

Submission
No 4

INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Nancy Snow

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Partially Confidential

TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

My name is Nancy Snow and I am the Principal of Woodberry Learning Centre – a Behaviour School in the Maitland Area of NSW. My submission to the senate committee is only in reference to Martins Creek PS.

I became involved in the later stage discussions about the possibility of the closure of Martins Creek PS

the minute taker at these final meetings.

At all times at the meetings I attended the School Director, _____, was conciliatory, always trying to reach consensus about what was to be written in the report, friendly and, I believe, genuinely trying to get Sue Coutts's and Gina Goulder's concerns into the final report. Gina Goulder was very vocal in putting forward her views and it was only when I put her in the minutes as a parent representative on the committee, she informed me that she was there as Sue Coutts's support person and not even on the committee.

_____ went through his report word for word for agreement and any clarification or necessary changes and when Sue and Gina wanted the words changed, _____ always agreed to it. I believe that the committee discussions were truly reflected in the resulting minutes .

I was not present at initial community meetings where I am led to believe there were flared tempers between the 2 parents present and the School Director. All I can say is that any meeting I attended, the School Director was respectful, acquiescent and consensual.

I can understand that the Goulders would like to keep Martins Ck PS open for their children to attend until they move on to Hunter Valley Grammar school and Sue Coutts would like her fostered child who has a disability to have his own little sanctuary. I believe there are only 6 children enrolled, 3 of whom attend from out of area. Martins Ck PS has been on the books for possible closure for years due to single digit enrolment numbers but the DEC has always given in to the determination of Sue Coutts who previously had a foster child with a disability enrolled at the school. Basically, Martins Ck PS has become an individualized special education setting for one child and virtually a "home" school with incredible individual attention for the remaining students of the other 2 families. The senate committee needs to look into the history of Martins Ck PS and the low enrolment numbers it has had for years.

I take exception to the comment by Gina Goulder in the Maitland Mercury that "it is in the public interest that bullying, favouritism, dishonesty and concealment of information and any other dishonesty by staff be revealed (if it is happening)". The implication is that it *is* happening. I certainly did not witness any of this in the course of my involvement with the committee.

c) & e) Should Martins Ck PS close, 3 of the students would more than likely go to their local school and no longer need to travel all the way to Martins Ck

. There are 2 public schools, Vacy PS and Paterson PS both approx. 8 kms away from Martins Ck – in fact there are about 20 local Martins CK PS students attending these schools. Martins Ck PS does not even have a cohort in any one grade i.e. there is no more than 1 student per grade. Surely these students would be better off at a bigger school where they could play, learn and generally interact with peers of their same or similar ages and interests as well as receiving more diverse curriculum opportunities and experiences. As for the student with a disability, Dungog PS and Dungog HS offer special educational settings. The student could be taxed to Dungog to attend Dungog PS or could attend Vacy PS or Paterson PS with individual funding support in a mainstream class where he, too, would have the advantage of other students of similar ages around him.

e) The impact on the local community would be minimal if the school closed. All the local children, bar 3, already leave Martins Ck each day and are bussed to the other close- by schools. Information from Dungog Council re land subdivision and demographic projections shows no likely significant increase in the enrolment of students at Martins CK PS . This has been the case for years!

g) Finally, any school closure should involve consultation with, and explanation to, all interested stakeholders with a lead-up time of 12 months to prepare the students , staff, community etc for the transition to other public schools. However, after this process has occurred (which was around 12 months in this case) a final decision based on sound evidence needs to be made. Surely the DEC having received all the evidence and input from all sources possible should be the ones to make the final decision. In my opinion Martins Ck PS has had ample time to encourage new enrolments or attract back local students over the years. I do not believe there is any justification in maintaining Martins Ck PS for single digit enrolments any longer. There was a time that if a school did not maintain a minimum number of students over a few years, the school was given 12 months to increase enrolment or lose a teacher or in the case of small schools – be closed. It is not as if this has come out of the blue. I remember when I was there as school counsellor, and that has to be at least 9 years ago, the DEC wanted to look into closing the school then, but it was kept open to please, at that stage, Sue Coutts. The time has come to settle this matter, see the benefits of closing this particular school, transition the 6 students to the schools close by and allow the DEC to finally resolve the issue. The social and educational benefits to Martins Ck PS's current students at their nearby larger schools would be immense. Educational outcomes and societal expectations are not the same as when small schools like Martins Ck PS were established. We need to prepare our students for we know not what and this can best be done with input, ideas, strategies and techniques from a variety of teachers, other staff and students to give every student the opportunity to learn the way they learn best and to have a variety of people modelling how we learn and behave.

Yours sincerely,

Nancy Snow