a PR exercise devised as a smoke screen and as a stalling tactic designed to deflect the real issue of a predetermined decision to close WPS.

The Department never got behind WPS or its community to look into the reasons for low enrolments, never met with parents in 8 years to look at ways of growing the school, or as to why this situation had developed. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact of the DEC's "cloud of closure" coupled with Out Of Area (OOA) enrolments!

The call for papers clearly shows that throughout 2013 the Department was active in encouraging the substantive Principal to take up another position, effectively paving the way to close the school without parent consultation. Finally we believe succumbed to the pressure and accepted a transfer.

In December 2013 in my role as an interview panel member, and despite my protestation, the ED refused to advertise the WPS Principals Position as its designated substantive position, opting instead for an EOI for a Relieving Principal with a finite timeline rather than as a merit selected basis. The Relieving AD emailed the ED regarding whether to advertise this position as its substantive self. This greatly reduced the available candidates.

I was involved in the selection process and there seemed to be a heavy bias towards the eventual RP that was selected by the DEC. This person was well acquainted with the eventual AD, who became "protective patron".

The new RP was invited to our presentation night, welcomed warmly and greeted enthusiastically and, where we discussed for the first time looking into growth strategies for WPS next year.

2014: The Consultative Process

Before school reopened parents, together with community peers, met with the RP to discuss a growth strategy for the school. The RP said that would follow up on our discussions and implement a growth strategy for the school. Despite repeated request throughout the year and P&C representations this never occurred.

In March the AD contacted me requesting an informal meeting as a lead up to the Consultative Process (CP). At that meeting, the sometimes enigmatic and charismatic AD seems to have been saying one thing verbally and another with body language!

From about this time on the Principal we believe embarked upon a deliberate path of destruction, much to the detriment of the students, angst of the parents, and disbelief of the staff and community. Please see formal complaints for details. *(Please see attachment: Principal Concerns)*

The Consultative Group spent some four months formulating and collating a questionnaire that, as the AD said, had no influence on the outcome, nor would form the basis of any decision. *(Please see attachment: Submissions Wollombi Discussion Letter)*

The AD suggested if we were all happy to take notes there was no need to record formal minutes. As such no formal minutes exist. This I would suggest to the committee is one recommendation to consider.

The AD was to take 7 weeks leave at crucial points during the CP. Firstly for 5 weeks mid stream, then another 2 weeks leave when the report was due. On the first occasion gave plenty of notice, the second came as a 1hr notice contained in a brief email to the Consultative Group in reply to my email regarding furnishing of the Final Report to the CG, as it was now due. During this period of absence (school holidays), was able to lodge the Final Report to the ED. This report had not been provided to the CG for viewing or ratification. When this was raised as a formal complaint, the response was; yes did do that, but is not obliged to provide a copy to the CG. Why then have we been meeting and working together on a draft for 6 months? This is another recommendation for the committee to consider.

The RP's focus appeared to us to be very much on self-promotion and career development. In the first few weeks of school, my wife and myself were called on separate occasions into the RP's office to inform us that will be off class for a lot of the time that year and didn't want that information to get out in the community. We were to learn later that the Principal was receiving a host of courses including a Principals Accreditation course to fast track career, and as the AD stated, "attending meeting of little value". Parents and community were viewed as nuisances to be disengaged and avoided at all opportunities.

We have been informed that in 2014, DEC employees had been instructed by the Regional Office not to engage with parents. It seemed that any temporary/relieving staff member seen engaging with parents was not asked back. Parents and families noted that staff known to them for many years, and with whom we all had a rapport, suddenly would avoid eye contact and behave uncomfortably.

During this period we witnessed staff members reduced to tears by the RP. The ill treatment of staff, particularly those of a permanent status, was in our view deliberate, unnecessary and very unprofessional. It is interesting to note that, the same relief staff eventually selected by the RP for WPS, are now being employed at Paxton, with the same disastrous result. This year at Paxton, out of 73 students at the start of the term 2, 30 have now left,

mainly citing the educational changes introduced by the RP. Others are in waiting lists for other schools. Over a staggering 3rd in a little over a term! The promotion of the WPS RP was, we believe, reward rather than merit based. Paxton parents are noticing that things have deteriorated to the point that the AD feels the need to meet with the Principal in car in the school car park in order to avoid attention! Interestingly the DEC spokesperson's response to the media report doesn't even hint at the possibility of the Principal being the issue here but rather, as was the case in WPS, it's the parents. It would seem that the DEC have either a clandestine master plan or as we have represented to the DEC, the Principal has serious skills issues and poor communications. Is this the public education system we all want for our children?

Congewai, another of the AD cohorts, has fallen from 22 to 8 since the Principal, recommended by the AD, was promoted to the job in 2014. This pattern all stems through the same AD back to the one ED.

To hear that it is all happening again with the same cast, just on a different stage makes us feel both ill and yet somewhat relieved to have left an education system that rewards atrocious behaviour, has no accountability and promotes hostility towards parents. Out of the 14 students (including 4 prospective enrolments) at WPS, 10 have decided to leave the Public Education System altogether.

Throughout 2014, the AD has provided unwavering support for the RP, who is from directorate of Maitland, as is Congewai's Principal.

The script at WPS reads like a Shakespearian play, with the ED in the main role as the mastermind of a Machiavellian plan to close small schools in rural NSW, the AD as the messenger and protector of the ruthless executer, the RP. This is not what one would expect from quality educators.

The RP indulged in a NAIDOC extravaganza inviting 600 odd students to our school. The RP then asked the P&C to contribute \$2000 for this event. We pointed out that the numbers might be overwhelming for our children and provide little gain. The reply was, let me know if you would like to make alternative arrangements for your children on that day! Quite clearly, this event was not about the children's enrichment, but rather the enrichment of the RP's resume. Despite, differing opinions with the Principal, the parents helped with the BBQ, running of activities and carried out all the clean up and pack up. In the next newsletter to the community, all and sundry were thanked, but absolutely no mention of parents. We are not after accolades, but it appears a deliberate tactic to humiliate and distance parents.

Another incident highlighting the distress and sufferance of the parents caused by the RP's incompetence throughout 2014 is the Nulkaba Speech Competition. Parents and children arrive at Nulkaba to find no such competition on the day! Meanwhile the RP who we had passed going the opposite direction, and who had fled Nulkaba School, had the incorrect day, rings our SAM to ask her to call parents and say it has been cancelled, arrives at WPS, nothing is said, and parents are ignored, and no apology given. Parents and kids had a 1.5hr round trip for nothing. We confirmed with Nulkaba SAM that it was always planned for the

following week. No changes ever made. The RP had simply got it wrong. When questioned denies getting it wrong and walks away. Please consider that our representations of all these issues received the unwavering support for the RP by the AD, a bit like Paxton's situation today.

Despite repeated requests to the AD from both within the CG and individually for uniform support, which is clearly outlined at step 11 in the CP protocols, the AD has chosen to selectively provide abundant amounts of uniform support to some whilst denying any to others on a discriminatory basis. The notion of government or non-government schools is absent from all documentation provided to the Consultative Group (CG). This explicit disclaimer or distinction, purported by the AD, is seemingly conveniently absent from the Departments' guidelines for forcibly closing a school, the CP Protocols. I believe, that as the Department's representative, it is simply not acceptable for the AD to tout a hearsay declaration on this matter without substantiating the claim. This is an ongoing issue with the DEC. *(Please see Attachment: School Uniforms and school uniforms (2))*

The AD took it upon to censor an up coming article in our community newsletter (Our Own News - OON). The article was to advertise to the community an upcoming mock auction of the school, which had been organised by WPS SOS. As the rented printer at Wollombi School was also used to provide printing services to the community and business for a fee, greatly subsidising costs, it was deemed by the AD that they had the right to censor our community article.

The AD's attitude on children's crossing, highlights the box ticking mentality of the AD that has been the hallmark & modus operandi throughout the CP.

I have never experienced such dishonest, despicable and dismissive behaviour as the AD displayed. The amount of money spent on closing WPS ought to form part of a royal commission in its own right into the DEC's, and in particular the ED's operations in closing small schools. There are 11 ED in the department costing, on base salary almost \$300,00 each, totalling over \$2.61m per annum. (DEC Annual report 2015). Based on the Minister's statements that closing small schools "will generate annual savings" to the operating budget of approximately of \$34,00 per small school, the DEC could designate one ED "surplus to needs" and save ten small schools in NSW per annum!

The DEC installed a first time Relieving Principal seemingly charged with the task of dismantling the school, disconnecting the parents and community from within the school and dividing parents, staff and school communities. It is purely about money, not

educational provision. Disconnecting parents was to enable the RP's own emotional detachment so as to make job easier of closing Wollombi School much easier.

The indignity, disrespect and disengagement shown by the relieving principal highlights the tactics of the DEC. The procedural unfairness towards the will of the parents and community requires further investigation.

Even after successfully reducing WPS's enrolments from 10 to 5, and eliminating all prospects of new enrolments, on two separate occasions (one per semester) the RP was unable to perform the simple and mandatory task of submitting attendance records for 5 students! As a result two families did not receive subsidies for the first half of the year. A first time principal, so disconnected from small schools that as a result of being off class more times than on, by the end of the year's presentation night couldn't remember the names of the five students was supposed to teach throughout the year.

Families were forced to leave the school and felt compelled to leave the Public Education System as a direct result of the behaviour/conduct of its agents in achieving their predetermined closure. The AD did not make any formal or written offer of counselling or suggest alternate schools once the Minister had made his decision.

WPS was a community school. It was used not only as a school providing quality tailored education and choice, but had a Preschool on site, was used for community meetings, community garden, chaplain counselling, voting venue, and a printing services for local community groups and small businesses. The Library hosted open days for the community such as Education Week Open days, Easter Parade, Book week pantomimes, Mothers and Fathers day and ceremonies. All this is now lost to the community of Wollombi.

The Media unit of the DEC manipulated facts and data to put mainstream media off the boil as was clearly evident in the call for papers. Their media spin-doctors and legal teams were well versed with methods to hush the media with misinformation, and incorrect data.

Meanwhile, we had a Principal in absentia, who was passive aggressive, divisive and conquering. Unprofessional towards staff, avoids engagement, not inclusive of committees, and clandestine in her movements.

It was an odd decision to select LPS over WPS as Wollombi has much better facilities. True, less students, but consider the stats, LPS's land is sloping, is situated in a catastrophic fire zone, and has ageing demountable buildings and no mobile coverage. WPS has permanent buildings, a preschool on site, connected classroom with computers and Wi-Fi access, a new amenities building, air conditioning, a working kiln, larger flat playing areas, a \$300,00 BER administration and meeting building, and a well-equipped library. At LPS it would be expensive to expand, has no suitable preschool site, lacks proximity to other schools, and uses a private sports ground, which is dangerous for children to reach. Yet surprisingly, none of these issues were raised or even discussed in the CP. In fact the AD never raised this prospect.

It is odd that the WPS was closed without first going into recess for a period of time. The “Call for Papers” was delivered two weeks over time.

Such was the confidence of the AD that didn’t provide a finalized report to the Consultative Group. Nor did provide, as was promised, the actual demographics data or financials for both schools to look genuinely at alternatives. Despite repeated requests for this information to better and openly assess the financial implications of one school over the other and ways to reduce costs, they were not provided. If one were of a suspicious nature, you would be forgiven for thinking that a predetermined decision had already been made!

The Minister, despite repeated requests throughout the year, would not avail himself to meet with the parents, community or Mayor of Cessnock Council, despite many offers for his time and place of choosing.

The Grand Finale:

The raucous laughter emanating from the Principals office once the final bell tolled after 162 years of quality education for the community and the closing service had ended, was reminiscent of a champagne celebration, or at the very least, two naughty school children rejoicing after playing a nasty trick on their teacher. Such was the disrespect of the AD during the closing ceremony that was asked by visitors to be quite and respectful during the “last rights” service of WPS.

By 8:00am the following morning, WPS’s historic bell had been unceremoniously cut down and removed at the AD’s request. It was only after community outcry that the bell was eventually returned in 2014 to the community and placed in the local museum.

Since the closure of the school, one CP meeting took place to distribute memorabilia, and then stalled at step 11 regarding the provision of uniforms to displaced students. No wash up or final discussion has ever been called. ***(Please see Attachment: School Uniforms and school uniforms (2)).***

The DEC report didn’t include growth or any balanced report about WPS. It was only after a formal complaint from myself to the ED, that I was allowed to submit a version that included the additional information together with a growth strategy. The meagre contribution of the RP was so incorrect and distorted that you would be excused for thinking the RP was a Principal in absentia- at least for most of their teaching time throughout 2014! Growth strategy was not looked at in any meaningful form by the CG.

Call for papers showed Deputy Secretary authorizing to consult locally on 23rd October 2013, yet parents were told on November 1 that the school was going to close at end 2013 and was supported by the fact sheet provided by Relieving AD. ***(Please see attachment: Fact Sheet 2013).*** Please note that there were 6 students not 4, as indicated at the school. There was never intent to consult locally.

Despite what we would consider robust representations of concerns at both WPS and Martins Creek, the Ombudsman's office refused to investigate our claims. Interestingly, in the call for papers, the ED states not to be concerned as has the Ombudsman's responses covered. When looking at the employee's names in DEC emails, and those at the Ombudsman's office there appears to be some correlation. **The Privileged Papers would make interesting reading for the Inquiry.** The Ombudsman's response begs questioning. *(Please see attachment: Ombudsman's Response)*

It seems that the DEC have a skewed priority when it comes to financial decisions. As demonstrated by the Area Director's, slide show, it cost the tax payer almost \$300,000 dollars to plug an additional 2 students into LPS, with the supply (\$27,000), cost (\$150,000) and installation of a demountable, and a third teacher (\$95,000), when they could have plugged an additional 21 students into WPS at virtually zero cost to the taxpayer. This was mostly achieved by OOA enrolments. A reliable source indicates that the AD facilitated its approval in 2013. Interesting that my repeated, and approved, requests to the AD for H1 and H2 financials for both Wollombi and Laguna have not been furnished. This was essential for incorporating cost determinations and their efficiencies/effectiveness or lack of, in the Final Report. As such the CG could not perform a cost benefit analysis.

(H1 (income) and H2 (expenditures) show the school's reports for budgeting and financial accountability as the total school financial balance)

Additional ongoing PVC costs in moving kids to another school were not included in "costings", as they came from a "different bucket", as the AD puts it.

Interestingly enough, now with the Paxton issues, parents who chose to leave that school are being refused at other schools on the basis that they are at capacity, or OOA. At Laguna they simply ordered another demountable and an additional teacher!

The 2014 expenditures at WPS would make very interesting reading for the Parliamentary Committee. Some of the expenses, including a pricey robotics kit ordered by the RP that was delivered to the school but never used by WPS kids, could show some surprises.

In 2013, the ED had promised that a community meeting would take place in early 2014 before any CP, but never did.

Demographics data was promised but not provided. Only stats from the Fact Sheet were shown.

A detailed cost benefit analysis for both schools not performed as had been indicated.

This pattern of false promises to community and community engagement appears to be evident as a vertical integration in the DEC.

The continual whitewashing of procedural complaints and Principal concerns is astonishing.

As the FOI (GIPA) showed the DEC is willing to modify the Laguna site at great expense to accommodate the demountable and move the preschool that will need to vacate WPS in 2015 now that it is closed. This is another cost due to bad decision making by the DEC. Another recommendation would be to furnish a costing schedule as part of the CP. *(Please see attachment: GIPA)*

Neither the ED, who has family in the area, and who may well be aware of rumours that abound about local interests in purchasing the school, nor the Minister who has been asked on many occasions, will dispel such rumours. Rumours suggest certain parties having already negotiated a deal to purchase the school. It would make for an interesting question of the DEC or Minister.

The cost for the “call for papers” was \$130,000. From the volume of activity generated by the DEC legal and media units, the costs must be extraordinary.

Submission as altered by WPS parent representative was not included as part of the final report to the Minister despite agreement from the ED (see comment on page 77, or 152 of GIPA)

(Please see attachment GIPA)

The AD assigned to perform an investigation regarding our concerns about the RP seemed desperate to contact us by phone - not email, to inform us that the outcome we sought was not achievable. That outcome we sought was the removal of the RP. . *(Please see attachment: Principal Concerns)*

We arrived for school pickup one afternoon, to have a relief teacher greet us at the school gate saying that the kids were still trying to remove paint from their hands. The stress levels experienced by the children, in particular our , as cried and desperately attempted to wash off the oil based enamel paint from skin with water and soap was distressing to us. *(Please see attached photos)*. distress was exacerbated when we had to drive to the general store to purchase Mineral Turpentine and wash hands over and over, causing further distressing at making late for gymnastics class. The use of this paint is banned for children in school, let alone the fact that the proper solvent was not on hand. The selection of that particular paint was intentional as it was to be used outdoors in the weather for what could be best described as an act of final vandalism to the school.

(Please see attachment: 1295_001.pdf)

So confident was the RP about the outcome that emails regarding the CP group's information sharing were often received with a read receipt stating that that they had been deleted without being read.

Our correspondence with the DEC, including the Secretary (DEC) has sought, on numerous occasions, clarification from the DEC of the term "one teacher school". We have in particular described in correspondence to the Department that it appears that the DEC has differing approaches to and definitions regarding this term. Specifically, the official DEC website, "acara", says that the total of full-time teachers for WPS is 1.3. Our understanding however is that there is no "one teacher school" in the state of NSW due to the operation of child safety legislation. In Section 28 of the *Education Act 1990* at subsection (10)(a) the legislation expressly provides in the case of a one-teacher school that the procedure outlined in the Act for the closure of a school does not apply. Supporting documentation outlining the DEC interpretation of legislation regarding a one-teacher school, section 28 One-teacher schools has not been provided.

Either all these actions are purely co-incidental, deliberate and malevolent or they are the hallmark of completely incompetent employees. We will leave that to others to determine.

Summing Up:

There is so much more to say about the Consultative Process and the tactics employed by the DEC. As Committee members who may have children of your own, or perhaps grandchildren, or nephews and nieces attending government schools, I ask this one question of you - would you be happy for your loved ones to experience such a process?

The call for papers revealed the amount of legal, media and personnel resources at the ED's disposal. It is staggering how much this well remunerated individual (ED) can spend seemingly without any accountability. The "call for papers were" largely made privileged, mainly we believe as a smoke screen. cursory observations by parents indicates that even the number of correspondences between certain persons, as outlined in the Privileged Index, indicates a despairingly different volume than that that would reasonably be expected. For the Call for Papers to have upheld integrity standards, and have been genuinely and honestly sourced, an independent IT specialist ought to have been engaged to extract the necessary files from the servers.

In my humble opinion, the Executive Director, Area Director and Relieving Principal have used and abused the Consultative Process as a means to an end, corrupted its intent and are a disgrace to the teaching profession.

We strongly believe the ED is working towards implementing the objectives and timeline laid out in the document titled, "New classification structure for schools and principals". [\(Please see attachment: classification.pdf\)](#)

We believe that under the current regime of the Executive Director, where there are Area Directors and Principals who are willing to implement these tactics without accountability, that all small schools in NSW are an endangered species. We believe that if these closures are allowed to continue without due process then rural NSW will no longer have small schools – the very fabric of their communities.

Wollombi School has closed. Wollombi School Community Trust (WSCET) is now building a strong case for maintaining the school in public ownership, as was originally intended by the gifting of the land for the community.

We believe, that due to the actions and conduct of certain DEC representatives the process was made abhorrent, humiliating and unkind, not only for the students and parents, but also for employees, family and community.

For us, this inquiry is not about the decision of Mr Piccoli to close the school, but rather about the process, procedures and the unnecessary conduct of the department and its representatives.

This inquiry ought to be about changing the process, adding transparency, accountability and seeking genuine community engagement. It is about formulating a robust decision-making process that is inclusive, adds humility and dignity to create a fair, just and democratic consultation together with genuine community engagement for all schools,

big or small. It is an opportunity to contribute towards shaping the future model of consultation for all public schools under threat of closure.

We owe it to rural NSW to stop this from happening to others in such a manner ever again.

We trust, that after having to relive “***annus horribilis***” for this inquiry, something can be done to prevent other families and communities from experiencing what we endured at the hands of the DEC. Ideally we would like to see a Royal Commission into the Executive Director’s powerbase, manipulation of government policies, political influence and most importantly the spending of public money for what appears to be a career rather than educational based objective/focus.

For your better understanding of what this process was actually like for the students, parents, families and community, I would like to include the following letters as part of my submission which I believe sums up the sentiments of 2014.

Yours Sincerely,

Some links of interest:

<http://www.cowraguardian.com.au/story/3170777/numbers-game-future-of-wyangala-school-hangs-in-balance/>

<http://www.cessnockadvertiser.com.au/story/3199713/inquiry-into-closure-of-nsw-public-schools/?cs=459>

<http://www.cessnockadvertiser.com.au/story/3271282/host-of-changes-leads-parents-to-pull-children-out-of-school/?cs=459>

<http://www.cessnockadvertiser.com.au/story/3199713/inquiry-into-closure-of-nsw-public-schools/?cs=459>

<http://wscetinc.wix.com/wscet>