

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 1**

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

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**At Sydney on Friday, 31 May 2002**

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**The Committee met at 3.00 p.m.**

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**PRESENT**

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods  
The Hon. Patricia Forsythe  
The Hon. D. T. Harwin  
The Hon. H. S. Tsang

**MARGARET MARY YOUNG**, Executive Director, Lady Gowrie Child Centre, 177 Doncaster Avenue, Kensington;

**JENI ANNE MULVEY**, Manager, Department of Veterans Affairs, 14 Bridge Street, Erskineville;

**GAI MARIE O'NEILL**, Principal, Erskineville Primary School, 61 Varna Street, Waverley;

**JOHN WILLIAM FOWLER**, Mayor, South Sydney Council, Mary Street, Surry Hills;

**SHARON CAMPISI**, Children's Services Coordinator, South Sydney Council, Mary Street, Surry Hills, and

**DEBORAH COULTER**, Redfern-Waterloo Project Manager, South Sydney Council, Mary Street, Surry Hills, sworn and examined, and

**FIONIE STAVERT**, Union Organiser, New South Wales Teachers Federation, Mary Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Ms Young, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Ms YOUNG:** I am appearing before the Committee as a representative of Lady Gowrie Child Centre which is a service for young children in the local community of Erskineville school and we have a very keen interest in the health of the local community and the facilities for children and families.

**CHAIR:** Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the Parliamentary Evidence Act?

**Ms YOUNG:** Yes, I did.

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

**Ms YOUNG:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms Mulvey, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Ms MULVEY:** As the President of the Erskineville Public School Parents and Citizens Association.

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

**Ms MULVEY:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms O'Neill, are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

**Ms O'NEILL:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms Stavert, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Ms STAVERT:** As the city organiser for the Inner City Teachers Association, one of the schools being Erskineville Public School.

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

**Ms STAVERT:** I am.

**CHAIR:** Mr Fowler, are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

**Mr FOWLER:** I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms Campisi, are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

**Ms CAMPISI:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms Coulter, are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

**Ms COULTER:** I am.

**CHAIR:** For the information of all the witnesses, if you 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.

The way in which we propose to hear from the witnesses is to give each witness five minutes to summarise their concerns and thoughts about the closure of schools. Have you any sequence in which you wish to speak?

**Ms MULVEY:** I am happy to speak first. The case for Erskineville has come to you in submission form. To highlight and add to the case I would like to present, firstly, the point that we, the Erskineville Parents and Citizens Association, assert that the former Minister for Education, the Honourable John Aquilina, the current New South Wales Government and the Department of Education and Training have failed to meet their obligations under the New South Wales Education Act, in particular section 28. We would also challenge whether they have fulfilled their obligations under the Freedom of Information Act and the State Records Act.

If I may, I submit copies of (1) my letter to the New South Wales Ombudsman regarding DET's failure to provide for my requested freedom of information application within the legislated timeframe and (2) my letter seeking a review of the delegate's decision of my FOI application listing the omissions and the department's reply to my review application upholding the original delegate's decision, hence no further documentation provided.

Secondly, we, the Erskineville Parents and Citizens Association, challenge the department's and the former Minister Aquilina's processes in relation to their planning for Erskineville Public School. They failed to keep parents adequately informed or encourage our participation and in fact we consider have actively worked to deflect or ignore us. Details are outlined in our submission; however, I would note our appendix 5 to the submission which contains DET documentation received under the Freedom of Information Act that demonstrates that Minister Aquilina and senior department managers, including Dr Alan Laughlin and Dr Ken Boston, had already signed off on the possible closure of Erskineville Public School almost 12 months prior to the shock ministerial announcement. I also note that the local member for Heffron, Mrs Deirdre Grusovin, had also received this information.

The department's case for closure of Erskineville Public School rests on decline of enrolments and outdated ABS data. They focus on the past. The Erskineville Parents and Citizens Association case that we have documented many times to them rests on the most current demographics. It includes (a) a survey of child numbers at local child care centres; (b) figures from local government, and (c) the most recent ABS data.

As a parent of Erskineville Public School, we celebrate the excellent standard of education that our children receive at Erskineville Public School and we believe that the department should build on this excellent model, not just for our children but for the children of the future.

One view we do have in common with the department is not to leave things alone. We have always articulated our willingness and our desire to be party to the process that will develop a new public education model for our local community. We acknowledged that the declining enrolments needed to be addressed. In fact as a P and C we started to discuss a marketing plan for Erskineville Public School in late 2000, now a developed and viable five year marketing plan, a copy of which you

have as appendix 3 to the submission. We have demonstrated in our submission that at no time did the department or the Schools Closure Review Committee analyse the demographics relating to the true catchment area or the feeder area for the Erskineville Public School. I just submit these maps which highlight, in fact, the area of Erskineville which we believe the review committee did not take into account in terms of the demographics.

**CHAIR:** That is just one map?

**Ms MULVEY:** Yes. Nor did they take account of the impact of the seven child care centres surrounding Erskineville Public School as potential feeder schools. If I may again provide maps in relation to the seven child care centres, and they are the pink crosses on the map. I have another one map here and the blue spot on this map is where the school is located.

Our research shows that 60 percent of the children from the seven feeder child care centres will feed through to local primary schools - sixty percent that is. Our centres have more than 300 on their waiting lists and their capacity is 290 collectively. In our marketing plan scenario, this notionally could translate to 200 children across the primary ages feeding into our school.

Further, we assert that the review committee did not seek independent, I stress here independent, demographic advice but rather accepted the demographic advice commissioned and defined by the department, a department that had already a vested interest in the outcome.

The School Closures Review Committee did not reflect that it had taken into account the demographic advice relating to Erskineville Public School from Professor Peter Phibbs of Sydney University. The committee did not, in its final recommendations, take account of the relationship between Erskineville and neighbouring Newtown schools, saying this was beyond the terms of reference of the committee, when in fact these neighbouring schools are part of the Erskineville community. It all translates into a shoddy process for us and the consequence of which we see as a very high risk scenario and there is almost certainty that there will not be places available locally for the projected increase of child numbers, a high risk for our community and for the high number of families within the low socioeconomic groupings in our community.

We have worked hard to fulfil our responsibilities as parents and citizens and we ask only that the department and Government fulfil their responsibility. We do not feel they have to date.

Final two points: 18 months ago, Dr Alan Laughlin wrote to another senior manager. I quote from his e-mail, you have copies of this in the submission: "We would not want to get in the way of a drift away from the school". The department knew. They did nothing to address the issue, to engage us. In contrast, when we heard about the declining enrolments we responded immediately with the development of a viable marketing plan and we have had input at every step of the way. It appears no one was listening. The integrity of this process we feel must be questioned for the public interest and the improved rigour in planning for the educational needs of our children.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Who wishes to go next?

**Mr FOWLER:** I am happy to go next. My comments might be taken generally over the whole local government area which may free up a little time for the second hour of submissions for Redfern School. I speak as mayor of the local government authority within which the schools are located. I speak as a councillor on the local government authority since 1989, and I also speak as an educator and a teacher having worked at both the Alexandria campus of the Cleveland Street High School and the Chalmers Street campus of Cleveland Street High School, which is the Intensive English Centre. My work has been particularly in reference to one area of educational need, which relates to new enrolments, and that is from the immigrant intake and refugee intake which are often schooled within Cleveland Street High School.

On that basis I believe I speak with a certain sense of knowledge of the planning and activities that have gone into, as is the want of the local government authority, and the duty, to plan for the appropriate usage of the land and the other impacts of that development, including the social

and other factors, not just the roads, rates and rubbish.

So consequently the local government authority and its representatives, elected by the community, have unanimously been in support of the retention of these facilities within the local government area. That ranges across the political representation of all the major parties that are represented at this committee, the Unity Party.

Having said that, it strikes the council as somewhat strange that the Government is planning to close a school in an area which they have already indicated in other policy areas to be an area of great disadvantage, particularly in the area of educational disadvantage. This has been noted by the Government, particularly by the Premier in his announcement of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project in March 2002. There is some anomaly of the fact that Government policy on the one hand to revitalise the Redfern-Waterloo area because of the large number of housing estates, and at the same time to be undertaking such a massive rationalisation of public assets that relate to education. This has gone on in the background in the context of local government authority which in 1996/97/98 undertook extensive consultation with the community, both land holders who were resident and non-resident in the area, together with residents, as well as stakeholder groups, such as neighbourhood centres, child care centres, as well as educational facilities that were in the area. In that period council re-adapted its planning controls for the local government area to include at that time a stated Government policy of urban consolidation. Council has been most active in that area of Government policy, consequently to the extent that Green Square is indicated to have a large intake of residential population, in the area of 20,000, with the possibility of some 10-15,000 jobs which will be created, which also has an impact on child care facilities. It is envisaged these residents will be taking up their position, some already have, and that will continue in the foreseeable future.

Given that background and council's planning where we have used the existence of urban infrastructure, such as Waterloo Primary School, Erskineville Primary School, Alexandria Primary School, we have given bonuses within our planning controls for any aspects of assistance to the built environment or the community, such as open space or park provisions, or pedestrian links, these have been placed in council's development control plan as a bonus element for which developers have, in the past, gained substantial development benefit by the fact that they are relocating urban consolidation projects with housing in close proximity, in Waterloo, Erskineville and the Redfern area.

Council's planning is obviously indicating the retention of these assets in the context of its policy of urban villages and the development, particularly Erskineville, of a refurbishment of the whole town centre to include increased pedestrian links and green linkages for safe movement. This makes another mockery of good planning in this proposal because there has been no added reference of State authority, such as the transport authority particularly, to ensure that with the relocation of these facilities massed in the Alexandria Park campus, there will be the ability of safe and convenient transport linkages.

The overall view on both of these and all of the references that are proposed in the building better futures document, they do not seem to appear to match the already comprehensive, I would suggest, and quite detailed planning that the local government authority has done in the context of State Government policy, which has been enunciated by Planning New South Wales. No doubt the facility, as indicated in Alexandria Park, will offer a wider range of educational and social and sporting opportunities. However, it remains to be seen in the planning from the Government in relation to education whether or not there has been the appropriate work done in maintaining the participation of the families in that educational facility. One of the areas that I believe has not been appropriately looked at in this is the continuous non-attendance of those school aged children in the area.

With regard to the demographic information underpinning the school closures - my colleagues who work at council will probably enunciate that much further - there has not been adequate consideration given to the local information that I have indicated broadly and the indication that council has maintained over the last number of years in its social planning.

**CHAIR:** We might hear from the principal.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I will not take my five minutes. I would like to make a comment that through this my primary role was to still provide and oversee a good public education for the children that are in that school and to my best skills manage what is a challenging process. The education of the children throughout this has not suffered, it actually has continued, and my role is to ensure that continuation.

**Ms STAVERT:** My background is both as the organiser for the New South Wales Teachers Federation in the inner city and also, from 1988, as a classroom teacher at Glebe High School. I have some background and understanding of the inner city and have lived in it since 1978. I have watched the changes that have occurred in inner city communities over that period of time and the observation I want to make is this: It was quite observable in the early 1990s that there were not too many babies, children, or whatever, around in the inner city, but I can assure you by 1994/95 a shopping trip to Marrickville metro, or assorted other places, had distinctly changed because the doughnut effect that used to occur in the inner city, in other words when the first baby came or the second baby came, people moved out to the suburbs, was no longer occurring. People in actual fact were bringing up their children in the inner city and so the renewal of the inner city as a place for families was most observable from 1993 onwards.

At that time I started to see preschools in the area built in numbers. I also saw that one of the key success stories of the inner city has been Newtown High School of the Performing Arts and this school having an enrolment policy of taking both local area children and children with audition success in the performing arts. What I did know about this high school was that if local area people were not successful, and indeed audition people were not successful, that tragically they seemed to move on then to the private education system.

Now, I bring this as a comment because I believe that if this plan of building the future in actual fact meant building the future then there was a far more creative way of resolving the issue between Erskineville and the process of closing Erskineville. The New South Wales Teachers Federation believes that to grow public education in this area what can be done is that Erskineville, yes, closes at the end of the year, but remains in public hands, public education hands, is refurbished so that it can take on both the students of that Erskineville area and the Newtown area, that is south of King Street. We would see then the closure of Newtown Public School and Newtown Public School would provide an expanded premises for Newtown High School of the Performing Arts. In actual fact we would grow, we would build a future if we thought through processes like that.

For the vexatious situation that exists at Newtown at the moment, where there is the competition between audition and local area, with this expansion the department could provide a win/win for the community and the demands of the performing arts and we would have Erskineville and Newtown community, which is within very easy walking distance of each other, with a primary school that would provide a safe travelling environment for those kids living in the most dense area of the city in many respects, that they can walk there and there was a safe community feel to that school.

I know that heritage aspects are possibly not strong arguments, but I do want to put before the Committee some very important aspects about Erskineville Public School. During the rent riots of the depression, Erskineville was where that community fed from. Lucy Woodcock, the principal at that time, ran the soup kitchen from that school. The Disadvantaged Schools Program, that is now State-wide, was commenced because of the action of those teachers who wanted to support what they saw were the inner city disadvantaged schools at that time, children of migrant backgrounds, children who in classes of 40 were not attaining a second language as quickly as possible and that is where it started, Erskineville Primary School.

I believe that the school was allowed to run down, as many schools in the inner city were allowed to run down, for a fairly disastrous period from roughly 1985 through to when the announcement about Building the Future was made. I think fundamentally because of issues of violence in schools, perceptions in the community were not positively addressed by the department, and it had this effect. What Building the Future has pleasantly done is that it has activated strong community links again and I believe that within this area of the inner city "use it or lose it" is well understood and I believe this school can have a vibrant growing future.

**Ms YOUNG:** Lady Gowrie Child Centre's initial concern on hearing of the possible closure of Erskineville school was that maybe a decision was being made that was based on wrong demographics. In our position as a long day care centre for children aged from six weeks up to school age in the local area, we are in a very good position to know who is inquiring after our service and who is enrolling children in our service. We are in the fortunate position that our service is a high quality service that is very much in demand, but we have noticed a real trend over recent years, and currently and continuing, for young families with young children to be moving into the local area in the suburbs all around our local community. So we were very keen to share that information with the school, with the inquiry, and with this Committee.

Our waiting list figures, of course, have changed since our original submission but the trend is holding up. There are many people from our immediate local neighbourhoods and the immediate suburbs around. It is also interesting to us because we have 300 children on our waiting list at the moment, and many of them are in the baby to two year age group and many of them are in the two to three year age group. They are the vast majority of our waiting list and they are the ones who will be moving into school of course in a couple of years. There are many people from the local community on that waiting list. That was a prime concern of ours.

Another concern that we have, which we have stated before, is about the safety of children in our local community. We are very aware that for children to go from Erskineville to Alexandria Park is quite a dangerous route. If they are travelling by foot and unaccompanied, they have to cross a couple of busy roads. My own personal view is that it is not a natural neighbourhood for the Erskineville community. The geography just does not work that way. Our Erskineville community seems more to flow towards Newtown; it is the way the traffic flows, or the streets go, or something like that. It is something I have been concerned about. We are very concerned about the possibility of losing Erskineville school as a public facility.

In our immediate Erskineville area there are very, very few places for young people to enjoy facilities that they can have recreation in. I think there are many things that could be done on that site to allow that. I know that young people use it informally as it is, and there are many programs in the school facilities outside of school hours. There is that aspect of our concern.

The final aspect of our concern is that it seems to us that closing a school like Erskineville is going against everything that we now know about how you go about building stronger communities, and strong communities help strong families and strong families help children to develop well. It just seems to us that a community needs a good local school, a strong local school. Even if it is a small school, it needs a good local school.

I think I would just like to read my last comment from our submission to the previous committee which was to say: In keeping with the view that I have just expressed, our Government should be not only supporting local schools to remain open but encouraging them to reach out to their communities so that the children and young people enjoy both ease of access to the facilities and the social benefits that healthy and vibrant neighbourhoods and communities bring.

**CHAIR:** We perhaps have a few minutes where we can hear from the other two representatives from the council.

**Ms CAMPISI:** I wanted to touch briefly on the demographic information that has been upheld to account for the four school closures, because there are four primary schools slated for closure in South Sydney. The research report commissioned by the Department of Education is inconsistent with demographic projections of the council. There are actually 1,388 children living in the suburbs of Redfern, Erskineville and Alexandria from the last census - that is outdated at this point in time. The department's report was premised on the assumption that children living in those suburbs must be going to schools in Newtown, because the enrolments in those schools were much lower than the number of children. It assumed that the Newtown schools had high numbers because the children were coming from those areas. There was no information in that report on the actual residential address of children enrolled at those local schools. The department's report was based on the 1996

census, which was outdated. There is no reference to local information such as council's local environment plan or council's development control plans. The department's figures for the increase in dwelling stock between 1991 and 1996 are inconsistent with council's. The Green Square residential and worker population projections in that report were inconsistent with council's.

Other medium scale residential developments, particularly in the Erskineville and Alexandria area, were not included in that demographic profile. The department used post-occupancy studies based on the Pyrmont/Ultimo area, which were inconsistent with South Sydney Council's post-occupancy studies. We found in our residential developments that we have higher numbers of families post-occupancy.

South Sydney also has a Development Control Plan on social mix which actually increases the number of two and three bedroom units which would ultimately lead to more families. The Macquarie Research Report also dismissed the possibility that children in that area will not attend school. The report, which we requested to actually look at the demographics for the future, was inconsistent with information known to the council, and our fear is that with the development arising from the urban consolidation in the area there may not be sufficient public education in the future.

**Ms COULTER:** If I could add to that, we have an alarming non-school attendance problem in South Sydney. I think you have a copy of the table. We have other evidence that supports this non-attendance rate. You can see that we have a five to eleven year olds attendance rate, based on this table, of around 76 percent compared to the State average of 96 percent, so we are not even in the ballpark. We believe that this plan to close the schools will actually compound the barriers to school for these children.

The other point I wanted to touch on was the role of the school closures committee. You would be aware that the committee was limited to reviewing the schools that opposed the closure and was not able to look at the cumulative impact of Building the Future and, given that we had four schools closing, that was important to us. It was unable to look at the reasons for declining enrolments or consider ways in which enrolments could be increased. You may also be aware that the committee was unable to reach agreement in relation to the review of the schools and that three of the seven members of the committee actually put in a dissenting report asking for Redfern and Erskineville to remain open.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for that presentation.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** I have a couple of questions to the Mayor: The expression "urban villages" is used in some submissions. Is it reflected in any planning instruments held by South Sydney Council?

**Mr FOWLER:** Yes, it is a theme throughout the whole local environment plan and it is also referenced continually in the development control plan to assist council's budgeting and has been a factor in our long-term plan of management. It is a plank.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** So it would have been signed off at some stage by the Government?

**Mr FOWLER:** Certainly, it was signed off by the minister, as all LEPs must be, and gazetted, and that fact is that urban consolidation has been based upon the concept of aggregating urban development around nodes. Green Square is one, but also the urban villages of Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, Newtown, Erskineville and Waterloo. In Waterloo, which is not specifically in relation to this, the whole level of planning around the school has been detailed within the LEP.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** Has the council done any independent valuations of these school sites?

**Mr FOWLER:** Certainly not. The indication from the current political representation of council is that council has not made a decision on any of the applications for subdivision and council



has only one assessment of those sites: As most valuable pieces of urban infrastructure in the replanning of the inner city.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** Sharon referred to the department's reliance on Pymont and Ultimo in their analysis of the needs of the area. I wonder, as an elected representative in this area, whether you have further material you would like to add on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of making those sorts of comparisons?

**Mr FOWLER:** Well, the original projection for Pymont-Ultimo was based upon the closures of some of the educational facilities in that locality based upon the fact that the demographic would not be represented in the people moving in as child rearers. That is clearly not the case in some of our post-occupancy surveys. We have surveyed two large development sites down in the southern industrial area, one in Kimberley Grove which is in the Rosebery postcode and the other in the Hudson development which is in Alexandria, directly opposite Waterloo school. In both these cases the indication and the intention of child rearing does not parallel that reference from Pymont-Ultimo.

I might also add on the rather jaundiced issue of South Sydney Council boundaries, part of this assessment in relation to the Department of Education's planning had been based upon two regions: Port Jackson and Bondi. Now the boundary of those two regions has been assessed as Botany Road and, if you note the indicated schools for closure in the local government area, two of those schools are in the Bondi region, two of those school locations are in the Port Jackson region; however, all four that they are intending to close are in the local government area of South Sydney, so I would severely state to the members most determinedly that there has been not the planning that is the fundamental essence of local government in this process and, I might add, while the local government consulted fully on the LEP, there has been no consultation in any form, except since the reaction, with the council by the department.

**CHAIR:** Let me clarify your evidence, Ms Young: You mentioned that you had 300 children on the waiting list. How many children are actually enrolled in the centre?

**Ms YOUNG:** Many children these days enrol in day care services on a part-time basis. We have 149 children enrolled and at any one time there would be about 75 attending the centre, so there are 149 enrolled, 48 of those children are less than two years of age; 50 of those are two to three years of age and 51 of those are three to six years of age.

**CHAIR:** In trying to estimate future enrolments at, say, the Erskineville Public School, how many of those children do you think would go on to Erskineville? In other words, they live in the Erskineville area or zone, I suppose you would say.

**Ms YOUNG:** The numbers I have are broken down just by what we call local area and that includes Erskineville, Newtown, Alexandria, the whole area around there, and we have 25 under two year olds, 26 two to three year olds and 32 three to six year olds from what we call the local area.

May I extend that comment a little: It has been our experience over the past couple of years when there have been rumours of the closure of Erskineville school that parents whose children are approaching school age seriously take this into account when planning for their children's enrolment. I believe the school has done very well to attract enrolments in that climate. It has been a really hard thing to do. However, we believe that - and this is one of the discussions that we have tentatively had with the school - the establishment of a pre-school program on that site, and there is plenty of room there for such a thing to happen, combined with a really strong educational program in the school would enable many families to decide. It would just become a natural choice for their children and it has a wonderful advantage for children because they do form relationships and friendships from a very early age and to be able to continue on into their local school community is a very powerful thing.

**CHAIR:** You have referred to rumours of the school being closed. I was just wondering, Ms O'Neill, if you could comment on how it has affected you, as principal, when there are rumours around that the school may close and your responsibility as a principal is to advise parents who contact you about sending their children to the school.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Just so that you know, Mr Chair, I have been at the school for just over two years, so I cannot comment prior to that, and I am in a relieving capacity at Erskineville Primary School.

Yes, I have been aware of the rumour because parents have approached me about enrolling at Erskineville Primary School and I feel it is my duty to inform them of the future of Erskineville Primary School and also provide choice around the community of other primary schools as well.

**CHAIR:** As a result of that, some of those parents have taken their children to other schools?

**Ms O'NEILL:** Most parents.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** Do you have figures on that?

**Ms O'NEILL:** No, but when parents come to speak to me some of their names are logged and I do have records of that.

**CHAIR:** Could you perhaps send that to the Committee, the information on people who inquired and did not proceed with enrolment at your school?

**Ms O'NEILL:** Yes.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Ms Young, just on those figures you gave us before about the number of children, nought to six basically I think--

**Ms YOUNG:** Yes, it is three months to five years, so it is three months up to school age.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** You said that the figures you gave us were for the Erskineville, Alexandria and Newtown area?

**Ms YOUNG:** Yes.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** As you can probably gather, we have been hearing a lot of statistics. I think there are seven primary schools in that area - it may be six, I am not sure: Newtown, Newtown North, Alexandria, Erskineville. I am just wondering, if that adds up to 83 children and you divided those children amongst five or six primary schools, it is actually quite a small extra enrolment, thinking, well, 83 is about roughly the same number of kids in the same number of years.

**Ms YOUNG:** Yes, I understand what you are saying.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Can you say, in relation to those children graduating, if you like, from your child care centre, which of those half a dozen or so schools they are likely to attend?

**Ms YOUNG:** I really cannot do that, but I could make a couple of additional comments to help put everything in perspective from a child care service point of view: Of course, we are only one of the child care services in that area as well. There are quite a number of others. We have our waiting list and I believe other child care centres may have similar waiting lists as well.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Do you track, for instance, with the children who are just about to go to school, which school they go to?

**Ms YOUNG:** No.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Are you engaged in transition programs?

**Ms YOUNG:** We are engaged in transition programs certainly with Erskineville school and with the local Catholic school, St Marys, but we do not track children. I could not provide a list of where children go beyond that. Many families do stay in touch with the centre, so we would possibly be able to get some anecdotal sort of information for you.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** I know it is not your job to do this, but it is hard for us to get a picture on the conflicting statistics.

**Ms YOUNG:** Yes. It is a very interesting thing because where we come from is not hard statistics but our impressions of what is happening in the local community and listening to the things that families who come to us say and knowing and observing the change in families with babies and young children in the local area, so I cannot really answer that question. It would be trying to second guess the intentions of parents.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Fionie, correct me if I am wrong, but are you more or less suggesting that Newtown Primary School be closed instead of Erskineville?

**Ms STAVERT:** It be closed, but the land and the activity of the school be kept in public education hands and expand.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Become part of the performing arts--

**Ms STAVERT:** Become part of the performing arts high school, yes, I think that is the suggestion that I am making if we are building the future.

**CHAIR:** Not dispose of the property.

**Ms STAVERT:** No, no.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Do we know what the Newtown community thinks of that?

**Ms STAVERT:** Yes, the principal of the school and the P and C of the community have had discussions around this idea and proposal and see the value of it. I mean it is no mystery that the older schools in our city in the oldest public education system in our country now need refurbishing - it stands to reason - and I think that the parent community of Newtown Public School see the advantage of a well-planned and solid refurbishment of the Erskineville site to provide an opportunity again for those children who are at that section of the community. It is not saying that they are against what is happening at Alexandria Park, it is about the distance, with young people with little legs going to an area where they will feel safe in that section of the inner city, but a well-planned, well-resourced environment, and they believe that there is advantage for their children in that.

**CHAIR:** I imagine that the parents from Newtown would see an advantage in having their children at Erskineville because of the greater facilities and the grounds?

**Ms STAVERT:** And open space, and the fact that they are not crossing some of the major thoroughfares of Sydney, that they still will be within that community and parents can walk their kids to school and pick their kids up of an afternoon.

**CHAIR:** Just to clarify what you were saying earlier, Ms Young, do you have any idea how many other child care centres there are, because it would be a misleading figure, just one child care centre providing children for these--

**Mr FOWLER:** That can be supplied to the Committee.

**Ms CAMPISI:** There are actually I think 18 child care centres in the South Sydney local government area, but we can provide you with information on that.

**Ms MULVEY:** There are seven immediately around the school. In fact there is a table in the submission which lists the names of all those child care centres and has the numbers, the capacity of each of those child care centres.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to hazard a guess as to what the total number might be? Are we talking about 1,000 or 2,000 children?

**Ms MULVEY:** Well, in terms of the capacity, the full capacity of those particular child care centres, in my introductory speech I just mentioned what that number was, so collectively there is a capacity of 290 in those seven child care centres, although when I heard Margaret speak about 149 I think places do not equal the number of children because a number of children go part-time, so I guess that would be an under-estimate, therefore, of the number of people that might utilise those.

**Ms YOUNG:** It certainly would, I would say, that would be the number of places.

**CHAIR:** And there can be three children using one place.

**Ms YOUNG:** Exactly.

**CHAIR:** Because parents only work part-time and so on and only need the centres for two or three days a week, not five days.

**Ms YOUNG:** That is right.

**Ms MULVEY:** They all have waiting lists as well, those child care centres.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** Ms Young, you have talked about the waiting list. Could you indicate whether you have always had a waiting list, whether it is bigger now than it has been at some stage in the recent past, whether you have seen some trends? We have heard from South Sydney Council about the move towards urban consolidation. Is that reflected now in the numbers at the centre?

**Ms YOUNG:** First of all, our centre has been fully enrolled consistently for many years and has maintained a waiting list for many years. The trend that we are seeing in our particular centre, and I would have to acknowledge that there are various reasons for this, is a great demand for our places, the program that we operate for babies and very young children, and that is not only reflecting that there are an increasing number of such families in our local area, what we call our local area, but the fact that we do operate a program that has very high quality.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** A question to the Mayor: The proposal for the Alexandria Park Community School in that area where Cleveland Street High School is at the moment, in terms of what is being proposed and the number of students that will be there compared to its current usage, is council completely happy with what is being proposed on that site?

**Mr FOWLER:** Well, no. I think the fact remains that there are currently 250 students for each of the two sites, the current Alexandria primary and the Cleveland Street, but there are 270 primary school aged children, on current figures. But there are statistics and there are statistics.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** It is proposed that there be 800 people in Cleveland Street, is it not?

**Mr FOWLER:** No, the development application is for 250 and the question here is really about planning, I would suggest, rather than statistics of what the enrolments will be. There is a given tradition of placement of pre-school child care in the inner city and that has been by the Kindergarten Union, Sydney Day Nursery and by local government. Now that has been going on certainly since the 1950s or 1960s and the establishment of those child care centres. That has always had a flow-on effect to schools. The argument has to be that council and the Government planned for a great amassing of people there and I would give evidence that there is not public educational infrastructure for the intended new residents of the Green Square urban redevelopment.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Perhaps the South Sydney Council people may be able to explain this. Looking at the table that you gave us, I notice that for South Sydney the preschool percentage is 15 percent whereas, for instance, the primary school percentage is 76 percent, so obviously when we are talking about people in preschool we are talking about a very small percentage

of the population. I am just assuming from what we have heard about waiting lists that the percentage has gone up from only 15 percent in 1996 to whatever it is now and I just wondered whether the council had any data on what the current percentage using preschool may be?

**Ms CAMPISI:** We do not actually have that because that was actually extrapolated from the 1996 census and the 2001 census is not available, but I would say the low preschool attendance in South Sydney is based on a number of factors, one of them being affordability. Preschool child care, all forms of care outside the public school system, costs money and that is an issue for a lot of families.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** So does the waiting list we see now reflect gentrification? I mean if it was only 15 percent and now we have waiting lists I guess it reflects even more desperation or more money.

**Ms CAMPISI:** Well, what I have seen as the children's services coordinator in council in terms of trends of child care usage is the use of child care dropped significantly after the operational subsidies were removed from child care centres and the fees became higher for families. There was a real reduction in the use of child care and a lot of part-time use as opposed to full-time use, but the subsidies have increased a bit in the last few years and that has led to a bit of a resurgence in the use of services.

**CHAIR:** But it still is a burden in some ways with very low income families.

**Ms CAMPISI:** Very much so, yes.

**CHAIR:** It does not mean that the child is not there, but the mother cannot afford to put the child in the centre.

**Ms CAMPISI:** It just means that they do not access the service, that is right.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** You said there were a number of inconsistencies in the Department of Education's figures which have come from a range of issues. Are they listed in your submission? For each of the things you identified where there was an inconsistency, have you got your figure and the department's figure on some form of table that we would be able to identify?

**Ms CAMPISI:** We were given a copy of the Macquarie Research report that the department had commissioned and council went through that report. That is in our submission.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** A table that compares the two figures?

**Ms CAMPISI:** There is a section in our submission, it is not actually in table form but it is in report form, of where the inconsistencies are.

**CHAIR:** You might be able, if you have time, to do that for us, just make a table of comparison? Not today, but forward it to us as a question on notice.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** Because that is going to become a very significant issue, I suspect.

**Ms CAMPISI:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** From what you said a moment ago it does appear that - and this is something that happened with Hunters Hill - the 2002 census is critical and a lot of decisions have been made on the 1996 census. We are in the wrong calendar, so to speak, when trying to make decisions when the 2002 census figures are not available.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** But remember people use, for instance, the Medicare data, which covers every child born since the 1996 census. I think we confuse ourselves if we think there is no data between 1996 and 2001.

**Ms MULVEY:** My understanding is that the projections were based on the 1996 ABS data.

**Ms COULTER:** And Medicare, but the demographic analysis refers to around 1,000 children in the target population and in fact it is close to 1,400. It is 1,388 based on the Medicare figures.

**Ms CAMPISI:** And then through the report it rounds it down to 1,000, which is grossly misrepresenting the number of children who actually live in that area.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** So it goes from 1,388 to a rounded figure of 1,000?

**Ms CAMPISI:** Yes, the projections are based on 1,000.

**Ms STAVERT:** If I could give a practical example that has been raised before in terms of Ultimo Public School, Ultimo Public School used to run at 85 students. The anticipation was that on the Pymont peninsula you would end up with dual income no kids and single occupancy. The fact is that that school has gone from 85 to 285 because what we forget is the casino, Darling Harbour, Chinatown, all of those areas, have to have people who cook meals, make beds, clean places and do all of that, so subsequently that whole Pymont peninsula has grown in size for that public school and the same will occur with many of the expansions in South Sydney.

**Mr FOWLER:** If I can add to that, the post-occupancy experience of some of the new housing establishments, such as Kimberley Grove and the Hudson in Alexandria, has revealed that, particularly with a lot of immigrant groups on arrival, and in the South Sydney local government area we look at east Asian, southern Chinese and middle eastern and Russian as a particular element, and often that Russian aspect is dual generations, you may have the elder parent going into Department of Housing who acts as a child care reference for the child that may well be going to day care or any other educational facility, but the parents may be residents in the area and, given that pattern of urban lifestyle, I would suggest that that Pymont-Ultimo experience would be reflected in Green Square.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**JOHN CHARLES McINTYRE**, Minister of Religion, 119 Young Street, Redfern, sworn and examined, and

**JOHN MICHAEL BENTON**, Relieving Principal, Redfern Public School, 180 George Street, Redfern;

**JENNY ANN MUNROE**, Student, 247 Lawrence Street, Alexandria, and

**DIANNE BUTMAN**, Lecturer of Education, 6 Pembroke Avenue, Turramurra, affirmed and examined, and

**JOHN WILLIAM FOWLER**, Mayor, South Sydney Council, Mary Street, Surry Hills;

**SHARON CAMPISI**, Children's Services Coordinator, South Sydney Council, Mary Street, Surry Hills;

**DEBORAH COULTER**, Redfern-Waterloo Project Manager, South Sydney Council, Mary Street, Surry Hills, and

**FIONIE STAVERT**, Union Organiser, New South Wales Teachers Federation, Mary Street, Surry Hills, on former oath:

**CHAIR:** Mr Benton, are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

**Mr BENTON:** I am.

**CHAIR:** Reverend McIntyre, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Reverend McINTYRE:** As a member of the Redfern Parents and Citizens Association.

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

**Reverend McINTYRE:** I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms Munroe, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Ms MUNROE:** As chairperson of the Redfern Parents and Citizens Association.

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

**Ms MUNROE:** I am.

**CHAIR:** Ms Butman, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Ms BUTMAN:** A member of the P and C at Redfern.

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

**Ms BUTMAN:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** If any of you consider that, in the public interest, certain evidence or documents that you wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request.

We have allocated up to five minutes for each of the witnesses to make a statement to the Committee of inquiry.

**Mr BENTON:** I have been the relieving principal of Redfern Public School for 12 months now. It has been an absolute joy, I have to say. I have enjoyed the time and the community at Redfern

a lot. It is a school with a proud history and a great tradition and a great staff. We think we are doing a good job at the school. We are constantly striving. Our aim this year is to make this year the best year for the particular children at the school, because, as we say, the school might be closing, but they are only in kindergarten once in their life and we want to make it the best kindergarten year that they have had, no matter what else is going on.

We are also striving to prepare the kids for the transition. We have a sports program with the other schools that are closing. All the other schools are in the Port Jackson district and we all share a common bond. We know each other quite well, the principals. We have developed that transition program. Our three to six section of the school regularly go up to the school and we are developing a transition program for the rest of the children, so they are happy with the school next year should they go there.

**Rev MCINTYRE:** I would have to say that when the decision was handed down about the closure of Redfern school - I am going to speak basically from the point of view of Redfern school - acknowledging that there are other schools that are being closed down, but from the point of view of Redfern school the decision to close us came as a shock, obviously, but not as a surprise.

I say that from the point of view of a community that is used, I guess, not to use too strong a term, to almost being raped in order to provide services for other areas outside the inner city. It seems that the Government track record, I say this both State and Federal and business track record and semi-Government organisation track record in our community is to shut things down. We have been through a whole series of closures. I have been in the community for nearly 12 years. In that time the Waterloo police station has been closed down. In that time two hospitals have been closed down, South Sydney and Rachel Foster Hospital. In that time there has been a threat to close down the Redfern police station. In that time we have had post offices closed down with promises that new ones will be opened, and they have never been reopened. It is not a surprise to us to have a statement made to us that we will have something else closed down, we will have further property taken away from our community. It seems to be that governments do that to us, as does business. They have closed down lots of banks. There is one left of about seven that were there when I arrived. It is something that unfortunately we are getting fairly used to in our community.

The problem for us in Redfern and Waterloo, I have to say, is that what this decision now means for us is that there are no schools in our community. In what we call our community there will be no schools left. People need to recognise and acknowledge that. Our community is not being listened to in this whole process. By that I mean that what we consider to be our place, which is Redfern and Waterloo, and even within that there are quite discrete communities, what we consider to be our place is being totally bereft of any public school. We think that that is an indictment on the Government to treat us in that manner.

Alexandria is not part of our community. We have been told that Alexandria community school is going to be open. That is great for Alexandria but it is not great for Redfern and it is not great for Waterloo. Increasingly, Alexandria is going to become less and less our community too, because it is a wealthy community. Houses there are now selling for well over a million dollars. It will be taken over by wealthy people moving into the community. I have no doubt about that. What is the largest public housing estate in the whole of New South Wales, in Redfern and Waterloo, will be left to one side. I have no doubt about that. They will not want our kids going to this posh new school. We have a dilemma in relation to that.

We also have a dilemma in relation to physical access. We have two main one-way roads that run between Redfern and Waterloo and Alexandria community school site. We are in a situation where there is an expectation that even while there will be bussing of kids, not all kids will get the bus. How do they get across the roads? They are very dangerous roads, some of the most dangerous roads in the whole of the inner city.

We are a community in Redfern and Waterloo that has been described as disadvantaged. I want to make it very clear that that does not mean that there is something wrong with the people in our community. Often people say disadvantaged and they are referring to people. What we are talking



about is that we are a community that is disadvantaged by the circumstances of our community. This decision makes our circumstances even worse. It disadvantages us further. There is nothing wrong, as far as I am concerned, with small schools. What I believe, as has already been emphasised by some, is that communities are often built around schools, and in some ways the smaller the better.

The people want to talk about our current attendance rate at Redfern Primary School. The rumours have been alive in our community for, I think, as local resident, at least five years, if not longer, that our school was under some sort of threat of being closed down. That does not mean a Government decision was made that long ago, but certainly we have heard the rumblings and the rumours and we are used to temporary teachers in Redfern Primary School because there seems to be some suggestion that we are going to be closed down at some point in time.

I guess we are saying: listen to our community, please listen to us. We are not educationalists, we do not have all the facts and statistics and figures, but we are a community that knows our own heart. Our heart is telling us we are being ripped off again, we are not going to have public schooling in the whole of our community.

We have some concerns about the consultation process. We were interested to see that in relation to the South Sydney boundary changes, this Government was clearly shown not to have followed due process. We would say that due process has not really been followed in relation to this particular matter. The original announcement was made as a *fait accompli*. Within Redfern school we were not even properly made aware of the right of appeal in relation to that announcement. The review committee, we know it was a split decision, three/three, with a casting decision made by somebody paid as a consultant by the Department of Education. Now how open a process is that in terms of due process? When we went to meet with the Minister we were told, "No way, this school has been closed. The decision will not be changed." That is not what I call consultation; that is not what I call due process. Again we say: please listen to the community.

Let me say one more thing in relation to the contamination of our site, which is one of the things cited to us as to why things will not go ahead there. We believe that contamination was conveniently found in about June of last year. Prior to that there had been not much talk about contamination. We also know that just about every property in South Sydney is to some extent contaminated anyway. With that in mind why is the Redfern Primary School currently on that site if it is contaminated? Why are there plans to have Murawina Preschool go onto that site, if it is currently contaminated? How is it that decisions like that are made about our school before final decisions were made about the closure of Redfern Primary School. We were sitting there discussing our right of appeal and people were literally measuring one of the buildings of our school to put a preschool into it, before we had been given a right of appeal in the closure of the school. That kind of process has continued to go on.

If it is all about contamination; Cleveland Street High School is currently on a block of land which the Alexandria Park School is about to go on. What is the contamination of that area? These are the sorts of questions that we think are very important and they seem to have been pulled out of the air as some sort of basis for closing our school and we would challenge some of those decisions.

**Ms MUNROE:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land we stand on today is Kuttabul land. I think by making that acknowledgment I come to you with a whole different aspect about history and learning and teaching, Aboriginal history, our sense of place. We have a very strong affinity with the Redfern community, we have a very long, proud association with the Redfern school, and I speak from a point of view of somebody that has been involved in the struggle for justice for our people in our own land for 30 years, going back to 1972, the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra, and then my subsequent employment in Aboriginal organisations in the Redfern area across that 30 year period.

A sense of place: Alexandria certainly does not have it. Redfern Primary School has it, a sense of place, a sense of history, a sense of pride. I can go to Redfern Primary School and point my grandchild out his Auntie Shirley Smith. I cannot do that in any other school in this country. I can go to Redfern Primary School and point out the history of Gough Whitlam and Vincent Lingardie. I cannot

do that at any other school in that local area. I can go to that school and talk about whose land it is, and all the other pieces of Aboriginal land in the close vicinity of Redfern School, the Wallumattagal people's land and on the other side of the harbour, whose country it is. That aspect of history is being forgotten in this whole process, our contribution of Aboriginal people to the Redfern community and to the Redfern area in particular, and our strong association with that school.

My children went to that school; my grandson now attends today. I am one of many families who have attended that school across generations. Our children get a sense of place from there, they get a sense of history from there and they get a sense of justice, and where it is not done properly also. I think the decision of the Schools Closure Committee and decision of the previous Education Minister was certainly done without due process, without taking into consideration the wants and the needs of the people in that local community and certainly without addressing the needs of those children.

I think there was an anomaly in how the Department of Education came to its decision with falling numbers as the basis for the closures. Cleveland Street High School has the same problem with falling numbers, and yet that is given an injection of \$7,000,000 and Redfern is closed. I would suggest to this Committee that that is because teenage Aboriginal children not at school are much more visible than younger Aboriginal children not at school, and the problem and the consequences of that have been taken up by the Department of Education for short term interest rather than the long term gain of our community.

We need to think it through a whole lot better and engage the whole of the community in consultation rather than shams, which has been done and perpetrated upon our community once again in relation to this decision. We know what injustice is. We know what shams are. We would suggest to this Committee that it might be in their best interests to understand those same dilemmas.

**Ms BUTMAN:** Thank you for the opportunity. I think what we have, not only in terms of Redfern Public School but in terms of all the schools that are threatened with closure, is the consequence of the last ten years of Government policy, which has been about encouraging school choice. The inevitable consequence of choice is that some schools are left with a residual population. As I believe the DET referred to on Wednesday.

When you allow the population to move around people will move in the belief that they are seeking and finding a better school, and you have remaining in other schools a community, and this is what happened at Redfern, a community where people are disempowered in the process, who have a disadvantaged context of life, a marginal community where unemployment is high, drug use is high, and what we have got in the proposal to close Redfern Public School is a position which the department, and indeed the Government, say is an economic decision.

There has not been any educational decision-making in the process. It does not recognise the unique needs of the community in Redfern, or indeed any of the other communities where the populations have declined. To simply say that you close the school and move the population out and move them to another school or another location fails to recognise the unique educational needs of a community like the kids at Redfern Public School.

The Premier's Department, as we have heard previously, has put a great deal of money, or is proposing to put a great deal of money in the Redfern-Waterloo project which is designed to support, develop and overcome the problems within the community. On what grounds, on what educational and on what welfare base can they propose to do that and at the same time take away the school which becomes the real mechanism for overcoming the disadvantage and marginalisation of the community?

What is needed in the Redfern community is a school, extra resourced, with smaller classes that will enable teachers and the community to work it together in a really integrated sort of way. In this way you connect with the community, the teachers will understand the community and begin a process of re-engagement of the families and the community in the lives of the kids in a process of change that will make a real difference.

The essence of the Premier's Department money in terms of the Redfern-Waterloo project

absolutely contradicts what we are seeing from the Department of Education in terms of the closure of the Redfern school, and indeed some of the other inner city schools as well.

The real tasks of schools like Redfern Public School should be the development of flexible, caring innovative curriculum and support, reaching out, connecting with the community, really requiring teachers with very special sorts of skills working with the children in that particular community. The current non-participation and high absenteeism of a significant number of children within the inner city and Redfern area is certainly not going to be solved by the removing of the local school to a site distant from the physical connection of the local community.

The Alexandria Park Community School does not reflect the Redfern community. The Redfern community was not involved in shaping up any notion of the proposal for the Redfern community. The DET has in some senses used the language of a community school, but there is no evidence in their proposal, nor in the process of the construction of the Alexandria Park Community School, of a sense that there is any understanding of what it means to have a community school. It is quite apparent, in fact, that the steering committee that was to guide and develop the Alexandria Park Community School has not met more than twice this year and, indeed, it has rejected a real sense of what it might mean. As a representative of the Redfern community participating in that committee, I was told on one occasion that I was wasting their time because I dared talk about the need to establish much greater links with the community. The task of the people present was to get on with the task of creating a new school, not to think about how to create a real community school.

Just by way of connecting back to Alexandria Park, the Alexandria Park School will not work. It breaks the link that education at schools might have with the local community by removing the kids from one end of the Redfern Waterloo area and trying to push them to another area, which is not part of the community.

Now, one last thing I wanted to mention was the issue around Murawina coming onto the Redfern site. It has been an agreed notion for quite some years that it would be a great idea to have Murawina preschool sharing, working alongside, Redfern Primary School, what greater way to create that connection, that transition from preschool into primary school. However, what we now have is a proposal, because mysteriously contamination was found on the back oval of the school, which makes a nice big oval for redevelopment, contamination was found on that site and the school is to be closed and Murawina preschool is to be relocated into one of the key buildings on the site. That is completely contradictory to the notion of providing for the transition. I do not know how on earth you can think about creating a preschool and then closing the school, because it is contradictory to the educational needs needed in that area. I will leave it at that point.

**CHAIR:** Ms Stavert, do you have any views on the Redfern school?

**Ms STAVERT:** When Building the Future was announced the New South Wales Teachers Federation had to view what was the best way forward for the teachers to work with a plan that we saw was asset based and not educationally based. I think the key tenant of what the federation has done has been that teachers do not keep schools open, communities keep schools open, and schools are there to provide for the children of those communities.

In the dissenting report that was presented and in the discussion that Marie O'Halloran had the other day in support of Redfern Public School it was clear that there was a significant section of the Redfern community that was making the statement that they did not believe the transition from Redfern Public School to Alexandria Public School was one that they wanted to make.

I think it is absolutely clear that the people who originally made the decision about these communities had no knowledge of these communities, because on a map it all looks - Waterloo is up the road, Alexandria is over there, Erskineville is up there, but from my experience of working with people in these communities, they might as well be 20 kilometres away from each other because they are distinct communities. In fact, when we talked about the secondary education options if Cleveland Street High School was to be closed, as per the original Building the Future plan, and the closest secondary schools that were going to be available for many of those kids in that particular area of

South Sydney, some of those kids do not go that far on their Christmas holidays, let alone to go to school each day. That was some of the reality of where not knowing the community was really going to mean that there would be an impact on kids disengaging from education.

The notion of the contamination and these sorts of things I find really frightening, considering that the area that is supposedly contaminated was an area that the students, the teachers, and the department of national parks created as a garden, native vegetation garden, less than two years ago. So, in other words students, teachers and these people have been digging around in this so-called contaminated area to create a garden, and I find it alarming that on an asset realisation this suddenly bears fruit, or it is presented in here.

The transition point of moving a community school where you have got preschool kids moving into the next stage of education, I do not think is being facilitated by this plan at the moment. I think the key thing that the federation and the Inner City Teachers Association want to say is that community consultation in this process, and really unpicking how the communities work, was never really adequately done.

Whilst there have been changes, I think one of the alarming aspects of Building the Future Mark 1 was Wingara, which was to be a school for predominantly Aboriginal students who were at risk. It was an appropriated Aboriginal name, ironically enough currently being used by a private school for the gifted and talented. There was no consultation with the community at all about whether this was an appropriate model. In other words, it was a mission school. That is rightly and properly how the community saw it. From that point onwards, being able to engender real support amongst that community to understand education options was pretty much lost for six months because the outrage about Wingara was so powerful within that community, people turned their backs on it, they did not want to know. We are really missing an opportunity to work within these communities and engage the students that Debbie knows so clearly about. That is the federation's position.

**CHAIR:** Perhaps over to the South Sydney Council team.

**Mr FOWLER:** I will make two comments and I will ask Ms Coulter to detail more of them. Redfern school has had a number of medium density developments that have come on stream and have people moving in. It immediately abuts the Waterloo high rise estate and any sense of activity that the department has in terms of local government requirements, such as planning assessment and subdivision, has been deferred by the council in order to have the appropriate assessment of this committee, in terms of the long term outlook for local education. In the eyes of the council it is an inappropriate reference to subdivide that land and provide greater containment on it without enhancing the school, which was the intention of the placement of Murawina on the site adjacent to it, and council has continuously supported that reference.

**Ms COULTER:** The children living in Redfern and Waterloo are undoubtedly some of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged in New South Wales. We have already mentioned that they have alarming rates of school non-attendance and we have expanded on the table in our submission. There is a lot of additional information to support that table.

**CHAIR:** Just to clarify that, have we got that yet?

**Ms COULTER:** Yes, you have received it. These are additional copies for your information if you are interested. If I can expand on the disadvantages facing these young people: We have around 1,080 in Redfern-Waterloo in the five to 12 age group. These are the young children that would be required to go to Alexandria Park School. They would need to cross up to three arterial roads to get there, Elizabeth Street, Botany Road and Wyndham Street. We also have a further 716 in the 13 to 18 years range. In total 2,527 nought to 18 and many of whom would be going to a school with a capacity initially of 250 children; 447 single parents in Redfern, 575 in Waterloo; 59 per cent of the Waterloo population receives a CentreLink payment; 383 Aboriginal people in Redfern, 425 in Waterloo. They are probably underestimates, and much higher than the New South Wales average. As we know, Aboriginal people are undeniably the most socioeconomically disadvantaged people in Australia.

We have large numbers of people from non-English speaking backgrounds; 76 per cent of Waterloo residents live in public housing. We have high rates of unemployment, large numbers of children identified as at risk, high levels of drug and alcohol abuse, low levels of literacy and numeracy, many people with a chronic disability, increasing homelessness amongst the Redfern-Waterloo population, a problem with crime, a significant number of families of prisoners, many people who are victims of violence or sexual abuse and high rates of employment-related discrimination. It is a very disadvantaged community.

We know the most disadvantaged children are the ones facing already barriers to going to school and this new school is going to compound them. I have touched on the roads that children are going to have to cross. In addition to traffic hazards, they are also facing opportunities for school bullying on the way to and from school. That is an issue for the Redfern-Waterloo community and also opportunities for abuse at the hands of adults in the community. A number of children already who attend Waterloo school are regularly tracked by a local paedophile on the way to school. All of the children know this person, adults know him. That is one example of the hazards facing children already. They will be travelling much further to get to the new school.

A study by Tony Vincent in 1999, *Unequal in Life*, talks about social disadvantage across New South Wales. Of the 578 postcode areas he studied across New South Wales, Waterloo ranked 22 out of the 578. It was one of two urban areas in the whole of New South Wales, the other is Windale in Newcastle, that came out in the top 30. Most of the other top 30 were rural areas. Waterloo also included four of the top 30 rankings for disadvantage out of the ten indicators used. In recognition of this disadvantage we mentioned earlier that the Premier has announced the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project. It is a whole of Government, whole of community approach to address the social, economic and environmental and planning issues in Redfern and Waterloo. The closure of Redfern and Waterloo schools will only compound the issues facing the project.

It has been mentioned previously that Redfern Public School is right on the border of Waterloo estate, adjacent to significant public housing, and that school has strong links with the Aboriginal community, and it is also recognised as a disadvantaged school. The Redfern Connect Project was established at the school several years ago in recognition of this disadvantage and it is funded by State Government Departments of Housing, Health, Education and Community Services. It was one of the first schools that community centres established.

Just if I may go on a bit more about the travel, the intersection of Botany and Henderson Roads at Waterloo, which is one of the roads that all of the children in Redfern and Waterloo will have to cross to get to Alexandria Park, is one of the worst intersections in South Sydney for pedestrian accidents. Many of our local families do not have cars, naturally, because of their low income levels. This will reduce their access to extra curricular activities at the new school. Travel arrangements may also result in increased transport cost to these families, increasing their disadvantage.

The public transport routes around and across South Sydney, but particularly in the Redfern and Waterloo areas, are very poor, particularly east/west. There may be some routes that can get people from Redfern to Waterloo, but they will not necessarily carry them on to Alexandria. How do you then get your children, perhaps a five-year-old and toddler, to Alexandria Park School from Elizabeth Street, Redfern, on a rainy day? I do not know how people would do that.

The new school no doubt will have a lot to offer, but we are just concerned that the Redfern and Waterloo parents will be dislocated from that school and be unable to participate in any of those extracurricular things.

**CHAIR:** Just to clarify something there, you have referred to Mr Carr's Redfern and Waterloo enhancement plan. Do you have a copy of it? Is it in documented form?

**Ms COULTER:** It is and we can forward that to you.

**CHAIR:** The reason I ask the question is whether there is any provision within that plan about education?

**Ms COULTER:** It does actually talk about education. In fact the Premier actually addressed the non-attendance problem in his speech to Parliament about the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project. He acknowledged the non-attendance problem at the school.

**CHAIR:** I meant more going to the physical need for schools.

**Ms COULTER:** No.

**CHAIR:** The question of closing the school and how that would fit in with the enhancement.

**Ms COULTER:** No.

**Ms BUTMAN:** It was ignored.

**Ms COULTER:** It is a new project and it has not really yet been able to address many of the issues.

**Ms FOWLER:** Certainly council is a partner with the Government on this but, with all respect to the Government, it is certainly more to do with perceptions rather than real planning or policy references.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** In the School Closures Review Committee were the factors of disadvantage for the Redfern school community given, in your view, adequate consideration, the sort of arguments you have just put to us?

**Ms COULTER:** I do not believe so. In fact I do not believe that the Redfern school submission was even read, not by the school review committee, but prior to that review Education did not even recall having received the school's submission opposing closure.

**CHAIR:** There was a submission, though, was there?

**Ms COULTER:** Yes.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** We have talked a lot about this non-attendance at school by students in the age group and the statistics that have come out of the South Sydney Council area. Mindful of those statistics, are you aware of what strategy the Department of Education has had in place to deal with this issue of non-attendance?

**Ms COULTER:** No. In fact, up until recently, the department has actually been refuting the non-attendance problem. It has not actually acknowledged that there is a problem.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** Up until recently, do you mean that they have now accepted that there has been a problem?

**Ms COULTER:** I think there has been recently, as a result of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project, some acknowledgment of the non-attendance problem, but prior to that there was none.

**Ms CAMPISI:** But the department does have a home school liaison team who works with parents.

**CHAIR:** To clarify that, though, if Redfern Public School was closed, would that increase the attendance rate at the new school or would the non-attendance rate actually increase?

**Mr FOWLER:** Yes. The indication on planning grounds is that non-attendance would increase and currently the home school liaison officer staffing within that region is woefully inadequate to do any of the home visits that are necessary and required and my experience as a classroom teacher

at Cleveland Street, the Alexandria Park location, would suggest that the department has been deficit in its duty of care in relation to non-attendance and, with the lack of policing facilities that have been related and youth liaison officers with New South Wales Police in the Redfern command, that has compounded the problems.

**Ms COULTER:** The Department of Education locally talks about non-attendance being based on school enrolments. We are saying the non-attendance should be based on the kids living in the area because the children who are not attending are not enrolled either, many of them.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** In the course of the initial consultations on Building the Future and the public meetings that were held, for example, at Cleveland Street, there was discussion about a proposal that had been put to the Government by the Aboriginal community in the Cleveland Street area which seemed to form the basis of this P-12 concept for Cleveland Street, but it has been suggested in some submissions to us and in discussions with people as I have moved around that bringing together all of the Aboriginal communities in the region may in fact not work, that there may be some groups that are not compatible with other groups or have a history of not working together. Can you enlighten me about this?

**Ms MUNROE:** Incompatibility I think is a human condition, it happens across races and it happens across families.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** I know, but somebody in one of the submissions does make reference to it.

**Ms MUNROE:** I think the problem is not that there is incompatibility. I think with the so-called consultation processes that do go on the majority of people that speak to these committees are not community people, they are either employed by the Government or de facto employed by Government and that really puts a whole different slant on the information that they are relaying to those committees. I think really the majority of those people sit in a conflict of interest situation. They cannot bite the hand of the master that feeds them. They follow where the master leads and it does not matter where the master leads, they follow. That I think is a problem and it has been a problem in the community across the board for a number of years. The so-called consultation processes that are engaged in are really not consultation at all, it is just Government setting up the process where it ticks off on what it thinks is the best idea for communities.

**Reverend McINTYRE:** The P-12 concept did originate from within the schools of our community, there is no doubt about that. It was totally ignored in Building the Future I, absolutely and utterly, even though funding for it to be developed came from the Department of Education.

**Ms STAVERT:** Priority schools project.

**Reverend McINTYRE:** So teachers involved at Waterloo Primary School, teachers at the Cleveland Street school and I think possibly even Alexandria, though I am not 100 percent sure about that, engaged in a process where they did talk to some parents of some of the children who went to those schools and that P-12 concept grew out of that, but to say that the local community was consulted in that process would be really stretching it.

**Ms MUNROE:** I am a fairly involved member of the Aboriginal community and most people in the Aboriginal community did not know of the concept until after it had been presented to us in the form of the Building the Future documents that Minister Aquilina had presented. We believe that there has been a cover-up of the move, of the discussion between ministers and the department in relation to the move by Murawina. I think it has been on foot for a number of years and I think those ministers in some of those departments have been pulling more than strings to make it happen.

**The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE:** Where is that preschool now?

**Ms MUNROE:** It has been in Eveleigh Street since its inception and rather than address the problems in Eveleigh Street holistically, which is what the Aboriginal community want, they hive off a

little section that is happening to the preschool kids and leave it out so that the problem disappears for them. That does not assist the community that lives there in the situation that they are in. It does not address any of their issues for them, the over-policing, the crime that is going on in the community, those kids that are going to school, how they are being preyed upon by different sections of the community for different reasons. Those kids are the future for all of us, they are one of our greatest gifts and they are being abused on a daily basis because of what departments and people who do not understand their needs are doing to them.

**Ms STAVERT:** If I could talk about the project, I think the importance of it was that teachers and, I take Jenny's point, elements of the community, from the early 1990s onwards, in the Redfern, Waterloo, Cleveland Street High School area, knew that something had to occur because what had happened was that - and I am loath to bring this up but it is the reality of what affected those schools in that area - there was a murder of a teacher and the impact of that and the impact of not actually working with parents in primary schools feeding into Cleveland Street to build up again confidence in the public education system in that area was an absolute travesty because what really it became, to some extent, was a self-fulfilling prophecy that these people were abandoning these schools because there was not confidence about safety, about security, about all of those things, and that happened over a period of time.

Now the elements of the education community in that area were not stupid, they knew that you could not continue on one level to sustain schools that were built for 1,000 running at 150 or all those sorts of things, but it was desperate to get some support, some resourcing, some real dialogue going, and the priority schools project was a kick-off point of that and I think the statement about consultation is a very real one, that consultation was just at that level. What that project was asking permission for from the department was to take consultation to the next level, so in other words there had been a group of the community involved in developing this proposal, the P-12 proposal, but what they wanted to know is that, okay, this is us, this is our group, have we got it right? We need permission to now move this out into a wider community and have a discussion there. They got absolutely no response from the Department of Education and Training at all up until Building the Future was presented.

**CHAIR:** Just to clarify something you said then, because of the incident that affected people's confidence in the public school system, where would they go? Are there many private schools or non-government schools in the area? I did not think there was.

**Reverend McINTYRE:** Can I respond to that because - and this is only anecdotal - I know a number of families who walk their children from the southern parts of Waterloo, as far as that, up to Crown Street Public School. I know another family who actually manage somehow, without a car, to get their children from the Redfern estate to Paddington Primary School, Woollahra Primary School, you name it. There are people who still have not got the means to access private education who are walking their kids all over the inner city, incredible distances, because of some of the rumour stuff that has been around and the loss of confidence in some of our local schools. That is just a common phenomenon. We could name family after family for whom that is the truth.

**Mr FOWLER:** In my experience in teaching at the school there was a project that was done by the then department at the Bondi office in terms of tracking students, particularly from Intensive English Centres, and the statistics are very clear. The private system, the Catholic system in the inner east would take a large number of students from the postcode areas and the other area would be J J Cahill and South Sydney high schools, which are the only two comprehensive ones left in the inner east practically which are not single sex or specialist in some form with the closures, and again I would point out that the Government is actually increasing the chasm between the wealthy and the poor by taking away the choice of comprehensive public education facilities, but they tend to go out of their local government area, Botany local government area.

**Ms MUNROE:** Could I make one final comment: I have been a parent in the school community of the inner city for a long time. My older children went through and were victims of the Metherill era in education and it seems my younger children will now be victims of the Aquilina era and the new minister. I have six children that range across 20 years in age. I mean how many generations



of children in the Aboriginal community do you think that is affecting?

I would also like to remind you of the riots that occurred at Waterloo Oval a number of years ago that the Cleveland Street kids were involved with and subsequently became the catalyst for the push for the Penalaway High School in Newtown. That high school was certainly something that had the whole support of the Aboriginal community, it was something that we dearly wished to see eventuate, but the people who were in control of that process let us down very badly. None of those people were charged, by the way, by the Department of Education and I think that is another issue that really needs to be addressed by departments. Particular people get away with a lot of things in the community because of who they represent and the little cards they give to people, being government employees. The school was allowed to fail at Newtown, the Penalaway High School. Nobody was charged in relation to the people that run it, but nobody has since picked up on the idea of the school and having an Aboriginal high school for students. I think that is what was the idea behind Wingara and I think they really did not understand the community's wishes and needs for that school because they were listening to advice from reconciliation committees. To a large extent we are going in the steps of our fathers and grandfathers by going down that reconciliation road, because in the past the road to hell has been paved for Aboriginal people by good intentions and we have set it up that we will continue on that road to hell, paved by good intentions.

**CHAIR:** Can you clarify something else that John has mentioned, this idea of the village, that the department should have started off by saying where are the genuine communities, where are the villages, and the school should be in the village, rather than take the school out of the village?

**Mr FOWLER:** The local environment plan and council's social planning that we are obliged to do under the reforms to the Local Government Act has been based upon the urban village concept. It has worked in Darlinghurst, it has worked with the placement of child care nearby. Darlinghurst School is a vibrant operating primary school which was indicated to be closed in 1994/95, similar to Pyrmont. The same thing is existing with Crown Street. Bourke Street is slated for potential closure at the moment, but because of the massing of increased places there, Bourke Street will create a southern Surry Hills urban village around Cleveland Street and that will be its school. Crown Street is the school at the Darlinghurst end of Surry Hills. Erskineville is clearly a plank within the attractiveness of that suburb within that community and the redevelopment going apace. Every weekend anybody can see the attraction of these urban villages. People demand to have the choice, if they can afford it, to be able to live and work near the city.

Council has a policy to try and increase that social mix, accounted for by the gentrification brought about by the marketplace, and we have maintained an affordable housing strategy which, while possibly not in balance with the change, certainly will at least maintain some social mix, and that is another plank of the local environment plan. Those two planks of trying to manage that and re-establish these new sites I think has been accepted by the community, certainly because the community was consulted with. The reality is the department did not even come and knock at the door of the council, let alone go and speak to the people of the community.

**CHAIR:** The better future idea, you only read about it when it was announced by the Government?

**Mr FOWLER:** Having worked with the Department of School Education and Department of Education, whatever current name it has, in the time that I have been a teacher in the New South Wales system, it has been run, more usually, not by the teachers who know it, not by the community and P & Cs that manage the school, but by something amorphous behind. It is called the department. The department in its wisdom apparently knows what it is doing. We try to persuade you that they do not in this case.

**CHAIR:** We thank you very much for appearing before the Committee and giving us very valuable information and the Committee will have to work very hard to bring all that together and to make our recommendations. We will endeavour to keep faith with you.

**Mr FOWLER:** If there is any assistance that can be given by the council, I am sure Ms

Campisi and Ms Coulter will help in any way they can.

**CHAIR:** That is useful because you have your fingertips on a lot of information that will be important to us.

**Mr FOWLER:** We can make that available.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**(The Committee adjourned at 5 p.m)**