

INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Madeline Allen

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Partially Confidential

My name is Madeline Allen,

I am writing in relation to the 'Closure of Public Schools- Are the right decisions being made?

I worked for the Dept of Education & Communities from 1971 to 2014 in the capacity of Sewing Teacher 1971 to 2001 and Senior Administration Manager from 1983 to 2014 until my retirement and I believe that the right decisions are NOT being made.

I worked at Eraring Public School for all of those years and at Hamilton North Public School from 1977 to 1989 also as Sewing Teacher and casual Ancillary Staff, was also permanent member of Awaba Public School from 1990 until 2008 as Senior Administration Officer. All classed in the small school category.

I also worked at many local Primary and High Schools of all sizes, during those years assisted many of these schools in piloting the OASIS Systems in small schools in the area and in many other roles related to the program both for schools and the District Inspectors of that particular period.

I therefore believe, as I have had many years working within small and large schools in the Lake Macquarie and Newcastle Areas, feel I can justify the importance of all schools, small or large and the ramifications of these schools performance and in particular the role of the small school both for students and society in general.

I was very upset with the whole process in relation to the closure of Eraring Public School and believe it was done in a very underhand way by the Dept. of Education & Communities assisted by the District Supervisor.

All reports in Newspapers given by the Department of Education and Communities, stated that everyone had been consulted, this is not totally true as the local community and Progress Association were never consulted and the current P & C Association of the school were only given the courtesy of what they needed to know. I as a permanent employee, even though I was on Long Service Leave, was never contacted in relation to the closure nor asked if I was going to return to the school in the future.

Also Newspaper reports from the DEC. stated that the last few terms prior to the closure there were no permanent staff at the school and I believe this was not the truth either. I was the SAM at Eraring Public School since 1971 working in the position of SAM from 1983 and prior to that as a Sewing Teacher, and I was still employed in that position on Long Service Leave from May 2013 and did not retire until October 2014 so I was still employed in that position with no consultation at all.

Prior to 2012 the school was a delightful place to work as the then current Principal along with all previous Principals/Teachers in Charge and the current staff were there for the students at all times. Numbers of students had fluctuated over many years and many times we were threatened with closure, but the type of Education that was produced in the school had many parents approach the school, and not within the area, for their children to attend the school as it had a very good reputation both academically and socially. It was also acknowledged by the, then local representatives of the DEC as to the dedicated performance of the Principal, teachers and the school and of the importance the school made to the students and the wider community. Sadly that commitment disappeared in 2012.

Most students who went on to High School were extremely well prepared and even after they left the school, they continued to come back to visit, and when activities organised by the school were happening, the school grounds were full of ex-students, families, locals and ex Principals all joined in as it was a totally community school and they felt that they still belonged.

The decline of Eraring Public School escalated from 2012 when a new Principal was appointed due to the existing Principal, who had been at the school for 25 years was not able to continue as he was very ill. This led to, over a very short period of time many students to be taken from the school by their parents due to their inability to consult, confer rationally, unable to put forward their issues on a constructive basis of structure and enquiry and extreme lack of cooperation of the Principal and also the extreme lack of support for parents, students, staff and community from the delegated representative of the Dept. of Education and Communities.

Parents, staff and particularly students were not in a position to approach the Principal on issues that were of importance to them, it was just not permitted and furthermore [REDACTED] was not prepared to listen and at times, usually ended each session in a screaming match by the Principal. This is not the way a school should be administered, I believe that the Principal does have the right to their opinion and a need to administer the school by the guidelines as stated by the Dept. Education and Communities, but they also need to be human, objective, considerate and plausible in the manner they approach every issue and this never happened.

All staff employed at the school were not trusted to continue doing their jobs as they had done competently for many years, but were required to get the approval of the Principal at all times on all matters.

Casual staff employed at the school, some who had worked at the school for many years, were not even notified that they were not required for the following year, this is not a very professional way to conduct the administration of a school or any other business. Some staff were informed by Email to tell them they are not required and I find this not very professional experience at all.

I personally wrote to MP Andrew Piccoli and MP Christopher Pyne on issues regarding the closure and got a very poor response from both of these men, these men are elected representatives of the current Government, elected by 'us' to assist 'us' when needed but their indifference is appalling and not a very comforting result as they referred their reply to [REDACTED] the DEC representative.

I also wrote to the Department of Education representative [REDACTED] and also received very limited information and I believe, not the whole truth and it was sent by the Administrative Staff of his office not him, which I also find very poor taste and not very professional.

I hope that you get a lot of submissions into the closures of all the schools throughout the state that are facing closure or have already been closed as I feel that these decisions have been and are made by 'so called experts' who sit in an office somewhere and think they know what is going on but fail to realise that these decisions impact on the whole community, sometimes with disastrous results and I am sure it would not happen on their patch.

These 'experts' need to get out into the community and ask questions both of the school community, the employees of these schools and most of all the students before important decisions are made. These decisions I believe are financial and other options are not considered. Also these "experts" need to be transparent with everyone, and this did not happen with Eraring Public School

I realise that most people do not want their local school to close, but I believe that the majority of these schools will give a balanced view of what should or should not happen in their particular area and if consultation is objective, transparent and honest will do the best for their area.

The problem with our Political system, including the DEC is that it is believed that these small communities can amalgamate without any problems to give us supposedly bigger and better schools, well they are wrong, totally wrong, our small school Eraring Public School was a benefit to all who attended up until the DEC made a very, very big mistake in their choice of Principal in 2012 and then close it in 2014 but will not admit their mistake.

The Local Community at Eraring now have a site with buildings on it that are sitting there wasting away. Also a building that was constructed only a few years ago, costing many thousands of dollars through the BER grants, once again decisions made by 'committees' that were a complete waste of money, time and effort on everyone's part and no decision now as to what the site's future is or if there is an answer, once again the community are not aware of.

Very poor decisions have been made throughout this whole situation, both by State, Federal Governments and the Dept. of Education and Communities and we can only hope that the final result for the schools that are still open will be the best one for their region not just a political result.

The schools that closed have my condolences as I know what they have gone through or going through to maintain a service to their community that is scorned at by both State & Federal Governments and Dept. of Education and Communities and their representatives.

Yours faithfully,

Madeline Allen.

cc. Bob Baldwin MP
cc. Christopher Pyne MP
cc. Adrian Piccoli LC
cc Greg Piper MLC
cc Paul Green LC
cc Robert Borsak LC
cc Lou Amato LC
cc Greg Donnelly LC
cc Ben Franklin LC
cc Courtney Houssos LC
cc John Kaye LC
cc Natasha Maclaren-Jones LC