

Submission
No 30

INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Partially Confidential

Submission for the small schools closure – Eraring Public School

I am writing this submission as an ex parent of Eraring Public School. I have had 5 of my 7 children attend Eraring Public School, it was our hope that all of our children would complete their primary school years at Eraring, but that was not to be.

Eraring Public School was in an idyllic location with plenty of land for the kids to run, play and explore. The grounds held frog ponds, bird aviaries, veggie gardens, a handball wall and much more. Our kids were allowed to be kids. It was a school we were proud to have our children attend and they loved being there.

We loved the small school feel and the sense of community that went with it. It was an extended family. As parents we were always welcomed into the classrooms, school events and excursions. Due to the student numbers our kids were in multi aged classrooms (k-2 and 3-6) this worked extremely well for the children as it meant they could work at their level of ability. Over the years there were whispers that our school may close but these were always unfounded and thankfully our children were oblivious to this.

Then in 2012 our Principal resigned for health reasons and this is where our decline began. The school was appointed an Acting Principal who was later appointed to the position. This person brought with [REDACTED] division amongst the parents and an unsettling learning environment for the children.

Over the next 18 months our school went from its previously consistent 35-42 enrolments down to 4 and the subsequent closure of the school. Over that time there was much speculation that the principal was appointed "to have the school closed down". There were many, many letters written by concerned parents regarding [REDACTED] conduct (both individually and as a collective) that were conveniently "misplaced", "lost" or brushed aside. I have attached some of my correspondence with this submission but unfortunately not all as I didn't take copies of some letters and emails written.

The responses I personally received from my letters outlining my concerns were at times condescending or non-existent, but as I sit here typing this in hind sight, all I can do is shake my head because they have all come to fruition and there is not a damn thing I can do about it and it makes me angry.

What I witnessed over that final 18 months was bullying, poor decision making, buck passing and an inability to act by those who had/have the powers to do something before the downward spiral occurred. This sickening trail of events led to the demise of our once beautiful school and now we as parents are still trying to heal the scars of our children and I am angry. Angry at a system that failed to act, angry at a system that didn't care for our kids, angry for all the under handedness and lie after lie after lie. And we still have no answers because anyone who was anyone in the decision making surrounding Eraring P.S didn't listen.

It is too late for us now, but there sitting at Eraring is a beautiful school that is rotting away. It could be used as a special school but again we have been told that will never happen. What a waste. Many letters have been written by residence to the local paper about it's future. Many articles have been published regarding its past and future but again no action has been taken by the DET.

My hope for your parliamentary enquiry into the future of small schools is that you can see their importance. At the final Earing P&C meeting it was stated by [REDACTED] that "...schools with under 300 students cannot offer the same opportunities that larger schools have... smaller schools would be better off combining...". I was gobsmacked. We moved our children to a local school with over 400 kids and my 9 year old didn't cope, he cried every day and made himself physically ill. In the end we found a small Christian school with a very similar philosophy and curriculum and again moved our kids. 3 schools in 1 year, not something I recommend for anyone. Small schools serve a purpose, it should never be about a budget, it should never be about power or control. Small schools are valuable and worthwhile and our children who have completed their schooling are living proof. Among my children and their friends who have been through Earing and finished school, they now work in jobs such as teachers, tradesmen, engineers, Chaplin's, youth workers, beauticians, pre-school teachers, nurses and cave guides to mention a few. These are adults who all began their education in a small school, who maintain their connections and thrive. What more can I say SMALL SCHOOLS ARE IMPORTANT.

Thank You

Helen Wills