

**Submission  
No 33**

## **INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** NSW Teachers Federation

**Date received:** 12/08/2015

---



# NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION

TEACHERS FEDERATION HOUSE Locked Bag 3010 Darlinghurst NSW 1300

---

Please address all correspondence to  
THE GENERAL SECRETARY

12 August 2015

In reply please quote: 671/2015/MF/co

The Director  
Select Committee on the Closure of Public Schools  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**E-MAILED**

Via Email: [schoolclosures@parliament.nsw.edu.au](mailto:schoolclosures@parliament.nsw.edu.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Closure of Public Schools in New South Wales (Inquiry)**

Please find enclosed a submission by the NSW Teachers Federation.

Yours sincerely

**John Dixon**  
General Secretary



# **NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION**

SUBMISSION TO

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL – NSW PARLIAMENT**

ON

**CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES (INQUIRY)**

Authorised by

**John Dixon  
General Secretary  
NSW Teachers Federation**

**7 August 2015**

# NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION

## CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES (INQUIRY)

---

### 1. Introduction

The New South Wales Teachers Federation (the Federation) is that state registered trade union representing teachers in New South Wales public pre-schools, infants, primary and secondary schools, Schools for Specific Purposes, teachers working in consultant/advisory positions, teachers in Corrective Services and teachers in NSW TAFE. The current membership totals over 69,000 practising permanent, temporary and part-time teachers and student teacher members.

### 2. Background

The Federation is concerned that frequently the focus of decisions to close and/ or amalgamate schools is centred on small schools such as those listed in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry.

Small schools occupy a unique and significant position within the NSW public education system. There are approximately 578 small schools across NSW in urban, rural and remote locations. Small schools play a pivotal role in supporting the local community. They contribute not only to the educational, social, cultural and sporting life of the students but the community as a whole.

In particular small rural schools serve a vital social purpose as well as their primary education function. The school is a place where, twice daily, parents can meet and converse about issues of importance. In isolated rural communities where neighbours are so distant, the drop off and collection of children at school serves to break down isolation, provide an important social connection and, in times of trauma such as drought, fire or flood, a very important chance for connection and communication amongst the community. The school and its facilities are also frequently used for social events and activities.

Small schools can provide particular support for students with special needs, students with disability, students who face difficulties with travel and Aboriginal students who may be provided with specific local language and cultural programs. Any proposal to recess, close or amalgamate small schools must not undermine the quality of, and access to, educational provision for students.

Consideration must also be given to the impact of the loss of a school on the whole community. Many small schools have educated and supported generations of local families the closure of the small school could result in some communities in remote and rural areas ceasing to exist.

Even where there is economic justification to close or recess some schools, there must be consideration to the unique circumstances that prevail in those communities and the nature of the services that each school provides.

Students, parents, teachers and the community members whose schools are at risk of recess or closure must be treated with dignity and respect throughout the process which must be objective, transparent, consultative, responsive and reversible.

During 2014, concerns had been raised with the Federation about Martins Creek Public School and Wollombi Public School that:

- there was inadequate consultation with the Federation about the proposed closure, the reasons for the proposal and the process to be undertaken

- some school community members reported that they believed that the process may have had a predetermined outcome which was to close the school without considering the opinions of the community
- it was reported that the reasons for the closure and the process of decision making was unclear and that procedural matters such as maintaining minutes of meetings were not adequately addressed.

The Federation believes that any decision to close, recess, amalgamate or provide another form of education provision relating to any school must be made on a case by case basis and ensure genuine consultation with the parents, teachers and community. These consultation processes must determine whether any change to the current educational provision will disadvantage students and the community and/ or cause undue dislocation or distress.

### **3. The processes, policies, procedures, accountability and decision making surrounding the closure of schools in NSW**

The NSW Teachers Federation raised concerns about the Department's process for school closure, recess, amalgamation or other education provision model directly with the Department.

Discussions between the Federation and Department resulted in the development of *"Protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provision models are to be considered"* (attached)

This step by step process is clear, transparent, sets out requirements for consultation, takes account of the needs of students, and the impact on staff and surrounding schools.

The Federation believes these protocols should be retained and enforced. Consultation with the relevant groups is facilitated by the formation of the School Consultation Group in step 5. On every occasion where recess, closure amalgamation or another model of educational provision is proposed as a viable option (as demonstrated in the flow chart) the Deputy Secretary should be required to approve local consultation and provide appropriate support, information and resources to facilitate the consultation process.

The Federation strongly supports the retention of Section 28 of part 6 of the *Education Act 1990 No 8* which deals with the closure of schools and the requirement to establish a School Closures Review Committee with representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation, the Federation of Parent's and Citizens Associations and Local Government Associations. This section also legislates specific requirements for conducting a review which facilitates consultation and community engagement.