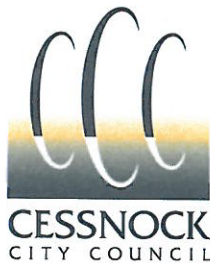


**Submission
No 13**

INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Cessnock City Council

Date received: 7/08/2015



5 August 2015

Hon. Paul Green
c/o -The Director
Select Committee on the Closure of
Public Schools
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY 2000

Dear Mr Green

Submission from Cessnock City Council for the Select Committee on the Closure of Public Schools

Cessnock City Council (*the Council*) welcomes the establishment of the 'Inquiry into the closure of public schools in New South Wales' (*the inquiry*).

The inquiry is of particular interest to Cessnock City Council given the Wollombi Public School is located within the Cessnock Local Government Area and is listed in the Terms of Reference.

The Select Committee on the Closure of Public Schools would be aware that the Wollombi Public School ceased operations at the conclusion of the 2014 school year. Prior to the announcement of the school closure, on the 3 September 2014 Council resolved a motion of urgency that encompassed a number of items to be addressed to the Minister of Education. In the correspondence to the Minister, Council expressed its concern for the proposed (at that time) closure of the Wollombi Public School (see attached correspondence from Cessnock City Council to the Minister of Education). Also Council, through an earlier motion of urgency and occurred on the 6 November 2013, raised concern for the potential closure of the Wollombi Public School and advocated that the community be provided with an opportunity to meet with the Department of Education. Both motion of urgency's are attached to this submission.

To provide context for the locality of Wollombi, it could be described as a small rural village township and at Census 2011 had a population of 352 people. Wollombi has minimal public transport options and therefore it can be challenging to access other townships within the Cessnock Local Government Area and also neighbouring local government areas.

In commenting on the inquiry's Terms of Reference, Council would like to discuss the following items:-

- Item d) - The transparency of the consultation process surrounding school closures

- Item e) - The impact on local school communities affected by school closures

Item d) - The transparency of the consultation process surrounding school closures

Council's engagement with the Department of Education regarding the potential closure (at that time) of the Wollombi Public School was further advanced via the resolution of Council dated 3 September 2014 (see attached). It was observed that prior to the resolution of Council, minimal consultation had occurred between the Department of Education and Council.

Council would like to inform the inquiry of the importance of consulting with local government at the earliest stage when determining a potential school closure. The value of early consultation allows for information exchange on matters that could include for example, Council providing the Department of Education with information pertaining to any possible future residential growth earmarked for that locality. Also, early consultation with Council can assist to provide the Department of Education with an understanding of the importance of the school for that community. This gathering of information through consultation with stakeholders such as a local Council, could assist in the assessment and deliberation process for potential school closure.

Item e) – The impact on local school communities affected by school closures

Schools in rural, small village townships and this includes the Wollombi Public School, are often the hub of a community. They can also be historical community assets and in the case of the Wollombi Public School the school is heritage listed under the Cessnock Local Environment Plan 2011. As a result they can be of great importance to the families that utilise the school and Council in a motion of urgency dated 6 November 2013 (see attached) acknowledges the importance of schools within a community.

If at any time a school was to be considered for closure, Council could assist the Department of Education with an understanding of potential community impacts. For example, this early consultation could assist to understand the value of a school to the local community and any community impacts specific to that community if a school was to be closed. This information exchange could occur as part of the early consultation process suggested in Item d) where for example expected future population growth is considered for that school catchment.

Suggestion

In summary, Council in its submission would like to put forward the following suggestion:-

In situations where a school is being considered for closure, the Department of Education at the earliest time should provide the local council/s of that school catchment area with a consultation opportunity to discuss matters that include:-

- ***Confirmation for any residential land release proposals within and/or near to the school catchment area***

- ***Potential impacts for a community if the school was to close, assisting to inform the assessment and decision making process.***

In closing, the opportunity for Council to provide comment to the inquiry is appreciated. If the Select Committee on the Closure of Public Schools requires further information, I can be contacted on telephone

Yours faithfully

Stephen Glen
General Manager