

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 1

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROPOSED CLOSURE AND
RESTRUCTURING OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN INNER
SYDNEY**

At Sydney on Wednesday, 29 May 2002

PRESENT

The Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. Janice Burnswoods

The Hon. Patricia Forsythe

The Hon. D. T. Harwin

The Hon. P. T. Primrose

The Hon. H. S. Tsang

The Hon. Dr P. Wong

CHAIR: I welcome the media and members of the public to this first hearing of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 1 for its inquiry into the closure of inner city schools.

I advise that under Standing Order 252 of the Legislative Council, evidence given before the Committee and any documents presented to the Committee that have not yet been tabled in Parliament:

... may not, except with the permission of the Committee be disclosed or published by any Member of such Committee or by any other person.

Copies of guidelines governing broadcast of the proceedings are available on the table at the door.

The Committee has received a great deal of interest in this inquiry, with almost 100 submissions and over 400 petitions received by the closing date earlier this week. Of course, the Committee and the Committee Secretariat have not had time to read all these submissions in detail, but over the next few weeks these submissions will greatly assist the Committee in responding to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

We will be holding two full days of hearing and consultations today and on Friday with a follow-up hearing on 7 June. The closing date for the report back to the Legislative Council is 28 June. I acknowledge that the inquiry has been hurried, but the whole purpose of the inquiry would be frustrated if it had an indefinite period, as the Government would not then have an opportunity to respond to any recommendations that were made.

The terms of reference for this inquiry are available on the table by the door. The purpose of today's hearing is to hear from senior management from the Department of Education and Training on the reasons for the current proposals. The Committee will then hear from members of the Schools Closure Review Committee and the representatives of the peak bodies, the parents and the teachers, and from an independent demographic expert. On Friday the Committee will hold consultations and hearings with the communities affected by the proposed closures of Hunters Hill High School and Erskineville and Redfern Public Schools. We will begin this session with representatives of the Department of Education.

Before swearing the witnesses, I would like to thank the department for their comprehensive and detailed submission. While I reserve my view on the arguments presented in the submission, we appreciate that the department has spent a great deal of time in preparing that submission in response to this inquiry. We thank you for that.

KENNETH GEORGE BOSTON, Director-General, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney,

ALAN LAUGHLIN, Deputy Director-General, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney,

JOHN ROBERT BURKHARDT, General Manager (Properties), Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, and

MICHAEL GOWRIE WATERHOUSE, Director of Legal Services, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Dr BOSTON: I am, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr BURKHARDT: I am.

CHAIR: Mr Waterhouse, I wish to make this statement in regard to your appearance before the Committee. I understand that you previously worked on the personal staff of the Minister for Education, The Hon. John Aquilina MP. I would like to advise you and the Committee that during this hearing I will follow the practice of this House and of the Senate, which is not to submit questions to Ministers' personal staff. Therefore, any questions directed to you should be in your current capacity of Director of Legal Services and I will rule out of order any questions relating to your former role.

Mr WATERHOUSE Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr WATERHOUSE Yes, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: If any of the witnesses today should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request and the hearing would go into camera. Do you wish to make an opening statement, Dr Boston?

Dr BOSTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to make a brief opening statement and then have my colleague Dr Laughlin present to the Committee some information about the reasons for the Building the Future proposal. That will be in the form of some slides. Those slides are also available in print form for Committee members if they would like to have them.

New South Wales at present has 2,225 public schools. They are the product of a very long history. In the past 150 years we have built and opened more than 7,200 schools, and some 5,000 of them over the past 150 years have subsequently been closed. Each closure of a school has been marked by sadness and by nostalgia. Schools are very special places for young people and their families. But change and growth is inevitable to respond to need, and the rate of change, the rate of school closures at the moment is no greater now than it has been in the past.

My colleagues and I are responsible for the provision of high quality education for all young people, about three quarters of a million young people. We are responsible for \$7.6 billion of the taxpayers' funds annually and for \$25 billion in capital assets, and we have a responsibility to manage

the provision of schooling effectively and well.

In the current context there are two drivers that are compelling structural change and curriculum reform in the provision of education in inner Sydney. One is common to the entire State, and indeed the nation, and that is the need for young people these days to have access to a richly expanded curriculum, including specialist subjects in vocational education, and New South Wales has in fact led the way in this in the reform of the Higher School Certificate and in the fact that 60,000 of our Year 11 and 12 students now take vocational subjects as part of their HSC.

The second driver, while also a national trend, is particularly acute in inner Sydney. Large numbers of students in this part of New South Wales have moved to the private education sector, leaving greatly excess capacity in those schools, and as schools become smaller they are losing rather than growing their curriculum capacity. The range of subjects which can be offered to many students is diminishing to the point where it is simply not viable.

We could take, if we wished, an entirely Darwinian view of this: do not intervene; let the schools compete with each other for an ever reducing number of students; survival of the fittest; let matters take their course. Our view is that in the interests of the generation of young people for whom we are responsible we have to manage the building of a new division of schooling. The alternative is that students should languish on in schools that are in some difficulty until those schools finally close because they have simply become not viable. It is also very clear that new capital will not be available for schools operating at 30 to 50 percent capacity, as many of these schools are, when schools in other areas of the State are bursting at the seams in demountable buildings.

So came the concept, Mr Chairman, of Building the Future, which seeks to do a number of things: to reorganise the provision of schooling into a new landscape of fewer and larger state of the art schools with excellent physical facilities; to offer in those schools choice and diversity with the capacity to specialise, while at the same time providing to all young people what we cannot provide now, and that is the full range of the New South Wales curriculum; thirdly, attract students back from the private sector to the public sector and reverse the trend which has been occurring; and finance all that to the tune of \$100 million or a little more, finance the capital works needed to achieve that by the sale of capital assets in under-utilised properties. In other words, every dollar in this scheme is ploughed back into schools to support the young people who are living in this part of Sydney, the current generation of young people.

All the indications so far are that that is working. Balmain High School, for example, which had last year only 33 students in Year 7, quite insufficient to keep that school going, quite insufficient to lead to a viable Year 12, now has 170 students in the school in Year 7, 60 of them in the selective stream; Malvina, which last year had a little over 40 students in Year 7, now has 150; Leichhardt has 160, and so on. We believe that the concept is going to deliver on the objectives we have for top quality education in state of the art facilities.

Now, Mr Chairman, if the Committee is in agreement, my colleague Dr Laughlin will provide some detail on the reasons for the proposal, and, as I said, this is also available in hard copy if members of the Committee would like it.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I would like to present to the Committee, if I may, some of the really pressing issues that have been confronting us in the Department of Education and Training that have been developing over a number of years, that, quite frankly, have reached a very critical stage for us over 2002-2001, and at the bottom of all of this is enrolment decline.

The graph you see in front of you there represents the total enrolments in Government comprehensive co-educational schools in Ryde, Bondi and Port Jackson districts. It is from about the centre of Ryde through to the eastern coast line. That is just the comprehensive, not the boys and girls, single sex schools or the selective schools. What you have seen is quite an extraordinary decline from about the early 1980s through to now, a dramatic shift, a 59 per cent loss of student enrolments. That is a huge loss of enrolments that we needed to address.

If you looked at some of the primary schools, similar things were happening there. The schools in question, which I know the Committee are visiting, or some of the Committee are visiting, include Redfern, Erskineville, Alexandria and Waterloo. What you see here are schools that had some 700 students and have now under 100. In fact, Erskineville school, which is this one, has numbers that have fallen down into here, that we are talking about in Building the Future, to just a little over 40. In fact, there are only six or seven students left sometimes in each year within that particular school. Those schools are all within about half a kilometre to a kilometre of one another and there are similar schools nearby. So it is a pretty grim picture of enrolment decline in the inner city.

If you look at the situation with secondary schools, this is a selective group of schools, including Balmain, Glebe, Marrickville and so on, where we are looking at enrolment decline over the period from 1984 through to 2001 and projected if the current situation continues, and what we would basically have in the inner city is something like the equivalent of six empty high schools of about 800 students. That is a dramatic decline that could not be ignored.

To bring that into very sharp focus, these are schools in the inner city compared to schools in other parts of the State. This is occupancy rates. So it means that if a school is 100 percent occupied, then it is above that level, then we clearly have demountable accommodation. If you went to schools like Bossley Park High School, Thomas Reddall High School in Sydney's west and southwest, Birrong girls, Mullumbimby and St John's Park, these are all schools that are carrying large numbers of demountables. Bossley Park, for example, has over 20 demountables. The schools in the inner city are sitting at about 40 percent or less occupancy levels. All those schools are packed in close to one another, such as Hunters Hill, Glebe, Marrickville, Maroubra, Balmain, Matraville, Cleveland Street. They are all generally inner city comprehensives.

It is very hard for the Department of Education or Government to take money away from these schools, if they need refurbishing and redevelopment, into these schools, when frankly it appears to us on the figures that the general population is moving away from them. That is a very stark problem for anyone in the public sector or certainly Government to consider. How do you invest your dollars best?

The other issue, as the Director-General mentioned, is the impact of the trend towards non-Government schools, and what we looked at in this graph was the local government areas of Hunters Hill, Leichhardt, Lane Cove, Drummoyne and Ryde, and what you find in primary schools - the red columns being Government primary school enrolment, the blue being non-Government - you can see it trending up in non-Government, but within the same districts, when you get into secondary education, you get this extraordinary flip. So people are in fact turning away from Government schools, tending to, and going into the non-Government sector. The non-Government sectors in fact are above the Government, and the Government sector is beginning to fall.

Frankly, that is a pretty stark illustration of the kind of problems we are confronted with in the inner city, and what happens when you have these falling numbers and when you do have the tendency of the population, because of a whole range of reasons, moving off to other schools, it impacts on the curriculum and it impacts on teacher numbers.

This is another graph that illustrates the trend between non-Government and Government schools. This one is in the same local government area, and you can see from the early 1990s the drift down, and accelerating down I must say, in the Government school sector, and accelerating up in the non-Government sector. That, for somebody who is involved in public administration, clearly requires a response.

The impact creates what we call residualisation. I am not projecting that onto any particular school. I am projecting it across the inner city. When you have reducing student numbers you get less choice in the curriculum, it is difficult to maintain a senior curriculum. We have some schools which are unable to offer subjects like physics, chemistry, some of the social sciences. When you get into the more, I guess, unusual subjects, information technology and so on, these schools are unable to offer it. This is what a number of the schools in the inner city are confronted with if the trend continued, a narrowing of the curriculum. Students tend to say, "I can't get what I want. I want to

move away. I have got to go somewhere where I can do particular courses", and it would become this spiral. That spiral of residualisation is confronting in the very near future and already in place in some of the schools in the inner city. The impact on staff numbers, between 1999 and 2000 in the inner city, because of this drop in population, was that we had lost some 77 teacher positions. So the impact on teachers' livelihood, the impact on where they are teaching, where they have to move to looks quite stark.

If you look at the issue of enrolments at Hunters Hill, which is a major feature I know of this inquiry, what you have got is that since 1992 the numbers have dropped quite rapidly, and that was a school, like many in the inner city, if you projected that on you would in fact find falling curriculum. The numbers in Year 7 in Hunters Hill have that particular trend line. In 2001 it has gone up slightly, but I will come back to that because that has a particular implication too.

The other issue that we have been confronted with specifically with Hunters Hill is where did the students come from, and what sort of support is there in that specific community for that school? If you look at the source of Year 7 enrolments, what you have got is a situation in 2001 - and this enrolment occurred prior to Building the Future being announced - Hunters Hill Public School which had around about 30 plus students, 34 or so, only had one student choosing to go to Hunters Hill High School, just one. It was the same the year before. Boronia Park had five. Gladesville had none. They were the three schools in that local government area. If you went to Lane Cove and Chatswood, there were similar sorts of situations. If you look at the percentage take-up rate at Hunters Hill High School from the local schools, this is where the percentages were heading. That is the objective evidence that we were confronted with in terms of enrolments in the local area. It meant in fact in the Hunters Hill local government area they were only bringing in something like seven students into Year 7. That is a pretty confronting statistic, but it is the case.

If you look at the number of students, in fact Year 6 students who lived in the Hunters Hill High School drawing area, what we had was half the students in Government schools in Year 6 tending to go to non-Government schools. They were choosing to go to Chatswood, North Sydney Boys and Girls, Willoughby Girls, Normanhurst Boys, Riverside Girls, Malvina and Hunters Hill. So it is taking quite a small slice of the students who in fact attend that school. What was tending to happen is that Hunters Hill was dependent upon students coming from other areas.

This is a pie graph of the distribution of families who attended Hunters Hill High School in 2001 and where they came from. This is the drawing area, the pink is the domestic area and these are Drummoyne, Balmain, Leichhardt, the inner west. If you look at the Year 7 numbers, that particular slice of the pie only attracts about 50 percent. What that meant was that it had a kick-on effect naturally to Balmain and Leichhardt, and potentially Glebe. What you have is a situation between the four schools of Malvina, Hunters Hill, Balmain and Glebe with no more than about 180 Year 7 students in 2001. That would normally be enough to sustain one or maybe two schools. We had four. So we did not believe, on those figures alone, that we could sustain all schools. It is not that they were not good schools, they were doing what they saw was best for the students in getting good results in a range of areas, but that, frankly, the community was moving away and those particular statistics indicate that.

This is encompassed in Building the Future, but an example of what can happen to the curriculum of a school when you start to get larger numbers in Year 11 is at Glebe High School. Glebe had this kind of curriculum and these were the subjects available within a line of the curriculum, so a student had to pick a subject within each line. That was pre Building the Future; this is post. So you can see what is happening, and in this case when we created Sydney Secondary College, we have linked it to the Sydney Institute of TAFE, we have linked it to the University of Technology and it has also been linked to a range of industries within the Ultimo area. The potential for that, particularly as it becomes a senior element of our multi-campus school, is absolutely outstanding, it is just outstanding, and we believe it will attract students, and in fact is. So we had to do something and that was part of it.

The other issue that has been raised is that Hunters Hill's academic results are outstanding - why did you choose to propose a closure of a school like that? Well, some of the results are very very good and some students have done excellent things, but if you look at the set scores which are the

standard deviation scores in subjects within the Higher School Certificate, in 1998, 1999 and 2000 some students have done in some subjects extremely well, and I think that is wonderful, some students have not, but that is not the picture of a school that is probably one of the most academically successful in the area. It is a school that is doing well in some areas, but not necessarily in others. We could say more about that as required, but what we had in essence is a picture of a system, not an individual school. We were not looking at individual schools; we were looking at a whole system of the inner city where we had within the comprehensive education system dramatically declining enrolments, we had parents moving away from public education and we needed to take radical and decisive action if we were going to reverse that, and we had the pressure of needing to be able to spend money, but to be able to justify that, in schools which were in many instances only 30 to 40 percent occupied. So they were the kinds of pressures, Mr Chairman, that were confronting us and confronting the Minister at the time and the Government and the pressures that led us to develop and propose Building the Future.

CHAIR: One of the issues that keeps coming up is that there is a change in the development of Sydney and the city areas, that is, you could say, the repopulation occurring with the development of units and so on that would bring families into that area. When you were developing the draft Building the Future plan did the Education Department undertake any future projections of the size of the 12 to 17 year old populations in the districts in question?

Dr BOSTON: If I could take you to page 45 of our submission, which deals with term of reference (e), if you follow that over to the next page, page 46, we are making the case there that, even with the closures that are occurring, 41 percent spare capacity still exists in the remaining schools. We could take, in the schools that remain, an additional 1,670 secondary places. There is ample capacity for growth within the remaining schools. Mr Burkhardt's people have handled the planning in relation to these facilities and I would be grateful if he could comment.

Mr BURKHARDT: I would like to begin with an opening comment and stress that the trends in school enrolments are the most important demographic analysis in terms of predicting school enrolments. Much has been said about broader demographic projections, but I would stress that the Department of Education has the capacity to produce enrolment projections on all of its 2,200 schools each year. We draw on data for high school projections from the enrolments in our primary schools and this, of course, is the best indicator for predicting enrolment demand.

The issue that you raise about the consolidation and development of parts of Sydney we, of course, have been analysing, but what is happening in inner Sydney is increasing marginally populations in inner Sydney, but it is not increasing the numbers of young children markedly. If I can give you an example, in Ultimo there were 3,220 units completed between 1995 and 2000. The net impact of those units was less than 60 students. We find in the inner city areas and the inner city areas of southern Sydney we are getting less than three children per 100 dwellings, so what is happening in the inner city is very different from the urban consolidation that is going on, say, around Bankstown. There are differences across Sydney and we have been monitoring this activity now for a number of years.

The estimates of enrolment projections that we are able to produce can project for high schools out some 10 years. We do monitor where there are significant changes in activity, development in urban areas in terms of unit development, but, as I have indicated, these are not traditional dwellings of people forming families. The formation of families occurs in areas further out. It occurs largely in dwellings that have more than two bedrooms and in the inner city, inner southern Sydney and in the city of Sydney, 85 percent of dwellings are two bedrooms or less. Over 50 percent in most areas are one bedroom or bed-sitters. These are not the dwellings of family formers.

CHAIR: Another general issue that has been raised over and over again in the media and by the parents and citizens groups that these schools that have been affected is that the Department of Education was seeking valuations on these properties. Is that in fact correct?

Mr BURKHARDT: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Who issued the order to conduct those valuations? Was that an internal decision

within the department?

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes, I am required to make valuations of all properties where we are considering disposal. It is a part of the requirement of my position to have valuations on properties.

CHAIR: I am more concerned with the sequence. Obviously if you are going to close a school then you may be considering the valuation. Were the valuations conducted prior to any decision being made as to which schools would be closed? Did the valuations, in other words, have any impact on the department deciding what schools should be closed?

Mr BURKHARDT: Let me assure you that the valuations did not and, from what you have seen in the presentation from Dr Laughlin, the issues around education and dramatic decline were the issues that drove the process. The seeking of valuations was a part of the exercise in terms of determining the availability of funds that could be reinvested in those parts of the inner city that were being redeveloped. It would be imprudent not to have an estimate of the funds that would be available for reinvestment through asset realisation.

CHAIR: Is there a list of valuations? Have we been supplied with that at this stage?

Dr BOSTON: We, of course, have a book valuation for every one of our 2,225 schools. Proper management requires that we have that. When we were considering the issue of school closures in this particular area, after it was decided that we would recommend closures to the minister, we sought alternative land use values, valuations on an alternative use basis, for all the schools. Those valuations are available for the Committee if the Committee wants them, but only, of course, on an in camera basis because it is our obligation to seek the best possible price for property when it is disposed of and if those alternative land use values became known that would set a ceiling on what eventually the Government might get in return. Let me assure you, however, that the valuations on Glebe, on Balmain and on Hunters Hill were all of the same order and that there was no distinction made on which of those schools might close on the basis of the valuation. Were I to table the valuations before you in camera you would see that that was correct.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I assume that would be the full list of schools that was provided to us at estimates last year? The minister at estimates indicated the number of schools where a valuation had been sought. I presume it would be the whole list?

Mr BURKHARDT: It is the complete list for that period.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I was not at the estimates committee and I have no knowledge of how many there were. I do not know that this Committee has any relationship to whatever was discussed then, but if we are seeking the tabling of confidential information perhaps we need a bit more clarity on just what this list is.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: They were all schools listed in the Building the Future original proposal. That was the basis of the question last year and the minister was happy to provide an indication at that time of which valuations had been sought and the list of schools was subsequently provided to the Committee, so I am sure that there should not be any problem about getting the valuations.

CHAIR: I think the point you are making is that we should perhaps only see the valuations of the schools that are relevant to this inquiry.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But they were all in the Building the Future proposal and they are all relevant to this inquiry. That was the basis of the question.

CHAIR: I mean the schools affected by the closures.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I assume the purpose of the question was were some schools chosen not for an educational basis but for a value of the property basis, in which case we need to see the valuations attached to each of the schools in the Building the Future proposal.

CHAIR: Is there another way that the information can be conveyed to the Committee? You may not have the information with you.

Dr BOSTON: No, we would need to provide that information within 24 hours.

CHAIR: Yes, so we will put that question on notice.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I am happy to provide the list that was provided by the minister last year of the schools upon which valuations were sought.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I do not really think this is worth arguing about. As I said, those of us who were not present at this meeting have no idea which schools are on that list. It is relevant to include the schools we are talking about, but I just want to get some clarity on that so that we are not all in a state of differing opinions as to what list we are talking about.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Could I move that the Committee be provided, in camera, with the valuations for the list of schools that the minister supplied as a result of a question on estimates last year about what schools within the Building the Future proposal were subject to a valuation?

CHAIR: Does that create some problem?

Dr BOSTON: We can provide that if you wish, but it will take 24 hours to get that information.

CHAIR: I understand that.

(Motion by the Honourable Patricia Forsythe agreed to.)

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I would like to follow up with Mr Burkhardt in relation to the comments he was making on demographics. I draw your attention to comments made by your predecessor, David Roland. He reported New South Wales school facilities, the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works, in 1997 and he made some comments that I think would be at variance to your comments today. He said that in relation to, for example, the change of the inner city "I know of no uniform overall planned urban strategy that says that in a particular area we will renew at a particular rate. Population can be expected to increase at a certain rate". He then went on to say in the same section, but I have left a little out: "The question is not whether or not some schools should be disposed of or by closure or whether they should be held against increasing densities over the next 20 years. We do not have good evidence to go one way or the other on that". Then it says Mr Roland reiterated the difficulty of obtaining accurate demographic data to predict the size and composition of urban regeneration. Can you give the Committee an assurance that, in the time since 1997, the department is in a position to have good evidence so it can make decisions on this?

Mr BURKHARDT: I would actually like a copy of the document.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I can make that available. If Mr Burkhardt can take that on notice I can come back to it.

CHAIR: Yes, we will move on to other questions.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I just say that I was disappointed that we got the approximately 80 page submission so late yesterday and I do not think any of us would have done justice to it yet, but it seems to me that we are going to end up in a situation where we are going to hear from other schools on their submissions and the department on its submissions and some of them are

going to be running parallel. I think the department has attempted to anticipate some of what it believes will be other submissions. It would be very helpful when we meet with Erskineville and their community and council on Friday, and Hunters Hill and their community and council on Friday, if they had the benefit of being able to see some of the arguments that the department has put, so can I ask if the department has any objections to this being made a public document?

Dr BOSTON: None at all.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I move that?

CHAIR: That is just for that particular submission at this stage headed "The Closure of Inner City Schools, Department of Education and Training Submissions".

(Motion by the Honourable Patricia Forsythe agreed to.)

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Page 2 of the submission refers to the cause for residualisation, falling enrolments, as one of the reasons for the decision to move towards the closure of some schools and the consolidation of others. It would be of great assistance for me to understand this whole process if I could get an understanding of the nature of the decision, in particular, if residualisation is one of the factors, you have talked much about Hunters Hill High School because it gets a special mention in the terms of reference. Its enrolments at the time of closure were 425. I have no objection to what you have done with Marrickville and Dulwich, but I do have to understand how that process was reached. Marrickville enrolments were 420 and Dulwich 468 based on your table provided to us. Can you explain to me the process by which you have taken Marrickville and Dulwich out of the Building the Future proposal, gave them some additional time for consideration of merger and then made the decision to allow both of them to operate?

Dr LAUGHLIN: What we are confronted with here is a total inner city system. Whatever you do in one school is going to flow through to another school and in my presentation I was making the point that the relationship between Glebe, Balmain, Hunters Hill and Malvina was linked and, when you looked at the population of enrolment numbers coming into Hunters Hill, whatever you did with Hunters Hill would have an impact on Balmain, potentially Glebe and Malvina; whatever you did with Malvina would have an impact, and so on down the line, so it is a systemic thing. The point I was making about residualisation, it is sensitive, but I will be quite frank: When you end up enrolling in a school very small numbers in year 7, and that is what all these schools were confronted with and it was going to get worse from our predictions, you end up with all those things, reduction in curriculum, loss of staff and loss of community confidence, so the people who end up sending their children to those schools - and this was happening more at Maroubra, if I might say, as an example - often the children who, for one reason or another, are having difficulties in a range of ways, and that can kick on to the culture and ethos of that school as well - for example, if you looked at Maroubra--

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I am much more interested in Marrickville and Dulwich.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I understand, but I am just trying to get the picture of what we saw on the horizon for a number of schools. I am not suggesting in any way Hunters Hill was that, I know the community here would be most incensed if I suggested that, but it was confronting that, as was Balmain, very starkly, and certainly as was Glebe and Malvina. So what you were going to get was a very limited slice of the student population going to that school and frankly they were going to become schools of last resort for some parents and I do not think that is a reasonable way for a school to build its future. It is not. That is what we were being confronted with and that is what I meant by residualisation, and it is sensitive but it is the reality.

In the case of Marrickville and Dulwich, there were some compounding issues. You had a stronger support from the local community, from the local schools in that area; you also had an intensive English centre there which was able to provide a number of students and which was not at any of the other schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: At one of the schools.

Dr LAUGHLIN: At one of the schools, that is quite true, so you had local support from local primary schools; you had the intensive English centre and, frankly, you had a situation where, in the original submission, we believed there should be an amalgamation of Dulwich and we had strong representations to say that that was not the way to go.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: From whom?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, from the community and from our own reassessment of the property circumstances, so looking at the property availability at Marrickville in comparison with Dulwich, and we decided the better thing to do would be to have more time to work that through and that is why we changed our position and that is what the consultation was about.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: More time to work it through - you have now given them both an opportunity to survive.

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes, that is right. That was a decision taken only in the last few weeks and it has been taken by--

Dr BOSTON: The Government.

Dr LAUGHLIN: --the Government and it is because those schools are going to be reconfigured in a different way and it was thought that they could in fact attract students back from their local schools. They had a quite reasonable take-up rate from their local schools which was promising and, as I said, the IEC is being kept there, whereas at one stage we were talking about moving it across to Cleveland Street. The IEC will stay and that will give them a flow-through of students.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: So that was a political decision, and do you agree with it?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, certainly, but it is not just political. There was a logic and a rationale to that that we believed was quite sound.

CHAIR: I think Dr Wong interjected because Dr Boston interjected to clarify that it was a Government decision, as if there was some difference between your department making decisions and the Government making decisions and whether the Government had overridden your decision.

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes. Well, we had not made a decision, we were just putting forward views and a recommendation and we moved away from that over a period of some time, and of course the Government makes the decision.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Could I ask Dr Boston to clarify that because you are interpreting Dr Boston's comment as though it was not a departmental decision and Dr Wong said it was political. Perhaps it would be fair for Dr Boston to actually say if there is any rationale.

CHAIR: We are seeking clarification of the interjection from you when you said the Government did, as if there is some interaction between you and the Government.

Dr BOSTON: I would simply make the point that I am an old-time subscriber to the Westminster system. We recommend to government.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What was your recommendation.

Dr BOSTON: We have recommended to government on a way ahead to deal with the situation and government has made decisions.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: What was your recommendation?

Dr BOSTON: Once government has made decisions we, as public servants, support those decisions and will implement them, and that is the end of the story.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Even if it were a bad decision you would still support it? You would support a government decision?

Dr BOSTON: I am not going to be drawn on that, Mr Chairman. We recommend to government, government makes decisions and we implement those decisions.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Dr Boston, what was your recommendation on Marrickville and Dulwich?

Dr BOSTON: The original draft proposal recommendation is in the notice paper and that is that there would be a proposed amalgamation. A decision was made on that which was of a different order. I am charged with responsibility for seeing that decision implemented and I believe, in the light of everything that was considered by Government, that is the proper decision to make at this time and I am not resiling in any way from commitment to that decision. This is the essence of public service.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Dr Laughlin, you referred to community support and you defined it in terms of primary school support for enrolments to high schools. Is that the way you have interpreted community support when dealing with submissions from the communities, including the local councils, of Erskineville and Hunters Hill?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Not entirely. I mean obviously it is an underpinning. If we are told that there is overwhelming community support within a particular local government area that says this school must stay here and remain open and service this community and we look at the data and the reality is that that is not correct, the local community is not supporting it, then clearly it impacts on our thinking and the recommendations we might make, but community support can come from a range of sources that have nothing to do with parents and nothing to do with perhaps direct relationships with schools - community support can come from organisations that might use a school - so all of that needed to be weighed and measured, but it is a significant aspect of it.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Would you comment on the community support that was received for Erskineville and Hunters Hill?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes, I can. Obviously both those schools are strongly supported by the students and the parents of the students who are enrolled there. I would not think otherwise, I would not suggest otherwise, but we still are faced with the stark reality that I was putting up on the overhead, that the numbers of students coming through was very small. In the case of Erskineville, there has been a lot of talk about that, but the numbers coming through into kindergarten before all this happens are only five or six students, for a school that was built for around 600 students. It just did not add up frankly in any logical sense, and a lot of those children going to Erskineville, I must say, did not come from Erskineville. Of the 40 of them, a lot of them did not come from Erskineville. So you have to weigh and measure those sorts of things and there is no hard and fast way, but obviously that data needs to be considered.

CHAIR: It seems that you use "community support" in a different way to the way everybody else uses it. We would assume that community support at schools must involve first of all parents and people involved with the school as part of that community and not someone who has no involvement with the school. It could be that the Chamber of Commerce or something may have a view, but you would think normally "community" should imply parents, students, teachers, people involved particularly with that school, that is their community, and you must take into account the community's response. It is misleading if you say the community is supporting what you propose and that is just isolated individuals.

Dr LAUGHLIN: No, sorry, I was not suggesting that. I am certainly not suggesting the community is one element. Again, it is quite a system of support or otherwise from a range of people. I am not suggesting otherwise. But the question I was asked, I think, was about whether we measured

primary school enrolment as being a measure of support and the answer is yes, that needs to be taken into account. Perhaps I answered it in an obtuse way, but that is what I meant to say.

CHAIR: You have used a lot of factors in saying why we should close down a school, and you take enrolments and so on. Do you take into account, on the other side of the coin, strong community support for the school, strong parent groups, strong esprit de corp you might say in that school? Do you consider those factors in making a decision on closure?

Dr LAUGHLIN: I think all of those things are critical. In this case though in the inner city, we were confronted with quite a unique circumstance. I have been involved in school closures in the past and they are never the sort of thing you like to be involved in, but I do not think we have ever been confronted with a total systems problem the way we have been across the whole of the inner city of Sydney. By that I mean from Ryde right through to the coast. It is quite extraordinary when you see those figures that there has been what you would have to describe as a collapse in public support for many of the comprehensive co-educational schools we have, and that required us to make decisions that did not focus on an individual school but focused on the total area. So it was quite unique and therefore we had to look at it in quite a different way to what we would normally do if we were just focusing on an individual school.

CHAIR: The other factor you have mentioned, and obviously it is clear, is that parents have moved away from the public school system into the private school system, and that then is used by you as an argument to really close down the public system. Should not the emphasis be on why parents are moving their children out of the State school system, what is lacking there, whether it is discipline, values, the things that parents talk about when they say that they are prepared to spend a lot of money to send their child to a private school, because they do not think they are getting those sort of things in the State system?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes.

CHAIR: Would it not be better to try and reverse that movement by improving the State school system as a priority rather than the closure of the school?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Mr Chairman, this is the crux of the whole thing. Building the Future was not about trying to make life hard for a couple of individual schools. It was really about rebuilding public education in the inner city. It was really about making a bold and decisive move, and a quick move, that would rebuild public education for the community. We could have tinkered on the edges, to be honest, but what we wanted to do, and the Minister at the time wanted to do, was to do something that was decisive.

What has come out of that in this particular area is that Sydney Secondary College and Ryde Secondary College, and when you look at what has happened with the part selective, with the multi-campus approach, with the linkages with the tertiary sector, we have provided a product that we believe is winning. If you look at the numbers coming into Year 7 this year, which is its first year, and its first year in controversy, it has been absolutely outstanding. To grow from 30 odd to 170 in Balmain, to do not too far from that in Ryde, and to look at what has happened at Glebe, with the level of confidence and building the morale within those teachers, I think we are addressing what you have asked, Mr Chairman, and I guess we could have done other things, we can always do other things, but I think the basis behind this was exactly what you have said, to try and build that community confidence into what we had on offer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can I just follow up. I come from south western Sydney. My son is actually in an English class with 31 other students, and I asked for the figures in terms of the number of students there, and I know at Camdenville High School there is 1008, Eldersley High School 1037, Elizabeth McArthur High School 3,170. That is a permanent accommodation utilisation rate across those three schools of 119 percent. It just seems to me that the product that you are offering in the rest of western Sydney, south western Sydney, et cetera, taking the Chairman's perception here, it has something to do with the product that you are delivering is obviously more attractive to the rest of New South Wales than it is to students in the inner city. Our biggest issue in our part of the world is

the enormous increase in numbers of students coming into public education. I would have thought that it has more to do with the demography in the inner city, rather than the product they are getting. Can I ask for your comment on that? Given you are looking at resources, the facts are that in the area where I live we have been constantly arguing to get additional resources, given the huge increase in numbers in our schools as opposed to the tiny numbers in other places.

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, I think that is very true and in managing the system, as I described at the start, there are great inequities between schools across the system which need to be addressed. If we are successful in getting more money for education, for capital works for education, in addition to the \$476 million boost we have had in the last budget, then it clearly has to go to those schools that are bursting at the seams and which have very large classes and, in comparison with other schools, quite unsatisfactory facilities.

Looking at the total resource which we are managing, it is clear that we have an obligation to say that in this part of the State, inner Sydney, we have a particular situation. In other parts of the State it is quite different. The other parts of the State in terms of equity must be a priority. If there is funding that can be put into maintaining all the schools in the inner city area, that would be fine, but the reality is there is not. The reality also is that the funding policies of the current Federal Government are exacerbating the drift to the non-Government sector, accelerating it very rapidly.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Here. Here.

Dr BOSTON: The Federal Government at the moment is supporting private education as a proportion of its total funding to a greater level than it is supporting our 38 public universities. We are not on a level playing field with this, and the whole basis of our Building the Future proposal is to give the inner suburban kids of Sydney a fair go, a top quality curriculum, in state of the art facilities, which this State can afford through asset realisation. It is perfectly feasible, perfectly achievable and it will halt the drift to the non-Government sector in this part of Sydney. It has already arrested the drift in one year. It is the most creative piece of curriculum innovation and school provision innovation that this country has seen for a long time, and if it does not succeed, then the current generation of young people in our public school system in inner Sydney will be the worse for it. This is an opportunity that must be seized and driven through, and, as I say, there have been 5,000 school closures in the last 150 years. Not one of them has been happy, not one of them has had community support, but they have been necessary in the interests of maintaining proper education provision for young people.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: My question is for Mr Burkhardt. Mr Burkhardt, thank you for walking us through the table on page 46. Is there a similar sort of table to the table on page 46 in the submission for the primary schools and the group of schools affected by the proposals for Alexandria Park school, e.g. Redfern, Waterloo and Erskineville?

Mr BURKHARDT: We do not have a table, but there is the graph on page 14.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: The table on page 14 does not quite, however, go to all of the matters in terms of utilisation and capacity that the table on page 46 does.

Mr BURKHARDT: I can certainly make that material available, but clearly there is a level of decline in utilisation which is very significant. Some of those schools have gone in total from 1700 students down to 271 and some of them were over 700 students and now have less than 70.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I appreciate that, Mr Burkhardt, and I am asking for basically an objective measure, rather than just a general overview, in the same format that you have provided for the secondary schools.

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: My second question is also related to the primary school proposal in the South Sydney area. What figures, what projections, is there a specific report that the department was using to consider the future of those schools in the South Sydney area? Has it had available to it

any of the census material from the 2000 census? And could you just enlighten us a bit on what the demographic basis for the decision was or the material used for the demographic decision relating to those schools?

Mr BURKHARDT: The census is the 2001 census. That information is not yet available. It will probably be available later in July or perhaps in August. But in terms of projections for that area of Sydney, we have projections that the enrolments could get in the order of 550 to 650, and we have had made provision for that in the Alexandria Community School.

I just stress that the Alexandria Community School is a K to 12 school, but it is based on two previous schools, Cleveland Street High School, which had a high school capacity for almost 800, and the Alexandria Primary School, which had a capacity in the order of I think around 300. So there is significant capacity at the moment for student enrolment that has dropped below 270.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Have you used an actual commissioned report or is it simply internal working projections that the department has been doing?

Mr BURKHARDT: The Yusuf report actually does do projections on those areas.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I ask in relation to the Alexandria Park school, one of the concerns a number of the parents at a number of the schools, but particularly Erskineville, is the issue of the number of roads the children have got to cross, the busyness of some of the roads. Were those factors given weight in the decision to consolidate those schools?

Mr BURKHARDT: There are a number of students that cross the railway line from the Newtown side to go to Erskineville now and it is anticipated, and we are already doing planning in relation to it, that some of those students will go to Camdenville and Newtown. So there is an expectation. I stress we are talking about on average 6.5 or 5.5 students per grade. So those students will have a choice other than to go to Alexandria Park Community School.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Just following on from that - I assume that you have data about the geographical spread of the students at Erskineville school. How widely are they spread? Do they all live close to Erskineville school or do they live around the other schools you have mentioned?

Mr BURKHARDT: They in fact are quite widespread. Some live out of the area. Some in fact live on the other side of Redfern. They are reasonably dispersed around there. I think if you go to 74, the numbers are there.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Some of them, if they walk, would presumably cross a lot of streets at the moment to get to Erskineville?

Mr BURKHARDT: Exactly, but, as I have said, we have taken account of the fact that some of them may wish to go to Camdenville or Newtown.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: In the previous budget estimate committee meeting in which you were present, Mr Chair, the then minister repetitively denied that there was a drop in public school enrolments. My question is, since then, when did such a drop happen, when did it reach crisis point and when did you decide to have a Building the Future plan?

Dr BOSTON: Could I see the document and then I am happy to respond.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: I am referring to the previous budget estimates committee meeting.

CHAIR: You want to see where the minister said that?

Dr BOSTON: What the minister said, yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: I can put it on notice.

CHAIR: You can take that question on notice, unless you have a copy of it. I think it is fair that you should see the primary document before you comment on it.

Dr BOSTON: Yes, thank you.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In terms of Hunters Hill the school community put forward some alternative proposals about other subjects to be offered at the school, making itself a specialist school in such areas as environmental studies, visual arts, working with the film and television school. They also put, as part of their submission, the fact that when they discovered that they had a drop in enrolments in 2000 - it could have been 1999 - they did some work with the local primary schools and had this positive primary school program that saw a lift in enrolments in 2000 and 2001. Were these aspects of their submissions given any consideration by the department; was there any belief by the department that they could grow their school?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes. When you say Hunters Hill had done a lot of work with its local primary schools, in fact what had tended to happen - and I am not criticising this - was the work was done with schools, it was successful in schools that were not within Hunters Hill drawing area. Students from Birchgrove were going past Balmain to Hunters Hill, that is where the encouragement went to get into a gifted program, for example. Now that is reasonable, I am not criticising that, but it is indicative as a systemic response we had to make because what you could have had was the creation of an environment where you did this here and the students would not be, frankly, at a school where they lived, so we had to take that into account when we had to come up with a total plan. Part of the submission from Hunters Hill was to do with performing arts, part of it was to do with a selective stream and we had actually introduced selective streams into Sydney Secondary College in Ryde and that is where those gifted students were going to Hunters Hill, so they were going to be taken up by the selective stream that was being proposed, as we saw it, and also we had already put forward the view that Balmain would have a performing arts stream. So we did take it into account, but we believed that on the balance of the number of students that might be attracted into public education it was going to be difficult to sustain. In fact we thought at the time we were probably over-stretching the whole selective stream issue in any case because we introduced selective streams into less than four schools and frankly it was a doubt we had - I had anyway - that it would in fact work.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Is it a fact that the minister has indicated to the parents that they could all have a first choice in relocation to another school next year?

Dr LAUGHLIN: That is correct.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What if they all choose the same school?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, we will have to make provision.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Because the majority of their Year 10s and Year 11s chose one particular school.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Which one was that?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Mosman. It is in the submission. Did that come as a surprise, that they chose a school that far from Hunters Hill High School?

Dr LAUGHLIN: It surprised me, to be honest, but I guess there was a lot of emotion involved in all of this and I can understand that.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Have you done an analysis as to why they would have chosen that school?

Dr LAUGHLIN: No, I have not.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Might it not be relevant in terms of the type of education they are seeking?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, I think people have made statements, they have said they are choosing that because it meets their particular needs, but I think it is because, in the heat of this, I do not think people have had a hard look, I would suggest, at what we have created in the new Sydney Secondary College. There is a lot of tension in that and I can understand it.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: It will not meet all of the parents' needs.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I suspect that there are many schools there that will, but then we will see.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In your submission you have a definition of comprehensive schools and I think we are going to end up with a semantic situation when we start to meet with the parents. It is on page 53. Is that the first time that definition has been used by the department? You have moved on into a post-Wyndham era, it seems. You are suggesting that they could be single sex.

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes, well, I guess "comprehensive" has a range of meanings. "Comprehensive" to us means that it is getting a range of students across the ability levels and it could be--

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But is that the first time that the department has used this definition?

Dr LAUGHLIN: No, it is not.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Is it in other written material?

Dr LAUGHLIN: I cannot tell you that, I do not know.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Because, as you know from the sort of submissions you have received from schools, parents have taken a very different perspective on what a comprehensive school might be.

Dr LAUGHLIN: Yes. What we have said here is, under this definition, "comprehensive" includes the opportunity to study both academically challenging as well as a range of dual accredited courses, et cetera. Now that is fine. I mean what we have done is moved into a situation where we are trying to offer the widest curriculum, we are trying to attract the broadest range of students and that is our understanding of what "comprehensive" means.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I am not quibbling necessarily with that, but I am just wondering, since it is quite different from the way that parents have addressed the issue, whether it is the first time you have used it.

Dr BOSTON: Could I intervene on that?

CHAIR: Yes.

Dr BOSTON: This is a use of a term that I have used frequently in writing and in speeches. The term "comprehensive" in Harold Wyndham's day was a term which described schools which were mainly coeducational, providing the full range of curriculum that was then available. That is comprehensive. The curriculum now is extraordinarily broader with information technology, with hospitality studies, with a whole range of vocational work, so the word "comprehensive" still means what it meant except the range of things that it now covers is much greater.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Dr Wyndham, on what we are talking about, primary school education, in his famous blue book on the guiding aims and principles, referred to a primary school saying that a modern school cannot live apart from its community. I think there may well be some parents in the community around Alexandria Park who may think they are about to be removed from their community.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But that was based on the practice of zoning all schools. My memory is that the blue book was in 1951. At that stage every primary school and every secondary school had a zone and when people talked about the school community they meant only the people who lived within certain geographical boundaries were able to attend those schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: It might be.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You really are playing with semantics.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I just want to understand where we are at today with primary schools, whether the concept of community is still a valid concept from the point of view of the department.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Mr Primrose has just pointed out that one of the children at Erskineville comes from Minto, so that is perhaps relevant.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I ask how the department views the role of primary schools?

Dr BOSTON: Well, the link between primary schools and our communities is very important. I would not say that it varied from Wyndham's day, although my recollection of the blue book, Mr Chairman, is not as good as some of the members of this Committee.

CHAIR: If there is no zoning now, obviously that opens up the question of parents making choices and children travelling longer distances to schools and the schools then are more competitive to reach enrolment figures. I noted in your submission that on page 53 there is a quote from the Planning New South Wales internal memorandum of 18 February 2002 commenting that only ten students from Hunters Hill Public School transferred to Hunters Hill High School, but would you agree that when there is a lot of discussion about closing a high school that has a tremendous impact on the parents as to whether they then continue to plan for their children to go to that particular school? They do not want to be in a school that is gradually being wound down, they want to be in a school that has a future, so would that not be almost self-creating a situation: We are going to close the school, falling enrolments, and the fall in enrolments actually accelerates because of the policy?

Dr BOSTON: Can I firstly go back to your remark about zoning. The current situation is that every child has right of entry to their nearest school, or their designated nearest school if they are equidistant between two, or the right to go to any other school in which space is available, but it is not a situation where there is free choice. There is a guarantee of an education in one school or you can go elsewhere if you wish, so that is the situation in relation to the term "zoning".

The first point you make about Hunters Hill really raises this issue: Does the Government of New South Wales want its public education system run on the basis of competition between schools for students or does it want it run as a public utility for the public good in a managed way? I am in this job because I believe it is the second of those roles, to provide the best possible education for young people in the best facilities we can and to guarantee that every child receives a good education rather than some sort of free market competition between public schools competing for a diminishing number of students. That is not the way to do it in my view. The issue you made about Hunters Hill, sure, once a school is slated for closure or even suggested for closure that can have a debilitating effect on enrolments, but if you look through the document that we have provided, and Dr Laughlin's graphs, the die was cast for Hunters Hill long before there was any proposal for closing the school, just as it was for many other schools in the inner suburban area. Hunters Hill has not been singled out, it was part of a total problem, and we have an obligation to take that problem and resolve it and that is the

genesis of this proposal.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: What would be wrong with redirecting the budget for new schools and expanding schools so that inner city schools are made more attractive?

Dr BOSTON: Well, if redirecting the budget to make the schools more attractive in the inner city involves taking money away from western Sydney and from the rural areas where we have difficulty or - not difficulty - challenges providing top quality education for young people, then there would be a problem. Our concern is to provide the best possible education for all young people and this is the best way to achieve it in inner suburban Sydney.

CHAIR: I do not think the Committee is arguing to try and transfer funds from western suburbs where there is such a dramatic expansion in school numbers--

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: If you do not spread this pocket of money around and you just keep investing in the inner city, obviously the money does not go to the west or regional New South Wales.

CHAIR: The only solution is actually to expand the budget.

Dr BOSTON: I will vote for that, Mr Chairman, any day.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I was just going to move on to some of the demographics. Moments ago, Dr Boston, you said the die was cast for Hunters Hill. When was the die cast?

Dr BOSTON: Well, not simply for Hunters Hill but all of these schools that are facing declining enrolments and have been facing them, as Dr Laughlin said, back to the mid-1980s. There has been a problem looming there for a long period of time and in recent years it has been exacerbated. When I said the die was cast I did not mean it was inevitably slated for closure rather than any other schools, but for all of these schools an issue has been clearly emerging now over a period of time that must be dealt with. It is not an option to leave things alone. It is simply not an alternative available to anyone.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You referred to not wanting to see competition between Government schools.

Dr BOSTON: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What has to be done prior to this about trying to win a greater share of the total student population, in other words from the non-Government schools, what strategy was already in place?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Some of us are trying to defeat the Federal Government but I suppose Dr Boston couldn't be expected to.

Dr BOSTON: Over the past decade or more, successive governments have attempted to address this issue. In the late 1980s, early 1990s, increased evolution was seen as a way of empowering schools locally so that they would be presumably more attractive to local communities and would be supported more strongly. Further on, in the middle of the 1990s, a decision was made to restructure the decentralised administration of the department to abolish regions, to attempt to maximise the amount of money which went directly to schools to support more teachers and reduce class size. In 1997, we were bringing schools and TAFE together under one administration, seeking to give them a common award so that teachers were interchangeable. There were enormous changes in curriculum through the 1990s; moving away from a norm referenced curriculum base to a criterion referenced curriculum base; introducing testing programs so that we could report to parents on what students know, are able to do and can understand; annual school reports were introduced to report to parents; the values of public schooling were enunciated, defined, promulgated. All of this has been an enormous effort to attempt to attract a larger proportion of the community than we had previously.

Total numbers have continued to go up, and that might be the point that Dr Wong was quoting when I see the Minister's paper subsequently. Total numbers have continued to go up, but the proportion of young people going to the non-Government school sector has gone up more rapidly than the Government school sector. The advertising campaign, I mean the Teach your Children Well campaign was also another element in attempting to turn this around. The \$476 million that the Government is now putting into capital works development, essentially concentrating on staff room facilities for teachers, school appearance, front office, attempting to improve the facilities in schools and the look in schools, an enormous amount is going on, but, as I say, when it is becoming increasingly possible through funding policies of the Federal Government to support non-Government education, a lot of parents are going to it for reasons which they believe to be good ones, but which I believe when we get down to detailed analysis are often not sound ones.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Strategies such as increasing the number of selective places, offering specialist programs, such as performing arts, sports schools, the programs you are now putting in place at the moment at Dulwich, seeking alliances, those sort of special programs, are they seen as only attracting students from other Government schools or as a strategy to bring back students from the non-Government sector?

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, they are seen as a strategy for winning back students from non-Government schools and providing a better education for all children who attend Government schools, and if we take, for example, outside this immediate focus, innovations like the St George campus, 40 percent, as I understand it, of young people who have gone there have been attracted into a public school from the non-Government sector.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Within the public schools proposal, visual arts, environmental studies, specialist subjects and opportunities have been an attractive option to students from the non-Government schools. Did you do any research on their proposal?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Can I just make a comment about the St Georges River College, which the Director-General has mentioned. Just in that area we have unfortunately had to close Narwee High School. Narwee High School had 33 students in Year 7, and the staff at that school in consultation with the parents said, "We just cannot maintain a curriculum. There is no likelihood for us to be able to attract students with the kind of infrastructure we have got, with the kind of curriculum offering we have got." We accepted that; we supported it. We have created within a few kilometres the St Georges River College, which is now the feature school of southern Sydney. It is a multi-campus college. It has no less than 500 students this year in Year 11 and it has attracted a significant portion of those from non-Government schools. What we have done is reinvested in creating a new educational environment that is working, but we could not sustain Narwee at the same time.

With the inner city, frankly, we are not going to be able to sustain every school that is there. That would be great if we could, but we have to re-invest, we have to re-shape and we have to be realistic about that, and that is frankly where we are coming from. If all we do is change the configuration of what is already there, I do not think we are going to make the difference, but we are making the difference with what we have proposed, we have made the difference in southern Sydney and I think that is an example of a working strategy.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Does that mean you are not going to give the families consideration? What consideration did you actually give to the proposal put forward by Hunters Hill?

Dr LAUGHLIN: We gave it very serious consideration, but we had to do it in the light of available likely student take-up rate. We are already stretched, as I indicated in a previous response, we believe, in having four selective streams in nearby schools. I am still unsure whether that will work into the future. It appears to be at the moment, but that was a risk. We took it. We just could not keep on doing that.

CHAIR: Just to clarify another point that has been made in another submission from Hunters Hill, there is the view that there was a recommendation from the regional director or an official of the

department not supporting the closure of the Hunters Hill High School. Was there such a recommendation?

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, the background to that is in our report.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Page 28 I think.

Dr BOSTON: Yes. There was a meeting on 20 March in the year 2000 of district superintendents, and following conversations and meetings that had gone on right around the State about the future of public education, the issue of a declining market share across the State and declining enrolments in particular areas, I asked the various district superintendents to produce for me a sort of opinion paper on where they could see the provision of education heading in their district in the next five, ten or fifteen years. It was interesting that all three superintendents for the three districts we are looking at in the inner suburban area all produced papers which recommended that various schools closed in other people's districts.

For example, Mr Haigh, the district superintendent for Ryde was recommending that, amongst other things, Hunters Hill remained open, but that Balmain across the border closed. Mr Basely in the Port Jackson district was recommending the growth of Balmain, but over the boarder Hunters Hill and others could close. They were looking at small scale districts, 40 or 60 or 70 schools, and attempting to sort out, as I asked them to, what the future would be within that little particular piece of territory, what they thought would be the best position.

We read those. Subsequently, we stood back some months later and took a more helicopter view of the whole thing and came up with the proposal of Building the Future. So those papers did not deliberately feed into it, but they did, in my mind at least, make it clear that we had a major problem that we had to resolve in this whole area.

CHAIR: Just to clarify that, in your submission you say in spite of asking for those things to be done, those plans, quoting your submission, "They were not assessed by the department during the period of development of Building the Future proposal. They were neither responded to nor entered into the file tracking system". It seems as if you had people do work and not even feed it into the final consideration.

Dr BOSTON: Well, Mr Chairman, they were briefing papers for me, and they certainly were in my head when we were looking at where we are taking the future of education, and they still inform my view of where we are heading in the future, and we will ask district superintendents again, in 18 months time perhaps, to have a similar navel gazing exercise, because clearly we have a responsibility for positioning public education.

CHAIR: I just want to ask one question following that up with Mr Waterhouse. There was some feeling by the Hunters Hill Parents and Citizens Association and others that those documents were being concealed, and that is why they then applied for the freedom of information. Were you involved with dealing with those freedom of information requests?

Mr WATERHOUSE: I was not involved initially in dealing with those requests. I rejoined the department in December 2001. The first two requests were, respectively, in March 2001 and, from recollection, June or July 2001. The documents were not provided at that time, and they should have been. That was an error. The documents were provided when they were discovered. The reason they were not discovered was that they were searched for by the district superintendent of the Ryde district, the author of the document, and he was unable to locate them and he did not believe he had them in his office.

Subsequently this year, in February I believe, there was a third freedom of information request from the Hunters Hill High School Parents and Citizens Association, seeking to discover whether there were documents that related to that request. The district superintendent asked his technology adviser to do a search of the computer systems, and the document was discovered on a back-up drive within the district office, which the district superintendent had not previously realised contained any

documents. The reason that back-up drive was there was because the documents were backed-up on to that computer drive when the Ryde district office moved location some time in 2000, from recollection, and the district superintendent has provided me with an explanation of that.

CHAIR: So have all documents been made available that people have been requesting from Hunters Hill or Erskineville or Redfern?

Mr WATERHOUSE: To the best of my knowledge, yes, other than those that are claimed by the department to be exempt. For example, there has been a request for the valuations and, for the same reason that the valuations are being provided in camera, they have been exempt under FOI because that could destroy the value of the property. I should say that the third FOI I referred to is still in process and the department has been communicating with the Hunters Hill people with the assistance of the Ombudsman to work through a process of providing documents in relation to that request, which was a very voluminous request, and it is a question of getting it to a practical and manageable level so that it is not going to be capturing some hundreds or thousands of documents.

CHAIR: How would you describe that last request? What actually is it? It is correspondence, is it?

Mr WATERHOUSE: Well, it asks 20 different questions and I do not think I can recall, I would not be able to list them, but overall I think it is about correspondence and things that have happened since March last year until the beginning of this year within the department. I think it covers things like requests for other demographic data that Macquarie University had used. I cannot remember.

CHAIR: It is not a specific document.

Mr WATERHOUSE: It is not specific, it is over quite a large range of documents.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: I would like to move to a helicopter view, as Dr Boston previously mentioned. How much money has been spent on inner city schools in the past 10 years, comparing that with the growing population of western Sydney and the declining populations in rural New South Wales?

Dr BOSTON: I would like to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: I can provide a document to Dr Boston dated June 2000. What strategy had been put in place to prevent this trend continuing? The minister said there was not a consistent downturn.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: All you have to do is come out to schools in western Sydney and you will see what the trend is.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Because there are not enough private schools there. If they had enough private schools then most of them would go to private schools.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: They go to public schools.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Yes, because there are no private schools.

CHAIR: Can we cease having a private discussion? Dr Boston, you did make an earlier remark.

Dr BOSTON: Yes, Mr Chairman, I believe that is correct and Mr Aquilina is recorded as saying the downturn in enrolments which is revealed in this year's budget papers reflects a number of things. First, it is not a consistent downturn. In fact, while there has been a drop of some 4,000

students in the secondary field, primary enrolments have increased by 1,000 making it a net downturn of something like 3,000 students.

CHAIR: What is the point of your question, Dr Wong?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: My point is that the minister was misleading the Parliament. There was consistent downturn as shown by the graph today.

CHAIR: He was separating the view between primary and secondary.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Yes, but the key point in the statement was that it was not consistent. Here is the graph.

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, I also believe that the then minister was talking about State figures as a whole, not the graph that relates to the inner suburban enrolments.

CHAIR: Thank you. We are now out of time.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: May I just ask Dr Boston: On page 28 of the department's submission it refers to the fact that district plans were provided to the Director-General by all 40 district superintendents on or about 14 April. They were collated and passed to the minister's office. In reference to those plans, which I think you have referred to here as personal position statements, you said that what happened was you had one district superintendent looking at his area, so you might have had in the Port Jackson area the district superintendent looking at, say, Balmain but looking over at Hunters Hill, and the district superintendent in Ryde looking at his patch. Have people of Hunters Hill, as a response to their FOI requests, been given the district superintendent's papers, his strategic analysis, the strategic analysis plan, the one that was provided to you from Port Jackson if it has made reference also to Hunters Hill?

Mr WATERHOUSE: Perhaps I could answer that. Yes, in response to its third FOI request, that has been provided.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So they now have a copy of the strategic plan, not only the one from Ryde but from Port Jackson as well?

Mr WATERHOUSE: Yes, from Port Jackson, that has been sent to them in the last few weeks.

CHAIR: We have now run out of time, so other questions will have to be put on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Mr Chairman, I am sorry, we have a lot more questions and there is no way that they are going to be put on notice. We will need further extensive time with the departmental officials. We received for the first time submissions from members of the public yesterday afternoon and they are about eight inches thick. With the best will in the world, and having read until 1 o'clock in the morning, I am still a long way from reading through all of the submissions from members of the public. I think it is incumbent upon Committee members to consider everything that is put before them.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We actually got a lot of them before yesterday afternoon.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: The time to be able to consider all of those submissions prior to being able to consider questions of departmental witnesses has just not been adequate and we will need to see them again face to face.

CHAIR: In my remarks I am just indicating that there could be questions that you have on notice now and I was not in any way discussing when or if they reappear as witnesses. That is a second question that the Committee will have to discuss.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I apologise, Mr Chairman. I just wanted to make my position clear.

CHAIR: There could be some questions that can still be given on notice, if the department can answer those. If we have the questions by 5 pm tomorrow and have answers within three weeks, would that be possible?

Dr BOSTON: Yes. Mr Chairman, what arrangements would you like to make for the valuations to be received?

CHAIR: It is a question of whether the document can be simply forwarded to the Committee or whether a hearing is required. I think we can get a ruling on that and we will let you know.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: My view is that we would need to go in camera as a Committee and view them together. They should not be held by the Committee.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr Chairman, I understand that you were originally proposing that the departmental officers be invited back anyway. Maybe that is the time that we could actually consider--

CHAIR: Yes. The point I was making was that it may be possible to simply have the document forwarded to the Committee tomorrow.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It is a bit of a non-problem because the department has said that it can get them to us in 24 hours and, since we are in fact meeting all day Friday, we are perfectly able at any stage on Friday to receive the necessary documents.

CHAIR: Yes, that is the point I am making. We do not need to have Dr Boston physically hand them to us.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: No.

CHAIR: We will communicate with you and advise you on the process.

Dr BOSTON: Thank you.

CHAIR: We are happy to have that document and ensure its confidentiality from a commercial point of view.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

VERNON JOHN DALTON, Management and Dispute Resolution Consultant, Chairman of the Schools Closure Review Committee, 49 Ridgescrop Drive, Castle Hill, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: If at any stage during your evidence in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request to go into camera.

Mr DALTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Did you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr DALTON: No, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Just a general question, Mr Dalton. What were the key factors why the review committee decided to endorse the department's Building the Future plan?

Mr DALTON: The Committee, Mr Chairman, did not have any role in reviewing the Building the Future plan. It was set up specifically under the terms of section 28 of the Education Act in respect of Maroubra High School, Erskineville Public School, Redfern Public School and Hunters Hill High School. The provisions of that Act allow schools, when the Minister has given notice of closure, to lodge an application for review under that section, and that is what happened at Hunters Hill High School and Erskineville Public School, but because Maroubra High School and Redfern Public School had also indicated their serious concern about proposed closure, they were included. Therefore, the Schools Closure Review Committee was asked specifically only to look at those schools. It had no charter or brief to review the Building the Future plan.

CHAIR: Did you see any merit in keeping Hunters Hill, Erskineville or Redfern schools open?

Mr DALTON: No.

CHAIR: No arguments at all?

Mr DALTON: Well, let me say it was a very unenviable role that the committee had. I do not think anybody on the committee would by choice have been advocating the closure of any school, but certainly the committee set out with a very intensive program of very carefully looking at all aspects, not only following the legislative requirements, but to try and make sure that we held hearings at each of those schools so that representatives of all the affected groups, that is teachers, students, school counsellors where they existed, the parents and citizens, the teachers representative groups and ancillary representative groups and anybody in the community, were given an opportunity to talk to the committee, as was subsequently the department. So it deliberately and very carefully went about the process of seeking public submissions, advertising the existence of the committee, conducting hearings and finally then making a judgment as a result of a combination of those issues.

CHAIR: Have you conducted hearings into other school closures prior to this?

Mr DALTON: Some years ago I was the chairperson of the Schools Closure Committee for Baulkham Hills Primary School.

CHAIR: Is it unusual that two or three members of the review committee submitted a dissenting report about the recommendations of the committee?

Mr DALTON: No.

CHAIR: In your opinion what were the reasons why there was disagreement among the committee members?

Mr DALTON: I cannot answer for them. I can only simply say that as the chairperson of the committee and as a person who felt that each of the schools should close, I made that judgment based on what I regarded to be very appropriate and detailed demographic and other information, both from demographic data and from the department's submission, about declining numbers and the fact that those schools could not be justified. More importantly, I suppose, I was persuaded that the information provided to the committee showed that even if you accepted the disparity in the two demographic studies, if you took the highest projection of likely enrolments at the school, the department very effectively showed that the projected enrolments for the next decade would still allow plenty of spare space if those schools closed, not only for that population, but for a drift back from the private schools if that was to occur.

The other charter that the committee had too of course was that it did not have the liberty of looking in isolation at those schools. It is charged, according to the legislation, with having an interest in those individual schools, as well as the interests of education in the State generally. That is a longhand way of saying that from my point of view the schools that we reviewed, despite the excellent professional and very balanced submissions that were made to the committee, in the end could not demonstrate that the projected enrolments and the department's data about places in schools in those areas could ever have justified them staying open.

The difficulty that some members of the committee had was that they would have (a) liked to have had the charter of reviewing the whole of the Building the Future plan, which the committee did not have, or, alternatively, looking at what schools might have been able to have been closed instead of the schools that were recommended for closure. Again, the committee did not have the charter to do that.

I think that answers your question adequately.

CHAIR: Apparently there was some problem in resolving the reports from the two demographers, Parr and Yusuf, where they had different outcomes. Which one did you finally accept?

Mr DALTON: I did not lean to one or the other. Dr Farhat Yusuf, who was assisted by Peter Caspersonn, submitted one set of information. Dr Parr, on behalf of Hunters Hill High School, produced some other data. In an attempt to get some better understanding of the different positions, the committee arranged to meet with those people and representatives of some of the schools, except Maroubra, at Macquarie University. In the end, I think both sets of data were useful in making a decision. I think Dr Parr's catchment areas certainly were beyond the normal catchment area for Hunters Hill High School. I think that Dr Parr discounted to some extent the likely drift back from the private school situation. He had similar criticisms about Professor Yusuf's work, but in the end my judgment was about utilising both lots of information, and regardless of in a sense who was right or wrong about the actual demographic projections, it still did not overcome the issues about the space that is available in those areas within the department's Building the Future plan. In other words, even if you took the most optimistic projection, which I think was Dr Parr's, the projections from the department about likely demand, even allowing for drift from private schools, demonstrated to me that there was still a lot of space available.

CHAIR: So when you say a lot of space available you are saying not at Hunters Hill but at other schools so that Hunters Hill can be closed?

Mr DALTON: That is right.

CHAIR: Do you actually ask the question: Is Hunters Hill High School viable? Its viability with 425 students or so.

Mr DALTON: Well, the school community argued very strongly that it was a viable school and I have no argument about that. They presented a very well argued, highly professional and very

well-balanced argument. On the other hand, the department argued that the academic performance was not as high as was argued by the school community. The department argued, I think fairly successfully, that the educational opportunities for Hunters Hill students would be enhanced by their entry to other schools where there was a wider curriculum. There was also an argument advanced by the Hunters Hill community that if there was a selective stream in some other specialist areas, such as environmental studies I remember, that would have been a justification for Hunters Hill to remain open, but really the committee was simply faced with a situation where there was strong argument and a lot was made by both sides of the out of area enrolments, and that is true, I mean I think the enrolments at Hunters Hill were, from out of area, in excess of 40 percent of the school population at the time that we did the review. The Hunters Hill community argued, well, that was an issue of choice and whether people chose to do that or not, but of course the department argued strongly that it was a process of taking kids from other schools and therefore likely to threaten them. So I must admit that there were all of those issues that were considered by the committee, but some of the committee members would have liked to have had and we did not have the option of nominating what other school might be more appropriate to consider for closure than Hunters Hill.

CHAIR: It sounds from your answers as if you took it as one of your main jobs to say, if the school closed down, were there other places for the children. Did you see that as one of your main priorities?

Mr DALTON: No, I think one of my advantages was that I had an independence and I did not have a vested interest on behalf of any of the parties, but the terms of reference were relatively narrow, what was the future, and the minister made a decision or indicated a decision about the future of the school. We went to undue lengths to consult with the community, to have a good look at the school environment itself, to talk to the school community and to receive submissions from a whole range of people, including local councillors and others, but against that was this strong and detailed information that the department persisted with which was to do with the wider Building the Future plan, the wider issues so far as local or nearby school facilities, the drift away from public education and what they were trying to do about reversing that, but demonstrating that in terms of Hunters Hill it was a rational and reasonable decision, so that is what we were faced with.

CHAIR: So you did assess the Hunters Hill High School in that context of building a better future?

Mr DALTON: Not that so much, but in terms of the data that was provided about the schools in the region that would be left and that would therefore be able to cater for the Hunters Hill students, but we received and we reported very accurately the pros and cons, any information that we received we reported accurately to the minister, but we did not take a great deal of interest, I would have to tell you - I mean obviously we were impressed with the physical environment, that is the site, the environment of the school. We were not persuaded nor did we get into some of the debate about whether it was a political decision and whether it was to do with revenue. We really tried to confine our most serious judgment as to whether the loss of Hunters Hill High School would mean for parents and students in that area the loss of an educational amenity, and in my view the department very satisfactorily showed that there were good alternatives and that the decision was a justifiable one. In fact if I was asked - I will not make that comment. I was going to say that is what it amounted to in the end, making a judgment as dispassionately as possible as to the validity of the proposed decision to close the school.

The other thing that I was probably aware of was that Hunters Hill High School had, for about four years, been under notice that it was at risk, I understand, and it really was not until apparently the minister's notice of closure that people accepted how serious the situation was likely to be.

CHAIR: Were you happy yourself that you had enough time to conduct your review, there was no pressure on you to speed up the decision, you had the normal amount of time you required?

Mr DALTON: Well, the short answer is quite satisfied. I mean I would say - and I know that self-praise is no recommendation - I think the committee did do a very good job of trying to approach the review of each of these schools as rationally and as thoroughly as was possible and I made sure,

for instance, at the end of each hearing that I had an assurance from all those who contributed that they believed that they had had a fair go. I made sure that every member of that committee had access to every piece of paper, whether it was as a result of written submissions responding to the advertisement, phone calls, emails, the earlier documentation that had been provided by schools to the department and all of the documentation that the committee was provided with during its hearings was made available to every member of the committee. As you would be well aware, it was difficult in one sense to organise the committee to get together at appropriate times, so it was drawn out over a longer period than it might have been if it had been easier to get people together, so I think there was a lot of time for people to consider the material that was provided. There was good opportunity provided at those public consultations, there was good opportunity for written and other submissions and I believe that the committee in the end did a good job of trying to objectively and in a balanced way present to the minister all of the information that it had received during those deliberations.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You have said that one of the factors was that the department presented the committee with compelling argument that there were good alternatives for the students at Hunters Hill. It now transpires that the majority of students who would have been in this year's Year 11 and have changed schools have gone to Mosman High School. Was the fact that Mosman High School was seen by many of the parents as the alternative to the type of education from Hunters Hill ever discussed by the department? Was it raised as a factor?

Mr DALTON: I do not know whether it was by the department, but it was by the parents.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Because parents have now provided submissions to the committee talking of students travelling two and a half hours each day in order to access the school which they consider to be a good alternative. If you were faced with that information, or indeed you say you were by parents, how do you say there was an adequate source of good alternatives?

Mr DALTON: Well, I am simply making the point again that the space in high schools in that region nominated by the department showed convincingly that there were plenty of places for the numbers at Hunters Hill. Now I may well be wrong, but my recollection is that it was the parents who indicated that Mosman was the school of choice, but it was also made clear to the committee and reported in the report to the minister that transport would be a problem because it is going in the same direction as the peak traffic both ways, so there was likely to be that complication, but it was put to me that it was the choice of the parents.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What is the definition of a good alternative?

Mr DALTON: Well, a school that offers at least the same if not a better curriculum.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: You were saying that the terms of reference were very narrow. Would you also say it is inadequate and prejudicial, leading to that outcome anyway?

Mr DALTON: I would not have thought so. I was saying that the terms of reference did not allow or require the School Closures Review Committee to review the whole of the Building the Future plan and some of the members of the committee, particularly Councillor Joyce Whitley, raised that as an issue. The second part of the question that you asked was simply that we were charged then with making a recommendation to the minister about individual schools vis a vis other opportunities that were available.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: You were saying earlier that you were impressed that Hunters Hill could be a viable school. Is it a good idea then to close a viable school?

Mr DALTON: Well, I do not want to be provocative, but the problem is, of course, which school do you close? Let me try and be a bit more objective. The problem is: Who wants their school to close anyway? What is the difference?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Does it mean then that the terms of reference are inadequate and the committee closing the school, the school closures committee, should have terms of reference

looking at alternatives, which ones should be closed?

Mr DALTON: I do not see that as a difficulty, no.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: There have been allegations that in your school closures committee half the people are appointed by the Department of Education, for the minister, including yourself appointed by the minister, so therefore it is not a truly independent committee.

Mr DALTON: I do not know what the point of that question is.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: The point is: If the Department of Education appointed three persons, including yourself as the chair, appointed by the minister, could it be perceived that the school closures committee indeed is not an independent committee?

Mr DALTON: I guess there could be that perception, in the same way that there could be the perception that if you have got people with vested interests on the other side, the same would apply I guess.

CHAIR: There was an earlier discussion when we had the departmental people here about the Ryde district plan of April 2000. Was that document presented to your committee, and, if so, did it have any impact on your thoughts?

Mr DALTON: I do not recall it, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Apparently that plan argued that losing Hunters Hill High School did constitute a loss of local educational amenity, but no-one actually provided you with that report?

Mr DALTON: No.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Could I ask you whether you were provided with the Port Jackson district superintendent's report that suggested closing Hunters Hill and keeping Balmain?

Mr DALTON: No.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: On the same grounds.

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: The Director-General explained before, so I think it is fair to ask about both.

CHAIR: Yes, that is fair enough. I am just thinking that all of those reports should have been made available to the committee of review.

Mr DALTON: Well, that really raises the question, Mr Chairman, again as to what the role of the committee was vis a vis the legislation, but I must admit that I would not have necessarily wanted to review the whole of the Building the Future plan. I would not have wanted the job of doing that. But that is the difficulty I guess, that our charter was specifically related to the schools that had been nominated for closure, or four of the schools.

CHAIR: These are actually apparently reports produced by various officials in those areas, so it is not to do with the whole plan, but it would seem that it would have been helpful to your committee if they had been made available to you to at least consider.

Mr DALTON: Or perhaps, depending on whether it changed ultimately, the substantial arguments about the future numbers. I do not think the department, in terms of the data and information that I saw in respect of all of those schools and relative to those areas, is really going far enough and I suspect it is going to be faced in the future with still having far too many places and

problems in rationalising its resources.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Mr Dalton, in relation to Erskineville Public School, the committee did not seek any independent demographic information on the drawing area contained in Professor Yusuf's work, did it?

Mr DALTON: Not that I am aware. I do not know if they subsequently did or not, I am sorry.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: No, I am talking about your committee.

Mr DALTON: No, they did not produce anything to the committee.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Did you give any consideration to the work of Associate Professor Phibbs that was given to you?

Mr DALTON: Not that I recall.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Was it in the Yusuf report on the closures within the South Sydney area?

Mr DALTON: I am not sure about that. I would have to have a look at that.

CHAIR: How was it conveyed to the committee? It was in a submission, was it?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I am reading from the submission of the Erskineville community. It says:

"It is also clear from the report submitted to the Minister by the Schools Closure Review Committee that the committee did not give due consideration to the demographic report which was submitted to the review committee by Associate Professor Phibbs, demographer, from the University of Sydney".

CHAIR: So it was a direct submission to the Schools Closure Review Committee.

Mr DALTON: What I am saying is I cannot recall it. I have got no doubt that if it had come to the committee it would have been well read.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In thinking about those school alternatives Hunters Hill, Sydney Secondary College, did the enrolment projections for that area from the department include the selective places?

Mr DALTON: I cannot recall. I do not think so.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So in fact there could have been many additional places taken up by selective students?

Mr DALTON: I do not understand.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I am suggesting that perhaps the choice is more limited than the department might have suggested.

Mr DALTON: Well, I cannot answer that. I thought the choice was fairly wide.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I ask in relation to Erskineville, did you look at factors that were very important to parents, and they are in the submissions we have received and we will come to some, about for example this issue of transport, that many of the students walked to school, and not only Erskineville, but Redfern had some similar concerns about the number of very busy intersections that the children will have to cross to access the new Alexandria Park Community School.

Was that a factor in the consideration that the school should close?

Mr DALTON: It certainly was.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But you considered that the problems could be overcome?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How?

Mr DALTON: In respect to Redfern, I think they were going to continue some of the provider transport arrangements and the department also undertook to look at how it was going to overcome the concerns that were expressed in regard to Erskineville and those other schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Which is what? How are they proposing to do that?

Mr DALTON: I think in negotiation with the transport authorities and other people.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Is it not a fact that Redfern only gets a bus at five in the morning?

Mr DALTON: I am not sure about that. I think it was to get the children to school, yes.

CHAIR: Just to clarify another point, Mr Dalton, the Government system now is that there is no zoning so that schools attract students. I understood the theory was that the schools that really are good and provide what parents want will attract students, which is what appears to be happening at Hunters Hill, and then you say there are other places available, we will close Hunters Hill and we will force the parents to send their children to another school. These are the ones that you were looking at in the immediate area. But they do not want to send their children to those schools. It seems to me as if there is a self-defeating policy of having good schools that attract students from anywhere and a rival, to say we are going to close that school and force the parents to send their children to another school nearby where they do not want to go, and that is why they are going to go to Mosman High. They understand that must be meeting their need or it is a similar environment to the Hunters Hill school, and they are happy for their children to go there, even though there are tremendous problems with travel and so on. Do you see there is some contradiction there in what the Government is doing, that you should be looking at the factor: Do the parents want the school to continue; are they supporting the school; is it meeting the parents' needs and obviously the students' needs; and it is not relevant whether there is another school half empty a mile away, which for various reasons is not adequate?

Mr DALTON: There are a number of issues with the matters that you have raised, and the first of those is that there are, according to the Department of Education and Training, educational resources in that area and there are schools that are more optimised than Hunters Hill High School was.

We were faced with precisely the issue that you are talking about: Do you try and justify the retention of a school in isolation or do you have regard to the educational arguments about curriculum quality, opportunities and maximising the educational resource and resource infrastructure separate from that? That is what the department argued very convincingly to the committee. It was not a question as to whether Hunters Hill High School in itself is a poor school. It was about how the resources generally, not only in terms of numbers of places in schools, but schools that are operating at a more optimal capacity, schools that have the capacity to provide a broader and wider curriculum, demonstrated that those resources were there.

It certainly could not have been restricted to looking at what the arguments were about simply retaining Hunters Hill High School. There were other factors, including the demographic issues, the places that were available to schools, the schools that were operating in a viable way, the schools on which lots of money had been promised or spent in terms of raising their standard, the opportunities

for curriculum and breadth of experience elsewhere.

CHAIR: I think in a sense there is a contradiction in saying that schools can compete with each other.

Mr DALTON: No, I do not think that is a contradiction surely, is it? It would be a contradiction if you said that if any school for its own sake wanted to continue, that you would use scarce resources to allow that to happen when you could perhaps use those resources more optimally for the benefit of the State, and that is the other dilemma that the committee constantly faced. If we had the luxury perhaps of just talking about Hunters Hill or Erskineville in isolation, it would have been a difference to having to have regard for the educational responsibilities across the State.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Just following on from the Chairman's question, you have talked about the comparative information, but I just assumed that you had your attention drawn to the declining enrolment at Hunters Hill High since the early 1990s from 800 odd to 20 odd, but also that in fact - I am looking at the material the department has supplied us with - that quite steep decline compares with growth in for instance Riverside Girls, in the same areas I am talking about, and Leichhardt High, and a relatively steady pattern over the last few years in Glebe and Balmain. Am I right in assuming that as well as that pattern, the comparison across schools in expenditure, that you were also aware that - I think you suggested parents making a choice for Hunters Hill, but I guess the difficulty is that 400 fewer students are having that choice made for them at Hunters Hill in 2001 than had that choice made in 1953.

Mr DALTON: Yes, the committee had certainly had its attention drawn to the continuing decline. It also, as I mentioned earlier, had been informed that Hunters Hill had been on notice for at least four years about the ramifications of the continuing decline, and it was a consequence of the decision, or the announcement of the decision, to close the school really precipitated the advocacy in doing something about trying to help in not closing the school and in finding students. It is very clear that at Hunters Hill the number of enrolments from the local area, from local primary schools, is very low.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In the case of both Hunters Hill and Erskineville you have talked about the enrolments last year. In the case of Hunters Hill you have provided a demographic study which referred to an increase at 2020. In the case of Erskineville, South Sydney Council in their submission have referred to the expansion, particularly in the Green Square area, 20,000 residents and 15,000 workers. What projections did the committee do about the likely increase in enrolments due to the change in the nature of the communities?

Mr DALTON: The Committee relied certainly on the projections from the department vis a vis the projections from the demographers, and it was able to demonstrate of the available places in surrounding schools, that in some, in most - I better qualify that. It was able to demonstrate that there would still have been plenty of spare capacity, up to 20 percent in some areas.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: The department in its submission says:

The enrolment and demographic evidence to close the schools was based as much on historical trends within those and surrounding schools as it was about projections into the future.

Did they in fact give you a proper analysis of projections into the future?

Mr DALTON: I believe so, yes.

CHAIR: Just to clarify something else you said earlier, Mr Dalton, even though you were not taking into account, as you said, the whole planning for the future, the department's submission was forcing you to do that. The way they drafted their submission was in the context of the plan. So in a sense your committee was working within that environment?

Mr DALTON: Yes, well, we did not have the capacity to look at what the alternatives were. If

you just take Hunters Hill again, there were arguments from the department about the cost of work to rehabilitate the buildings for example, the amount of money that was being spent elsewhere. Yes, from that point of view they were simply demonstrating to the committee that the resources, whether it was the teaching or the financial resources, were needed to develop educational services elsewhere in the State.

CHAIR: And that became a factor in your -

Mr DALTON: Only in respect of that individual school. They argued about what the factors were relative to that school.

CHAIR: When you said a moment ago that Hunters Hill had been on notice for at least four years, what did you mean by that?

Mr DALTON: Well, the department submitted to us that the declining numbers at Hunters Hill had been of concern for four years and that the Hunters Hill High School had been alerted to that and I guess that is what I was referring to.

CHAIR: So you are implying that there was some communication between the department and Hunters Hill to say four years ago--

Mr DALTON: Over the last four years.

CHAIR: --that the school's future was in doubt?

Mr DALTON: With the continuing decline in numbers, yes.

CHAIR: You believe that it did happen, that there was some communication to the school?

Mr DALTON: That is what the committee was told.

CHAIR: By the department?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: If they did communicate it to the school and that became known in that area, would that have an effect on the future of the school on its enrolments?

Mr DALTON: I would have thought so.

CHAIR: If the school virtually faced being wound down and perhaps closing?

Mr DALTON: Well, that is the implication.

CHAIR: Parents do not like to have their children change, especially in the high school situation.

Mr DALTON: Well, that was the implication of what the department was saying, I guess.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But surely the department only started saying that after the decline had already accelerated?

CHAIR: Please let him finish the answer.

Mr DALTON: Yes. I am not sure what you are saying. All I am saying is that that is what the department was saying, that over the last four years, each year, there was concern about the declining population which had been conveyed to the school and nothing had occurred in terms of arresting that decline.

CHAIR: The point I am making is that, if that became known in the area, would that in fact have an effect on the enrolments?

Mr DALTON: I would have thought so.

CHAIR: In that four years, it would accelerate the decline.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But the point is that the decline which had already occurred prompted the concern. The figures I referred to before show a marked decline from 1993 and the warnings, if they started four years before, are three or four years after that.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But he said enrolments did go up after the school put in place a plan to address the issue.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: From what to what? If you look at the Year 7 enrolments, say, from 1996, they are 89, 88, 71, 82, 50, 61.

CHAIR: I suppose the other issue that is hard to calculate is the effect of all the new development that is occurring in the Gladesville area, the large housing developments and so on, only in the last, say, two years, and I know in evidence earlier the department was arguing the fact that they are families who do not have children and therefore, even though there are a lot of individuals moving into units and things like that, they are not children.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: I would like to correct that because the department was referring to Ultimo, not Gladesville. That piece of information you mentioned referred to Ultimo, as I recollect it. At Gladesville my understanding is that the surrounding schools do have spare capacity. Even with the closure of Hunters Hill, the other schools could still cater for additional students for any growth that would take place. That is my understanding.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: There was no reference to growth in Gladesville or Hunters Hill.

Mr DALTON: The dilemma for the committee was that that argument was run in respect of a number of schools where there had been no increase in the government school population at all and the populations had continued to decline despite a lot of evidence about massive residential medium to high density growth in a number of areas and it had not made any difference, it had not arrested the populations at any of the schools we looked at.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Mr Dalton, you were provided with evidence in relation to child care places and child care waiting lists in the Erskineville area which showed that all of the centres were at their capacity and in fact there were waiting lists. I am advised that there are now some 300 children on those waiting lists. I was wondering, with that evidence in front of you and taking into consideration the demographic analyses you had been given by the department, should that not have given you some cause for concern that perhaps the trends were not as clear as they were being presented and further work really needed to be done to evaluate whether in fact Alexandria Park would very quickly reach capacity and following the sale of all of those schools there would be no capacity or it would be difficult for the department to buy back into the area and re-establish schools?

Mr DALTON: I am not sure what your question is, I am sorry.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Did you look at the figures in relation to child care, the fact that local child care centres were at capacity, that there were waiting lists approaching 300, and did that not suggest to you that there might be some problems with the demographic figures that you were being given?

Mr DALTON: No. Yes, and no.

CHAIR: Were you given those figures?

Mr DALTON: We were given those figures and we took them into account, yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I gather you were also given kindergarten enrolment figures. The department has told us you were given those figures. Did you take into account the fact that kindergarten enrolments had shown a drop of a couple of hundred in the Bondi district and a couple of hundred in the Port Jackson district?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Looking at the alternatives in Erskineville, were factors such as the current capacity and enrolment numbers at Newtown North and Newtown Primary School looked at?

Mr DALTON: Well, I suppose the short answer is yes. There was a proposal put to the committee as an alternative to closing Erskineville which was included in the report to the minister.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Not the alternative of the amalgamation and relocation of some of the schools, but the actual capacity of Newtown North and Newtown to absorb some of the students who were already at Erskineville?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: And you are satisfied that there is additional surplus capacity at those two schools for the students who live, shall I say, on one side of the railway line, since the department has suggested that the railway line is a critical factor on whether you are heading towards Alexandria Park or somewhere else, and were you satisfied that there was sufficient enrolment capacity at those two schools?

Mr DALTON: Well, we were satisfied with the information that the department provided to argue that, yes.

CHAIR: I understand - and obviously it would be very true - that the leadership of the school would have an effect on its enrolments and the principal and plans that the principal might have. Was any information given to you when a new principal was appointed at Hunters Hill High School following Mr Cooper, who I understand was the principal during the declining period, that the new principal put in place a number of initiatives to build up the school enrolments?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: Were you aware of that?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: Did that have any impact on your consideration?

Mr DALTON: It was certainly considered by the committee, yes.

CHAIR: But those initiatives were not sufficient to justify a change in your recommendation?

Mr DALTON: No, as I recall, they were quite specialised initiatives.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Before the committee commenced its inquiries did you meet and determine what factors you would be looking for to perhaps indicate why schools should not close? What factors would have led you to recommend against closure?

Mr DALTON: I am sorry?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Well, presumably you start off on the basis that a school may or may not close. What factors would have been compelling for you to have recommended against closure? What circumstances would have needed to be in place?

Mr DALTON: Well, let me address it from a different point of view. The committee, I believe, undertook this task - and I am speaking for each individual - within mind having the most objective role that it could possibly undertake. We, I do not think, entered into the process with any preconceived view about whether a school should or should not close and I think the committee was scrupulous in not having any private conversations or discussions with anybody about that and, as a consequence, to hear what it was that the school communities and the whole broader school community was saying to us. We had no briefings from the department, we chose to conduct the hearings at the individual schools ahead of any present representations by the department.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But they did not convince you?

Mr DALTON: May I finish? So we did that very thoroughly I thought, and we equally asked that the department not have representatives at those hearings in the same way as we asked that the department have the opportunity of presenting its arguments.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Mr Dalton, did you interview the principal of Hunters Hill High School?

Mr DALTON: I had not quite finished answering the question that was asked. Part of the process also involved some time with an orientation at each school, including interviews and meetings with the principals, and then the more formal part of the day where each group had an opportunity of talking to us. We did that and of course we had some preconceived views then about whether the school may or may not or should or should not close. We were then presented not only with the submissions from the department and the presentations from the department but the various sets of demographic data and it was at that point that we tried to discuss and reach a position in respect of each of those schools.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: The Committee was told that the principal, Judith Felton, was asked not to partake in the presentation. How and when did you speak to her?

Mr DALTON: I am sorry?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: The Committee has received a submission which says that the principal of Hunters Hill High School, Judith Felton, was asked by the department not to partake in the presentation of the Hunters Hill submission. You said you spoke to the principal. On what basis? When, where and how?

Mr DALTON: Well, from the time we first arrived at the school, when we went with the principal who then arranged for us to be given an orientation of the school.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: So virtually a cup of tea?

Mr DALTON: No, it was not a cup of tea at all. It was a very extensive review of the school, quite apart from other groups. There were student groups, there was the foreshore committee, there was a bushland regeneration committee, the historical group. We visited classrooms, we had a very extensive orientation, during which process the principal, Ms Felton, certainly spoke to me and I presume to other members of the committee.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: In that case then did the principal also tell you that in fact the number of Year 7 students was increasing, from 47 in 2000 to 68 in 2001? Were you aware of that fact?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: And what did you think of that?

Mr DALTON: I do not know what the question means, I am sorry.

CHAIR: Dr Wong, could you rephrase the question?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Earlier there was no such evidence. I am presenting now that in fact the evidence before me is that indeed Hunters Hill High School Year 7 students had increased from 47 in the year 2000 to 68 in 2001. Is that not evidence that maybe the school is recruiting more students?

Mr DALTON: That is certainly true, but I also think that it was in respect to a special initiative or a special arrangement in terms of music or something else that was initiated.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: But was it not your claim earlier that there was not enough curriculum development or curriculum availability and that was one of the major reasons for closing Hunters Hill High School so, despite whatever methods Ms Felton used, it was not a good idea?

Mr DALTON: I didn't say it wasn't a good idea.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: What is your problem?

Mr DALTON: I don't have a problem. We were talking about a broad curriculum earlier.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: It was broader, wasn't it, by increasing music or otherwise?

Mr DALTON: I can't recall what it was but there were some special initiatives, yes.

CHAIR: I did raise this question earlier, but just to clarify it again, if other areas of Sydney are declining in population, like Port Jackson, there is no doubt that Hunters Hill is a developing area and some of the land that has been developed there in the last two years would be providing for families which will have children. Was that taken into account, that it is a developing area?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: It seems that what you have been basically doing is saying Hunters Hill is a viable school, however, there are empty spaces in other schools and the children could go there. That seems to be a strong factor in your assessment: If there were vacancies in other schools, then we don't really need Hunters Hill High School. That seems to be an important factor, if not the main factor in your -

Mr DALTON: I wouldn't have thought so. I thought I had tried to explain to the Committee that the issue was a combination of factors. It was to do with the curriculum opportunities; it was to do with maximising the schools that were in the region; it was to do with the costs that were likely to be required to re-establish Hunters Hill in terms of the maintenance and work that was needed. So I think it was an issue related to the demographic and the future likely population of the school. Those of us on the committee who recommended the closure of Hunters Hill considered the broadest range of factors in reaching that situation.

CHAIR: Just to clarify the point you made a moment ago that there was information you were given that it would cost a lot of money to apparently upgrade the Hunters Hill High School, was that conveyed to you in a submission from the department?

Mr DALTON: Either in an oral submission or a written submission.

CHAIR: Do you remember what that figure was?

Mr DALTON: No, I do not, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Were you aware when you visited the school that it was in such decline that it would cost a large amount of money to renovate it?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: That was obvious, was it?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Can I just ask whether weightings such as community views about the school were considered?

Mr DALTON: Yes, and I think the report on Hunters Hill tried to identify what it was in terms of the community's concern about the future of the school that ought to have been taken into account.

CHAIR: Just to finish off one of my earlier questions about the cost to renovate the school, did you hear the figure \$16 million?

Mr DALTON: I can't recall, Mr Chairman. It was a large sum of money.

CHAIR: Of that size?

Mr DALTON: Something like that, yes.

CHAIR: You do not think that was exorbitant?

Mr DALTON: No, I could see that a fair amount of work was necessary.

CHAIR: That was accurate.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Mr Chairman, on that, the report by Peter Haigh, the district superintendent, the one that has been the subject of the freedom of information, in its description of Hunters Hill High School, the Director-General in his personal view says something quite different from the conclusion that you have drawn. The district superintendent's comment in his strategic plan was, "70 percent fibro, Bristol buildings, the library and some specialist rooms in good condition". He has drawn the conclusion that they were in good condition. You have drawn the conclusion that they were near the end of their economic life. Our Committee is now faced with some different conclusions drawn about this. Did your conclusions come from an assessment by the department, did you have an independent assessment or was it based on your observations of the building?

Mr DALTON: I think it was certainly observation, but as I mentioned to the Chairman, I am sure there was some submission made by the department about the projections of expenditure on the school, yes.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. It is now 25 to one. We have to have a lunch break and come back again, so you are now into your lunch break. That is the problem.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Mr Dalton, is it true that the curriculum at Glebe and Balmain is narrower than at Hunters Hill? You were saying earlier that one of the criteria for the assessment was the curriculum provided for these students, but is it true Glebe High School and Balmain High School have less curriculum than Hunters Hill, yet you advised the closure of Hunters Hill High School?

Mr DALTON: I don't think that is an unfair question. Well, I do not know. The short answer is I do not know.

CHAIR: We will have to close this particular part of the hearing, and, again, if members of the Committee want to put on notice questions to you and you have three weeks to answer them, would

that be adequate?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

CHAIR: Subject to your ability to answer the questions.

Mr DALTON: That is right.

CHAIR: If they are absolutely impossible, then you can't answer them. Assuming that they are questions that you can answer, would the members of the Committee give those to the Secretariat by five o'clock tomorrow.

(The witness withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

IAN HARRY BURNLEY, Professor, University of New South Wales, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Professor BURNLEY: Yes.

CHAIR: If at any stage you should consider that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, I will just read some notes I have made. The first points are just about population projections generally. Population forecasting for small areas of cities is difficult at all times. It is particularly difficult for established areas, areas that have already been built out, which we are dealing with here.

Fifteen to sixteen years, which the population reports are dealing with, is a medium to long range projection period by any standard in which some variation from eventual reality is inevitable effectively. An uncertainty which is quite clear in all the reports is the amount of medium density development to occur in school catchment areas and an uncertainty about the demographic characteristics of those who live in medium density housing, and various reports have dealt with that, one a bit more than others. There is considerable uncertainty about the future demand for private secondary school education in the inner city and I think everybody is aware of the trend of many people, quite happy, preferring to send their children to public primary schools, but there are strong attitudes crystallising and that have been going on for some time towards getting children going to private schools, more particularly among the middle income people whom I think we would assume, and the evidence in the reports presents, are going to be living in the inner city areas more and more, so there is considerable uncertainty there.

Population projection is not prediction and in a text book that was published by the Federal Government that I wrote myself in the 1980s and that has been widely used I called it population estimation for small areas, even though a lot of the methodology being used by myself or which has been used in these reports here, which is on the whole quite sound I may add on both sides but I can answer questions on that in a minute, was used, but I would prefer the term "estimation" particularly for parts of cities and for established areas of cities such as what we are dealing with here.

I have a few more points about uncertainties in the inner city, if you would like me to refer to them. There is uncertainty as to the extent that urban consolidation will change population characteristics, particularly if there are seven, ten or higher storey developments, as we know there are on the upper end of that range in Pymont-Ultimo which has been discussed in some of the work, or in the area near Green Park station, the area in south Sydney. While population fertility is falling, there is no hard evidence that couples electing to have children have significantly altered their preferences for detached or semi-detached housing on a long term basis. Now a number of the urban consolidation developments, particularly these big ones, do assume that there has been a radical change in preferences. We do not have hard evidence in the Australian social science literature that I am aware of that there has been a significant preference change. In fact, from a personal point of view, I do not think that these big developments in the inner and middle ring suburbs will significantly slow the outer suburban expansion which parents with children type families prefer, in fact a lot of my own research can indicate that. I have projects under way looking at preferences of people moving to outer suburban Sydney, then peri-metropolitan areas, the southern tablelands and all those kind of areas. These are uncertainties which sort of inform this whole discussion of the technical reports before us.

Price changes going on in the inner city housing market, which various reports have referred to, may mean that the current preferences for families for separate dwellings may be mediated by price pressures. Now that is a possibility. Professor Phibbs has referred to that in his material. As price pressures increase in the inner areas, people's preferences for accessibility to the city centre may outweigh their desire for more outdoor private space. That is a possibility, particularly with low fertility and the fact of movement more towards one child families, which is quite common, although there is some uncertainty about that.

There is still another question, which is contextual, and that is: How important relatively are the inner city preferences for families to assume the conversion to apartments? I mean are people really prepared to value being in the inner city, such as the inner inner-west, which is mostly what we are talking about; are their preferences so strong for being there that they are prepared to live in apartments as opposed to semi-detached housing, walk-up apartments which are dotted through, villa units, terraces and so on? That is another uncertainty about the future.

I do have other observations about broader population factors in Sydney that I do not think have been taken into account by any of the reports which I think should be mentioned.

CHAIR: Would you like to mention those at this stage?

Professor BURNLEY: The first point is the question that it seems that Sydney in the late 1990s has retained more population. I think everybody is aware that Sydney has been attracting more immigration, disproportionate amounts of immigration, something close to 39-40 percent of the national intake, which raises an issue that I do not think any of the reports have sufficiently looked at: Net migration by age in terms of the components of change. Now there are good reasons given why, if there is a short time frame, you cannot disaggregate the international migration from the internal. However, I think ideally that should have been done, particularly with changing immigration patterns, the fact that some immigrants will come in to rental housing in the inner city and they may have children who will be going to public school.

CHAIR: And I suspect another point would be that they often have large families.

Professor BURNLEY: Sometimes on arrival they may have larger families, although immigrant fertility on the whole, population fertility, is very much approaching the Australian norm now. It is converging quite definitely, there is a lot of evidence about that.

The point about this retention rate, as I think you are all probably aware - and there has been a lot of press coverage about it - is that the population of Sydney growth rates in the late 1990s, for the first time in 25 years, have come up above the rest of the State and are comparable with the nation or even slightly higher. Now there are two factors in that, continuing immigration and the focus on Sydney, but the primary reason is an increased retention rate, that that internal migration net loss which has gone to the coast, interstate, over decades since the early 1970s, has slowed very definitely in the late 1990s from indirect evidence, bearing in mind that we are handicapped by the 2001 census data not being available until next month.

One reason that gives us evidence of this is the estimated resident population which both major contesting reports, if we can call them that, have used - one report more than others, and that is the one representing the Hunters Hill Parents and Teachers Association. It estimated resident populations which are available by local government area right up to 2000. These certainly show in metropolitan Sydney quite an upswing, suggesting fewer people are leaving, and I think that has affected the data of the report I have just mentioned to a fair extent and it is legitimate to use the data to an extent insofar as they are officially published data of the ABS. However, I have to mention - and this is not the fault of any of those people preparing the report - that there is some discussion among people who use the data, and including some people in DUAP, that maybe the population estimates, and that is what they are, using medicheck, births and deaths and all sorts of data like that, for 2000, are a bit high for Sydney. Now that is a question mark and it is only going to be confirmed in the census.

I may add that there are drawbacks when you are using census population counts and that is that they are the counted population in the census, and that is what is going to come out next month, that is what has been used by the consultants in the main reports here up to 1996, but we do know that in the 1996 census, whereas the population count was 3.7 million for metropolitan Sydney, the estimated resident population was 150,000 more when that was disaggregated over time. The count is just where people are on census night with some allowance for tourists and people in hotels. Ideally a proper analysis of change over time would use - none of the reports have done this and it may be that they did not have time - the usual resident populations from each census which comes out some time

after the count data. Unfortunately, the usual resident populations are not in the C data, nor are they in those community profile change data that had been legitimately used.

So there is a problem with the report I mentioned. What they have done with the net migration estimate, they have taken the estimated resident population changes for 1995-2000, which is fine, they are series you can use together - you cannot use the estimates directly against the census, the ABS points that out in its own technical addenda - but what they did do is take net migration, 1991-1996, and then they looked at the estimated net migration using the residual method 1995-2000 and using the estimates by comparing the births minus deaths for the areas in question and then the differences in net migration, and because the ERPs are up I think it does suggest, because of the different sets of data being used, that it is up partly artificially. However, I think there is something in the fact that the ERPs, estimated resident populations, this is the annual data the ABS come up with in the absence of the census, that there has been this increase in retention rate in Sydney, and if that is the case, it may be in the inner city as well, which is reflected in this data, but there has been a bit of a turn around in the city in terms of more people being held. Therefore, the higher estimate of the second report for the Hunters Hill area, although I have to say I think it is slighted a bit favourably towards Hunters Hill High School, but it is a scientific piece of work. I think that the estimates are up partly for our data factual reasons but they may be reflecting a turnaround with the outflow from Sydney compared to what had been going on hitherto.

The other reports by Yusuf et al, and also by Phibbs, are scientific pieces of work. A general critique I would have of all the work, though there is a variation on the amount of residential redevelopment going on, that urban consolidation, I think I would have liked to have seen a low, medium and higher estimation in the total population profile. Also another general critique is fixing fertility, which is taking the general rate at 1.7 and holding it constant. Portugal and Italy are down to 1.1. Ours is 1.7, almost the highest fertility in the industrialised world apart from New Zealand. There is no evidence that the total fertility rate of 1.7 is going to remain that high. It may continue to fall. I personally hope not and would like to see it come back to about 2, because I think there are overall problems for Australia with a very low birth rate being one of its major problems down the track, but what they have done here is hold it constant, for quite good reasons.

Another problem when you use the total fertility rate for small areas is you have to realise that the total fertility rate, which is the standard technique used in demography, or this total fertility rate is not very good for comparing small areas because the low rate in the inner city is very much because there is a high proportion of women in the child bearing ages who are electing to or are not having children, and that has pushed it down, which often is associated with the stage in the life cycle in which people go into apartments and that kind of thing. So that is a problem.

I think if I were doing it, I would have had a higher fertility assumption, maybe about 1.9 for most of the areas. You must remember of course, and the point is made clear I think in both reports, that a lot of the young children have already been born and then we are talking about them surviving through up to 2016 and so on and so forth. So we need to be aware of that. A number of the children involved up to age 17 have just been born around the top end of the 12 or 11 to 17 age range.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: What are the fertility rates like in the Hunters Hill area? In a sort of middle class, rich area they would be lower, wouldn't they?

Professor BURNLEY: As it said in the reports, it is very low. It is down to 1.1, 1.2, which is the same as Portugal, but it is reflecting not necessarily so much the people who are having children, they are having fewer children, but rather the fact that in the denominator there is a lot of people there who are at the stage of their lifestyle where they have not got together with anybody yet, they may move out, establish a relationship later and then start having children, it may be elsewhere or they may stay.

The housing cost factor is actually involved with that, because I think house price increases may push a lot of young people out, particularly if you take the quoted figures, which I am very glad the reports alluded to, particularly the Yusuf et al report about the house prices and the developments throughout the various areas, the apartment prices being around about \$450,000 for two bedroom

apartments. There are a lot of young people, kids of middle-class parents who will not be able to afford that unless the middle-class parents give them some money to start, give them some help with the mortgage, particularly as interest rates are now going to rise.

CHAIR: Summing up, you comment about the R Owen's report. You have given it some pluses and minuses. At the end of the day, would it still be reasonably accurate?

Professor BURNLEY: I think, given a number of the assumptions, that both sets of reports are fair. They are both scientific inquiries. There is a lot of judgment involved with this. That is one of the reasons why I would prefer, even though the reports are all using the cohort component models and the fact of what is involved when you replace housing stock is something called a not yield model, which DUAP has regularly used and so on, but it involves degrees of error, particularly when you are getting at the demographic characteristics which might flow on to the actual fertility rate of kids being born and things like that. There are other much more critical issues too, which is not a fault in the reports, which have to do with the preferences towards - talking about secondary schools now - the preferences towards private schooling and all of this kind of thing, and the analyses of retention rates are good and so on and so forth.

I may add that the mortality analyses in both reports are fine. They hardly affect the age groups involved. Using the cohort component model is an approach, although most formal demographers would argue that using the cohort component approach for small areas is very hairy because there are some probability assumptions that are not held, and one of these is this net migration figure, the enormous population turnover that goes on in that kind of zone of the city for example. There are certain probability assumptions that if your cohort is surviving, that is ageing the people by the life table probabilities which have been done, there are assumptions that the base population has largely stayed.

We know in fact from the internal migration data which are available that there is a lot of population turnover going on in the inner city areas. So some would argue that you should only do cohort component survival for populations of about 100,000 or more people, but that is a judgment. Within the parameters done here, it has been done by both groups basically well, but I think there are so many factors involved, that if you are talking about a school like Hunters Hill to 2016, it is very hard using these techniques to prove the absolute desirability of it closing or remaining open because there are so many other extraneous factors involved, preferences particularly of middle-class people towards private education. One of the reports mentions, well, maybe if there was more streaming in the other State schools, then more might stay with those State schools rather than go to particularly prestigious private schools or try to get into selective State high schools, which of course are not in this region, but there are all those societal factors which are not predictable.

CHAIR: You said earlier 40 percent of the folk from overseas are in Sydney?

Professor BURNLEY: Of those coming to Australia, settling in metropolitan Sydney, yes.

CHAIR: How much of that percentage would be in that inner city area, as opposed to going out to--

Professor BURNLEY: A factor in many settling in the west or the north, in the west many of the skilled migrants from East Asia are on higher incomes, in the IT industries or in professions in the managerial areas. Many have been settling in the northern suburbs, but a number do settle in the southern and inner suburbs, and certainly Strathfield, Ashfield and parts of Drummoyne are becoming very attractive to some groups there as they are pleasant environments. Also many numbers coming from the Indian subcontinent, who are in professions and managerial areas, well educated, are also settling in those areas, and any of you going through will see the institutional response as well, quite pleasant habitations.

We do know from work that DUAP has done that there is more tolerance for medium density apartment living among many of the immigrant populations than there has been for the older resident Australian population. I do not mean older in an elderly sense. This is where you get into cultural

factors. Many Australians have in the past preferred low density, and that underlies school and underlies a lot of the movement out of Sydney.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Just on that last point, Professor, you have seen the material that South Sydney Council suggests is an analysis of the Kimberley Grove Estate at Kensington and the sort of people that live there?

Professor BURNLEY: There was a summary in one of the reports actually, yes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: That would tend to suggest that with those immigrant populations there are quite large numbers of families with children.

Professor BURNLEY: And who are prepared to live in medium density environments, which might have been, in terms of their own backgrounds, by their previous backgrounds, low density.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Indeed, that is largely relevant in terms of the fact that the department has heavily relied upon studying Ultimo/Pymont -

Professor BURNLEY: Yes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: - and trying to extrapolate the relevance of that towards the Green Square.

Professor BURNLEY: I think there are problems if you do that. I think Pymont is different.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Would you like to expand on some of the difficulties in extrapolating between the two?

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, first of all while some of the price range is similar, it is a bit more up-market at Pymont/Ultimo. It is certainly a development which has put itself forward as being for inner city life-styles. We know there is a lot of single and unattached people living there, with an imbalanced situation in favour of women in fact, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with that. There isn't a great deal of evidence though of it being family centred, and there are a lot of reasons traditionally from a planning perspective, as well as social demographic reasons, why many people with families and mothers and children will not settle in high rise apartments because there is not anywhere for them to play or the children cannot be seen by the parents when they are playing, and many body corporates have restrictions on children playing in stairwells and so on, and unless a development provides play areas for children, and I suppose degrees of supervision, and that they can be seen, then there might be problems. Pymont/Ultimo has got an indoor swimming pool and so on, but it is not oriented towards families, having visited it.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I suppose the question I would really most like help with is in terms of this work that the department is doing, if you had to provide them with a check list of things that they should look at if they are going to have some demographic aspect to their decision-making, what are the things that they should have considered before making the decision?

Professor BURNLEY: Well, these reports have a number of the factors in them, but I think that what has to be considered is how the housing market is going, particularly the renting and owning proportion. Secondly, insofar as Pymont-Ultimo is being used as a model, the extent to which it is owner occupancy as opposed to renting and this information cannot get beyond the owner occupancy of people living there from the census, there are inadequacies in the census, as you would probably be aware. You may be aware of this or it might be quite a surprise: The 1996 census shows that, of the people living in high-rise apartments in the CBD, 80 percent of the occupants are renting. Some are owned by corporations because of Sydney's global role and executives coming through, but 80 percent are renting. It is not about owner occupier families living in the CBD bringing a youthful life to the CBD at all and I would not be surprised that that may occur in time, unless there are covenants against renting out something you have bought, and I am not sure about some developments, whether there would be some of these or not, but I think there are dangers certainly in extrapolating from the

Pymont-Ultimo development, say, to the other big ones that are going on in the inner city.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are there any specific tools that you would use?

Professor BURNLEY: Well, I would look at the housing market trends over time. I think, although the main reports here certainly have done very well to relate a lot of trends to those of Sydney, what one has to do is to look at what is happening over time, what younger people have had to do in metropolitan Sydney over time and we find the falling ownership rates at younger ages, particularly under 40 or 45, which of course are the child bearing ages, and they fall, and the peak was in the 1966 and 1971 censuses. Since then there has been a falling away, probably for lifestyle reasons, uncertainty about relationships, but I would argue the housing cost factor and that affects where a lot of young couples who wish to have children are going to live in the city. We have known in the past, for example, that many young couples from the north shore cannot afford to live there, even though they have grown up there, so they move out to the north-west and so on and may later come back towards the inner city.

CHAIR: The Federal Government has announced an increase in immigration, plus the refugees, and if the majority of those people come to Sydney do you think it is dangerous or perhaps a policy which may create problems in the future to actually sell schools, sell properties, because obviously you cannot buy property to start a school again.

Professor BURNLEY: I would not sell any of the school properties off at all and in fact I think I would probably - partly intuitively here - keep Hunters Hill school open for a while if I was doing it and wait and see what happens about those events. Remember from the reports, and people would be aware, the catchment area for Hunters Hill is quite extensive and, of course, now that we do not have zoning for primary or high schools, as has been made out well in the reports, people can pass one school and go down the road because at one particular point in time it got a reputation for being good, and these things shift over time and if the principle of choice is being maintained then I would keep them open. I can understand the government's point of view, wanting to rationalise, and obviously in that south Sydney area there is going to be rationalisation, big development, I think before probably coming together to be one large community school at the primary level and so forth, but I would be reluctant to sell off that kind of real estate myself because you would never be able to afford to buy it back in.

I must mention to you that, if you go back to after the second world war period when we had the heavy immigration of southern Europeans, okay, it was a lower income kind of migration because the priorities for migration were different at the time, but the impact on the inner city was so profound that new high schools were built essentially for those populations, particularly I think Marrickville High School, because you had many children and then many of the immigrants migrated here and started having children here. That has been one of the distinctive things about Australian migration, that many people come to Australia because it is a very good place to have families, they are aware of its security and therefore they start their families here, and some who come into these inner west suburbs that we are talking about and the south could well be doing that there. Now it is going to depend on the housing market. Some, first of all, will rent. If that contracts, of course, and it is all owner occupied, they might not be able to move in. On the other hand, we do know from the preferences from work done by DUAP and some others that many immigrants with families are prepared to live in apartments, and with young children. If that is the case then that would obviously have impacts on school enrolments in the areas that we are talking about.

CHAIR: Or in villas. A house and land may be very expensive, but once that is redeveloped into, say, four villas, which is happening in those areas, the unit price for that villa is a lot cheaper and could come within their price range and that would increase the population.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes. Again, it is going to depend on the nature of this development. We assume that they are going to be kept at a high standard. I think one of the issues for the inner city still, in my view, is that with these apartment redevelopments, assuming urban consolidation is desirable and I think some is, there should have been ideally some low income housing incorporated.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: I would like to see whether you agree with my observation as a migrant. As a migrant and as someone who works in the city and as someone who has been involved in the city of Sydney in planning for many years, in Ultimo 85 percent of all the units built are one or two bedroom units, so that does not really encourage a family to live there, although the council has enforced that any developments have 10-15 percent three bedrooms. With rental units, a lot of students come to the city to study, so a lot of them are student population and therefore again no family. Those families who do migrate and choose to live in Australia, as you say, eventually adopt the same patterns. I would like to have five kids; my wife said two, so we do exactly what the rest of the community does. Before we got married we lived with our family or we lived in the eastern suburbs, but we cannot afford to stay there with the kids, so we moved to Bankstown like everybody else because it is cheaper, but ultimately that is where the growth is, that is where migrants will go and live, in the western suburbs, because it is affordable. If there is a population increase, whether it is increasing population of migrants or local Australians, ultimately the increase or the pressure is in the west comparatively and not in the inner suburbs.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, I would agree with that. I would not say there is pressure in the inner suburbs. I mean government policy by pushing for urban consolidation is trying to hold the lateral expansion, as we all know, and big developments such as the one in Sydney's south and Pyrmont - we have not seen all the impacts yet - may create local pressures, but these are experiments to a certain extent. I agree about the prices. I think there is only one local government area in Sydney that has a median house price below \$200,000 and I think that is Wyong. At Campbelltown I think - I saw the figures - it is about \$226,000, that is for a house, and even at Bankstown it has become more expensive, and I agree there is an enormous population mix there, but some immigrants can afford, like Australians, and are quite driven to go for environmental amenity where there are present residential neighbourhoods. Haberfield is one of these inner city areas that we are discussing, Ashfield, right through there, where there is quite a mix of housing, and I think it is very important that council policies and DUAP should preserve that mix and not go for too much consolidation and to a certain extent that is happening in that the big consolidation is being concentrated to a fair extent in a few areas, although all councils, of course, as everybody knows, are being required to build a certain amount of medium density housing throughout the city.

I would just answer the question that I think more immigrants, including skilled immigrants, could go to those inner city areas. I agree the overall population pressures are on the outer areas, but I think to rationalise school enrolments or schools too far in the inner city could be a disadvantage, just as I would argue that if you go too far with hospital closures in the inner city there is a disadvantage. In fact I have heard some medical specialists mention, and from an equity point of view rather than a personal point of view, that maybe there were too many district hospitals built in suburbs which are now starting to lose populations as they grow but once were outer, and there should have been some attention to where the public transport routes focused for basic hospital services, so to a certain extent that has relevance to high school enrolments in that the catchment areas are usually larger for high schools.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I have two or three interrelated questions. Firstly, you were asked about the department using Ultimo and you, quite correctly I think, pointed out that Ultimo is perhaps not typical.

Professor BURNLEY: Pyrmont, yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Well, Pyrmont-Ultimo, but as you would know in fact from the documents you have seen there is a considerable amount of demographic work being done on, for instance, the South Sydney Council area and so on.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Ultimo was the example that was used this morning, but in all the written material it goes well beyond that. I just wanted to take up with you, given what you have said about population, whether you have looked at things the department has provided about the capacity of the schools at present and the remaining schools. For instance, if you look at the list of

schools affected by the strategy, the figure we have been given is that at the moment only 61 percent of the capacity is being utilised and even following closures - this is high schools and comprehensive high schools, all the existing ones - it would still only be 75 percent. That capacity presumably allows for a fair amount of population growth amongst the adolescent age group.

Professor BURNLEY: It does partly, though remember you have preferences being expressed for private schools and some people are travelling to private schools located outside this whole region altogether, maybe the eastern suburbs and so on.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: And so are you assuming that that will cease and that the capacity will need to provide for all those children?

Professor BURNLEY: It might level out. I think I saw some figures and they are roughly in the eastern third of Sydney, say, arcing from about Manly down, but going right into the CBD and across a bit, about 40 percent of high school students are in private schools.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But I am talking about the inner west area.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, but even here for Hunters Hill I think it was 70 percent or something, I mean it is very high in some.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Fifty.

Professor BURNLEY: Fifty, is it, yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But even so, if following the building plan and the proposed closures and so on there is extra capacity of 1,670 in high schools, it would take quite a long time to fill that capacity up.

Professor BURNLEY: Well, yes. You talk about spreading it out among that whole range of high schools?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: No, only the schools in the area.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, in the area, yes. It is a population of one good sizeable high school, I would quite agree.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I do not think we have ever had a high school of 1,670.

Professor BURNLEY: The thing that I would be concerned about is the uncertainty about how many people. This retention in Sydney that I mentioned definitely happened right through the 1990s, from the work I have done myself independently with Professor Peter Murphy at University of New South Wales. We were looking at something called the population turnaround, which is the net loss from metropolitan areas or people even avoiding the metropolitan areas - these are primarily Australians but some immigrants are involved - to go to the coast or to other States in which housing costs and amenity and environment are factors. Up until 1996--

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Sorry, I am asking about--

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, but hold on, let me get to this because it is relevant to what is happening in the inner city. You have seen the figures and the projections about the declining enrolments in some of the schools and there have been declining populations up to 1996 certainly, a bit of uncertainty between 1996 and 2001, but if Sydney is starting to hold more people, the population retention rate has increased with fewer people involved with a net loss to the country, that has implications for the inner city populations too.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: A large percentage of those people are children of a relevant age.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I remember when I lived in what was then the Drummoyne municipality, now Canada Bay, being staggered by the figures and I think from about the onset of the Depression, which is about when Drummoyne stopped growing, until certainly the 1990s the population of Drummoyne had I think, despite all the units in Five Dock and Drummoyne and so on, hovered between 29,000 and 31,000 for that whole 70 years or so, and that always seemed to me a reasonable indication of the kind of pattern, and that was of course including huge changes in terms of closed industrial areas replaced by quite high-rise units, up to eight storeys, it included influxes over time of particularly Greeks and Italians, at times living in two bedroom houses with up to six children, but whatever happened during all that period the total population, as I said, tended to hover between 29,000 and 31,000.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, and there was a lot of medium density development in that period too. What we can now do from the census reports that we could not do earlier is get the characteristics of people living in apartments and analyse those. I totally agree with the point you are making.

I can just give you a very quick example. I did the social planning for Bankstown Council in the late 1980s and I was looking at 1981-1986 census data. The number of medium density developments, the units and the walk-up apartments, units were down to 1700, yet the population of Bankstown fell by 1500. Those bald figures though do not tell us enough about the age structure, except on the whole, given Australian people, unless there is a radical change of the older resident, longer resident Australian population, there needs to be a quantum change I think in attitudes towards medium density living or more three bedroom apartments available, as you were saying before, for people to be prepared to buy them. One of the problems why that failed after the war, and there was excellent work done in a book *Our Australian Society* by M B George, a ten thousand word essay on housing in Sydney, and this was published in the 1970s, why the apartment early consolidation initiatives failed in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the Eastern suburbs, proportionately at the time, was that the three bedroom apartments cost the same as the three bedroom house.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I only have one more thing.

CHAIR: You took a lot of time in that story. Can we just go back to questions, rather than long stories.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We have heard quite a lot about the wisdom or unwisdom. You would be aware of the closure in the last 15 years of Drummoyne Boys High, Leichhardt Girls High, Meadowbank Boys High, Ryde High, Dover Heights, Wilkins High. It seems to me that if you actually look back over the last say ten or 15 years in the area we are talking about, something like a dozen high schools have closed and none have opened, and I just wondered how that fits in with what you said before about opposing essentially doing something about these schools?

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, well, some of those declines occurred with rationalisation. Some of them have taken place because the number of kids has fallen whenever there has been an overall fertility decline that has gone on in the population as a whole and that started since the 1970s and is still continuing, but in some of those LGAs, as the reports have shown, those trends have continued. One of the reports shows the trends very well going right back to 1978 or 1980 I think, virtually annual rates of change and so on, of decline. One or two have turned around, such as Ryde more recently, and we need to look at why that has been going on, because there has not been a massive degree of apartment building there, but some turn around for life cycle reasons or perhaps because Ryde for example is an area which is a middle ring suburb, some people might favour it because it is accessible and it has got lower densities and will come back in, but we do know from some localised interurban life history mobility studies that many people have got out of the inner city or they have had to move out because of costs, go to the middle ring and outer and then will actually come back in later in their lifestyle.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Three high schools in Ryde have closed.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, and I know one or two primary schools with hardly any children left in them, for example Gladesville Primary. I know that because the geographical society of New South Wales has had its headquarters there. More and more schools, or more and more rooms have become empty, but then in some cases the schools are used for multi-purpose or special services and it keeps the school open. That is quite a substantial and large primary school.

I agree it is much easier to do that at the high school level, but I would raise the issue that if you sell them all off, then you are not going to be able to get the schools back, but a little bit of rationalisation is involved. The point I am making is it is very hard to say which one from this kind of population projection, although I think there is scientific excellence in the reports, because there are too many uncertainties to control over a 15, 16 or 17 year period from now.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: We have spoken a lot today about where people are living, the types of households they are living in. Is there any research, and I am thinking in particular in relation to the primary schools that we are looking at? One of the other factors that has changed in the last 20 years in particular is the number of women in the workforce. Have there been any studies done on the number of women or families who locate their child in a primary school not adjacent to where they live but adjacent to where they work, and, if so, is it a relevant factor? I note for example at Green Square one of the statistics is we are going to get 25,000 more residents and 15,000 workers in that immediate area and that is a significant influx as well.

Professor BURNLEY: First of all, I am not sure that all the people - you have got 20,000 people and 15,000, and that assumes that a lot of the people who are living there are working there, but I think there will be an enormous movement out. We already know now there is so much relocation of jobs from the inner city to the outer. There is a lot of commuting out now, as you would all be aware, not only in industry but in office employment as the CBD has changed its function towards higher order kind of offices. So you have got all those factors working.

There is work which has touched on that issue by the Institute of Family Studies which is well worth pursuing. They have had a longitudinal study looking at families in South Sydney, which is one of the areas that we are concerned with here, compared to families in Campbelltown and compared with a Northern Territory group of families, and that has been going on for some time and they have already published quite a lot. That is a federally funded research body, a very good one.

CHAIR: I know it is hard to answer a question like this, but when you look into the future, Professor, you know that governments are worried about that fall in birth rate, and you have said that Portugal is down to 1.1. I understand there are a lot of policies being devised to try to bring up that fertility level, if you like, the number of children per family. It is probably hard to estimate what effect those policies would have, like maternity leave and so on, if over a period of time they were introduced. Is there any way you can make calculations to say we may be able to turn that birth rate around from 1.7 up to 2.2?

Professor BURNLEY: I do not think anybody, any country - a number of countries are trying, particularly in Skandinavia, but very few countries have succeeded anything near that, and as you know Europe has been going down and we are talking quite seriously now of Germany which has lost a million and a half people through natural decrease in the last two years. Instead of it having a current 80 million, it could have 25 million by 2100, and many other European countries are having natural decreases now, Russia, Austria, Hungary, Denmark and so on, that is deaths exceeding births because the birth rate is so low, in which case you have a situation around about 2035 where in some of those countries 40 percent of the population will be aged over 65. There is nothing necessarily intrinsically wrong with that, but I think there are a lot of serious problems for the economy in a society like that and a whole host of things about the transport provision and so on and so forth. Estimates for Adelaide are putting its population that is aged over 60-65, this is metro Adelaide, at about 30 to 33 percent about 2020, because not only has immigration, which has a certain rejuvenation effect, slowed right down in Adelaide, because of industrial and structural changes, but there is a net internal migration loss from Adelaide interstate. You get the two factors operating together, it increases ageing

in situ. That has got a lot of implications. They have got big infrastructure planning, in which case you have got to provide public transport for a lot of people who as they age will not be driving a car. That is a different set of problems to what we have got here.

My main thrust is I think particularly the Yusuf work, but also the other report, is quite scientific and competent. They would know I think, they being obviously the terms of reference, to try to project the population in forecasting, using demographic techniques, usually the total component method and to varying extent they have factored in a lot of other information, which in the end has to be used judgmentally. I would think that there has to be further analysis on the inner city as to the income structure and likely income structure of the population, what the housing market is going to be like, how much renting will be left, what renting market will be left and at what level the rental housing market will be and what quality of renting, because that will affect how many immigrants come in, but also other Australians coming in from the country and getting a foot in Sydney as well, and those factors then could affect the number of children likely to be there, particularly young children.

CHAIR: Are you expecting any major changes in the next census figures, which I know we do not have, between the 1996 and 2001 census?

Professor BURNLEY: If the estimated resident population, the annual data which are being used - and I should explain how the ABS do that. It is mentioned in the reports. They use births and deaths, and you can come up with quite fine age structures from that, but also they are using heavily now the Medi Check data, Medicare data in population estimation. They used to use electoral roll transfers, but that is fairly deficient because a number of people, perhaps 200,000, are not on them, particularly young people.

The census is not perfect. As one of the reports mentions, the attendance at primary school seems to be under recorded in 1996, and a big problem in the census in 1991 and 1996 was the number of students actually attending high school and university, and the ABS has admitted that, there is under recording of that. It is a drop and pick up census and some questions are harder to answer than others. So there can be not only under-enumeration in the census, which is relevant in terms of looking at past trends by the way, when you are looking at those total populations in the city, if the under-enumeration fraction at all has varied between censuses, and the ABS has figures but they do not know the extent of under-enumeration for small areas. There is that point that has to be remembered.

The other thing is I think the census will show that if the ERPs, the estimated resident population, trends since 1995 on an annual basis are correct, that the population of Sydney will have increased more than it was doing, partly because more people have stayed in and are not moving out. It is a hypothesis, but I think it will show that.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Will that have any specific local implications for the Hunters Hill area or South Sydney?

Professor BURNLEY: I would suggest it would, and I would say they have got to be immediately investigated, although ideally we have got the count data. You must get the estimated resident population from the census, the usual resident population from the census. That uses the question where you normally would buy. You would be aware that what is provided in the count data, occupation, income and age and the basic stuff that comes out is where people were on census night, not where they usually live.

CHAIR: Could it be argued then that perhaps no firm decision should be made to sell those properties, other than what has been made up to this point, until that census 2001 could be fully analysed to see what impact that has on the future for demographics?

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, I would argue that from the census, but I would stress it is very hard when you are going 15 to 20 years ahead at this scale to be accurate, and you will be aware that the ABS, which it has done up to 2040 and 2050 in the steps for ten years and five years, always provides a range, and you need the range of estimates considering low, medium and high and different

levels of redevelopment and more detail on that, and more detail on the socio-economic and housing market changes in the inner city. But yes, I would hold it until you get the next census, and not only the count, but the post censal enumeration estimates, how accurate it was and all of that needs to be considered.

CHAIR: The early point that was made that a dozen high schools have been closed over the last few years, maybe that is an argument to draw the line.

Professor BURNLEY: It could be. I would not say we have got to keep closing just because we closed 12. If there is a bit of a turnaround in some suburbs, and there may be, we need to look at that very carefully. I may add that the way cities have tended to develop up to now, you would be aware of the life cycle of people - you fully develop a suburb, the population grows, the kids leave home, the parents age, there is some replacement, on the whole the population eventually falls, and that is one of the reasons, because of the wasteful way we suburbanise over several decades. There was always waste in school infrastructure, and the education department got around to a certain extent, perhaps rightly, some of the changes or rejuvenations or massive developments with demountables, which can be moved here and there and so on and so forth, they are not necessarily very aesthetic, but it has a certain logical, but the way suburbs develop, unless you develop them in such a way that you can add piecemeal infilling over time, the population must fall and the school age population in particular must fall steeply. So in a sense you have wasted infrastructure in that sense.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: That is one of the reasons why I gave my Drummoyne example because it is the case - it has certainly been the pattern in Sydney - that it is a multi-generational pattern over decades and decades and we have not seen any developments that have made a huge difference to that pattern.

Professor BURNLEY: Drummoyne did gentrify. Most people know about the term "gentrification" which has come into the literature, which is not the same as medium density redevelopments--

CHAIR: Would you give your definition of it?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It was not gentrification, it was the worst 1950s and 1960s walk-up blocks--

Professor BURNLEY: Yes, but it has had gentrification now.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Drummoyne also had enormous quantities of boarding houses.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Particularly around the old Dunlop factory.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes. With respect, the point I was trying to make was that there are different types of gentrification which urban analysts look at. Paddington was the classic example that most people would know about. It usually meant a tenure change, exactly as you said, from rental, boarding houses, to single person households, often middle-class people who refurbished existing housing. We are not talking about destruction, we are talking about refurbishing existing housing. The population initially fell and then it started coming back and there have been studies showing that and how it has affected school enrolments, particularly at the primary level, at Woolloomooloo, Darlinghurst and some areas like that, there have been local studies which have examined that, some students' thesis work, but that happened after the initial drop in population with gentrification.

Taking the Drummoyne example where it was larger scale than Paddington, some developers bought whole streets and converted them to owner occupier. Other parts of the gentrification process were people who came in and did up their own homes, as you know, so there is a whole variation. We do not use the middle-classing of the inner suburbs via gentrification in the same way. It is not quite

the same process as redevelopment for middle-class people.

CHAIR: So could you just give your definition of the term?

Professor BURNLEY: Gentrification? Yes, usually an area becoming "middle class" which was formerly "working class", usually with a tenure change from renting to owner occupancy and usually improving the residential fabric with the intention that people would stay for quite some time, and many of the people who were doing that were families with children, so it has affected school enrolments.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Certainly one of the primary schools in the Paddington area was suggested to be closed in the late 1980s and did not, and it is at absolute capacity. I think it is Glenmore Road.

Professor BURNLEY: Yes. The reputation I have heard, since I know some people who are teachers, but also from consumers, from people who have kids going there, is that it is an exceptionally good school, and that reflects the fact that parents, now that they are allowed to, are shopping around for what is reputationally a good primary school or reputationally a good secondary school.

(The witness withdrew)

BEVERLY MAY BAKER, President, Federation of New South Wales Parents and Citizens Associations, 59A George Street, Redfern, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms BAKER: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: If at any time during your evidence, in the public interest, you believe that certain documents or evidence you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request.

What is the view of the Federation of New South Wales Parents and Teachers Association on the closure of Hunters Hill High School, Erskineville Public School and Redfern Public School? Why does the federation believe these schools should stay open?

Ms BAKER: We oppose the closure of these schools and have done so since we first heard about it. The reason that we oppose the closure is that we believe that public education serves a unique place in our society. It is part of the cornerstone of our service provision and we believe that wherever people are and wherever people want a public school a public school should be there.

These communities have demonstrated that they do not want to lose their school. There is enough evidence to say that schools of that size survive in other places around the State and we do not believe that, simply because people live in a high population area and their numbers have dropped, the schools should be closed because of a lack of occupancy rate within the premises and that has been our position I think for in the vicinity of about 80 years.

CHAIR: Do you think if those schools are closed it would actually be encouraging the drift towards private schools?

Ms BAKER: I think the evidence is already in on that. We have just had the statistics on the inner west and the number of students returning to public schools in that area and the numbers are dropping. Parents want their kids safe. They want to know that they are going to that school and they are going to be there for the time that they want them to be there. When you start fiddling around with the provision of education, you have no forward planning and there is no opportunity for the community to negotiate and debate around those plans, parents are destabilised. They do not want their kids' education interfered with and so what they do is find something that is stable and what we are seeing in the inner west, and it is a thing that horrifies me more than anything, is that we are closing public schools because they have empty classrooms within them yet at the same time enormous amounts of public money are being poured into the non-government sector to build empty classrooms. There are no waiting lists for those schools to require those additional classrooms being built, but they are being funded to a large degree out of the public purse or at least with public support to build empty classrooms in areas in which we are being forced to close schools because they have empty classrooms in them. It is a very clear message to those people. It says that public education is transient and the private school system is building in bricks and mortar to stay forever. Those messages go to the heart of parents. They want their children in stable environments and that is why they are moving to the non-government sector, not because it is a better sector but because it is stable, it is built in bricks and mortar and they can see that those things are going to stay there and they want their children somewhere where they are going to be permanent.

CHAIR: Would you agree that, when there are even rumours that schools may be going to close, that in fact has an impact on the enrolments?

Ms BAKER: The impact is short and it is alarming. We have had some discussion around the closure of Chatswood High School. Rumour would tell us that as soon as that discussion was on foot, which was to move the campus to another place, parents immediately went up the road to the non-government school and enrolled their children, put their kids down for enrolment. We also have it - and I have to say that it is rumour because these things are never substantiated - that that school, the

non-government school at which these enormous enrolments were being applied for, went through a culling exercise within its own school and was saying to parents: Demonstrate why you should be staying here because we now have a raft of people wanting to come in.

We are dealing with a public infrastructure versus a market and those sorts of things need to be fair. I have no idea whether that rumour is true, but it is certainly being conveyed to me by parents in that area, both from the non-government sector and from the government school sector, where parents from that non-government school rang me and said: What can we do? We are being asked to justify our position here because there are other kids now on a waiting list to come in. So the ramifications have just been enormous.

CHAIR: We heard evidence earlier that Hunters Hill school was supposedly on notice four years ago. We are not sure in what way, but they said that they were on notice. Would you say that that would have had an effect on Hunters Hill High School?

Ms BAKER: It would have an effect.

CHAIR: Did it have an effect?

Ms BAKER: People are not blind. They see numbers dropping and they think, well, what is the provision going to be like for my child here? Hunters Hill knew that its numbers were dropping and it started to have a look at why. It went to its community and said we have a fantastic school, why aren't you using it? They found out some information from that, which is what you would do in any market when your numbers start to drop. They then started to re-engage that community and they started to get people back. Public schools have been beaten over the head and shoulders with everything that anybody can pick up. People, for some reason, think that their public schools are not safe places to send their kids or the standards are lower. There is no evidence to support that, but that is what people have in their minds.

Hunters Hill did more than you could ask anyone to do. It went to its community, exposed itself and said: Why aren't you using us? Why can't you come here? It discovered what people wanted and it went out then to try to engage the people by saying it is here, look what you've got. That school is a celebration. It actually took a dwindling population in an area where, as you have heard from the previous evidence, people are moving in and looking around for options and different things, it stood there and it started to increase its numbers, it started to get people back. The numbers in local government schools in that area, the primary schools, were also dropping. It started to get them back. It had started to redress that drift by consistently and intelligently looking at what was going on. It knew it had a terrific school, Hunters Hill has always had a superb reputation from even when I was a kid at school. We had kids from Chester Hill High School go to Hunters Hill High School. It always had a fantastic reputation, so they moved across. This school actually did everything you could possibly ask it to do. It did know four years ago that its numbers were dropping, but it knew that it was doing things to get back, but this school copped it in the neck again because when it lost its school hall nobody went to the school and said, look, guys, you have lost your school hall, this is a huge infrastructure cost to us now, we might really have to look about whether or not it is worth our while putting some injection of funds in here to preserve this. That would have put that parent group on notice 12 months ago that that school was in danger of closing, a 400 pupil school. When have we ever closed a school that big? Never. Here you have a school being told: We are going to rebuild you the hall. You have a school that is actively going into its community and re-engaging its community. You have kids who are doing exceptionally high in our only marking standard, which is the HSC. You have a school that is thriving, small in numbers but a terrific community, and the only public school serving that group. It goes out there and does it and then, out of the blue, sight unseen by anybody, no warning, no nothing, it is hit over the back of the head and told: Not only are we not even amalgamating, we are shutting you down and we are selling the property. Those parents had nowhere to go. They had done everything they could possibly do, as had the staff.

This is the most disgraceful display of betrayal that you could ever hope to see. It was a total betrayal. Firstly, they lose a very valuable asset, the school goes into grieving mode, it pulls itself out of that, it is told it is going to have that building rebuilt, it is celebrating that and, without even any

warning, it is told now you are closing and the school is back into a grieving mode. That school pulled itself up by its bootstraps, it went out into its community, it moved and worked with other schools in the area to come up with a package that would revitalise that whole area and that was completely and utterly ignored. It was as if those people said nothing. We are talking about a public education system of, by and for the public, and here the public had said this is what we want to do, this is what we think we can do to re-engage, and that was completely and utterly ignored as if those people had said nothing. We are talking about a public education system, of, by and for the public, and here the public has said, "This is what we want to do. This is what we think we can do to re-engage." This is not a school of 400, but a campus of 2000. Those schools were working together to come up with something that would preserve public education in that area and be dynamic and alive and a true competitor for the non-Government sector in a market sense. Public schools should never compete with the private sector, they are a different animal, but if you are being forced into that sector, that is what you have to do. This school did it and this school was punished for doing that. Those parents who chose public education, and do not forget we are in this choice mode, those parents who chose public education had their choice rubbed in their face. How dare you choose public schools; why didn't you choose the schools all over the shop rather than your local school, and golly gosh, you have got people outside your local area. Well, hallo. I would like to have a look at all of the non-Government schools in the area and see how many people they have got out of the area in them. Nobody is pillorying them. Have a look at your selective schools, have a look at all of the schools. They have non-local enrolments, but this school was targeted for closure, this school was told: How dare you have non-local enrolments. When all of us were told to go out there and get the folk, they went out there and got the folk. How dare they. They have done everything they possibly could. The only thing they didn't get was the resources from the Government to make the school look as beautiful as that school ought to be and it has the potential of being an absolute lighthouse school. They were not given those resources and because they did not have access to those resources, they are being punished. It is a disgrace. I am sorry. I am a bit upset about it to say the least.

CHAIR: Were there any signs that the Government intended to actually construct the assembly hall?

Ms BAKER: My understanding is, and it is only from speaking to the parents, that they were told that the hall would be rebuilt.

CHAIR: Was there any sign that that was going to happen though?

Ms BAKER: We have to operate on trust. If you get the head of the department coming to your school and saying, "We will rebuild. We will not have this asset lost to our system", you have got to believe them. Maroubra was in exactly the same boat. Maroubra's numbers were really, really low and Maroubra was worried about closure because schools around that area had closed. The department had contacted that school and said, "We do not close schools. It is a failure to close schools. What we are going to do is re-energise this school." Six months later - "Sorry, closing".

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Is it true that Ken Boston went to the school and promised he would build a hall?

Ms BAKER: My understanding is that that is the truth. I have no hard evidence other than talking to the parents and I have no reason to believe that they would lie to me. I haven't seen Dr Boston at the school and I have not read anything that he has written, but certainly that school community believe that that is what he told them.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Ms Baker, in relation to the process of the Schools Closure Committee, what are your comments on the process that you went through as a member of the committee? Were you satisfied with the process and were you able to access adequate material to form a judgment?

Ms BAKER: I believe personally, yes, that I was. Reading the papers some months later, I understand that there was evidence withheld or not made available that may well have changed the way that other members of the committee viewed it. I thought the evidence was absolutely clear. I

thought that the evidence supported the community in not wanting to see their schools close. I thought that the evidence demonstrated that there was a need in those areas for those sites to be preserved for prosperity and for regrowth and growth.

The parents had argued the demographics in those areas and had demonstrated by schools in that area, because at a previous time in a previous place a previous Government shut a number of schools in that area, it shut Blackfriars. At the time the parents of Blackfriars Public School argued strongly for the retention of that site. They were told that the numbers and the demographics were such that nobody in a high density housing breeds. I don't know how they think we were going to replenish the population, but nonetheless they were told this. That site was sold for about a quarter of what it was actually worth. On market values it was sold for a quarter of what it was worth. Today Ultimo Public School, hard up against the side of a cliff, full of demountable buildings, nowhere to go, full to the brim. We desperately need that Blackfriars site back, but if the Government were to try to buy it, it would not get it back for what it sold for, it would pay market price plus to get that site, but we need that site, because there is no room to expand. Parents will not continually jam their kids like sardines into a place and they will then find something they can afford. With the Federal Government's policy on subsidisation of private schools - the only country in the world that does it - they will find a cheap, private option that has space rather than send their children to a highly crowded Government school, in spite of the fact that they know that the education they will get there is better than anything else, because they don't want their kids in an overcrowded, asphalt laid covered playground with no room for the kids to move.

We need Blackfriars back now. It should never have been sold in the first place. If it had remained in public ownership, it could have been leased, it could have been rented, it could have had a number of things done that would have generated income, and now it is needed back we could have nominated to the people who were there, "Sorry, the lease has run out", and we could have re-opened that now as a school, relieving the tension on Ultimo. We are going to see the same thing across all of the schools that are being sold. Once the land has gone, you will never get it back. If you try and buy land in the inner city you are paying a king's ransom for it.

CHAIR: In comparing some of the private schools with Government schools, and you have used that point, which I think is a valid one, about crowding children into the State schools and into Government schools, it is fairly noticeable that most of the private schools have large grounds, grass areas, trees and so on, which Hunters Hill High School does have.

Ms BAKER: It certainly does.

CHAIR: Would that be a positive environment in which students should be studying?

Ms BAKER: Of course it would. I keep saying that I don't believe education is a market, but we are in a market. I know a little bit about selling, and the first thing that you know about selling is you make sure that your package looks better than anybody else's. Some Government schools have got that sewn up. Here we have a beautiful site, the possibility of turning it into something absolutely stunning and seriously getting into this market. Have we done that? No. We are going to run away from that site. We are going to say to the people who are there, "You have to send your kids hither and yon".

Hunters Hill has got everything you could ever possibly ask a school to have. It has got wonderful grounds, it has got superb teaching staff, it has got facilities in the school to allow for expansion and growth and change, so that you are not locked into one model, you can actually move it around, have a look at the educational provision there. It has the opportunity of being a lighthouse school. If we had taken a different view, if we had said: Okay, we are going to market this wonderful thing called public education which we have in this State, we are going to take a school with dropping numbers, we are going to put some money into that, we are going to promote it, and we are going to demonstrate that if we are serious about turning public education around Hunters Hill is our vehicle, and we'd have done it.

That school had everything going for it, including its location, which is a middle class

location. Who are we losing from our system? Middle class people. How do we turn public education around? We get middle class people back. But the middle class people that we have got in that school are being hit over the back of the head. Why on earth would they ever want to send their kids to public schools again? Is that perhaps part of the lesson. Middle class people get out of public schools, go somewhere else or just leave public schools for those of you who cannot afford anything different.

There are all sorts of questions going on as to why on earth you would do something so contrary to what you would say you would do. If you are genuine about increasing market share, why would you do something to deliberately shut it down? It is not what you would do.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I have been through your comments on Erskineville and Redfern Public Schools in the Schools Closure Review report. I wonder if you could just expand a bit on those comments as they are recorded there and also if you feel that lack of support by the department is a factor for falling enrolments at the Erskineville Public School?

CHAIR: Before you do, just for the record, can you indicate whether on that committee you voted to keep these schools open or closed?

Ms BAKER: I voted to keep the schools open. In terms of Redfern, we were told that the site was toxic - not toxic enough not to put a kindergarten on it I hasten to add, but nonetheless it was a toxic site. In terms of my social and moral responsibilities, I will not and cannot put children on what I am told is toxic. I will not allow children to be poisoned.

I was told that Redfern Public School was a poisoned site and our children shouldn't be there. For that reason I voted that children at the Redfern school should be moved - not closed, moved. That community, one of the most disempowered communities in our town, should not be forced to bus their kids to other places. We have very little understanding of the cultural background of the people in those areas, and I thought that it should have been respected that that community, that school, small as it was, was a community. They were working together, they were supporting one another. Redfern had one of the first support networks for bringing adults back into the school, to re-engage adults in the learning process. It was a community centre. It was not just a school. We cannot ask our children to be on toxic sites. In all conscience, I could not do that, but in all conscience I could not say that Redfern should shut. It should have been moved. I hope that is what was reported because that is what I genuinely believed.

Erskineville was one of those schools where there was no reason for people not going to the school, and the opportunity for Erskineville to stay open was to actually have a look at the needs of that entire community, because what the inner west restructure did was hive schools off. It did not talk about all the schools, it did not look at a pattern for all of the schools. Why in something like this aren't we looking at Newtown Performing Arts High School, why weren't we looking at Newtown North, Newtown Primary School itself, why weren't we having a look at the other schools in the area to see if there is a way of building networks and supports there? But we didn't have a look at that. We were just picked out.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Both of which I am told are at Newtown and Newtown North.

Ms BAKER: And why is Erskineville not? Was it because there was departmental facilities on that site? There was no research done. The parents at that school did not want the school closed. They saw that it was in an ideal situation, that it was perfectly possible, and what they proposed, and it is a proposal that I support, is that Newtown Performing Arts High School is packed to the rafters and in fact pressure is on that school to become more selective, which is the only high school in that area. It shares the site with Newtown Public School. To actually move Newtown Public School to Erskineville and create a new school there, it is not a long distance, it is not a huge ask. We are not bussing people half way across the town, but to actually do something, you could then expand Newtown Performing Arts, remove the pressure to make it more selective and you would actually maintain it as a comprehensive school within that town with a performing arts bent and you would move Newtown. Now, that was a proposal put up by Erskineville and supported I understand by the P

and C at Newtown. That was not even allowed to be discussed. It was, "No, this is the school that we are looking at." You can't look at schools in isolation.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So the process is not ideal. I think that goes back to the question that I asked earlier.

Ms BAKER: The process on the review panel, until the end basically I felt that the review panel had access to everything that it asked for. It was after the fact I felt that didn't happen. The process in the lead up to the decision was the worst process I have ever seen in my life, and I have had 22 years history operating as a parent advocate and going through school closures. I have sat with schools as they have grieved about the closure, when they have agreed that the school has no further life.

Baulkham Hills was a case in point. Baulkham Hills was built for 600. The numbers were down to about 80 kids, most of those were kids with disabilities. The parents did not want to close the school, but they saw that they had no way of keeping it open. We went through the same process. We looked at the demography, we offered the parents an opportunity to challenge it. They questioned it. They accepted that these numbers were going to drop. We did not want the school site sold, but the parents agreed that at this time this school was non-viable and they would move. So even though there was grieving going on in the community, it was a smooth closure.

Those parents knew a good 18 months before their school was closing that the school was closing. They had 18 months to try to turn it around, then they could appeal the decision and then the school was closed. These schools have not been treated in that way. The first thing we even heard about this, in spite of the fact that as a federation we had been talking to the department about our concerns about the lower numbers in these schools, especially with the advent of the colleges springing up like toadstools all over the place, it was part of the reason that we actually put some money up to pay to Vinson to actually have a look at the provision of public education, is that we knew that these schools were dropping in numbers and we wanted to do something really dynamic, to re-engage people's belief in the inner west in public education, and we had been talking to the department about that. The department knew we were concerned as an organisation and interested, and knew that we were talking to people out there in our schools, as we always do. We heard and knew nothing of this proposal until I was summonsed to a meeting at five o'clock, I think it was on a Tuesday afternoon, for the launch of the document the next day.

I put my head on the table and begged them not to do it. I begged them not to do it. I said this is against any of the principles. And I was told by a person on that committee that, "If you want change, if we gave people time to think about this they would react against it" - oh derr, who wanted it anyway - "and we are going to put this through because this is the way forward, we have to have 85 percent occupancy rate." Who said 85 percent occupancy rate was a law? Who said that was in the drawing circle? You might find this very difficult to believe, but I was absolutely silent, because I knew if I had opened my mouth outside of that meeting, what came out of it would not have been nice. I was too angry at something that gave up everything that we had worked for.

We fought with the previous Government over the closure of those schools. We argued and got through the Upper House and the Lower House amendments to the Education Reform Act that this would never occur again, and here it is occurring again, to schools who are in a different position to those other schools. Those other schools were closing, but their numbers were really, really low. These schools were not in that position, especially Hunters Hill was not in that position. This was such a betrayal of the things that I held really dear, and I am not one that can actually shut me mouth, I can't help it. If I really feel betrayal, I will go for that, and I felt that if this is the proposal, people other than me have got to make these decisions, and I stepped back. All I did to support those people was to create a forum in which they could come and talk, something that should have been done before this was even dreamt up. On I think it was 24 April, we created a forum out at Cleveland Street High School and said come together and tell us.

Out of that we got a raft of recommendations. Those people were willing to come together. We have got petitions lurking in this place, thousands and thousands of people saying, "Do not take

our schools away" and coming up with ideas. This is against anything I have seen the Government do before. I don't know whether it was politically driven, personally driven or Treasury driven, I have no idea, but it was such a betrayal.

CHAIR: You made a comment a moment ago that you were unhappy with the process of that Committee. In what way?

Ms BAKER: I am president of a pretty big organisation, which makes me chairperson of that organisation. I chair most meetings. I have never cast a casting vote to do anything other than uphold the status quo. I believe that is the responsibility of the chairperson. We have an independent chair, and I am prepared to accept I am biased. You have the departmental officers, two departmental people, the Teachers' Federation and our federation, and two other people, a lady from local government and a local media person, so you have a seven person committee. As chair of that, I believe you would simply hold your vote. It was split 50-50. The Teachers' Federation and I were not independent, so you have two non-independent and one independent, being a local community representative, and you have the department, two non-independent and a community representative disagreeing, 50-50 split. As chairperson, you should have cast a vote in favour of status quo, which means the schools remain open. That chairperson did not cast their vote that way. I do not know whether I am breaching confidentiality.

CHAIR: Was that the vote on each of the schools?

Ms BAKER: On each of the schools, it was four to three on each of the schools, except on Redfern where it was four to three that Redfern should move, not close.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I am intrigued to know as to why you were not allowed to consider alternatives in relation to Erskineville, that is Newtown Public, but presumably you were allowed to analyse the options for Hunters Hill, its plan.

Ms BAKER: No.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Not that either?

Ms BAKER: Not that either. I had the Hunters Hill plan because Hunters Hill had a huge public meeting in which they launched the plan.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What did you use? On what basis was the School Closures Review Committee--

Ms BAKER: On the evidence presented about that school, and it was all about demography.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So it is only about the past and the present, not any suggestion about alternatives?

Ms BAKER: None at all. We were allowed to discuss none of the alternatives because they were not the reasons for the closures. We were only allowed to look at, according to the Act, the merit of the Government's decision on the closure and that was frustrating because the closure came about so fast there was no opportunity for you to have a look at alternative structures. I mean we had places like Ryde and Peter Boyd. They amalgamated.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: And Meadowbank.

Ms BAKER: But that was before then. Meadowbank amalgamated to Ryde.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: No, Meadowbank closed. Ryde amalgamated and Ryde became Peter Boyd and Peter Boyd closed.

Ms BAKER: So we had all of these things all over the place. What has been the pattern with

these amalgamations and closures has been continued dropping numbers. The department knows that; we know that. That is why when Maroubra was told that school closures do not work, the department is not interested in school closures, it is interested in doing something else, they believed them. So do we. Because we know that school closures and amalgamations do not work. The only place a school closure works is where the community is in agreement, as with some schools, that their numbers are so low that they simply cannot maintain the provision in that school any more. Hunters Hill is not one of those schools.

The ramifications of Hunters Hill have a ripple effect that has gone further than just the inner west because within a week of the announcement I was in West Wyalong at an Isolated Children and Parents Association meeting in which the president of that association got up and argued fiercely for greater support for parents living in isolated areas because if a 400 pupil school in the heart of Sydney was viewed as non-viable why should they be forced to send their kids to a rural school with 180 kids in it? Why could they not be given the choice of single sex schools and selective schools? Therefore they wanted funding to move their kids out of their towns. Now public education is underpinned by those small rural schools and we are now at risk of having those small rural schools sucked into this debate because, if a 400 pupil school in the heart of Sydney is non-viable, how non-viable is a school in West Wyalong with 180 kids in it? That is the ramification across the board from this. This is not just the inner west, the ripple effect is far greater and, as I am on record as being absolutely fundamentally committed to public educational provision wherever it is needed, it is eroding that fundamental commitment to public education and who would believe now, when you can say we will close a school that is workable and open one that is not? What numbers are the numbers?

CHAIR: Do you agree with some of the parents from, say, Hunters Hill Parents and Citizens Association and others that they felt that the minister was virtually making a decision that was non-negotiable anyhow?

Ms BAKER: Well, that is what the minister is on record as saying and it is probably why I was silent because I certainly did not want to get arrested. The minister had said that these things are discussion points only. I was horrified at the starting point but my attitude was, if they are discussion points, then let's have a talk. That is what a discussion document is. Within 24 hours the media was reporting, with a microphone under his mouth, the minister saying they are not negotiable. "Not negotiable" means they are not discussion documents, they are set in concrete, and those parents must have been absolutely furious at that and, as I said, felt absolutely betrayed. You cannot have a discussion document that is not negotiable. That is an oxymoron, I believe, it cannot be contained in the one sentence, it is contradictory in view, and that is exactly what happened.

I do not know who dreamt this idea up. I do know that Michael Waterhouse, the then chief of staff, was the one leading the argument and in fact was the one that excluded us from the press release and made us wait downstairs like something out of Dickens for the media to come and approach us. I did not understand and am still not able to understand why the department argued for the closure of these schools. The department knows that closures do not work. They know the impact on that community and it has been demonstrated by the numbers this year. If Treasury is driving it, then who in Treasury? If it is the Treasury bureaucrats then I suggest we put a broom through them because that is not their job. Their job is to administer the money, not to decide who gets it. If it was done by the minister then he was poorly advised. If it was done by the department then I am at a loss to understand why the department would do that to its own schools.

CHAIR: Would you think that, as it is apparently true, if valuations were to be done on the properties, it sounds as if the Treasury could be driving it?

Ms BAKER: I believe the Treasury is driving it. I think the Treasury drives a lot of stuff that we see in our society today and it is being driven by people who are not elected, who have no responsibility but have a degree in some shape, form or description and wave it around and intimidate people with it. The fact is that these are public assets. They are not a cost to the community, they are an asset to the community. They accrue in value. If we used it for community purposes, if we accepted that we could not run a 400 pupil school - which I find is a nonsense - that asset is of benefit to the community. There are heaps of groups in the community that could have used that asset, that

could have built it, that could have kept it going. They are public assets, they are owned by all of us. The Treasury decides to trade one off against the other. I mean how offensive, to say to one community: We're going to sell your asset because we're going to use the profit from your asset to enhance the facilities in another community. That is robbing Peter to pay Paul and then blaming Peter for the fact that you have done it. That is really unreasonable and that is what Treasury has suggested. I mean I am on the outside looking in, rattling on doors, I have no idea who dreamt this idea up, but it was not dreamt up with, I believe, a genuine commitment to public education. People were doing the best they could to put a positive spin on it, but the bottom line remained the same. You close public schools, you lose students, and that is exactly what has happened.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Can you comment on the differing demographic evidence in this debate and, in particular, can you suggest reasons as to why the department projections are so vastly different from others and how each of these projections was validated?

Ms BAKER: Apparently the data that was used was old census data and it was really quite an interesting exercise. I mean I am amazed at what Hunters Hill was prepared to do to preserve their school and no community should have ever had to have done that. They employed and paid for an independent demographer, so it was not just them saying "I reckon" and "I think", they paid someone to pull this demography together. The department went and paid someone apparently from the same faculty that had a different view. Now on that committee, talk about not knowing which end is up, because I am not a demographer, I haven't got a clue how it all works, we had these two highly subject-specific gentlemen arguing with one another and we sat there just thinking what does it all mean? So we pulled back and had a look at what you could only claim as not expert evidence but people evidence and the people evidence is that in those towns, in the Hunters Hill area, all of the preschools and child care centres are full with waiting lists, so the demography might show that people are not breeding, but somebody is, and obviously they are busing their kids in. They are busing their kids in from other areas obviously, because all of the child care centres are full. Now what are child care centres full of? Not workers, they are full of kids.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: That is the same really with Erskineville.

Ms BAKER: Absolutely.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: There are 300 kids in child care centres around the school and another 250 on waiting lists.

Ms BAKER: That is right.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We have also been given the figures for the same areas for the drop in the number of kids in kindergarten in the schools.

Ms BAKER: And why wouldn't you have that drop? If you have a little tiny child and you are looking around for a school that you want to send your child to, are you going to send her to a school that has dropping numbers?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: No, I mean a drop in kindergarten across the entire Port Jackson district, Bondi district, et cetera.

Ms BAKER: Perhaps they have not got to the school age yet. I have two granddaughters, my granddaughters are part of this new baby boom, they are three and four. They are not at school yet and their preschools are chock-a-block, they cannot get in, and in two or three years' time, when they are starting to put their names down for where they are going to go, those numbers will go up. What we have to do is look not where they are now but where they are going to go.

CHAIR: So there is a bulge effect that is going to occur.

Ms BAKER: Well, what I am saying to you is that the demographers were screaming at each other across the table in language that, to a novice, was (a) rude and (b) confusing and that is why we

went back to the population. If you have preschools that have waiting lists a mile long then one will assume, just like baby boomers, you end up having to build schools to accommodate them.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I need to come back to this issue because it is something you said earlier and it is going to become important I think. Section 28(6)(a) of the Act says that in conducting a review the committee has to call submissions and seek expert demographic and educational advice for both the present and the future use of the school. Now can you confirm what you said earlier that you did not have an opportunity to analyse the future use of the school in terms of the plans?

Ms BAKER: Certainly did not.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How then were the words "future use of the school" interpreted by the committee?

Ms BAKER: The future use of the school was interpreted as the future use of the school as a school as it currently was.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Where did your direction to interpret it that way come from?

Ms BAKER: It came from the chairperson and because most of us had been on review panels before and that is the way that we had interpreted it before. We did want to look at proposals, alternative proposals, but the view was that that is not what we were there to do. We were to look at the closure of this school as a school, as it currently runs and running as a school in the future, as an isolated instance, as a unit in itself, not as part of a bigger picture.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Even though Hunters Hill, for example, said in its future use it was only adding to its curriculum--

Ms BAKER: No, we did look at those things, I am sorry, I misunderstood the question. I thought we were looking at Hunters Hill, the work that was done in that whole area of the inner harbour collegiate or something like that, I am sorry, I really cannot remember the name of it.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Erskineville put theirs in the context of sharing with other schools and changing.

Ms BAKER: They certainly did, yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So you could not look at that?

Ms BAKER: No, because we had to look at that school. Any proposal for a different structure was not part of the proposal we were to look at. We were only to look at that school and each of the schools were dealt with as that school as an individual school.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So in terms of Hunters Hill which put up a proposal about adding to its curriculum, providing some diversity, building on its local community links, you gave weight to that plan?

Ms BAKER: Yes, certainly did, because they were looking at, and they had a history of, working out what it was their communities wanted from them and putting it forward. Hunters Hill I think had one of the best arguments for a selective stream. Other schools in the area that were not subject to closure were offered a selective stream. Hunters Hill was in a position where it knew that its population was moving to selective schools and it demonstrated that by its own demography that showed where folk were going and said if we put a selective stream on here we will get these people back. They do not want to bus their kids across Sydney. Put a selective stream on here and we will get them back. Those things were not part of the discussion because we had to say this is the school and if the school stays this way will the numbers increase and I would have argued that, even if it had

done nothing other than what it had already done, it would start to get the community back.

CHAIR: Our time has expired. We appreciate you coming along today and presenting your evidence in a forthright and clear manner. We have no doubt as to what you intended to say. I think that is good. There may still be some questions on notice. Are you happy if the Committee, after consideration, sends you some questions to answer?

Ms BAKER: Most assuredly.

CHAIR: And we will give you three weeks to answer the questions. You may not take three weeks.

Ms BAKER: I just don't want to see any other community go through this. This has been devastating to those communities. I am working with people at Redfern via my metropolitan vice president, and those people are grieving and are really a disempowered group, and it is just sad.

Maroubra High School would break your heart. Maroubra High School was a school that took kids that no-one else wanted. We have a massive, massive disengaged population in the inner west, because that is where people when they run away from home run to. We had a wonderful opportunity with Maroubra High School to actually turn it into an alternative structure that allowed kids their second chance. They took those kids who had run away, street kids, a whole range of kids. We could have done something really positive there. We could have really engaged our community and really turned it around and made a fundamental difference to the lives of kids who are already in so much trouble they are looking at gaol. We could have done something.

CHAIR: We are going to do a big development in that Maroubra area.

Ms BAKER: If the figures are right, we have got something like 15,000 kids of school age who are not in school.

CHAIR: Long Bay rifle range, yes.

Ms BAKER: And we have got to do something for those kids. We had an opportunity of really doing something for kids that nobody is doing anything for other than putting sniffer dogs on them or rounding them up and corralling them. We had a real opportunity to get those kids back, because if we don't get those kids back we are going to be facing them in our lounge rooms, angry, in years to come. We gave up that opportunity.

CHAIR: Just a quick question with Redfern. Did you have a toxicity scientific report?

Ms BAKER: The department produced one that said that the playground was poisonous.

CHAIR: And that was scientific and you accepted that as genuine?

Ms BAKER: We just accepted things. Basically, I am an easy person to lie to. Tell me the truth; if I haven't got any evidence to tell me that it is different, I am going to believe it. Why would you lie to me about poisoning kids? What happened was that virtually within a couple of days of the place closing, in came the dozers, took off the top layer of soil. Nobody mentioned it was only that thick and you could fix it. If it is not all right to put kids between the age of five and twelve on the site, why is it all right to put kids between the age of one and four on the site.

CHAIR: It is like Homebush, the same thing.

Ms BAKER: You don't put babies in that kind of danger; you just don't do it, because those babies are babies. Now, babies are babies when they are still at kindergarten, but they are bigger babies.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

MAREE O'HALLORAN, President, New South Wales Teachers' Federation, Member of the Schools Closure Review Committee, 23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes.

CHAIR: If at any point during your evidence you would like in the public interest to give the evidence in camera, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Thank you.

CHAIR: What is the view of the Teachers' Federation on the closure of Hunters Hill High School, Erskineville Public and Redfern Public Schools? I gather the federation believes they should stay open.

Ms O'HALLORAN: The Teachers' Federation view is that the schools are viable and should stay open.

CHAIR: Why should they stay open?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Each one individually?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms O'HALLORAN: So you would prefer me to start with the schools, than rather than an overview?

CHAIR: Give the overview, if you would rather just make some overview, just to put it in context.

Ms O'HALLORAN: I would like to, because we always took the overview view. Before I do that, I just wanted to make the sure that the documents that the federation would like to put before the Committee are there. There was obviously our submission. There was the School Closures Review Committee dissenting report. There is also a submission of the Teachers' Federation to the Legislative Council.

CHAIR: We have the review report.

Ms O'HALLORAN: You have the Schools Closure Review Committee, the Teachers' Federation submission to this Committee, and the Teachers' Federation put a submission to the whole Building the Future proposal at the time that it was up for consultation. If that is not before the Committee, I would like at the appropriate time to make sure that the documents are.

CHAIR: Have you got a copy there?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I have got a copy.

CHAIR: We will take that as tabled now.

[Document tabled]

Ms O'HALLORAN: Thank you for the opportunity to make some opening comments and I will be quick. The Teachers' Federation has been calling for some time for the State Government to conduct a State-wide review into the organisation of public education. It has been 50 years since there has been such a review, and that was the Wyndham review, and that was only into secondary education.

We are of the view that there has been a lack of long-term planning or any coherent public policy framework about how public education would be organised and that what was happening instead was a series of piecemeal changes, formulations of college groups, setting up of specialist schools, closing of other schools and setting up a competition between public schools, and so we were asking for that long-term planning. As a matter of fact, because the Government has never agreed to that, we have set up our own inquiry, the Wilson inquiry, sponsored by the parents and the teachers.

Our view about the Building the Future proposal when it came down was that there did need to be a plan, mapping across the whole State and also for the inner city and surrounding areas, but that the plan ought to be an optimistic one for the future of public education. What we saw in front of us with the Building the Future proposal was a defeatist plan for public education, a plan that said that you had to close some schools, cannibalise them in order to make sure that the infrastructure of other schools was sufficient to go forward. We thought that it was a defeatist plan. We felt that it conflated educational needs with asset realisation, so that the funding of the schools became the priority, rather than the educational needs for the community.

That was our general view, and we also felt that the Building the Future proposal could not be viewed in isolation from the public education system as a whole and that piecemeal changes to the system obviously affected one school after another. That was a general view that we took. We thought that the State Government could do better for public education than implement the Building the Future proposal. We felt that the document Building the Future is built on public policy failures of the past. What the federation wanted was an optimistic and expansionist plan for the public education system and a view as well that small did not necessarily mean not successful.

That is just a general overview, but I am happy to go to the individual schools now if you think that is appropriate.

CHAIR: Did your federation have any input into the Building the Future proposal? Was there any consultation with the Teachers' Federation or other groups?

Ms O'HALLORAN: We had no input to the Building the Future proposal. What we did have, however, was we had an industrial agreement about college groups in the State, and with the industrial agreement was a commitment, we thought, from the Government to do a mapping exercise or a review across the State. In the context of that, we went down to the consultation session and then had put in front of us what was called a situational analysis of the inner city and surrounding areas. We had two sessions where the department put to us the demographic changes in the inner city and the need for a plan, but we had no input into the proposals, and, indeed, we would not have because they are flawed.

CHAIR: Could you then give your views on those respective schools?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Erskineville Public School is clearly a small school, but all the evidence before the Schools Closure Review Committee and all the evidence that the Teachers' Federation has was that it was a very successful school regardless of the small numbers, that indeed we have across the whole State 502 what are called PP5 schools which have small numbers. Erskineville is one of many. Clearly, the school was designed for more students, and what the Teachers' Federation said at the Schools Closure Review Committee and other places was that rather than sell Erskineville Public School and lose that land to the public, that we ought to look at other alternatives in the area, and one of those alternatives we tried to put forward, but the department would not listen to us, either in consultation sessions or in the Schools Closure Review Committee, was the proposition that we could amalgamate Newtown Public School with Erskineville Public School on the Erskineville site, which is a tremendous site in terms of public transport facilities, and that Newtown High School of Performing Arts could be expanded so that it could have more auditioned places and more local selection places. So what we said is there are other structures which the Government could look at which would be much more positive for public education.

The response essentially was that Alexandria Park Community School, which the federation supports in its proposal, could not be successful unless Erskineville was closed. It was not the students from Erskineville that Alexandria Park Community School needed, it was the funding of it. So that was Erskineville Public School.

Redfern Public School is also one of the inner city schools with declining enrolments. It was, in the department's terminology, what they call a residual school, that is there had been a flight from the school of certain groups of people. Nevertheless, the community argued strongly that the Redfern Public School site was at the heart of the Redfern community, that the loss of the site itself would lose some of the community's assets, and what the Schools Closure Review Committee dissenting report and the Teachers' Federation's view was that there should be a school at Redfern; it may not necessarily be the one that is currently there, but there needed to be some proposal in order to allow Redfern Public School to grow and to remain in the system. There is certainly a lot of evidence that some of the students would not go to the Alexandria Park Community School and it would be a great loss to the community around Redfern Public School.

Hunters Hill High School is clearly a thriving and successful local comprehensive high school, clearly successful on anybody's terms, be they the department's terms, where they looked at value added data, or the school's own submission which was about their success academically. I think there was no doubt from anybody on the Schools Closure Review Committee that that was the case. The argument put to the Schools Closure Review Committee about Hunters Hill High School was that there were too many public schools in the area and that one school had to close. One of the difficulties for the Schools Closure Review Committee was that even if you accepted the department's view on that, even if you accepted it, and we did not accept that there were not enough students in the area, there was no way for the Schools Closure Review Committee to know whether Hunters Hill was the appropriate school to close or not, so we simply could not make that decision. However, we were forced into making the decision, and that was one of the problems of the process of the committee, but Hunters Hill High School is obviously and clearly a very successful, local comprehensive high school and should remain open.

Again, I might add about that that on the Schools Closure Review Committee we were taken first to the schools that would remain open and showed the facilities at those schools and what facilities they would get if the other schools closed, which seemed quite a strange process, given that it was really about the school communities that were about to close and what their arguments were. We were taken first to the other schools, so that the whole premise that the Schools Closure Review Committee started with was that these other schools cannot be successful if you do not close all the other schools.

CHAIR: I note from what you said you were not very satisfied with the actual way in which the Schools Closures Review Committee carried out its work then, or the way in which it purported to carry out its work?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I think that you could say that every member of the Schools Closure Review Committee was a sincere person who wanted to do the best job that they could do on the Schools Closure Review Committee. I was not particularly happy with the process from the beginning, but there was a view that we would try and make the committee work so that we could try and come out with a positive decision for public education. What happened was that each school was left to argue by themselves in isolation for whether that school should remain open, but they were faced with the Building the Future proposal in its entirety from the department. So every time that school argued one of the reasons they should stay open, for example Erskineville had a number of reasons, the response would be, "But if you stay open, Alexandria Park Community School cannot be successful". So the difficulty was was the Schools Closure Review Committee looking at the Building the Future proposal in its entirety or was it only looking at each school that was closing, and what seemed to happen was that the department had it both ways. They got to argue the whole Building the Future proposal against each and every school, but when the Schools Closure Review Committee wanted to put up alternative structures that could be good for public education, we were not allowed to do so because we were only empowered to look at the schools that were closing.

CHAIR: You almost had your hands tied then as a committee in carrying out your work?

Ms O'HALLORAN: One of the difficulties too in my experience was that certainly the committee has never had to look at more than one school closing. It would seem to me by reading the Act that it is actually set up for an examination of one school closing. What happened here was there was a whole plan for restructuring and four schools closing, and I do not think any of them could get a fair hearing in that circumstance.

CHAIR: We have heard from previous witnesses on the committee that there was dissatisfaction with the fact that the committee split three/three and the role of the chairman should have been to support the status quo. Is that your view?

Ms O'HALLORAN: It was a difficult role for the chairperson obviously. It would have been a situation where you would hope that the chairperson would vote to keep the schools open, given that that was the current situation. So yes, that is my view as well.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You have said that it seemed that all the decisions were predicated on asset sales. What did you understand was the department's position on these asset sales? Did they have any figures in mind, did they talk about asset realisation? What did you understand about that?

Ms O'HALLORAN: They certainly did. Even in the session that we had before the release of the Building the Future, each overhead that was shown had the amount of money in the bottom corner that they expected to realise by the assets. So certainly, even at that point in time, they had that in mind, and my recollection of the Schools Closure Review Committee was that one of the departmental officers indeed said that the department had already begun to draw down from Treasury on the basis of those asset sales.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Was there any indication that was given to you about a guideline, whether formal or informal, which the department either had chosen to work to or had to work to that was driving the proposal?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I am not sure of the thrust of your question, but I certainly felt that there was not going to be any extra funding to refurbish schools in the area and that they were driven by that view, that it was a cost neutral exercise or at most a very small amount of money put in.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Perhaps I should be less cryptic. The previous witness put to us that there was a guideline of an 85 percent occupancy rate that had to be achieved in schools in order for the proposal to proceed or, sorry, which had to be the end point of basically the proposal that was put in place.

Ms O'HALLORAN: There certainly, to my recollection, was information about the utilisation of properties and what was the correct utilisation of properties. I do not recall the 85 percent number, but there was a driving force around properties utilisation and maximising numbers at each and every school, that there was vacant space and that vacant space had to be--

CHAIR: Do you think that that is a satisfactory way to discuss public education, almost like how many rooms are being occupied in a hotel, if it is profitable? Should the same kind of approach be used in public education?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Really what should have been looked at first is what did each and every community need in terms of educational needs before we looked at vacant spaces in different schools. For example, there was no evidence, and indeed I think it is probably to the contrary, that students would go to the areas they were directed to go to by the department to fill up the occupancy rate at every school.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: In the federation's view, what is wrong with the thinking of the department that in order to fund education expansion in schools in the outer west and south-west we

have to close down schools?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Schools sometimes have to close, there is no doubt about that. Sometimes the demographics change. But what was happening here was almost a cannibalisation process where there was to be no extra funding regardless of refurbishment needs and there were to be schools closed that were clearly successful and driving schools, needed in their community, and in fact with some of the schools that were marked to close there were other schools funded by the Government in the area that happened to be in the private system that had perhaps the same number of students and yet they were not earmarked in the same way. In other words, there was funding to another system, the private school system, to keep open schools with the same or similar numbers of students and yet there was no money for the public education system.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Are you trying to say that this Government places more importance on the private school system than the public school system?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I am trying to say that, if schools have to close, surely the last school left standing ought to be the public school rather than a private school funded by the Government that has the same numbers as schools that are closing. In the inner city and surrounding areas - and it is in our submission - there are many schools that receive funding from the Government that have the same or similar numbers or lesser numbers than Hunters Hill High School, for example.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: When you say they are government funded, the majority of the funding is Federal funding rather than State funding?

Ms O'HALLORAN: There is a combination of funding, both Federal and State, yes, more funding does come from the Federal Government, but there is also State funding. There are also interest subsidies and so forth and building loans from the State Government. That is in our submission. What is in the submission is what comes from the State Government to those schools.

CHAIR: Do you think, in looking at the situation, that the scenario could have been, as happens with government departments, the minister or Treasurer or someone says to the Department of Education or Minister for Education: If you want to make changes or meet certain needs you have to do that within your budget. In other words, there has to be rationalisation within the minister's portfolio.

Ms O'HALLORAN: My view is that that is exactly what happened.

CHAIR: Instead of extra funding that may have been needed.

Ms O'HALLORAN: My view is that there were falling demographics in the inner city in some areas and some of that is to do with public policy around the different structures of schools and some of it is to do with democratic changes, that there are issues of urban consolidation. My view is that many of the inner city schools and surrounding areas needed refurbishment. Many of them needed refurbishment to make them attractive to parents, as they should rightly be. The Government was not prepared to fund that and fund new schools in that western area. It was not prepared to do both.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You referred earlier to some meetings that the federation participated in, consultations prior to Building the Future--

Ms O'HALLORAN: That I was there, yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: When did those meetings occur; were they run by the department; who participated; were minister's staff involved and, if so, who?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I am just trying to recollect. There were two meetings of that nature. They originally arose, as I said, from industrial negotiations around a memorandum of understanding. Certainly Dr Laughlin was present, Neville Warner maybe, someone who had done some figures, not a demographic analysis because no demographic analysis had been done at that stage.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What is the timing that we are talking about?

Ms O'HALLORAN: The release was March. One to two days before the release.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So just at that time?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes, and that came about because when the college groups were being formed across the State, while we got an industrial staffing agreement, we said don't make these changes piecemeal, let's map out the State and see what the future is going to be, and in that context they said, well, here's a map of the inner city and surrounding areas and this is what we intend to do, and it was in fact called a situational analysis which are the very words that were in our agreement.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: How do you know there was no demographic study at that point having been done?

Ms O'HALLORAN: How do I know that?

CHAIR: Were you shown anything?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I certainly was not shown any demographic analysis, but I was clearly under the impression that the only work that had been done in that area had been done by a person whose first name is Neville - I think it is Neville Warner - where he had looked at the population numbers in each school, but certainly I found out in the School Closures Review Committee later, some time down the track in September, that nothing had been done at the time.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But these meetings specifically talked about the schools, the alternatives, in this area, days before?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Were minutes kept of those meetings?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Not to my knowledge. I have not got minutes, I do not believe minutes were kept.

CHAIR: It was not a consultation.

Ms O'HALLORAN: It was more an information session.

CHAIR: A briefing.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes, like we are going to do this, what do you think? We think it is terrible. And that often happens.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Do you think that there was any need to take action over the whole pattern of falling enrolments in the inner city?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What sort of action?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Well, one of the things that could be looked at is, first of all, why are the falling enrolments happening in some schools and not others? For example, Maroubra High School had become, in a staff's term, a deselected school because of the hierarchy of schools in the area set up by public policy of successive governments, so if people could not get into the local selective high school or the local single sex high school they might go to the private system or then, in the competition between schools, another high school seen to be more successful, parents went there, so

there was a hierarchy of schools established by policy and a school that was deselected was Maroubra. The Government's solution to that was to put a cross against Maroubra and close the door of Maroubra High School, which was a strange decision given that we know that urban consolidation in the area was going to bring people back into the system, there were very few places in the desired schools, so there would need to be a school. There should have been a plan to make that school successful and one of the things that was put forward by the federation and other bodies was, for example, a P-12 school at Maroubra High School, an alternative school for students with special needs, behaviour disorder students, or what has been successfully done at some other areas, which was placing a selective cap on Maroubra High School to bring back a more comprehensive profile in the school. All of those things were put forward by the federation and other bodies. On the School Closures Review Committee we were not able to put those alternatives forward because it was not seen to be our role, despite the fact that Building the Future did put forward a lot of other structures, so there were solutions other than just closing the door on that particular school.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What about I guess what you would call the aggregate excess capacity in schools in the area? Obviously the argument has been put that here are schools as a group that had something like 61 percent occupancy, talking only about the high schools because the issues are rather different for primary schools.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes, if you are looking at the aggregate, and I cannot remember the exact figures, but one of the things is that it was predicated on a market share for public education, in the department's terms, not growing, so that first of all if you had a plan for public education that looked at it growing then you would need surplus capacity. The demographic analysis was also, to my mind, not clear that there would be a drop and there was census data coming, very close, and yet they would not wait for that. That census data would have given us a much better and accurate picture about whether or not these schools needed to close.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: We did hear from the demographer earlier about the use by the department, amongst others, of the annual residential figures. In other words, it is not a matter of waiting for the five yearly census, that information is coming in on an annual basis, if not coming in all the time based on the number of children in, for instance, primary schools.

Ms O'HALLORAN: That might be true, but one of the things is also a perception of the public that what was being said was true and I think that the census data would be something that people could rely on as well. What you are saying may be true, I do not know because I do not have expert information in that area, but waiting for the census data might have been a better move in terms of public perceptions about what was happening.

CHAIR: Do you agree that perhaps there should be some decision within the Department of Education and perhaps with the Minister for Education to defer any action until those census figures are available and analysed, the 2001 figures?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes, certainly.

CHAIR: The situation should be frozen at this stage.

Ms O'HALLORAN: The schools should not close until we get that, yes, certainly the Teachers' Federation supports that view. I am just trying to find some information that we had in our submission about the Standing Committee on Public Works which talked about - and probably you have had that evidence before you - the issues of urban consolidation and not making decisions about property closures that might be overturned by urban consolidation, and certainly there were areas under consideration where, yes, there was urban consolidation, that was accepted by the department, but they argued that private schools would accommodate the children in that area of urban consolidation. If you take the Maroubra area, for example, there was not very much surplus capacity once Maroubra had closed, only at Matraville High School and one other high school, J J Cahill, both of which are very good comprehensive high schools, but the department's whole argument was that people wanted selective and specialist schools. With urban consolidation in the area, for example at Prince Henry Hospital and around those areas, the argument put to us was, well, yes, that may bring

school aged students into the environment, but they will probably go to private schools.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: The department has given us the figures that for Matraville the occupancy rate is 35 percent of capacity and for J J Cahill it is 54.

Ms O'HALLORAN: That is right.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: And for Maroubra it was 33.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Obviously there is a lot of spare capacity.

Ms O'HALLORAN: There is, but the issue about that is, because of the hierarchy of schools, parents are choosing certain schools. We believe in the comprehensive system, and I think those comprehensive high schools are doing an incredibly good job, but the argument was then used that the people who came into the area would not necessarily go to those schools because their choices would be selective girls or boys and there is no surplus capacity in those public schools, so therefore the department said they would go to private schools. I would hope and believe and want them to go to their local comprehensive high school, J J Cahill and Matraville, but the evidence in the falling demographics and falling enrolments is that our comprehensive high schools that are essentially deselected schools are where the problems are, so it seemed to me that they were trying to have it both ways with that argument. Yes, there is under-utilisation. Why? Because of the hierarchy of schools and choice to go to different schools. Then an argument: But never mind, if people come into the area with urban consolidation, they will go to those schools. Well, I hope they will, but I think one of the problems is that they might go to the private sector and in that particular electorate there will be less than 50 percent of the students in secondary school in the public sector, so a better and less defeatist plan for public education is what we wanted.

CHAIR: When you had this inquiry by Dr Benson he made a strong recommendation about class numbers being reduced to 20 and so on. Would that not mean then you would have more classes and so those schools would have greater utilisation?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Well, of course, and that is one of the things that we did put forward, that the under-utilisation of the buildings was dependent on those class sizes in the way they are currently used. You might look at a different future for public education which, as you suggest, in the early years had smaller class sizes. One of the objections that have been put to us about that is that we do not have the space for it, but in certain schools they do have the space and of course that would make a huge difference.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: In your opening speech you were talking about lack of long-term planning and lack of coherent policy.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Looking at the Building the Future document, do you believe that this document has achieved the ends you were talking about and, secondly, if this document, Building the Future, was a policy that was to continue, would the drift of public school students to private schools continue?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I do not think the Building the Future document fits into our view of what a long-term plan for public education would be, first of all because it is only one section of the public education system. It does not look at any of the policy surrounding the public education system, it only looks at basically cannibalising one school to get refurbishment funds for another school, so I do not believe the Building the Future document fits into what we would hope, and in fact what the Vincent inquiry is coming down with is a blueprint across the whole system of a whole range of needs. The second part of your question was?

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: About the drifting of public school students to private schools and your opinion about the department holding a defeatist attitude. Would the trend continue?

Ms O'HALLORAN: I think, to be fair about the Building the Future proposal, one of the successful things about it has been that, for example, Balmain, Glebe, those schools have had an increase in enrolments, a very welcome increase in enrolments, but not because Hunters Hill closed. You did not need Hunters Hill High School to be marked for closure to make those schools more successful. The fact of putting, first of all, the selective cap, which has its own problems, but at least guarantees a certain number of enrolments to the school, changes the profile of the school to make it more comprehensive, and the guarantee around refurbishments made those schools in a very short period of time very successful and obviously marked to do very well, without the closure that was said to have to happen. In Hunters Hill, in fact, we were told it had to close in order to make those schools successful public schools. The lie has been put to that, because in the medium/short term they are successful without that school closing and without the need to do so.

CHAIR: The federation has representatives in each of the schools. Have you noticed that in the schools that they wished to close there was a reduction of funding for maintenance in those schools over a period of years, in other words they were being allowed to run down?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes. Teachers in the whole of the inner city area and surrounding areas have for years felt as though the sword of Damocles was hanging over them when nothing was happening in terms of maintenance and so forth. They knew that falling enrolments was an issue and that some of them were under threat of closure, and that went on for some years. So, yes, there was a deliberate running down of some of the schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: One of the arguments put forward by the department is in relation to comprehensive education and the importance of broad curriculum, vocational choices. From the point of view of teachers at these schools, in particular Hunters Hill, what is the view of teachers about the range of educational opportunities available for students at Hunters Hill?

Ms O'HALLORAN: The point of view of teachers and the Teachers' Federation is that the range of opportunities at Hunters Hill is great, very great. Obviously, you can by having a very large high school maximise the number of course offerings, but at the end of the day students can only choose six of those course offerings, and we have got very many successful high schools across the whole State, country areas are obvious ones, where schools about the size of Hunters Hill are incredibly successful schools. West Wyalong High School where I used to teach is quite a small high school but a very, very successful high school. Yes, there are benefits to a wide range of course offerings, but there are also benefits in a number of students being at a certain site so that everybody in the school is known and the welfare need of the school is very very strong and Hunters Hill is one of those schools.

CHAIR: That is a point I was going to make. There has been a lot of evidence that successful schools are ones that have 400 to 600 students, and that resolves some of the social problems, I would think, as there is greater interaction between teachers and students.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Yes, and everyone is well known. There is a tension between a large school that can offer a lot of subjects and a school where every student is well known by every member of staff. The numbers that you are describing can be very successful numbers for high schools.

CHAIR: And that is healthier for the students themselves in their own self-esteem and so on?

Ms O'HALLORAN: In my view, certainly, and there are also many ways that you can make more course offerings. We have certainly got access to more technology now and there are other ways of making sure that a wide range of choice can be catered to. Another thing that can be useful in that way is that if schools co-operate in the district to ensure that subjects that are available at one school can be available to students at another school as well. You do not have to close a school to do that. You can have co-operative networks between schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: That is a northern beaches approach? The department said it is a northern beaches approach.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Northern beaches college group where they work more successfully together. That may well be, but I was actually thinking of systems where schools co-operate to ensure - in Bathurst, for example, they have a system where the schools co-operate to ensure that the subjects are offered to all the students in the town regardless of which school.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: There are models that could be applied?

Ms O'HALLORAN: There are other models. We were not able to put those models forward.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: If the Hunters Hill High School is viable, has adequate curriculums, is performing adequately, has an important community, then I do not understand why it is the Schools Closure Review Committee came to the conclusion that it has to close.

Ms O'HALLORAN: Obviously I was a member of the dissenting minority, three, who voted to keep Hunters Hill open.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: That was three to four?

Ms O'HALLORAN: It was three to four, but if you are asking me to speculate about why, you will find it in the submission that I drafted for the Schools Closure Review Committee. I believe the argument that was put was that the educational needs of students across the State, and that is in the Act, equated to funding for public education. So I think that well-meaning people on the committee accepted the view that in order, for example, for Malvina to be refurbished and be a very successful school, some other schools had to close. So they operated in a cross neutral model, because that was the proposition put to them by the department, and that was that tension between the educational needs of the community versus the educational needs of the State.

The educational needs of the State became the funding line, and clearly the funding line was not going to be more dollars from Treasury, it was going to be the sale of the schools. So I believe that is why some of the committee members came to the view they did, that they accepted that argument, but obviously I am not one of those and I am only speculating.

CHAIR: That is summed-up in the expression the end justifies the means?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Possibly. The Committee was led to that conclusion by the way it undertook its work. It began its work - we were put on a mini bus and taken to a whole range of schools as I described earlier that were going to be refurbished as a result of the plan. That seems to me to be completely outside of the terms of reference of the Schools -

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Is this schools in the western suburbs?

Ms O'HALLORAN: No, the schools in the inner city where money was earmarked for their refurbishment. We went to Randwick Boys High School, Malvina High School, Cleveland Street, all of which are very, very good schools and where we heard from the staff how much they needed the funds to refurbish. I might add we also heard from the staff that they did not want schools to close for that to happen. That was the premise for the operation of the Schools Closure Review Committee. It doesn't seem to my mind to be part of the Act or what was required by the Committee. So then people on the committee could be led to a conclusion.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: In that case, how can the Schools Closure Review Committee come to that conclusion?

Ms O'HALLORAN: First of all, if there is going to be a school closure, and we have had many, many schools close in the public education system, thousands of them, and sometimes a school

has to close, but firstly a school should be looked at alone. It should not be looked at in the context of fighting against other schools for money. So the Act should be that if a school is going to close, that school should get its own review committee. We actually tried to argue that way, but we were told that under the Act that cannot be. That was the first thing.

The second thing is, as I suppose you have heard previously from another person giving evidence, it would be important that the chairperson has a set of guidelines for how to operate the committee and what happens when there is a three all vote, how they cast their vote.

CHAIR: One thing in the back of my mind which you have not mentioned is that there was a problem with the assembly hall at the Hunters Hill High School. There are no signs of it being rebuilt?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Again, that is another example I think where certainly a decision might have been made earlier because the school had such a struggle in order to get that work - well, they didn't get the work done. So, yes, I think it is indicative of allowing the school to run down in that way.

CHAIR: That would affect the operation of the school, not being able to have their own assembly hall?

Ms O'HALLORAN: Clearly, yes. Having an assembly hall means that the school can meet. An assembly hall is like the heart of the school, where people meet, where instructions are given, but where there are celebrations of the school as well. Not having a hall is a big impediment.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.25 p.m.)