

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SCHOOL
INFRASTRUCTURE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

CORRECTED

At Room 814-815, Parliament House, Sydney, on Wednesday 13 July 2022

The Committee met at 09:45

PRESENT

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Wes Fang (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Scott Farlow

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales. This is the third hearing into this important issue. Before I commence, it is the custom of this Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I do that with all due respect, as well as acknowledging other important contributors to the history of this site: those who constructed the Parliament House building and the parliamentary staff over many decades who have supported MPs and made our work and representative role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all.

Today we will be hearing from a number of parents across the Greater Sydney and Hunter regions, including parents from Gledswood Hills and Medowie public schools, as well as parents who serve on the P&C of Marsden Park public, Wentworth Point public, and Randwick boys and girls high schools. The Committee will also hear from community organisation Future of Western Sydney University, Milperra campus. While we have many witnesses with us in person, some will be appearing via videoconference. I thank everyone for making the time to give evidence to this important inquiry. I also thank the representative from School Infrastructure NSW in the audience, who has diligently come along and has provided good feedback and assistance to this inquiry so far. I rate School Infrastructure NSW the best part of the department, and they have been very helpful so far.

Before we commence I will make some brief comments about procedures for today's hearing. We are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. A transcript will be available on the Committee's website as soon as it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish. While parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses giving evidence today, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing, so they need to be careful in that regard.

Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is not the Barilaro inquiry. All witnesses have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. If witnesses cannot answer a question, it is available to them to take it on notice to take more time to give a considered answer with reference to certain information. Those answers are due within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they can do so through the staff or by email if they are appearing via Webex.

In terms of the audibility of the hearing today, I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphone and also to turn off your phones. If you are on videoconference in particular, it is helpful to the Committee to identify who you are, as it is for Committee members to identify themselves when asking questions. For those with hearing difficulties who are present today, the room is fitted with induction loops compatible with hearing aid systems that have telecoil receivers.

Ms HANNA BRAGA, Parent at Gledswood Hills Public School, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms KATE LANEY, Parent at Gledswood Hills Public School, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Our first set of witnesses are founders of Community Support for Gledswood Hills Public School, which hopefully one day will be a very important facility in the district. We welcome them to the inquiry. It is available to both of you to make an opening statement, if you'd like. But be mindful that in our visitations the Committee visited the site of the Gregory Hill public school. That's the one that's yet to be built. We were told it was at the planning and design stage. We also visited Gledswood Hills Public School and looked at the various problems there. That information is so the witnesses are aware of our prior knowledge as a Committee. Also, for Committee members, Hanna and Kate have submitted some documentation, which is being circulated, for us to have a look at. Hanna and/or Kate, would you like to make an opening statement?

HANNA BRAGA: Sure. Pretty much the way that Kate and I got involved in this, we both—sorry, am I still on?

The CHAIR: Yes, Hanna, loud and clear.

HANNA BRAGA: It just disappeared, sorry. Kate and I both met in the kindergarten orientation in 2020 for our children who were starting in 2021. Both of us had come from Oran Park Public School, where there were 48 demountables. We had moved over to Gledswood Hills Public School because a new school was in our area. We saw the chaos at Oran Park and we really didn't want that for our children. So when we turned up to the kindy orientation for our second children and we found out that there were already 200-plus kindy kids involved for the following year, we were really concerned. That made us start asking questions about what's happening with Gregory Hills and when this school is coming. There's obviously a need for it if we're having these huge numbers in the kindergarten groups.

We created the group Community Support for Gregory Hills Public School, and there was a huge push from the community. The majority of people we spoke to wanted to know what was happening and when, because Gledswood Hills was obviously a much smaller site than Oran Park and we didn't have the high school site to play in that Oran Park had when our kids were there. So we reached out to various members in Parliament—Peter Sidgreaves, Sarah Mitchell, Gladys Berejiklian and Prue Car—to try to get some answers, and they were not forthcoming with much information. We were often referred to School Infrastructure, which was giving us generic answers. We then ended up finding out that Gregory Hills public school had been pushed back to a 2027 opening date for a two-stage opening—so half the school opening in 2027 and the other half opening in 2030. Knowing that Gledswood Hills was already 200 above capacity after one year, we were obviously very concerned.

A day after we found this out and it was on the news, we had Gladys Berejiklian and Sarah Mitchell come out to Gregory Hills and announce that it would be in the budget. So it was going to be brought forward but no further information—we asked them, "What's happening? When will the school open? And, more importantly for us right now, what's happening with Gledswood Hills? What is the plan for next year at Gledswood Hills? We've got another 250 kindy kids starting again next year and the year after and the year after", and there was just no foresight whatsoever. So at the moment we have an overcrowded Gledswood Hills Public School. It is about to become a construction site. Then across Camden Valley Way we have Barramurra, which is only at 50 per cent capacity as far as I am aware. With a little bit of foresight, in my mind, they could have redirected some of the Gregory Hills families over to Barramurra while they were building the extension at Gledswood Hills or building Gregory Hills. I just feel like this area is completely neglected. Things are not thought about and it is affecting the kids, the teachers, the community, the roads—everything.

KATE LANEY: I would support everything that Hanna has said already. Further to that, I am actually a resident of Gregory Hills, so I have been travelling from my suburb to Gledswood Hills. I did exactly the same thing as Hanna has already said. We have felt that this has been a topic that keeps being repeatedly announced, that it will be going ahead, but up until we were able to secure some documents on a date through other members of Parliament, we had no date. There was no plan moving forward and we just kept getting told that it was in the planning stages. Gregory Hills' first residents moved in in 2012. I myself purchased in the middle of 2015 and moved in at the end of 2016 when I had a one-year-old and a 2½-year-old. My children are in year 3 and year 1 now. I didn't think that when they had said that there was going to be a school in the area that it would not be needed and that we would actually have to fight for answers on why there was a site that was sitting there empty. It is just really frustrating knowing that we have been at Oran Park, we have seen the excess number of kids. There were 14 kindergarten classes when our first children were there in 2019.

The school had to separate break times for K to 2 and 3 to 6 because there was not enough playground space, and they were borrowing the oval from the high school, which had not been built yet. We wanted to move them closer to home and avoid those issues of the large numbers of people. After the first year we were in the same boat again, and we don't have the space on the site at Gledswood Hills. Because it is a steep and terraced site, there is not much room as there was at Oran Park. So our concerns are, when is the Gregory Hills school going to be built, delivered and ready for opening, and what are they going to do in the meantime? At the moment we have 18 demountables on site at Gledswood Hills Public School and there is not much room left for the kids to play. They have also separated the break times at Gledswood Hills now after that first year. As of 2021 they separated the break times because there is not enough room for all of the kids to be out at the same time.

The CHAIR: I might start the questioning to Hanna. I was surprised to hear that Barramurra is only at half capacity. Are families from Gregory Hills and Gledswood Hills allowed to go to Barramurra out of area?

HANNA BRAGA: No.

The CHAIR: Really?

HANNA BRAGA: I haven't tried to enrol myself, but I have heard that it is very strict. You cannot go out of area.

The CHAIR: So there is a school sitting half empty just across Camden Valley Way. I suppose these would be families who would do the 10-minute car trip. You wouldn't let your kids walk across Camden Valley Way.

HANNA BRAGA: Not even 10. It is eight minutes.

The CHAIR: But you can't do it out of area. Opening up that opportunity surely would ease a lot of the pressure that we see at Gledswood Hills.

HANNA BRAGA: Yes. This is what I said to Sarah Mitchell when she came out. I said, "What's the plan for next year?" She came out halfway through last year. I was highly concerned because we obviously had I think 220 kindy enrolments last year. Coming from Oran Park, we know that the kindy groups get bigger and bigger because it is a young area. I think there were 250 this year potentially—I don't know 100 per cent. But I was like, "Can we not rezone Gregory Hills new parents to Barramurra in the meantime or something?" No-one would listen. But it's very frustrating that there is a half-empty school eight minutes away and there is a school at capacity, about to become a construction zone, that they just keep sending people to.

The CHAIR: That sounds ludicrous. My second question, from Peter Sidgreaves' office: Is that still the completion schedule for the Gregory Hills school?

HANNA BRAGA: No.

The CHAIR: It'll take eight years to fully finish that school in 2030, which just seems a bizarrely lengthy construction schedule. Eight years to build a school on that site.

HANNA BRAGA: When we first started asking questions and we couldn't get a date, that date was found out maybe early last year or mid last year. Literally the day after that went to the media, that is when Gladys Berejiklian, Sarah Mitchell and Peter Sidgreaves came out to the Gregory Hills site and they then announced that it would be in the next budget. The latest date that we now have is potentially it will open around 2025.

The CHAIR: That is a lot better.

HANNA BRAGA: They have brought it forward, but still there is nothing in writing. It is just what we have heard. They did an open day and the people who were planning it said it is looking like 2025.

The CHAIR: That is a lot better. But to help the school support groups, our Committee can write to the Minister to say, "What is the exact construction schedule and planned opening date of Gregory Hills?" And, "Can we do something about ending the out-of-area restriction on Barramurra to fill the school that is obviously needed given the overflow at other schools in the district?" We will do those two things and forward to you an answer to try to give you the up-to-date, accurate information from the Minister's office.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much, Hanna and Kate, for your time and for your campaign that you have been doing. As the Chair said, we had the opportunity to come out and see Gledswood Hills. We understand, Kate, when you are talking about the angle of the playground. We very much are familiar with that, and the fact that you are going to be losing about half of that space for the upgrade. Anyone should have seen that that upgrade should have been part of the initial build of the school. When you are talking about a kindy intake of 250 kids, that is half the actual capacity of the initial school. I can't understand that. Thank you very much. I wanted to first of all ask you about the way—you alluded to this in your initial comments—that the

Government has communicated with you. You moved to this area, you were promised a school. Let me ask you that first: How did you know that there was space for a school? Was it because it was signposted? Was it promoted to you when you were purchasing your block?

KATE LANEY: Yes. It was listed as a proposed school by the Dart West company. That was the developer of Gregory Hills. It was shown in their display. Their sales office had a plan of the area and the future stages that would be built, and there was a proposed school on that site. I had found out that—it was not until obviously this whole process started and we actually started questioning that—the school was required to be built as part of the approval for the construction of the estate at Gregory Hills. But at the time we just assumed that. They said, "This is the proposed school." They were using that to sell to families to buy blocks of land here.

Because to me, if I had not known that that was there, it would have put me off purchasing the land here because I believed that there was going to be a school there and that my kids could one day walk to school from the place where we purchased our land. I am less than a kilometre from the site, and that was the real appeal. When we purchased the land I was pregnant with my second and I had an 18-month-old. That was a really important thing that brought us to this area. We've been previously in an existing area that had plenty of schools available but, just at the time, the best option for us was to move to a new area and build a new house, and we would have the infrastructure there ready. They didn't have any dates or anything, but they said that there would be a school. So that was what was proposed and sold to every family who bought in Gregory Hills—there was this proposed school. Knowing what I know now, obviously, we've been waiting and expecting it to happen but haven't known the length that that would happen.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And, Kate, it's reasonable, if you're purchasing a block when you're pregnant with your child and you've got an 18-month-old—you're giving them a bit of a lead-in time. You're not saying that I've got a four-year-old and I'm moving in and so I expect a school built. You're being reasonable—

KATE LANEY: Exactly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —but the Government hasn't been reasonable in this case. Would you agree?

KATE LANEY: Definitely. I definitely think that it's not been reasonable. There was families that had been there at least four years before we had moved in that were expecting a school. Since then, their children have gone to high school, and they have missed the complete opportunity of one of the reasons why they would have bought there in the first place.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I just check, Kate, did the developer say to you that the land was for a school that had been given to the Department of Education at the time? Because it's my understanding that the land wasn't actually handed over to the department until last year.

KATE LANEY: Yes, that's right. The land wasn't actually handed over by the developer until last year. But it was—

The Hon. WES FANG: So the developer didn't declare it to you that the land actually wasn't made available to the department at all until last year?

KATE LANEY: No. That's right, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have a couple of questions. I wanted to ask about whether the department has recognised the community support for Gregory Hills public school as a point for consultation about the future developments of the school at Gregory Hills. Is there a formal point of contact with the department—a project lead or someone who your group can liaise with to try and get information about the progress of the construction of the school?

HANNA BRAGA: You would think so, but no. I've reached out multiple times. They obviously know that the group is there. They are never forthcoming with information. I always have to ask the question and often it's not responded to or I get a generic response, or I get—yes, it's usually just a generic response. So many times, like, for example, there was a meeting for the community to come out and see the plans for Gregory Hills public school. And originally they had posted that it was going to be at the Narellan town centre, and then they changed it to Gregory Hills town centre, but I didn't see the change and no-one told me. So a couple of members of the community actually messaged me and were like, "Did you see this post saying that it's now at Gregory Hills? You'll have to update your post so everyone knows to go to Gregory Hills and not Narellan." And I'm like, "Why wouldn't their office call me?" Because they know that—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They know you exist, don't they?

HANNA BRAGA: Yes. Absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Why do you think it is that the department aren't forthcoming with information?

HANNA BRAGA: I think it started with the fact that they knew that—if you look at the documents that I sent through, originally Gregory Hills public school is marked as it needs to be open by 2023, not negotiable. "Not negotiable" is ticked. And then they have at some point changed it to a two-stage build starting in 2027. So I think, when we started asking questions, they knew, "Oh no, we've pushed this school back and this school's over capacity after a year." They haven't got any good news to give us. That's what I'm assuming. They have seen that we've accepted what happened at Oran Park—48 demountables, thousands of kids, traffic, you know, going in and out. They've seen that we dealt with it, because we knew it was a new suburb. And I feel like they've probably assumed that we would be okay with it continuing at Gledswood Hills. But, as parents who moved out of Oran Park, it's like, this is not right. They can't keep selling blocks of land, and the blocks of land getting smaller and smaller, getting more families in here, without adequate infrastructure. It's just not right.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So it's fair to say there's a transparency problem with the department?

HANNA BRAGA: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Would you agree with that?

HANNA BRAGA: Absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We've obviously done a site visit at Gledswood Hills. I wanted to ask about what it's like to pick your kids up in the afternoon.

HANNA BRAGA: It's a nightmare.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you tell us a bit about what happens in the afternoon, given there's so many kids to be picked up?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I ask a supplementary question to that? What time do you have to get there to get a park?

HANNA BRAGA: Some parents get there at 2.00 p.m. but I don't have that kind of time up my sleeve. I just walk, or I park further away. Kate, I know, parks quite far away as well, because that chaos really close to the school—I feel like it can be quite dangerous because there's not enough spots and the streets are really small. On top of that we've got construction just around the corner, so there's often huge trucks coming down those roads. Construction is about to start in the school, so that's going to add a lot of heavy vehicles.

KATE LANEY: That construction site is directly across from the school. The top gate—it's directly across. And there's B-doubles coming down the street at the time of school—like, the gates open half an hour before the bell goes in the morning, and there's B-doubles going down that street while parents are trying to cross their kids to the school gate. And in the afternoon, the same thing. They have B-doubles coming up and down the road. And that road is not very wide, even though they have parking shoulders. But—sorry, Hanna can continue.

HANNA BRAGA: It's not enough. Then, on top of that, things like the back gate—parents had to call and complain to get, not even a crossing. What's that thing called that they put the flags up and it says "Children Crossing" but it's not an actual crossing?

KATE LANEY: Yes, like a safe place to cross, but it's not a designated—

The CHAIR: A refuge.

KATE LANEY: Yes.

HANNA BRAGA: So the principal sometimes goes out there because it's just chaos and someone has to try and help get these kids across the road safely. It's just not planned well, whatsoever, for the 600 that it is built for, let alone the—I don't know, is it nearly 1,200 in there now? I don't know the exact numbers, but it's chaos. Like I was saying, I live in Gledswood Hills, so I would love to say to my kids, "Yep, you can walk home." They're too close to get the bus pass. Technically, in the route thing, we're just a little bit too close. But I can't have my kids walk home because it's crazy, too many people, trucks, not adequate crossings.

KATE LANEY: The kiss and drop zone is always full of cars. That back street—there's the kiss and drop zone, then there's the road, which you can fit two cars going either side, just. But if people park all down the side where the lake is, in that green space opposite, it is bumper to bumper through there. And the teachers are there until at least 3.10 p.m. with people trying to get through to get close enough to the school to pick up their kids from kiss and drop. I do park a few blocks away and walk up the hill to get there because I just don't want to

go near it. And even though my kids could catch the bus from Gregory Hills, it's overcrowded. I would not let them. It's too dangerous.

The same thing to walk home—even if I was within walking distance, I agree. You could not let a primary school aged child, unless at least they're in year 5 or 6—it's so dangerous. There's not enough safe spaces to cross and kids go in all different directions from the school. So there's multiple exits—there's three exits and the crossing is at the top across the main road. But they have put a couple of refuge islands in further down to Hermitage Way but it is not actually near the school. But there's pram ramps and spots to cross all around that roundabout which shouldn't have been put there in the first place unless they were going to have a refuge island around it because there's nowhere safe to cross for them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask just as a follow-up, have you seen or are you aware of any near misses in terms of dangerous incidents where kids potentially have been close to harm?

KATE LANEY: Have there been any? I haven't witnessed any but the parents have a Facebook group for the school and there's been a number of times I've seen parents commenting about how a child was nearly hit either on a bike or walking. But I've not witnessed any myself but I have seen parents who've, like, where the person who saw, or it happened right in front of them. No child was hit but it's very—

HANNA BRAGA: It's a matter of time—

KATE LANEY: Scary, yes.

The CHAIR: Unless there is one last question, our time has expired for this session. I want to thank Hanna and Kate for their participation, very good submissions and information backing up our visits to these sites. If we get some information from the Minister's office, as I mentioned earlier, we will pass it on to you as quickly as possible. I think all of us would agree that the lack of communication keeping you up to date is a problem and is a subject for some of our recommendations when we develop our committee report.

HANNA BRAGA: Can I just mention one more quick thing?

The CHAIR: Yes.

HANNA BRAGA: Just high schools is another huge issue. There's not enough high schools out here and we're struggling to get anyone to communicate with us about where our kids are going to go to high school. Our kids are in year 3 and we're, like, worried about that now.

The CHAIR: Yes, we did visit Oran Park High School which is a great facility but you need another one of those, plus we have been urging on the selective high school that's supposed to be built at Leppington.

HANNA BRAGA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: The other thing I would just say is in that Gregory Hills residents are not actually permitted to attend at Oran Park. It's out of the area for us. We're still relegated to going to Mount Annan High School.

The CHAIR: Can you go to Eagle Vale?

KATE LANEY: Well, technically within the boundaries that we're in, the requirement is that we have to go to Mount Annan. And there's no school bus that goes from Gregory Hills to Mount Annan. The kids have to get to Narellan on a public bus and then change and go to Mount Annan apparently.

The CHAIR: That is a fair hike crossing Narellan Road. So that's surprising. You would think, given you haven't got a high school, you would have the flexibility of choosing between Eagle Vale, Mount Annan or Oran Park.

KATE LANEY: Yes. I know of a parent who had her son in the same year, so they were in kindy together, but he has an older sister who's just started high school this year and she kept them at Oran Park Public School. And then the Oran Park High School opened and she had to apply as an "out of area" on compassionate grounds because her son was still there and it would mean that then they wouldn't be in the same place anymore. She thought it was really difficult to get her daughter into Oran Park so that they could still be—because they are right next to each other—picked up and come home together.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Kate and Hanna. We will move onto our next session and we will pass on that information as it comes to hand. Thanks for being involved today.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms LIBBY CLARKE, Vice President, Marsden Park Public School Parents and Citizens Association, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement?

LIBBY CLARKE: Sure, thank you. First of all, thank you very much for having me and taking the time to have this inquiry. Hopefully any recommendations you give are handed down, passed on. I am the daughter of a primary school principal, retired primary school principal. So I know how difficult things are and how things move very slowly with the department and things like that. I have many friends that are teachers—primary and high school—and obviously lots of family friends. So this isn't something that I'm here to bash the Department of Education. I understand what an amazing job the teachers, the principals, everything, does.

But my unique opinion is that I work in the construction industry. I work for a company that has a Sydney Water contract. All these new suburbs—Marsden Park, where I live, Gregory Hills—we exclusively were developing Gregory Hills—Lilydale at Oran Park. We did Oran Park. You know, all these greenfield subdivisions that are going on, we're involved, and we're involved very, very early in the piece. So what astounds me is the Government knows how many lots are coming. Who moves into these new houses? Young families. Yes, we are here to talk about school infrastructure, but the roads are never ready, the schools are never ready. And it just astounds me that the Government knows how many people are coming. They know the lots. The master planning is done years before the first lot is sold. And that is where I think that there is a downfall, and that's what concerns me.

The CHAIR: Well, it astounded me for about 45 years living in Western Sydney, I've got to say, that we don't get facilities in as the people are arriving. But this is our historic struggle, which is ongoing. In your submission you make the telling point that the 1,600 students combined at Northbourne and Marsden Park public schools, that no high school is being built to accommodate the inevitable flow of 1,600 and rising students through to secondary education. Another astounding thing is, really, sometimes the inability of the local MP to actually get these things done. Primarily it's the function of the person you have elected to State Parliament. Who is your member of Parliament there and what updates do they give you about the capacity to build this high school that's desperately needed?

LIBBY CLARKE: Coincidentally our MP for where we live in Marsden Park is Prue Car. She has been fantastic helping us campaign and she has been very, very helpful. And we have Kevin Conolly as well who, on the other side of Richmond Road, is—before we started campaigning for the high school, we had huge issues at Marsden Park Public School before Northbourne was built. Prue even helped us even a lot more than Kevin Conolly because even though it was out of her electorate, it was affecting the people in her electorate because Richmond Road is the boundary. The school is on one side and the estate is on the other side. So she was very, very helpful as well.

The CHAIR: What update have you got about a site, purchasing land, getting going with the high school? Is there any progress at all?

LIBBY CLARKE: The site is there.

The CHAIR: The site is there. Whereabouts is the site?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, the site is there. Now what was very surprising was we have been out there, we have seen the site. And then when we were given a plan, it shows half the site is a high school and half the site is another proposed primary school. How they are going to fit it will be architecturally genius! But I don't know the ownership of the land, whether it's still owned by Stockland or whether it's owned by the department, I'm not sure. The department has issued some information to us and recently they had a virtual meeting room, I think they called it, where we could go on and see the pretty pictures of what it's going to look like. The only thing that wasn't there, and it was the only piece of information everybody wanted, was a commitment date when it is going to open. Yes, it looks great; it looks really pretty. It's the latest and greatest of everything. So I reached out to them and said, "It looks lovely. When's it going to open?" "Oh, we can't commit to that."

The CHAIR: Is there any starting date?

LIBBY CLARKE: Nothing.

The CHAIR: Nothing—no starting or finishing date?

LIBBY CLARKE: I did have a meeting—and I think my information was passed on from School Infrastructure—with a private company that's doing the social impact statement for the school, talking about when the SSD was going to be submitted. They were aiming for sometime late this year. But, like I said, I work in the

construction industry; I know how long these things take. So there was no commitment date even when the SSD was going to be submitted.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much your time, Ms Clarke. I appreciate your unique position as well. We went out to Northbourne and we understand that there's huge development going on through Marsden Park on both sides of Richmond Road. At the moment your kids would have to travel an hour and 20 minutes to the nearest public high school?

LIBBY CLARKE: To Riverstone, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But you say in the initial plans there's a public primary school and a high school on the same site?

LIBBY CLARKE: On the same site, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you know roughly how big the site is?

LIBBY CLARKE: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's fine.

LIBBY CLARKE: I could've found that out but I don't know, sorry.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's alright. You make the point that the communication hasn't been great from the Government. How responsive have they been to the concerns that you or the parents have raised with the process?

LIBBY CLARKE: I've been dealing with different government departments since my older son started school in 2018. There were 60-something children at the school and there were nine kids in kindergarten. We were very early in the estate; it was like a little country school. By the time he was in year 1 and year 2, there were approximately 800 kids at the school. It was enormous growth. It has now filtered back down now that the kids have gone to Northbourne. Our school is down to a few hundred—300, give or take—whereas Northbourne is well over capacity. What the ladies were talking about earlier about the boundaries—the children who left Marsden Park and went to Northbourne, some families wanted to come back and they were told no because they're now out-of-area enrolments.

I've got three boys. One hasn't started school yet; he starts next year, thank God, but my eldest is in year 4. I know how long it takes to build a high school. I touched on when Northbourne was built, they had ridiculous plans in place to bus the children back and forth. It's in my letter. The thing is, when you build a demountable school—they could do that at Northbourne. They could put the children in demountables on the oval whilst they built the school next door. You can't do that with a high school. With woodworking, metal labs and science labs and kitchens and things like that, you can't build a demountable high school. Something very, very interesting in the census results that I was looking at was there are more children in the Marsden Park postcode in non-government high schools than in government schools. In our area within a five-minute drive there is St Luke's Catholic College, Australian Christian College, Norwest Christian College and Richard Johnson Anglican all within five minutes of driving, but there's no high school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That brings me to my next question, which is the independent schools and the Catholic schools have been able to get their acts together and build. They've clearly seen the need and they've built schools, and they've managed to do it in a reasonable time frame. What choice does that give you as a parent? You can either take the public school option, where your kids have to travel an hour and a half, or you've got to leave the public school system.

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes. I talk as a generalisation, but a lot of young families who move to these areas with young kids—some people don't have a lot of money to send these kids to the non-government schools, which is why State schools are there. The growth in our area, not so much in Marsden Park but on the other side of Richmond Road—Blacktown council in the last few years created a bunch of new suburbs because the growth was so astronomical. I know the reason for it was something to do with emergency services and planning and things like that. They've done that but there's still no high school. The fact that they can't see the need for it and they're not rushing it is very, very frustrating.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: To be clear, there is a site there that's available for Marsden Park High School to be built on?

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We can ask them questions about the ownership of the site. Do you know when the site was identified?

LIBBY CLARKE: I don't.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But it's been common knowledge that that's the site?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes. We've been out there and definitely the paperwork and the information packets that we've received from the department confirms that is the site. What we were surprised with in the last couple of months when we received the information was half is a primary school and half is a high school. But any high school would do at this stage.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand. I have a few more questions but I will pass back to my colleagues because I don't want to take up all the time.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm curious about the land that's been identified. That's separate, is it not, to the other site that's got the co-located primary school and high school. Is that correct?

LIBBY CLARKE: No, it's the one site. It's actually in a suburb called Melonba. It's essentially Marsden Park; they just created a new suburb name. But it is one large square site and half is planned for a high school.

The CHAIR: The plan is to build something like Riverbank.

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, and are you aware of the issues at Riverbank?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I guess we've seen it at Riverbank and at Oran Park as well.

The CHAIR: And Oran Park, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: That site has been funded in the budget. Is that correct?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, for the high school but, as far as I know, not for the primary school. Although Northbourne is over capacity at the moment, the primary school there is not the major concern at the moment; it is the high school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: This high school proposal at Melonba, where is that in terms of the School Infrastructure staging? Is that still at the planning stage? Is that how it's described?

LIBBY CLARKE: I think it's well into the planning stages. There is a site plan. But apart from a site plan, I've seen nothing else.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There was a significant underspend in terms of the proposal. As I understand it, the budget had \$9.9 million allocated but they've only spent \$3.6 million. Can you tell us a bit about the communication from the department about where the process is up to? How are they keeping you informed of the development of the proposal?

LIBBY CLARKE: We receive a letterbox drop. I think over the last couple of years we may have received two or three—just A4 pieces of paper dropped in the letterbox. Our school often puts it out in our communication app. Originally it started with "we're in pre-planning". I don't know exactly where it's up to because we haven't received any information for a while. It would be quite a few months since we've received something.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So there are not regular public meetings about the proposal?

LIBBY CLARKE: No, there are not. They have said that they would like community consultation. But community consultation is probably the biggest downfall we've experienced with School Infrastructure, so I don't have high hopes for it.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I want to clarify: In terms of the plans that you were shown of the new school that you were talking about, through what channel was that? Was that with the P&C?

LIBBY CLARKE: It was a letterbox drop, which I'm assuming most people in the estate received. Then it was kindly issued through our school app, in case anybody had missed it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there not a way for interested members of the community to register for regular updates? Is that something that School Infrastructure has made available to the community?

LIBBY CLARKE: On the occasions that I've emailed School Infrastructure directly, it takes some time to get a response and then it's generic. There's been no signup information. You know where you enter your email address for updates? No, there's been nothing like that. In the virtual consultation room—I think they called it—that they did, you could submit a question. I did submit a question, which was about the commitment date. They did get back to me; they called me a few weeks later. I spoke to Germaine at School Infrastructure. She was very

helpful but she couldn't answer my direct question. She didn't have that information available or was not allowed to share it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that person the designated project lead or is there a point person who School Infrastructure provides to the community to be able to deal with inquiries?

LIBBY CLARKE: Not that I'm aware of yet, no.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: When did the process of the letterbox drop and the virtual consultation program you're talking about happen?

LIBBY CLARKE: The virtual consultation was only in the last two months or so. The letterbox drops have been happening for probably a couple of years, maybe one or two years. But it was, you know, "We're seeking money in the budget", "We now have money in the budget. Here is a site plan," but very slowly and not answering anybody's question on a commitment date. If they had told us, "It's not going to be until 2030," at least then we know and we need to make arrangements for our children. It is going to be, in my limited experience in construction, at least probably a two-year build. My son is in year 4. People need to start either budgeting for the non-government schools or making arrangements for travel to the local high school. People need to plan these things.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: From the site that has been identified, is that a flat, easy site, or is that a site that has some challenges? I guess we are going back to the experience of Gledswood Hills, which is quite steep terrain.

LIBBY CLARKE: It is a master plan community; it is a completely flat grade. But there are houses on three fronts of the property. The trucks, the construction—it will upset residents. In saying that, they bought a house opposite a proposed school.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And they are going to get the benefit of having a school on—

LIBBY CLARKE: They are going to get the benefit, yes, you are right.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have one other question that just came to mind. You mentioned the issue of budgeting for private school fees. Given the uncertainty around the completion date for the high school, is it fair to say that the community in this area—thinking about cost of living—are very sensitised to interest rate rises?

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And that will squeeze local budgets. The capacity to be able to send your kids to a private school, if the State fails to provide a public option, is going to put real pressure in terms of cost of living for this community.

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely. I can talk obviously in my experience and my close friends' experience, but I would assume in the Marsden Park area, where the new estate is, I would say there are a lot of mortgages. Absolutely, the cost of living, the rate rises and then adding essentially private school fees on top of it would strain a lot of houses. Absolutely.

The Hon. WES FANG: Ms Clarke, in relation to the build of the school, obviously you have experience in construction, but have you had the opportunity to see some of the new modular schools that have been built around New South Wales? Have they spoken to you about the ability for those to be built off site and then re-established on the actual school site itself? Effectively it is a prefab construction.

LIBBY CLARKE: The precast build?

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

LIBBY CLARKE: No.

The Hon. WES FANG: It has been happening a few times. Those construction dates are around a year. Would that fit into the time line that you have?

LIBBY CLARKE: That would be wonderful for me, personally. Yes, that would be great because my concern was, like I mentioned earlier, that you can build a demountable primary school. The kids just need a classroom, somewhere to sit and the technology in the classroom. But the high school seems to be more difficult. So if there are precast schools that are built—

The Hon. WES FANG: It seems that people have this picture of the old way that construction used to happen, where it was built on the site, whereas obviously offsite construction and then re-establishing it on site seems to be a lot quicker.

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely.

The Hon. WES FANG: I understand that it can actually happen in around 12 or 13 months. So they haven't spoken to you about that possibility?

LIBBY CLARKE: No, they haven't. Northbourne was built very quickly, the primary school. That was built in 12 months and it is a two or three—I haven't actually been in there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That was one of those prefabs.

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes. If that's the case, wonderful.

The Hon. WES FANG: When you talked about the two years, it triggered in my head that we have had a look at some of those sites and they are actually very quick to build. Outwardly they appear no different to a regular school.

LIBBY CLARKE: That would be great. I don't have issues with demountable classrooms like I know a lot of parents do. Once the children are in the classroom and they've got the bright colours and the interactive whiteboards and things like that, they could be in any classroom. I am not here opposed to demountables. My concern was that you don't get offered the woodworking and the kitchens and things like that as you would in a constructed high school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And the point you make, Ms Clarke, is that then the demountables are on the oval, so there is less play space. And going back to Gledswood Hills, which we were talking about before—

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —schools are planned for a certain number of students.

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you know if the proposed school has got a school oval in it?

LIBBY CLARKE: It does. Basically we were shown an oval, parking, three storeys—the building is three storeys—and I think there was some undercover area, like the COLA that the schools have. I believe there was something like that as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do they have a school hall?

LIBBY CLARKE: I don't recall, but I'm sure it does. Yes, sorry, they do because there were areas for performances. Yes, there was a hall.

The CHAIR: Ms Clarke, can I ask for your assessment of community expectations about how many demountables any school could have? Because you've made a really good point that it's hard to build a demountable high school with the vocational educational offerings that are needed today. We've heard accounts—and it's true—that at Oran Park at one stage they were edging up towards 50 demountables and at Riverbank there is a sea of demountables there. Do you think there is basically a community expectation that no school should have more than 50 per cent of its classrooms demountable? They are a higher standard of facility than they were 20 years ago. But I am thinking about a suburb like Marsden Park or Oran Park, where people have invested well in a good standard of private housing for themselves. They have good expectations that Government would make similarly excellent provision for the education of their children. Would 50 per cent be the cap for demountables in terms of public expectations?

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I throw a supplementary comment onto that as well? I have found out that those specialist classes can actually be done through demountables. Just to that point.

LIBBY CLARKE: That would be fantastic. I do not want to put a percentage figure on it. I know that schools are built for the longevity, not for the boom. I understand that they build a school, let's say, for a thousand kids. Yes, for five, six, seven or eight years it will be over capacity. But then the population changes and the numbers drop as the young families get older. I do understand that schools are built for longevity. I think, however many demountables need to be there for the time being. The problem is, is there enough space for them? Do the children have anywhere to play? I have three boys. If they don't run around at lunchtime and burn some energy, I feel very sorry for their teachers. You can fit as many demountables on the site as you want, but are there other areas left for the children to play?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I guess you have gone from that experience through Marsden Park, from what you were talking about, where you started at 60, it went up to 800 and now it is at 300. I take it there were a series of demountables that were used during the time that the school was at 800?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, and they are still there.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Even at 300?

LIBBY CLARKE: They are empty.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Libby, for your advocacy, which has obviously been excellent for the quality of your presentation today. You have added some excellent ideas for our report that we then furnish to the Government.

LIBBY CLARKE: Thank you. I look forward to it.

The CHAIR: Thanks for the work that you do.

LIBBY CLARKE: Thank you very much, everybody. I really appreciate your time.

The CHAIR: Good luck getting a high school.

LIBBY CLARKE: Thank you.

(The witness withdrew.)

Ms MARNIE COATES, Parent, Medowie Public School, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome, Marnie, to our inquiry. Would you like to make a short statement to the Committee?

MARNIE COATES: Firstly, I apologise for not being able to be there in person. COVID has finally caught up with me. But I am, as I said, a mum of three primary school aged children at Medowie. I'm also a chemical engineer, and tomorrow I start my new position as executive manager of water at MidCoast Council. I'm telling you this because I'm a passionate advocate of public education and I'm also a product of public education. The rapidly expanding community of Medowie has been promised a public high school for over 40 years now. Land was purchased in order to build a high school in 1983, and since then various governments have promised a high school in some form or another—promised to start planning or building or designing. But we still have nothing. We bus over 1,000 students out of our suburb to high school every day, and some of them are travelling over two hours a day on buses to get to school. There is a current plan by the Government to expand the two high schools that exist in Raymond Terrace, and this is not acceptable given the rate of expansion in our community and the geographical location of those two schools compared to where the students are coming from.

The CHAIR: Thanks for that, and thanks for battling on with the COVID, in your circumstances, and thank you for your commitment. Forty years of a broken promise is a hell of a long while. At any time, has a site been identified for this high school at Medowie? Why hasn't anyone acted on progressing the site into actual buildings?

MARNIE COATES: I'm not sure about why it hasn't been progressed. The land has been purchased, and that's been there since 1983. It's adjacent to the current—one of our two primary schools in Medowie. We have had various promises, but nothing has been delivered to date.

The CHAIR: Is there any update from your local member of Parliament about the possibility of getting the high school? Could you just explain the level of fast-growing residential growth in Medowie? It's not a stable population, is it? As I understand it, you've got suburbanisation, effectively, and the need for the high school is going to become more pressing as the years pass.

MARNIE COATES: That's exactly right. At the moment we're a population of about 10,000. The latest census, in 2016, it was about 9,500. There's 1,000 properties currently approved and under construction and the council prediction is that by 2036 there will be an additional 7,000 dwellings in Medowie. Besides that, the surrounding satellite suburbs that would all logically feed a Medowie high school are also rapidly expanding. The community of Karuah, for example—there's huge development going on there. The two current high schools which exist in Raymond Terrace, where everybody is currently zoned, are both bursting out the seams and the plan, currently, is to just expand them. But any expansion that happens won't even meet the current projected growth. I can just see that we're going to end up in a pretty bad situation for our kids.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much, Ms Coates, for your time today. I feel like I'm a relative latecomer to this, because I first heard about the need for a Medowie high school from your now local member 12 years ago. It seems like it's been a very long time waiting.

The CHAIR: Who is that? Is that Kate Washington?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, Kate Washington. She's a former head of the P&C there at Medowie Public School as well. Can I thank you for your time, for your advocacy and wish you all the best with COVID—goodness me, starting a new job and COVID; that's quite a lot. I just wanted to really paint that clear picture. There's 1,000 public school kids who get bussed out of Medowie every day. Obviously, there's going to be a number of people on top of that who go to different schools—but there's 1,000 public school kids who get bussed out of Medowie every day. Is that right?

MARNIE COATES: There's 1,000 high school kids who get bussed out of Medowie every day. We have two private schools within Medowie, so some are going there. Lots of parents, I guess, try to get their kids into those schools to keep them in the community, but it's not an option for most people. For example, our brand-new Catholic high school that was built a few years ago—they have 20 places available per year for students who are coming from outside of their three Catholic feeder primary schools, and all of those Catholic feeder primary schools are from outside the area. So there are some of those students in there, in that 1,000 who are being bussed out of Medowie, who would logically still go outside of Medowie. There are selective schools, sporting high schools, creative arts schools. But when you take into account the surrounding suburbs who are also bussing kids to Raymond Terrace, who would logically feed into a Medowie high school, there is still around 1,000 students that make up that public cohort of high school students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you've got a clear need, you've got a site, you've had consistent promises from the Government, and then they've just completely failed to deliver it.

MARNIE COATES: That's right.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you think that the demand is going to—you sort of talked about that in the census data. The demand is going to continue to increase, right? It's not like we're seeing a one-off boom. There is continuing growth, both in Medowie and surrounds.

MARNIE COATES: Yes, that's right. I think the last census showed that the median age of people living in Medowie is 36. We're a very young family based community. There is already a huge proportion of children in the area and that is only going to increase—by about 70 per cent, is the prediction, by 2036.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The demand is going to continue to grow. This is my last question. You said there is a Catholic high school, there is a Christian high school—I mean, you've got two feeder public primary schools as well. The Catholic system and the independent system have acknowledged and seen that there is a need. They've stepped in. But it's the public school system that's not providing that local option for parents. Is that right?

MARNIE COATES: That's right. Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much for your time and for your advocacy. It's very, very important. Thank you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Did you say Karuah is in area for Raymond Terrace?

MARNIE COATES: I believe so.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So the kids from Karuah go to Raymond Terrace. That's quite a way to travel each day, isn't it?

MARNIE COATES: It is. I think the feeder schools—currently there's Salt Ash, Karuah, Lemon Tree Passage, Fern Bay, Tea Gardens, Hawks Nest. They might not all currently feed into Raymond Terrace, although I suspect they do. But they would all logically feed into a Medowie high school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Right, I see. I want to ask about the process of communication and liaison between School Infrastructure NSW and the community in Medowie. This has obviously been a long-running issue. What's the point of contact with School Infrastructure about progressing the agenda of having a high school established at Medowie? What does the dialogue look like between the community and School Infrastructure?

MARNIE COATES: There is no dialogue. I have been in constant contact. I have had sit-down conversations—many with Kate Washington. I've sat down with shadow Minister Prue Car—for education, I should say. Federal Ministers Meryl Swanson and Tanya Plibersek have both also expressed their support for a high school in Medowie, and they are sort of willing to help assist with Federal funds for some of the ancillary infrastructure if the State is prepared to build a high school in Medowie. I have had conversations with Angelo Gavrielatos from the Teachers Federation. I have had support from all the Port Stephens councillors. I am hearing nothing from the Minister. My main line of communication is through Kate Washington's office. Whenever she has raised the issue in Parliament, which I believe has been well in excess—I don't know, there's probably 15 to 20 times over the last 15 years, there's just no response, basically.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has there been any communication about why School Infrastructure would choose to expand the Raymond Terrace high schools? Is there not some communication from School Infrastructure about a trigger point that would say, "Okay, well, if the community in Medowie meets these conditions, then that will be the trigger for us to make a decision to actually proceed with building a high school on the site that's been reserved since 1983"?

MARNIE COATES: Yes, we had that commitment in 2011. At that point I was dealing with Adrian Piccoli who was the Minister for Education then. He promised to make the high school shovel ready and then backflipped in 2015, I believe it was, because he said that the two current schools in Raymond Terrace were not at capacity and that was the trigger point for building a Medowie high school, when those two high schools have reached capacity. Those two schools are now over capacity and the response has been—I can only assume from a financial perspective—that it's cheaper for them to stick a few more classrooms on to those schools than it is to properly plan the infrastructure that is needed for Medowie.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Okay, but there has been no further communication from the department, School Infrastructure or the Minister in relation to that decision around expanding the capacity of Raymond Terrace versus the construction of a new high school?

MARNIE COATES: No, the only time I've heard from the Department of Education, I heard an interview with a representative on ABC Newcastle. I wasn't invited to comment. You know, I've done so many media things over the last few years in relation to Medowie high school, you would think if they wanted information about the issue that they would reach out to me or the community group. We've had no correspondence.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just clarify, there are two schools in Raymond Terrace that take kids from Medowie. Why is it that it is not just one school that has the drawing area that includes Medowie? How is it that it is split between two schools?

MARNIE COATES: I believe it was just poor planning back when those schools were built. Originally southern Port Stephens would have been heavily populated in Raymond Terrace, which is the southern-most suburb of our area. So, I guess, they built all of the schooling infrastructure there and then, as the suburbs north of that have grown, they've just continued to bus everyone to Raymond Terrace.

The CHAIR: Thanks for your presentation today, and all the best in getting over COVID and in your new job. The Committee furnishes a report or recommendations to the Government and, unfortunately, Medowie is one of a whole series of areas where population growth is not being matched by the provision of essential school infrastructure. We will do our best to try to advance your cause. Thank you again for joining us today.

MARNIE COATES: Excellent. Thank you so much.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms SUZY FORRESTER, Secretary, Randwick Boys High School Parents and Citizens Association, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms LEANNE BERGAN, Secretary, Randwick Girls High School Parents and Citizens Association, and former Treasurer and Vice-President, Randwick Boys High School Parents and Citizens Association, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Suzy and Leanne, it is available to you to make a short opening statement to the Committee.

LEANNE BERGAN: I just wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to present some information to the inquiry. As I said, I speak for parents with students at Randwick Boys High School and Randwick Girls High School. I am speaking on behalf of the Randwick Girls P&C where I am an officer. As I mentioned, I am a past office bearer at Randwick Boys High School P&C. I was also a secretary at Randwick Public School P&C where we went through some major upgrades fairly recently. I am wholeheartedly committed to public education and I'm just a little disappointed with the current conditions at our public high school.

SUZY FORRESTER: I would like to echo Leanne's thanks to the Committee for this opportunity. It's certainly very important for our school community, I think, to have this chance to draw some attention to our own situation but hopefully, in doing so, make a contribution to what you're doing in looking at school infrastructure across the State. I also have children who are currently studying at both schools. Both of my kids are now enrolled through Randwick Boys High School, but my year 12 student is actually currently studying an extension subject at Randwick Girls that wasn't available at the boys school due to low enrolments. We, as a school community, have been incredibly frustrated through this process. We feel that our school has been identified as having very clear needs, but the failure of School Infrastructure to involve our school community in this process has meant that we have struggled with inadequate facilities which they recognise as dangerous. It's really impacting on the ability of our staff and students and school community to attract enrolments from our area and to actually support the students that we already have in achieving their own goals.

The CHAIR: I will start the questioning by saying that, it seems to me, the summary of your circumstance is you have been given the run-around for many, many years as to the future of these schools. There has been an amalgamation proposal for the two schools as well as the infrastructure renovation problems, rebuilding problems. What in your view, Suzy and Leanne, would be the ideal outcome that the school community is seeking from School Infrastructure NSW?

SUZY FORRESTER: As we have outlined in our submissions, there was a process undertaken in 2019 to consider the reclassification of Randwick Boys High School as a co-ed school. So, under that proposal, Randwick Girls would have remained as a single-sex girls school and the boys school would have converted to co-education. The support of the parent community and the responses in the survey that was done as public consultation were positive in terms of supporting the change for the boys school to co-ed. The department decided on balance that, once they considered other information, that would not go ahead. It actually quite a long time for that. The time in between the outcome of the survey and the actual decision was several months. So we do understand that there have been some delays at our school as a result of that process going on. There was frustration at the time in that it was felt that the boys school community, and the community generally, were in favour of the change. But at that point we felt that if a decision on that had been made, we should simply be moving ahead with the infrastructure upgrade that those schools clearly needed.

The issue has, to my knowledge, been bubbling along. Leanne and I have both attended meetings of the Eastern Suburbs P&C Alliance, and there is certainly interest from our local primary schools in more opportunities for co-education in our area. I understand that Rose Bay high school is over enrolment at the moment. They're over capacity because of demand for co-educational places at our end of our school community group. At the P&C we are certainly now exploring opportunities for students to take advantage of offerings between the two schools. Effectively, at this point we've said if the department has made the decision and it's not going ahead, we want the upgrades to our schools so that our physical infrastructure is adequate and meets the safety standards that it's been identified as not meeting and gives our students the minimum standards that the department says they should have. And if there are other ways that we can explore further opportunities for interaction between the two schools, we will do that in the context of two separate schools.

The CHAIR: So overwhelmingly the community priority is upgrading these unsafe, aging facilities, not necessarily to go back and revisit the proposition of co-ed at the boys high school? You want to get decent facilities there; that's top of your list?

SUZY FORRESTER: It does seem to be that there is interest in the community in the co-ed situation. But at this point our current students have been in facilities that have already been run down and our basic maintenance hasn't been kept up. We are at the point where, whatever is happening, the students at both schools need these upgrades to happen now. If it is a question that we will revisit, the co-educational situation, it is at the point where we have to consider that as a separate matter because the students at this point are being disadvantaged. So if there's a situation in which a decision is made to consider the upgrades in terms of the possibility of a later amalgamation, that is something that could be done. But at this point it does seem that the focus is very much on getting the upgrades done for the students we have now.

The Hon. WES FANG: I heard in your opening statements there was some talk around dangerous components to the school. Can I confirm, is that the construction fencing that's currently up in the school itself? Is that what was referred to as the dangerous component of the school infrastructure?

LEANNE BERGAN: The buildings are not meeting building codes. There is concrete cancer throughout the facilities. There has been asbestos identified and, I think, removed from around the toilet blocks. We do have a number of witch's hats and construction fences around the property. There are certainly unflued heaters in classrooms as well.

The Hon. WES FANG: When you said "dangerous", you're talking about the construction fencing. Is that work that the P&C was involved in commissioning?

LEANNE BERGAN: There is some construction fencing around a portion of a garden that was being built last year. I don't know why there would still be construction fencing there.

SUZY FORRESTER: If I can add, our concerns about dangerous situations were also triggered by the final business case for the project that indicates that we don't meet building codes, and there are concerns about fire safety and emergency management systems as well.

The Hon. WES FANG: But there is a plan underway for the upgrades. Is that correct?

LEANNE BERGAN: We don't know.

SUZY FORRESTER: This is our point: We have not been given updates on the current status of our project at all. The reason we have information about what we should have expected is that we were given a copy of the final business case, not by School Infrastructure NSW. Any representatives the school had involved in the process of producing that were required to sign confidentiality agreements so that they were unable to fully inform us about what decisions were being made or to inform our representative about our wishes with regard to what was happening. We haven't had a full outline of what we should expect from School Infrastructure at any point.

We are now aware that our project was put forward to Treasury in 2021 with a proposed series of funding amounts for the various budget years and a proposed completion date, but none of that information has ever been communicated to us by School Infrastructure NSW. In fact, letters that we have sent not realising that this business case contained this information have simply repeated very general statements—effectively press release level statements—about the project and then referred us back to the School Infrastructure website. Our project never seemed to move beyond the planning stage, despite the defined business cases being done.

The Hon. WES FANG: There has been, however, funding announced in the 2021-22 budget. Is that correct? It is my understanding the department has been working with the school leadership and the P&C for the development of the scope of works. The information that I have is certainly contrary to the what it is that you're presenting now.

LEANNE BERGAN: Are you referring to the one parent representative on the PRG?

The Hon. WES FANG: It's my understanding that School Infrastructure is working closely with the school leadership and the P&C. Business cases are normally commercial in confidence. They're not often released because tenders can often be written around business cases as opposed to best practice. Commercial in confidence sometimes plays a role there, but certainly my understanding is that the funding and consultation is very much underway and has been progressed to quite a reasonable stage.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But they've only spent \$154,000 despite promising \$5 million last year.

LEANNE BERGAN: Five million dollars was in the budget for 2021-22. According to the final business case, that number should have been \$10.06 million. Did that \$5 million then roll over into what was recently announced in the 2022-23 budget—\$3.755 million, which should have been \$29.37 million by the business case? Is the \$5 million plus the \$3.755 million getting us part of the way through? We don't know; we've

never been told this information. We need to seek this information through our local member or by trawling through the budget papers.

The CHAIR: Who's the local member? Michael Daley?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Marjorie.

LEANNE BERGAN: Do we have \$8.755 million parked away for part of our upgrade? That's the question we'd like to ask. Because \$100,000 has been spent so far. Where is it going?

SUZY FORRESTER: I think we also had some concerns that as far as the final business case was concerned, they did outline a basic option. That was described in terms of "make safe and keep operational", so the absolute basics of what would need to be done to our school to make it meet that description. For the two high schools, that involved an amount of \$15 million between them. That's the absolute minimum; we haven't even been allocated that amount of funding at this point. I think the point that we're trying to stress is, even if things are happening that are not being communicated, what is happening isn't matching what we would expect based on this document.

We are really quite nonplussed that the assumption around this entire process is one of secrecy. The fact is we're dealing with an organisation that appeared to be designed to produce a publicly defensible decision about how funds are allocated by following a clearly outlined process and set of criteria, and yet as a P&C we've struggled to obtain any information. As I said, our only representative was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement that meant she couldn't communicate details to us and we were unable as a P&C, as a parent representative group, to provide her with information that was specific to what was happening.

The Hon. WES FANG: I've definitely picked up on the nonplussed attitude, I can assure you of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I thank you both, Ms Bergan and Ms Forrester, for your time and for your submission. I think we have all probably seen the photographs in *The Sydney Morning Herald* today that show the state of the school. Certainly I should acknowledge our leader, Chris Minns, and local MP Marjorie O'Neill, who were out there last week having a look at the state of the school. I think you make an excellent point, Ms Forrester, that \$15 million is required just to get it to that safe level of operation. I might come back to the question about parent reps because I wanted to ask you for a bit more detail on the point that you made in your submission, which is that the state of the school is then limiting the ability to attract parents. It is obviously in an area in the eastern suburbs where there is a host of other Catholic and independent options. There are still parents who are very committed to public school education, as they rightly should be. But when they are being faced with sending their child to a school that doesn't even meet basic safety standards, it is not really a choice for parents, is it? It is putting them in an incredibly difficult situation because the Government is not holding up its end of the bargain.

SUZY FORRESTER: That appears to be something that is acknowledged in the final business case itself. This morning I was looking at the Auditor-General's report into the functioning of School Infrastructure NSW. Exhibit 5 is an example of an under-utilised high school. At the moment we are told that our school has a capacity of 1,080 students. We currently have 680 students enrolled. In this exhibit it talks about a high school that has students deterred from enrolment due to poor reputation and limited curriculum opportunities and the way that feeds into a lack of enrolments, which is seen as a lack of demand, and that results in no investment in the school. We do feel very much that that is the situation.

Really, for us, the fact that we are having to come out today and draw attention to all of these negatives about our school is quite challenging. We have an amazing school executive and wonderful teachers who go above and beyond all the time to provide our students with opportunities. As I have noted in our submission, at our open day parent after parent was admiring the teachers and the students and talking about their enthusiasm and how well they represented the school, and then they were saying, "But your facilities are substandard." As we mention in the report, our school captures 22 per cent of the eligible students in our area.

LEANNE BERGAN: Which is half the State average.

SUZY FORRESTER: Yes, which is less than half the State average. And talking to other parents from other P&Cs at the Eastern Suburbs P&C Alliance, there is a real push back on the idea that in the eastern suburbs parents don't want to send their children to public schools. It is actually more a situation, as was recognised in our final business case, of if you provide an inadequate offering, parents will make other choices. We are in a situation where we are looking at the idea that demand for us would grow, as you would expect, under situations where parents are facing economic stress, as they are now under COVID-19. In fact, our enrolments have gone up over the last couple of years for that reason—we assume it is for that reason—but also because our school is working so hard.

Our NAPLAN results and our HSC results have been on a steady upward trajectory. As I say, we have wonderful teaching staff, whose levels of self-sacrifice are amazing in terms of how much they actually use their own time to provide opportunities for our students both inside and outside the classroom. As a P&C, we are doing what we can to support them, but we can't do everything. We can work on what we provide within the school, within the boundaries of our resources, but at the end of the day parents are looking at a tired, worn-down school with buildings that are over 50 years old and just do not provide the opportunities that students need to achieve their goals.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And these upgrades were promised four years ago in 2018.

LEANNE BERGAN: They were announced in 2018. The final business case, we now know, went through in March 2021. We actually not only had no communication about that, but if you look at the School Infrastructure NSW website, our project is still listed as being approximately halfway through the initial planning stage. So it has not even been updated to reflect that the final business case has been produced.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Those issues about communication and an inability particularly for parents and school communities to access information is something that has really come through consistently, particularly this morning, but over the course of our inquiry. One of those issues has centred on that issue that you raised yourself, about the parent representative often having to sign a non-disclosure agreement. So they are there on behalf of parents, yet they can't consult back with parents about what advice they are providing. They also then can't be a communications tool, so it is actually just shutting up the shop even more and shutting out the rest of parents.

SUZY FORRESTER: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It actually puts that parent, who put themselves forward, in a really difficult situation. How do you think we could have a better system to actually be communicating with parents?

SUZY FORRESTER: It seems difficult to believe. We do understand that you can't have every parent in every school involved in every decision at every step of the way. That is not feasible. But the idea that you allow that parent to bring back some information about "These are the issues that we are currently discussing. We have a time frame that we need to provide some input. Here are some specific questions that we need to have answered. I would like to be able to take this information back to the next meeting. Can we discuss it?" If it is a clearly outlined process—as a parent organisation, we do have limits on the time and attention we can request from our volunteers because everyone is very busy we can't take it from them.

But we do recognise that people have limited time and attention, but they have a lot of enthusiasm for our school and they will make time for these things if they are given the opportunity. The fact that we haven't—since the very beginning of the process, no parent who is not our parent rep has been able to actually find out what's going on or have any idea about the specifics of what's happening or the way that preferences are being weighted once the discussions have started. Yes, having a structure where there is a list of "These are the questions or the issues that we need some input on, can you please do that within this time frame?"—we will do it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Those are excellent and practical suggestions and I really appreciate that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: One of the suggestions in your submission is about a dedicated community liaison officer. Can you talk us through why you think that is necessary and how you think that might work or improve the transparency that seems to be at the core of the approach that School Infrastructure NSW has taken to projects like yours?

LEANNE BERGAN: If I could answer, a lot of the time we are referred to the School Infrastructure NSW website, where there is a "contact us" if you would like to talk about the project. I have sent a few submissions off and have not heard back. I have emailed through that "contact us", asking specifically about the project, and have not had information. When you can just send something onto a generic website, you don't know who is going to answer it. Do people respond to those "contact us" pages? In my experience, they don't. It is only when I have contacted local members, the Federal member, that you get an answer—or if you write directly to a Minister. I think that there does need to be a contact person who is responsible to be the bridge between School Infrastructure NSW and the project and the school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Otherwise it is like a faceless bureaucracy, isn't it?

LEANNE BERGAN: It is absolutely a faceless bureaucracy.

SUZY FORRESTER: Can I also add to that that one of the things that Leanne is drawing attention to is the fact that if we have limited time as a P&C to actually be able to be involved in this process, we need to know that we are speaking to a person who can give us answers; that we are not simply contacting a person in a generic call centre version of School Infrastructure NSW, but that we are actually speaking to a person who knows what's going on in our project and will be able to answer our questions in a timely way.

LEANNE BERGAN: Isn't the basic question is the upgrade actually happening? Because that is the biggest question we all have, and it's something that the principals can't answer, the PRG representatives cannot answer, so we don't know. Are we actually getting an upgrade? A major upgrade? Or are we just getting a make safe? Or are we just getting maintenance? Because we have had no PMW funding for two years of the girls school. Who can we ask the question of? I don't know.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No-one has come to P&C meetings or briefed the P&C?

LEANNE BERGAN: No.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I mean, the onus really should be on School Infrastructure to proactively communicate what it's doing and how the project is progressing. It's fair to say there's been no proactive outreach in terms of School Infrastructure's efforts to communicate the unfolding of the project?

SUZY FORRESTER: No, not at all. We actually had requested that someone would attend the P&C meeting in 2019, and that went nowhere. The most recent update available on the project on the School Infrastructure website is from October 2020. We haven't had any direct communication about what's happening, where the project stands—as you say, we don't know what's happening now. Our approach is to ask for information. We've been sent back to the website, so—

LEANNE BERGAN: And the website changes without us having information. Initially, the project itself was set with a funding year of 2018-19. It just highlights today, here we are, 2022, asking what on earth is happening to the upgrades. At today's date, it is reflecting now a 2022-23 budget, which looks, kind of, a little bit better, I think. But why was that changed?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about communication through the principal?

LEANNE BERGAN: The principals have signed a non-disclosure agreement at both schools. They are unable to give us much information. They are in a tenuous position. Parents ask, at every P&C meeting, "What's happening with the upgrades?" They've been asking since 2019—or 2018, really, "What's happening with the upgrades?" The principals can't answer anything very well. They can give no meaningful information.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has there ever been an explanation as to the logic behind the non-disclosure agreements?

LEANNE BERGAN: No.

SUZY FORRESTER: No.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What information have they tried to conceal?

SUZY FORRESTER: That's our question.

LEANNE BERGAN: That's our question. I mean, this information is really good information. I don't know that it would give anyone a heads-up for a tender for a project—you know, for construction work. I don't think it's at that detail. There's no architectural drawings or there's no quantity surveying. It's just information that talks about the demographics at our school, why we need the upgrades and what the benefits will be once we've got them. I don't know what's so secret about that.

SUZY FORRESTER: Especially when the totals involved are announced—that were publicly announced at the beginning of the funding process.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How does this impact on the community's confidence in School Infrastructure if they are very evasive and not forthcoming with information?

The Hon. WES FANG: That's a bit of a presumptive question, isn't it, Mr D'Adam?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am posing the question, regardless.

The CHAIR: It's a question, it's valid, and Suzy and Leanne are available to answer it, please.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm sure they will.

SUZY FORRESTER: It certainly hasn't increased our confidence. The thing that I'm particularly struck by is, if you read the final business case, it's actually a very thorough document. There's obviously been an attempt to address a set of criteria to make a clear case for why our school needs these works. The fact that there has been so much avoidance of contact and a failure to provide information really has made life very difficult for us as a school community. But School Infrastructure is obviously attempting to do what they were supposed to do. The fact that they're not communicating that to us seems very mysterious. It really doesn't make sense—the assumption that this process needs to be secret doesn't make sense. As a school community, we should be able to have confidence that they're doing their job. It appears that they were trying to do that. And this is the thing, we have no explanation of why they've achieved as much as they have but then not informed us of that, and we have then had no information about that document or what's happened since.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Obviously, the Government is setting budget priorities. Do you think more transparency would make the Government's decision-making around prioritising or de-prioritising particular projects more defensible or more, I suppose, palatable to the community? I mean, if there's a strong business case that's been presented, then the Government should be able to defend allocating funds to a project like this one.

SUZY FORRESTER: Looking at the auditor's report, the purpose of School Infrastructure NSW is to actually provide information that makes that process possible. The reason that we have a business case is so that our project can be viewed in the context of other projects that are being considered at the same time. So the idea that you wouldn't actually allow that information to be publicly available seems to be working against the very reason that they're there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's true that there hasn't been an update on the School Infrastructure NSW website since October 2020. Isn't that the case?

SUZY FORRESTER: Yes. That's the most recent update that's available as we logged in yesterday.

LEANNE BERGAN: If you exclude the budget information. The budget information somehow has been updated.

SUZY FORRESTER: If you actually go to the update website, as in "Updates On Your Project", that is the most recent piece of information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Bergan, you're saying that they refer you to look at the website, but they're not updating the website, they're not replying to your emails, they're not providing information back. I think you make a good point as well, Ms Forrester, that they're probably trying to get this work done but it's just that a big part of that is actually about communicating that with parents so that they know the scope of it, and they can get a sense of what they can understand. I mean, one of the other parents said this morning, "We just want to know, so we can plan." They are seeking this information and then it becomes this issue because they just want to know what is going on. Would you agree?

LEANNE BERGAN: Absolutely.

SUZY FORRESTER: I think we both mentioned in our submissions that we—for example, the P&Cs have applied or have organised to apply for funding through Solar my School for solar panels for our schools. For our school, the estimate was that we'd be looking at a cost saving of around \$17,500 a year for our school. That project has been in limbo since 2018 because we've been waiting for information about what was happening with our upgrade. We were told that the asset management unit wouldn't sign off on our applications because the panels may need to be removed and replaced as part of any upgrades that were happening at the school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You're looking at a possible saving in the vicinity of \$70,000—

SUZY FORRESTER: It's \$17,500.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is since 2018. So you're looking now in the vicinity of \$65,000 to \$70,000 that you could have saved the school, that the P&C wanted to be a partner with the school in. But, because of poor communication, because School Infrastructure isn't working with you as it should be, I would say, as the voice of parents, then they're actually depriving the school of funding under its operating budget.

LEANNE BERGAN: Yes.

SUZY FORRESTER: That would meet the criteria that the works are supposed to be working towards, like improving the sustainability of the school.

The Hon. WES FANG: Or is it perhaps the case that the installation of solar panels, which then may need to be removed at even greater expense, and perhaps damage some of those panels in the process, instead of waiting for the upgrades to be completed, is probably a better and more sensible solution for the school?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Then just get along and do the upgrades, or communicate with the parents. There's two options.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think they're taking the former. They're getting on with the upgrades, is the understanding that I have.

The CHAIR: Suzy or Leanne, an answer to the question please.

LEANNE BERGAN: In some instances of the business case, some buildings aren't being touched so there's no reason to withhold solar panels on a building that's getting a very cosmetic update.

The CHAIR: Any other questions?

LEANNE BERGAN: We can't be held in limbo. So for four years we haven't applied for a significant grant under the CBP funding that would make a real difference to our school. Sure, we would put in some outdoor seating because we couldn't do anything more major than that. I have just found out that the MPC, which is our hall—a multipurpose centre—is not getting any major upgrade. It's getting louvres replaced. Those louvres are actually currently leaking. I would see that as maintenance rather than an upgrade. So now that I know that the MPC is really off limits for this upgrade, I've applied for a substantial grant for an audiovisual upgrade, which is sorely needed in the school which will never be part of the upgrade. Now that I have got that certainty—I am pretty sure—I have gone ahead and done a substantial grant application.

SUZY FORRESTER: I was just going to say maybe to push back a little against the idea that the upgrades are underway because we actually don't know that.

LEANNE BERGAN: They are not underway.

SUZY FORRESTER: What we've seen at our school is some basic maintenance on the hall at our school, a replacement of the floor. We actually have no clear information about what's actually happening in terms of any upgrade or the amount of money that our project in total is being allocated or a time frame. We actually don't know what's happened.

LEANNE BERGAN: The floor, just to be clear, the floor in the hall of the boy school was never even on our wish list. It was never factored as an issue but, all of a sudden, we've got new bouncy floorboards that no-one really asked for.

The Hon. WES FANG: You may not have asked for it, but perhaps there was a need for it.

SUZY FORRESTER: I think the point is if there was a need for it, that is maintenance, that is not an upgrade. We don't actually have information about the scope for a total plan for our project.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think the point I would finally make is that there is a want or a desire for communication with parents in theory because they should be communicated with, but what you just outlined is that there are actually significant financial benefits, or significant financial consequences, for the lack of communication on both schools. It actually means that you miss out on grants or you have not been able to save the school money on energy savings or there are other opportunities that have been foregone that have actually seen a further decline in the standard of the school infrastructure. Is that correct?

SUZY FORRESTER: Yes, and there is also the fact that there's maintenance and minor repairs that aren't being undertaken because we are being told that the building will be removed. We are not investing funds into things that we may otherwise have done maintenance because at any point we could be being told that that building is being taken away.

LEANNE BERGAN: Can I just add something? We are talking about infrastructure buildings, bricks and mortar but at the end of the day there are children and teachers inside these buildings, and at the moment they are really struggling.

The Hon. WES FANG: Struggling?

The CHAIR: Order!

LEANNE BERGAN: They are working and learning in very suboptimal conditions.

The CHAIR: Any other questions?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I was interested in the comment about the enrolment share based on the overall catchment. As a final question, I want to ask you is what message do you think this sends—this uncertainty, the delay—about the commitment of the Government to delivering public education at a higher standard to your community in the area?

LEANNE BERGAN: My opinion on this is that it almost seems like the Government wants people to go into private and independent and Catholic schools. That's my take on it and we are like the poor relations. If you have to go to your local public school, you're either hand on heart totally committed to public education, or you can't afford another option.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's the message you've got from the Government? Interesting.

LEANNE BERGAN: That's what I get, yes because—

The Hon. WES FANG: No.

LEANNE BERGAN: —because there's such a lack of investment in our public high schools and yet I look around—

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You don't have to badger her.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm not badgering.

LEANNE BERGAN: —yet I look around at St Catherine's, Scots College and Cranbrook, even Marcellin and Waverley colleges, all of the schools in our area are beautiful buildings. They have had massive land expansion. They have had Federal funding, whether it is State or Federal funding—

The Hon. WES FANG: I suggest you speak to your Federal member.

LEANNE BERGAN: There has been a horde of money poured into private and independent schools.

The Hon. WES FANG: I suggest you speak to your Federal member.

The CHAIR: That is not a question. Any other questions from the Committee? If not, I thank Suzy and Leanne for their participation today adding to the Committee's knowledge and a pattern of issues that have come up.

The Hon. WES FANG: Insights.

SUZY FORRESTER: Mr Latham, may I ask one further thing?

The CHAIR: Yes.

SUZY FORRESTER: I thought it was quite interesting in our final business case to see that one of the risks associated with the project was dissatisfaction from the school community and that one of the actions taken to address that risk should be communication with the school community. It does seem that School Infrastructure NSW is aware that leaving our parents and citizens' association, our school community generally, in the situation where we have no information is something that actually acts against what they're supposed to be doing. So we very much encourage that there are some ways instituted for parent communities and for school communities to actually have input into these processes that are supposed to be open to other scrutiny.

The CHAIR: Thanks for that. It is an important point and it is a regular theme that has come up today and other days in our inquiry as to School Infrastructure NSW—do they see themselves as a communications agency or having that component or do they leave it to the media or the public advocacy section of the education department? Although I note that recently the department set up a parental engagement unit—I do not know what sort of engagement it's doing. They did a survey that had a pretty paltry response, but maybe that's a good job for the new whiz-bang parental engagement unit to actually engage with parents wanting to upgrade their school infrastructure, in your circumstances from a pretty dire situation. So parental engagement, I am sure, will be a key feature of our report and recommendations to the Government. Suzy and Leanne, thank you for your time today and we wish you all the best with your advocacy and endeavours.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr CLEMENT LUN, President, Wentworth Point Public School Parents and Citizens Association, affirmed and examined

Mr MARK GREEN, Member, Wentworth Point Public School Parents and Citizens Association, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Would either of you like to make a short opening statement to the Committee?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes, I would. Hello, Committee. First of all, I just want to say thank you for opportunity to speak today and to be able to represent my community at Wentworth Point. I trust that the Committee has read our written submission. To reiterate, the lack of proper planning and transparent consultation with the community are central to the problems that have occurred in Wentworth Point with the primary school and also, unfortunately, now are still occurring with the new high school. I understand that two-thirds of Sydney's schools have demountables. Look, personally, there is nothing wrong with demountables as a learning space; my kid is in a demountable. But when these demountables are taking up precious open space, playground space, for the kids it can become detrimental to children's development.

Unlike greenfield suburbs, where there is enough land to support more demountables, land in Wentworth Point is precious. Furthermore, Wentworth Point is unique in that we only have apartments. So families there don't have backyards unlike those living in greenfield suburbs. This makes the school playgrounds and open space even more important in our community of Wentworth Point. I would also like to table the two documents, which we have included. One is the Wentworth Point Residents Action Group response to the proposed joint use agreement for the high school oval and the second document is the Wentworth Point Residents Action Group submission on the Wentworth Point high school to the Department of Planning and Environment.

The CHAIR: I will start the questions. I want to get some clarity. I can see the pressing need for the permanent buildings at the public school because you have 14 demountables. There was an expectation of a school for 400 students. You have 610 enrolled and you are expecting a thousand over the next four years. They are obvious arguments for permanent buildings at the public school. But on the other side of the equation, on the other side of the land parcel, you've argued that you don't need the high school because in the 2021 census you've only got 219 secondary students living in Wentworth Point. But won't the funnel effect of all those primary students coming through ultimately require a high school for Wentworth Point?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes, for sure. The new high school has a big catchment area. It's not just for Wentworth Point. The high school will service Wentworth Point, Newington, Sydney Olympic Park and Concord West. In my submission I was just saying that for Wentworth Point itself the high school is not providing any staff parking. They are only providing 29 car park spaces for staff and they expect the majority of the students to be travelling by either active transport or walking. For us, looking at the census statistics, it is just not possible because the bulk of the enrolments that we expect will be coming from out of Wentworth Point.

The CHAIR: So your argument is that Wentworth Point is not the best place for the high school to be sited because of the loss of parkland and it serves a broader catchment. Have you got a preferred site for the high school to be established for Newington and the other suburbs that you mentioned?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes. From talking with the local MP, Lynda Voltz, originally the project was called Sydney Olympic Park high school. Only now it has been changed to Wentworth Point high school. Previously they had been talking about possibly two sites within the Sydney Olympic Park suburb to have the high school. It only happened in the last couple of years where they suddenly then decided to put the high school in Wentworth Point which, as I mentioned in the submission, is a suburb in the peninsula. There is only one road in, one road out. It is not the best place for a high school, especially when they are talking about enrolments of up to 1,500 people. In looking at the census statistics and also the growth patterns, the bulk of the population will actually be centred in Sydney Olympic Park itself. That itself is going to be, according to the Government, a big city of 50,000 people.

The CHAIR: The view that you're articulating, is that the broader community view? Is this the unanimous position of the P&C? It seems to me, logically, that there might be some parents who want their children to be able to walk to the high school in Wentworth Point and wouldn't be as happy having to go to the Sydney Olympic Park site. I know there is lots of land there and you could do a high school there. Is it a mixed view as to the preference to have the parkland or the high school? If there is no high school, the students are obliged to travel a longer distance for their secondary education.

CLEMENT LUN: It is a mixed view at the moment because that particular land where the high school is going to be built was also earmarked for apartments.

The CHAIR: So not parkland as such. It is open space at the moment.

CLEMENT LUN: Open space.

The CHAIR: But it has been slated for more apartments?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes, that's right.

The CHAIR: Anything is better than more apartments, I suppose, in a crowded location like Wentworth Point.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Just on that point, I am looking at the information that has been put up on the planning portal and I think the zoning on that area is largely a neighbourhood centre, which I imagine will not be taking place because of the high school, and, as you quite rightly pointed out, high-density residential across that space and a small park that was for public recreation within that catchment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you both for your attendance today. I wanted to start firstly with the recurring theme that we are hearing from witnesses today about the inadequacy of consultation between School Infrastructure and the community. Can you elaborate on the problems that you have seen in terms of the approach that has been taken by School Infrastructure in terms of consultation both around stage two of the primary school and around the high school proposal?

MARK GREEN: I will speak specifically about the high school consultation. The relocation of Sydney Olympic Park high school—and I agree with Clement, the community is spread, the P&C is spread, so to the question that Mr Latham raised—do we want a school in Wentworth Point—we would like a school that is built once and built well and actually provides for the needs of the community, and that's the whole community of the catchment area from Rhodes, obviously Wentworth Point is our real concern, Newington, right up to Carter Street in Lidcombe. It's a fairly big area that it's going to draw on. We're not necessarily opposed to a school being there, but what we're opposed to is a school that doesn't meet the needs of the students or the community. The buildings look beautiful, but our real concern is over the facilities that come with it, or the lack of them. In terms of consultation, the school has been promised for over 10 years and the area, as Clement said, had already—there is an existing DA over the area where the school is now going.

Landcom, on behalf of Transport for NSW, had started building a park. It had put in a road, brought in thousands of truckloads of soil, wiped out a lot of trees, and then, without notice, withdrew overnight. The community asked the question, "What's happening? Why has the park stopped?" There was a lovely time line—consultation had occurred—on the Landcom website and no word, no response as to what was going on with the park. Then in the media sometime later we found out that the school was being moved down to that site. So that was the consultation. There was zero consultation with the community. Then we were trying to figure out, "How can you fit a park, apartments and a high school on this tiny piece of land?" And some of the vegetation on the peninsula is actually protected, so how does all of this fit together?

From the community's perspective, we've been very disappointed. There has been no consultation. There was one information session since. Each time we raised the questions, "Where is the oval?", you know, "Are the kids going to fit? You've got 1,500 kids." At the moment the land area in stage one is one hectare. It's going to be like a Japanese subway or something where you shove them in, is the way we look at it as a community. Each time we write, we ask the same question. You know, the standard is one child per 10 square metres of play area. How do you calculate that? It does not add up if you have 1,500 kids. They keep saying, "Yes, it does," but no-one can actually give us any answers. There is no real consultation. There is a high degree of frustration, is what we would say, because there just hasn't been consultation.

The CHAIR: On that topic, hasn't your P&C heard from this much celebrated and announced parental engagement unit at the Department of Education? Wouldn't they write automatically to every P&C and say, "We're here to engage with parents." That's their job. There was an announcement made by the Minister and the departmental secretary and, logically, wouldn't you think they set themselves up, basically, to say any questions you've got about issues like this, the unit would answer them and get the answers promptly for your P&C?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes. You see, the problem is that the goalposts keep changing as well. Initially, the high school—

The CHAIR: Have you heard from this parental engagement unit, established a few months ago? Have you had any correspondence, any contact from them? Nothing?

CLEMENT LUN: No.

The CHAIR: I wonder what they're doing of a day. They're not engaging with P&Cs. But you were saying that the goalpost move—the goalposts move in what respect?

CLEMENT LUN: The high school was first proposed to be 1,500 students, and now they're coming up with a secondary exhibition for—they're reducing it down to 850 students so that they don't have to build the school oval.

The CHAIR: Is that what they've said? That's the official reason that the number of students has been downgraded, so they don't have to build an oval?

CLEMENT LUN: They have reiterated, there is a phase one and phase two. Phase one would be 850 students.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How can they make that adjustment?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Sorry, on that point—there still is an intention for a phase two, catering to 1,500 students. Is that correct?

MARK GREEN: That's correct. Phase one just has the 850 students, two buildings and one temporary basketball court, because they have to apply—I don't understand how it got to this point, but there's an improved road that was built. The soil was brought in, thousands of truckloads—it's still there. And there's apparently an approved DA over it and that hasn't been rescinded, or whatever they do with it. There is no new DCP or DA over the land. So what they're doing is working, as far as I can tell, because we're not communicated with—they're working around that until the new plan comes in.

Now, in the new plan—so there's two stages, as Clement said. Stage one has the two buildings, which look lovely and I think will be great assets to the community, and lovely teaching resources. But the problem with it is there's 850 kids with these two buildings, but only one temporary basketball court for them to use for sports facilities. I am a former deputy principal and I have asked everybody I know in the department and said, "How—when NESA does their random inspections, if you get to that 850 kids, when you've got 2½ hours per week per child that they must provide in practical PE lessons, how are you going to do that? There's no hall, no fields, one temporary basketball court, that's it." I'm just at a loss to figure out how they're going to actually get accreditation and then not lose accreditation when that audit is done. Because they don't—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Just picking up on that point for a second, sorry, and looking at the planning documents. Apologies for my ignorance—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: Chair, I had the call initially and then I think I gave latitude for you to ask another question, but I hadn't completed my initial round of questions.

The CHAIR: That's probably right. It's a little bit hard with videoconference. But I think we'll let Mr Farlow just wrap up his final question, and then come back to you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's not too much, Anthony. I'm just trying to understand the site, that's all. At the moment, in terms of what's being exhibited, the high school area, I think, is 9,240 metres squared, put out on exhibition. And then, just for my clarification, on that there is a proposed playing field which sort of—

MARK GREEN: No.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: —links into the future Wentworth Point peninsula public park. Is that right?

MARK GREEN: Okay. That's not—it's split into two stages.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That's part of stage two, is it?

MARK GREEN: It's part of stage two, when you get the 1,500 kids, and then it goes up to—is it 1.8?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes, 1.8.

MARK GREEN: It's 1.8 in the second, with the proposed playing field. But the proposed playing field is by joint use agreement between Education and Transport. According to the first submissions report, before they put it back out with the new design, Transport are going to keep it in their ownership. So Education won't have an oval. That oval is to be shared, whenever it is built in stage two—and there is no date for stage two. But when it is built, it will be a shared oval between the community of 15,000 people. By then—at the moment, 610 primary school students and something closer to 1,000, based on current projections, and 1,500 high school students.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So it's a shared—

MARK GREEN: They're leasing it back. Yes. But, unfortunately, the primary school—as a former high school teacher, the usage of that oval to meet mandatory requirements for the high school, I cannot—it would take someone a lot cleverer than me to figure out how the primary school are going to get access to it during the day if

you're meeting your mandatory requirements and you've only got one oval. So it's going to be used a lot—pretty much all day, I would expect, which means that there's a problem with the primary school. Because the primary school is full of buildings. There's one tiny—there's the basketball court, basically. That's it, in the primary school. Yes, there is an oval. It's not going to be owned by Education as far—we want it to be, and we've said that in our report. We think it should be dedicated—an oval for Education, for the two schools. There are some ways that you could work around that. We've suggested that in our submission. But, at this stage, we're still waiting on a non-reply—

CLEMENT LUN: I want to add, the main source of confusion and also anxiety for the community is that in the development application it states that the school oval will be leased to Education for only 25 years. So the community is asking, "What happens after that?"

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think you mentioned earlier that they are planning for stage one and I'm not sure whether you can confirm this for stage two—there's no school hall for the high school. Is that right?

MARK GREEN: The school hall is part of stage two as well. But, again, there is no time frame for stage two. None of that is approved. So there is a school hall planned in stage two, and that is an actual Education facility, unlike the oval, which is maintained in the ownership of Transport under a joint use agreement. So, yes. The hall doesn't come until stage two, whenever that does occur.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In the interim, what explanation has School Infrastructure given about how they will operate without a school hall for assemblies and the like? What is the explanation for that?

CLEMENT LUN: There's also been no funding, as well—been given for stage two in the latest New South Wales budget line item. We did raise those issues about the lack of facilities for the school. That's the reason that they gave. That's why it's being built in two stages—stage one and stage two—so that in stage one, because of the smaller number of enrolments that they're expecting, that they do not require those sort of facilities.

I can even speak on behalf of the primary school. There's actually no formal school hall at the primary school as well. So that school of 400 students, we actually cannot hold whole-of-school assemblies, because there is only this COLA area—it's got a covered outdoor learning area. It's not fit for purpose. Even the teachers in the primary school cannot have a full staff function within the school grounds because of the lack of communal space. From what I've heard, for the stage two upgrade for the primary school, there's also no provision for a school hall, either. There's going to be additional learning spaces, like the classrooms for the kids, but there's no provision for a school hall in the primary school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask about traffic planning. I know you mentioned earlier the assumptions that are underpinning the additions are that the vast majority of students will arrive via active transport. It doesn't take into account staff transport and adequate parking for staff at the high school or the additional staff that will come at stage two of the primary school.

CLEMENT LUN: Yes, that's a major issue. So even at the primary school now there's not enough staff parking. A lot of the staff actually have to—they have some sort of process where they rotate the cars around or they actually have to park in the local shopping centre at a daily rate. So it is a big concern for the high school because it seems like history is repeating itself. For a high school of about 1,500 students, you are looking at about approximately 200 staff, and all they are providing is 29 car spaces. And these car spaces actually are not even in a car park of the high school; it is actually on the side street as a normal car parking space, which they said will be designated during school hours for school staff and then it will be free parking out of hours.

The big concern that I have seen in the primary school is that the primary school principal has shared with me and the P&C that they have problems retaining talent, you know, as a result of the lack of parking. Because, obviously, if teachers have to pay for parking then they would rather, I guess, teach somewhere else where there is parking provided. And the thing is, I understand that obviously if you're in, say, Chatswood or the CBD, obviously not all schools would have enough parking. But Wentworth Point is a suburb 15 kilometres out of the CBD. We are not, you know, like a central business district area. So I think parking should be provided for each staff.

The Hon. WES FANG: Have you been consulted—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, I am still going with questions.

The CHAIR: One more question, Anthony, then we need to share them around.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I wanted to ask further about the traffic implications. What modelling has been shared with the community about the transportation? Obviously the major growth area in terms of the

drawing area now is Carter Street, where there is still development being put in, whereas Wentworth Point is nearing completion in terms of its maximum population. Those students coming from Carter Street will obviously have to be transported there. Probably the majority of them will be coming by car. Has there been appropriate modelling? You intimated in your submission about the difficulties already in terms of access to Wentworth Point, there being only one road in. What is going to be the impact in terms of additional cars flowing in around peak hour and end-of-school hours into Wentworth Point?

CLEMENT LUN: It is interesting you ask that, because in the SSDA they actually referred to a traffic study which was done in 2014. The majority of the newer part, like the higher density part of Wentworth Point, only started five years ago. So these traffic studies that they were basing on, you know, was before all the high-rise apartments have come into play. It is definitely inaccurate. They should be doing traffic studies now, I suppose, to do proper analysis of the traffic flows in and out. Also the other problem is that Hill Road, the only road in and out of the suburb, floods. So in the past couple of years, as a result of climate change, there has been a lot of floods. We just had one just a couple of weeks ago. There was a flood that happened—I think it was last year—where Hill Road was actually closed for two days. So being the only road in and out of that suburb, people were isolated, basically. You are talking about, you know, almost 12,000 people in the middle of Sydney being isolated because the one road gets flooded. There is a bus bridge that goes across to Rhodes—

The CHAIR: Bennelong Bridge.

CLEMENT LUN: Yes. That was opened up, obviously, for emergency access during that time. But it is just unacceptable, I think, for being in the Sydney metropolitan area where you are basically stranded if these rain events—which seem to be happening more frequently as well. They talk about one in 20 years, one in 50 years, but now it is happening, like, twice a year, even.

MARK GREEN: I think Clement alluded to it before, but also if you look at the latest 2021 census, there is only about 10 per cent of the students—if every student in Wentworth Point of the high school age went to the new high school, that would make up 10 per cent of the enrolment. Some 90 per cent of them have to come from somewhere else. Already we have buses going out to private schools from Wentworth Point. So it would be pretty unlikely that they are all going to come to the high school, but let's hope they do. But that still leaves 90 per cent that are going to come in. Now, in the plan, we have tried to be positive in our submission and give alternatives. But there is no plan for buses. We have asked around to local schools, and based on 1,500 students and 90 per cent of them coming from outside of Wentworth Point, then you are looking at at least nine buses every morning and every afternoon having to bring kids in and out if you want them not to come by private car. And there is no bus bay allowed in the planning. And it all seems to come back to the same thing, which is the fact that we are trying to cram too much in.

There is spare Crown land, which is owned by Transport, to the east of the new high school. But Transport seems determined, from the community's perspective, to slam two new massive towers on there, which would block out any future expansion or for community use or teacher parking or whatever you want to use it for. There is space there; there is enough space. There is a block the equal size of the high school. But unfortunately we have been, you know—they've come up with, from my perspective and from the P&C's perspective, a bad design because we're just trying to cram too much into a peninsula. That is our position.

The bus bays—we have put to them and School Infrastructure has suggested two sites. One of them is on community association land, which is private land down there. No negotiations have taken place, because I just happen to be one of the reps on the community association and I know they haven't contacted us. The other one is on the other suggested bus route, about a kilometre away from—the bus parking is a kilometre away from the school and falls where the PLR 2 planned route is. So I don't know how you are going to put a bus bay there because if you do, at some point you're going to have to get rid of it if the PLR 2 goes ahead. So lack of planning is our concern. We've put it in our submission. We are trying to be positive and put solutions. We are hoping someone will listen.

The CHAIR: We have time for two more questions, from Wes and then Courtney.

The Hon. WES FANG: I wanted to find out about the consultation you have had with the department. My understanding is that they have provided you quite a lot of insight and also the ability to have some feedback. Is that a reasonable view of the engagement that has happened between yourself and the department?

CLEMENT LUN: Yes, so they have done two engagement events so far. One was actually virtual because it was held during the COVID lockdown. The other one that they had was just a couple of months ago. That was in person, which was a lot more positive and a lot more—it gives the opportunity for the community to come out to actually see the plans and talk to the project managers. I think overall there has been community engagement from the department but I think a lot of, I guess, the feedback was not sort of taken on board. Also

there is a lot of things that they need to know that they don't know until they actually come onto Wentworth Point. You know, they have to see it in person, see the suburb in person, how it looks. I think a lot of decisions are made sitting at a desk, I suppose. A lot of these, especially for the school, for example, when that school was opened for 400, the Government had already designated Wentworth Point as a UAP, which is an urban activation precinct, which is where they lifted the height of apartments from eight levels to now 40. So obviously the Government knows that they will be injecting a lot more population into the area.

The Hon. WES FANG: But, as president, you've had direct and separate consultation. Is that correct?

CLEMENT LUN: Not as the P&C, but I am a representative on the PRG for the high school. Again, I find the process a box-ticking process. I am just there because they need a community rep to be there. I have expressed my concerns, but I don't really see them responding to my concerns.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I totally agree with the final comment of Mr Lun. I had the opportunity to drive around the local area and it is a tiny parcel of land. It really does highlight for you the logistical issues. Also, I am not sure that we have really teased out the fact that it is designed for the kids to come from Newington as well. As you say, they are clearly going to be coming along that one road. With them plus staff, as it is it is going to be pretty congested. To add another 1,500 kids plus the staff, it is just creating a huge issue. I think the point you make, Mr Green, about the nine additional buses but no bus bay. It just does not make sense that you would, on a primary school site that is so constricted already, jam more people and more students and more kids into that site so close when it looks like it's probably going to be needed for a primary school expansion, is my reading of it. I just want to say thanks very much.

MARK GREEN: Luckily, I still have a lot of contacts in high school, so I can reach out to high school senior execs to ask them how many they thought of their teachers would use active transport or some other method because they have provided a lot of—I smile because I am a cyclist—bicycle parking, which is great. I think that's great and I laud their ambition. But every senior executive that we spoke to said that almost all their staff—the nature of teaching is that there isn't a set time when you go home in the afternoon. The resources—unfortunately you still have to carry books with you, as much as you might think it should be all done by tablet or something. Teachers and the admin staff aren't always the fittest, and some of them travel massive distances to get to the school.

I am really worried. I am trying to encourage some of my best teachers I know to apply for the school, but I'm really worried that they are already saying to me, "But how will I get there?", and, "If I can't park"—the best teachers won't necessarily come from Wentworth Point and they can't walk or ride. I think, particularly in a time of a teacher shortage, it is probably not the greatest sales point for a school.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am not sure we have a teacher shortage.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Find out.

MARK GREEN: Maybe we do, maybe we don't [disorder]. I am not going to enter into that debate because I am retired.

The CHAIR: That's for the next inquiry.

MARK GREEN: Yes, but I think it's certainly an issue.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Clement and Mark, for your presentation today. It has been excellent. Thanks for the time and the consideration that you have given us. We will be producing a report and recommendations to try to address all of the issues that you and others have raised.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr ANDREW MOLLOY, Future of Western Sydney University Milperra Campus, sworn and examined

Mr PAUL JUDGE, Future of Western Sydney University Milperra Campus, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Paul Judge and Andrew Molloy, thanks for your time today.

PAUL JUDGE: By way of personal background, I am qualified in economics, I've spent 30-odd years doing the public sector trifecta—Commonwealth, State and local—and I'm a longstanding resident of Milperra. We live two blocks from the campus and put two offerings through its bachelor courses.

The CHAIR: You are both sworn in. It is available to one or both of you to make a short opening statement.

PAUL JUDGE: Our group sincerely appreciates the opportunity to address this Committee today, Mr Chairman. I appreciate you have a large, ambitious agenda. Our interest really lies specifically in an opportunity in our particular neck of the woods, the Western Sydney University campus at Milperra. We think this constitutes an absolutely unparalleled opportunity to address public education requirements, not only in Milperra but in the surrounding area, the catchment area of the university. The site has had a long association with education. The first primary school in the district was established there back in 1918. It has since been through several iterations, as a college of advanced education, an institute of advanced education and it became a campus for what was then the University of Western Sydney in the late eighties and, of course, was subsequently renamed the Western Sydney University Milperra campus.

Most of the development of the site has taken place since the seventies. The university has invested tens of millions of dollars in the last decade or two in 40-odd purpose-built structures around the university in education-specific infrastructure and a raft of quality fit-out and amenities—and we can go through the detail of that if the Committee wishes to go down that path. The current situation at the university, though, is really what we are here to talk about. In 2019 WSU decided to establish a new vertical campus in Bankstown CBD, which effectively meant that this Milperra campus became redundant. In fact, the university was looking to use the return from the sale of this campus to Mirvac to bankroll its tower development in Bankstown. Those plans are proceeding; they are partway through a planning and development process as we speak.

One might ask, "How did we get to this point?" The original site of the university was State government owned. It was gifted to one of the university's predecessors back in the seventies as the basis for a college of advanced education. It has been extended since then. The university's own Act provides that it must seek approval from the Minister of the day before it can dispose of any part of the site that was originally received at less than commercial rates. This was basically a nominal fee arrangement that the State Government entered into back in the seventies. In 2021 the then education Minister, Dr Geoff Lee, gave approval to WSU to dispose of the site. We are not aware of any significant research that the Minister undertook at that time into the future educational requirements of the area. There was certainly no community consultation at that point in time.

The sale arrangement has proceeded to the point where we are now partway through a project proposal, which is about to go on exhibition in the face of, I might say, not only community opposition but our own council's strong objection. Why do we see this campus as being a unique opportunity? It's an overused word, "unique", but if we can perhaps distribute to the Committee members some aerials of the site and a map of the layout, you will see that it is quite a large site; it is close to 20 hectares. It is in the middle of a built-up industrial and residential area. These parcels of land just don't exist anywhere in our part of Sydney; I suspect they don't exist in too many parts of Sydney closer than the outer west. As I mentioned, over the course of the last decade or two, WSU has invested tens of millions of dollars in facilities at this site.

The CHAIR: Paul, I am loath to interrupt, but the opening statements are normally short to allow questioning. As Chair, I am obliged to ensure that the proceedings here are relevant to our terms of reference. We are not an inquiry into WSU or tertiary education, nor are we an inquiry into urban planning and housing density issues. I see in your handout you have some data about our remit, which is school enrolments.

PAUL JUDGE: Indeed.

The CHAIR: We are looking at school infrastructure. I think that's where the comments and questions will need to head.

PAUL JUDGE: Thank you, Mr Chairman. In that case, I'll pass to Andrew, who is across the demographic and enrolment data.

ANDREW MOLLOY: I'll just tell you a little bit about my background. I have a Master of Business Administration, a Master of Arts, a Bachelor of Arts and a Graduate Diploma of Education, covering three

disciplines of humanities education, business and economics. In 2018, besides teaching at TAFE for nine years, I returned to my old high school, where I discovered many things about modern education, being the teacher shortage, financials. But the most important thing was to look at the school infrastructure and the way that students' opportunities are being restricted by a serious lack of buildings and the need for funds to be utilised in this area. Just for a reference point, my own submission No. 71 has a number of those issues that you can read at a later date in time.

The populations of Milperra and its surrounding suburbs are growing substantially over the years. Attachment E shows the population increase of Milperra is forecast to grow between 2016 and 2036 by 12 per cent. The majority of the population growth will be in babies, preschoolers, primary schoolers and secondary schoolers. There is only one public school in Milperra, Milperra Public School, which was relocated from this particular site in 1975. There are no public high schools in Milperra. However, there are some educational high schools in the adjoining suburbs of East Hills and Picnic Point, which are available for the people of Milperra.

Between 2014 and 2019, the population of Milperra Public School itself grew by 14.6 per cent. However, in the other documents on the website for this Committee, Councillor Linda Downey from Canterbury Bankstown council received a reply on 20 June 2022 in which the Milperra Public School enrolments from 2016 were 232 but in 2022 they're at 304. This is an increase of 31 per cent in the students. Since those statistics were delivered to the Committee, in the past couple of weeks there has been a Mirvac development approved on the western side of Milperra for 180 new dwellings—new building sites—of which it is unspecified how many of those may be duplexes. If the school population's already grown from 31 per cent in six years and you've got another 180 dwellings on the western side and the proposer of this development is proposing 430 dwellings, that's an increase of 630 dwellings on top of the 31 per cent growth already. Milperra itself has only got 1,300 dwellings, so an increase of 630 houses is something like a 48 per cent increase.

All across the East Hills district in the adjoining suburbs of Panania, Picnic Point and Revesby, you couldn't walk down a street now without a single block being developed as a duplex in any of the streets I'd take you down. The population is set to grow within the greater southern Bankstown district by 12,000 to 15,000 people over the next 20 years. But at present Picnic Point High School has 1,000 students and is pretty much at cap; East Hills girls is at 850 students and is pretty much at cap; East Hills boys has a similar number; and Sir Joseph Banks is at 800 students and within two years is forecast to be at 1,000 students. So in a mathematics sense, if we've got 180 new dwellings on the western side of Milperra, we've got 430 dwellings if this goes ahead and we've already got duplexes galore happening in Panania, Picnic Point and Revesby, where are all these high school students going to go if the schools are already over cap?

I must add, in personal anecdotal evidence, that last year my son had to relocate high schools. When we rang up Menai High School across the Georges River, we were told that Menai was 17 per cent over cap. So what does any department do if they want to just adjust the numbers? All the students from year 7 2022 from south of the railway line between Riverwood and Revesby, between Little Salt Pan Creek and Salt Pan Creek, they're all going over to Menai High school, which was already 17 per cent over cap. So we've got 100 to 150 students every single year for six years inclusive—600 to 900 students—who suddenly don't belong in the broader East Hills district for purposes of organising catchment numbers. We'll stick them over the river. When we stick them over the river, we can say, "There's no need for a new high school at Milperra because those people have gone over to Menai," waiting two weeks for a science laboratory to do experiments.

The last point I'll add is that we've been waiting two terms for the Minister for Transport, David Elliott, and the local member, Wendy Lindsay, to organise a school bus for those students. Some of them are crossing Henry Lawson Drive and Davies Road. Schools are supposed to be about equity and safety for students. For two terms, 12- and 13-year-olds have been shuffled across the river for purposes of adjusting numbers so we don't need the Milperra site. They haven't got a bus organised yet. Even letters by David Coleman, the member for Banks, have not—they refused to answer him. That's all. Thank you for that.

The CHAIR: Mr Anthony D'Adam has a particular interest here, so we'll start the questioning with him.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you, Andrew and Paul, for your attendance today. In terms of the core focus of this inquiry, I might summarise the issue. With respect to Wentworth Point, earlier today we've heard the fact that the department is trying to create a school on a very small site. We know that the Department of Education needs to do long-term planning around need. We know that the Canterbury-Bankstown area is a fast-growing area and since 1918 a parcel of land has been dedicated towards an educational purpose. Now, at the whim of the Minister, that purpose is no longer going to be applied to that land. My question is to what extent was there any consultation around this decision? When was the community advised of this proposal around changing

the use of this land and foregoing the opportunity to retain this land for an educational purpose, ideally for a public high school? When did the community get wind that this decision was being made?

PAUL JUDGE: I think it would be accurate to say around 2019 the university started to make known its plans to find an alternative use for the Milperra campus site. As far as the Minister's decision to actually provide the approval for the university to proceed with that disposal, there was just no advertised consultation at all. It was at a peak period of COVID, as we would all recall—2021. It was basically very much a decision that the Minister steamrolled through. I'm not even aware that our local State member had much to do with that decision. It was simply announced.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has there been any communication from School Infrastructure to explain, to justify—presumably they provided some advice to the Minister in making that decision that the land was not going to be required in the long term or an education purpose.

PAUL JUDGE: One might hope so.

ANDREW MOLLOY: I have a couple of more pieces. At a council meeting last year when Mirvac addressed the Canterbury Bankstown council it was stated by one of the representatives that Wendy Lindsay had met with Mirvac on 20 May and had given them an indication that she'd undertaken community consultation. However, it is my solemn belief that there's been no adequate community consultation whatsoever, asking the community what we would really want, let alone looking at specific numbers. And to answer the new question—what is the new question?

The Hon. WES FANG: I find that people say they don't have community consultation when they don't feel like the decision goes their way. That is usually what I have determined.

PAUL JUDGE: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that a question?

The Hon. WES FANG: No, it is. I'm going to a question.

ANDREW MOLLOY: I just want to answer Anthony's question.

The Hon. WES FANG: Oh, okay, please do.

The CHAIR: Come to Mr D'Adam's point, please, Mr Molloy.

ANDREW MOLLOY: What is his question? He asked—

The CHAIR: I must bring you back to the fact it is an inquiry about school infrastructure, not housing densities or the future of the university.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes. I have a number of questions.

ANDREW MOLLOY: Yes. Well, I will answer Mr D'Adam's question. On Wendy Lindsay's own page last year, I asked: What's happening with the Milperra site? And there is a reply, which simply says the department didn't want it. So, are we going to assign over a hundred years of history because the department doesn't want it, if there's been no consultation with these people?

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I check? So that site was actually given to the Western Sydney University in 1997. Is that correct?

PAUL JUDGE: No. It was back in the seventies.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay.

The CHAIR: It was the old CAE.

PAUL JUDGE: Correct, Chair.

The CHAIR: When the Dawkins—well, the seventies; it would have been the Dawkins reforms of the CAEs.

PAUL JUDGE: In the eighties, correct, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: But the actual transfer of the land occurred in 1997 under Labor. Is that correct?

PAUL JUDGE: Um—

The Hon. WES FANG: Well, I can tell you it is. The land was actually transferred to the Western Sydney University under Labor in 1997—

PAUL JUDGE: As part of the renaming.

The Hon. WES FANG: It was Minister Stokes who was asked to sign off on the transfer in 2018. Part of the approval process was that the Catholic school that was adjoining the land was given the opportunity to purchase some of the land first, which they have done, and then it was signed off by Minister Lee after that for the reassignment. So I think in—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Just to add to that, I take it as well that part of it is that Western Sydney University is redeveloping a Bankstown campus in the Bankstown CBD.

PAUL JUDGE: Yes, as I mentioned earlier.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you giving evidence, Mr Fang, or are you actually asking a question?

The Hon. WES FANG: I am just asking if they're aware of this and, you know, does that change perhaps the views around the use of the land, given that the Catholic schools have been able to purchase part of the land.

PAUL JUDGE: A Catholic school is not a public institution, I hasten to say.

The Hon. WES FANG: Does that matter?

The CHAIR: Order! Look, can we come back to school infrastructure? Mr Fang, I think in relation to the point you're making, it is fair to say neither side of politics has ever stood in the way of the redevelopment plans of the university of western Sydney.

The Hon. WES FANG: We haven't.

The CHAIR: No State Government of either complexion has ever said, "University, you don't know what you're doing. We're going to make the decision for you."

PAUL JUDGE: It's pretty much the university's decision, Mr Chairman, to make that choice.

The CHAIR: That's right, but I come back to the point: That is outside our remit. We're not going to make a recommendation that the university got this wrong and revisit it.

PAUL JUDGE: I wouldn't ask you to do that.

The CHAIR: We're solely here about schools.

The Hon. WES FANG: And we transferred the land in 1997. It's not our grid.

PAUL JUDGE: In terms of schools—high schools, primary schools and preschools—we have a site here with all the necessary infrastructure that would accommodate—

The Hon. WES FANG: And Labor gave that—

PAUL JUDGE: —that would accommodate an integrated co-educational high school from preschool through primary to secondary in a purpose-built facility that has literally everything that opens and shuts.

The CHAIR: This is the land owned by the university?

PAUL JUDGE: Acquired, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: That the Labor Party transferred in 1997 due to—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: With conditions.

PAUL JUDGE: [Inaudible] taken them out in the mid-seventies.

The CHAIR: Okay. Mr Fang, we've got the history of it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: With conditions.

The CHAIR: We need further questions, please. We've got six minutes left of our hearing time.

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got no more questions.

The CHAIR: Mr D'Adam?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I just wanted to come down to this question around selective schools. There has been an announcement around a selective school for south-western Sydney. Is this a site that could potentially accommodate a new selective school?

PAUL JUDGE: We believe so, Mr D'Adam. Sydney has 48 selective high schools. Canterbury Bankstown LGA, which is the largest LGA in Sydney with 400,000 people, has exactly none—none within its LGA. This is an opportunity that we're asking this Committee to form a view on and perhaps make a recommendation to Government on—that there is the opportunity here at the Milperra campus, before it's razed to the ground for housing, to set it up as a selective high school. It may not even need the entire site. There are parts of the site that are extensive car parks or areas that may have already been disposed of to the adjacent Catholic school. This was a facility that used to accommodate 8,000 students, so it's a large area. We believe that there are facilities there that could be very readily switched across to deliver on the potential for a selective high school.

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you want to elaborate on—

The CHAIR: No, Mr Fang. You said you've finished your questioning.

The Hon. WES FANG: Fair enough.

The CHAIR: You're jumping in.

The Hon. WES FANG: Fair call.

The CHAIR: Mr D'Adam, further questions?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, I thought Mr Molloy was just about to say something.

ANDREW MOLLOY: No, I'm right. For once, I'm lost for words.

The CHAIR: Mr D'Adam?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No. Look, I might leave it there.

The CHAIR: Okay. Other any final closing comments then from the witnesses?

PAUL JUDGE: Do you want to touch on anything?

ANDREW MOLLOY: Yes. I'd just like to say that the current schools, the four high schools, are over capacity or near capacity, okay? We'll increase the population by 20 per cent or 30 per cent in southern Bankstown over the next 20 years and I can't believe that the New South Wales Government wouldn't say, "Well, let's at least have a second look at this site", and say, "Let's see how we could redevelop this as an extra high school for all these extra people", particularly Milperra itself, which is having a large amount of development, and it's going to be an opportunity that will go to waste. One thing I would just like to table, which I just remembered before, is that there is already a petition with greater than 1,500 that Liz Clark was going to circulate. Is Liz around?

The CHAIR: Yes. It's in the bundle

ANDREW MOLLOY: Sorry, yes. That's growing by the day. You know, the people that are moving in the area, in another 10 years' time—every second development's like a preschool—in 10 years' time, we're already over cap and crammed into the schools, it's going to be a sorry day in 10 years' time when those people are getting further crammed into the existing high schools.

The Hon. WES FANG: Move to Wagga. We've got land.

PAUL JUDGE: If I could offer my final thought, Mr Chairman. While housing is important, there are alternatives to meet housing targets that the State Government has set for the LGA. There are no alternatives or new sites for primary or high schools in our area—or anywhere near our area—other than this one. This is an irreplaceable opportunity. Once it's built out, it's built out. I think we all appreciate that there are no opportunities to readily establish new facilities in well-established built-out areas anywhere near the centre of Sydney.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Just on that point, though, the alternatives for the housing is that this looks to me like a low-rise residential development. The alternatives would be higher density, wouldn't they, in the area?

PAUL JUDGE: We expect that most of these dwellings would be two storeys. There is scope also for three-storey residences as part of the Mirvac plan. But the council, with community consultation, has drafted LEPs for a number of sites around railway stations in the LGA, which would accommodate eight, 10-storey apartment-type dwellings that could readily meet the housing targets that the Government has in mind. What we're

saying here is that there is one opportunity to get this right for our area and it's on this site. You can find, through densification, through changes to zonings close to railway stations, other alternatives for other housing needs.

ANDREW MOLLOY: Yes. And I will just finish with this. At those four other high schools, there's demountables after demountables after demountables. At the Menai High School where those students are being shuffled, there are up to 10 demountables—and no bus, I may add. So it's not like a great job's being done at the moment catering for the infrastructure for those existing schools; yet we've got tens of millions of dollars of buildings which, because somebody in the department said they don't want it—and there was this consultation—goodbye.

PAUL JUDGE: In 1997.

ANDREW MOLLOY: That's the end of that site. So it's really a sad story to think that that can't be re-used, that Mirvac can't be asked to perhaps rebuild or redesign and perhaps build two or three six- or seven-storey towers towards the southern end of the campus and leave those buildings intact. When you can only provide old demountables for the current students in the district, I find it hard to swallow buildings being pulled down because that's not providing infrastructure and shuffling people over a river and not giving them a bus is not providing a movable infrastructure.

PAUL JUDGE: We would very much, Mr Chairman, like to invite the Committee to undertake a site visit at their convenience. For want of a physical visit, there is a virtual tour of the campus facilities that are available; the recent links we've shared with the team here. So if they could be distributed to the Committee, that would be useful as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

PAUL JUDGE: But there's no substitute for coming out and having a look.

ANDREW MOLLOY: One last thing, is that there could be compromise. They could get their 430 new dwellings at a different part of the campus, leaving the buildings intact.

The CHAIR: We're out of time, but thanks for your presentation and consideration for the Committee today. We need to now go to some motions in private session.

ANDREW MOLLOY: That's fine.

PAUL JUDGE: Thanks so much.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you for your attendance.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 13:16.