

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 1

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

At Sydney on Friday, 7 June 2002

The Committee at 2.30 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. Janice Burnswoods

The Hon. Patricia Forsythe

The Hon. D. T. Harwin

The Hon. H. S. Tsang

The Hon. Dr. P. Wong

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

Government schools in inner Sydney.

The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of the guidelines governing broadcast of the proceedings are available from the table at the door. I point out that in accordance with Legislative Council guidelines for broadcast of proceedings, members of the Committee or witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the procedures of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

Witnesses, members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendant on duty or through the Committee clerks.

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

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

JENI MULVEY, Manager, Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs, President of the Parents & Citizens Association of Redfern Public School, 14 Bridge Street, Erskineville, and

PETER PHIBBS, Head of School, Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney, 12 Grosvenor Crescent, Summer Hill, sworn and examined:

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

Ms MULVEY: Yes, I am.

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

Dr PHIBBS:

CHAIR: If you feel any evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request and we would go into camera.

As members know, we did have a short hearing into Erskineville school previously, but whether by my mistake or not, we assumed that the South Sydney witnesses were part of your team of witnesses, and their part in the inquiry then took up a lot of the time that the Erskineville witnesses wanted to present. So we have allowed you this opportunity to reappear to make up that lost time. Also, do we have any apologies or any alternate members of the Committee here today?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I was going to say something in conjunction with Peter Primrose's apology.

CHAIR: I will just mention this now. Mr Primrose has sent his apology, and for the interest of the witnesses, you may not be aware that we have a large number of committees of the Parliament that are conducting simultaneous inquiries. So when a member is not present at an inquiry it does not mean that they are disinterested or lazy or sitting at home. For example, Mr Primrose today is a member of this inquiry and also a member of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 inquiry into the Cabramatta drug situation and policing and he is now at Cabramatta. He just wants to make that clear because of the critical letter that we received from one of the witnesses from Erskineville.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I just wanted to add to that, Mr Chair, that people perhaps are not aware that the Government in the Legislative Council actually has nine back benchers. Today, as you would know, there are at least four inquiries being held. We have three members at the Cabramatta Police Inquiry, the Workers Compensation Inquiry as you know was on earlier, we have a member of the Joint Select Committee on Building and there is this one. We literally do not have enough members to go around, even with a proxy, and of course the same could be said for last Friday as well. Obviously, most members of the public are not aware of the enormous number of committees and inquiries that Government has, but as you would know, for various reasons they place much more intense pressure on Government members than on non-Government members.

CHAIR: The other point is that obviously under our rules committees cannot meet when Parliament is sitting, so we have to jam all the committee meetings into Mondays and Fridays normally.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: I also make it clear that as a parliamentarian I have committee work, I work seven days a week, perhaps have one or two nights off, and my mobile phone is always available to anyone who wants to talk to me, and furthermore, I have been active in tutoring for ten years, and I am involved in the Hairdressers' Ethics Board and chair the Ethics School Board. I truly support the public school system. It does not mean that I am available at all times because it is virtually impossible.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: As an explanation for the understanding of the witnesses from the P & C of Erskineville school, some of us who are Government members also have a role to play in Government matters. I am the Chair of the Asia Business Advisory Council, and I apologise that on that day I could not attend visiting their school, but I was asked to attend a meeting with the visiting Prime Minister of Thailand. So there were different obligations, but I did try to get back to you in time for the hearing. Government members share information and we talk to each other, so if I could not be

there, it is not necessarily that I did not want to be there, but I was relying on my colleagues to brief me on what happened. I see you understand.

CHAIR: Finally, we realise you are very concerned that the Committee's recommendations may not have impact by not having a two year inquiry. It would make it pointless. Inquiries by General Purpose Standing Committees are normally short to try to bring a result straight back to Parliament. That is why we have been forced to have a limited amount of time for hearings and so on, if you would just understand that. Would you like to present your material to us now?

Ms MULVEY: Thank you, Mr Chair, and I would like to respond. I really appreciate all the feedback that people have given today, because I think part of any process is being informed about the process and understanding the constraints on the process as well, and the feedback that you received from some members of the P & C in Erskineville did raise some of those issues that you have responded to, and I will ensure that that goes back to the committee. So we thank you for that response and information. We appreciate those pressures that people are under.

I will start today, and this is an opportunity for the demographer Peter Phibbs to also respond to the processes of the proposal of the closure of Erskineville Public School from a demographic point of view, but I will just add a couple of points before Peter Phibbs wants to respond in his own right.

The terms of reference specifically that I was going to address today are: One, the effectiveness and integrity of the consultation process, and in relation to that I have made a number of points in my comments on 31 May and in our submission. The points to be raised in the minds of the inquiry members are the transparency of process and the right of our timely advice and opportunity to participate in this particular process. As you can see, we are an articulate group of people and we do seek to have real participation and be informed so that we can participate to the best of our ability and be part of a process for building good infrastructure and services for our community. One of the things I would like to highlight that has not been mentioned I think to a large degree is the process of consultation.

As early as a year before the Minister's announcement the department actually had considered the possibility of closing Erskineville. There is one piece of evidence I would just like to put forward for your consideration on that, and that is that in March 2000 the principal of Erskineville Public School was not re-appointed on a permanent basis and in fact the department made a major decision which impacted on the school to employ a relieving principal at that time. As I understand from papers received under the freedom of information, the then district superintendent, in fact still the district superintendent, Jack Basely, advised senior managers to expect that there would be a voluntary closure of the schools and that parents may well choose to send their children to another school and he acknowledged the low enrolments at that time. The next point of contact from the district superintendent was August, as I understand, to one parent where the low enrolments were discussed, and then the second contact was after the holidays that then ensued, the Olympic holidays. There was a meeting and two people from the school, a citizen who has been long-term involved, in fact Francis, whom you have met, and this one parent that Jack had talked to were able to be present at a presentation from the department. It was then that a letter went out to all parents at the end of October, and that was really the first time we all did learn about the possibility of the future of Erskineville.

I have made this point, but I would like to read to the Committee the letter. I just want to be clear with members what did happen in this process, because the P & C was a very small group before we heard about what the potential future was and what was going to happen with the school, and the P & C was re-established and the parent group was re-invigorated at that time and we wrote to the Minister. You have our letter at appendix 4 of our submission. We directly sought information about participation in the process and we also flagged that we understood the school was under review because the letter from Jack Basely that went to parents did indicate that it could possibly lead to a closure of the school if the enrolments continued to decline. That is when we got a response on behalf of the Minister from Jack Basely, and I quote to you:

While currently no school review is being undertaken at the school, the Minister has asked me to monitor the school's enrolment and to advise him of the trend in early 2001. The school's principal and the school council president will be provided with appropriate, timely advice should any decision be taken to vary existing arrangements.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Could I have the date of that letter please?

Ms MULVEY: The date of that letter was 18 January 2001. As you can see, that was two months before the Minister made his announcement. We do understand Government processes and we understand that for a Minister to be making an announcement like that, it is very questionable to us that there had not been some sort of process going on internally, and that is why we wrote our letter. Our concern is that in asking to participate, in asking for a transparency of process, in asking for what were the appropriate processes, we were responded to in that regard.

As I have said before, at every point in the process we have tried to present some information which is contrary to the information that was being used to make that decision, to plan for that decision. We do not feel that information has been taken on board, and, in particular, in terms of the terms of reference, this impacts on the available options for public education in our area of Erskineville, and in terms of addressing the education needs of our children, we feel that Erskineville has been caught between the future planning for an area which has put forward, the Alexandria Park Community School, and in terms of the future for Erskineville and the Newtown area, which is the area that Erskineville really relates to.

Now I guess what we tried to communicate to the department is that your planning direction needs to take account of the fact that Erskineville relates to Newtown and the children will not attend Alexandria Park school. Peter will talk about the demographic side of things in relation to that, but a point that I think was not clear the other day, which perhaps the Committee has an opportunity to revisit, in terms of other primary schools in the area, the children at Erskineville attending the school or future children within Erskineville are more likely to attend the Newtown schools and the Newtown schools currently are almost at or are at capacity, and into the future that will become an issue. Again, it is not the issue about tomorrow, it is not the issue about today, what the enrolments are at Erskineville, the issue is the future. What capacity do we have in this area to meet the education needs of the Erskineville-Newtown children?

I would like to emphasise that we have always said that we wanted to work with the department in terms of a model that will work for the area. I read the transcript of the department's presentations to the inquiry and, as I have said before, in terms of structural change and curriculum reform we do not have any problems with working into the future. What we want is the opportunity for Erskineville and Newtown to be planned in terms of the needs that they have.

DET has acknowledged that there are a high number of people from Erskineville now or into the future that would actually go to Newtown, and in fact I have been involved with the department in recasting draft boundaries for the catchment to Newtown Primary School. I think that this demonstrates recognition that the community of Erskineville does in fact relate to Newtown. I understand that the department's policy is that, when a school is closed, the resources in relation to that school should follow the children and my issue there is that the site of Erskineville Public School and the resources there are really resources for the Erskineville-Newtown area and, if that area is going to grow into the future, what we are proposing is an opportunity for expansion with Newtown High School, Newtown Primary School and the Erskineville community for a model that will include those sites.

I will leave it there and welcome the opportunity for questions.

CHAIR: Peter, would you be able to share your material with us?

Dr PHIBBS: Yes, I do not want to say too much, I suspect most of what I want to say you have seen in the appendix to the Erskineville submission. I work at the University of Sydney in the urban-regional planning program and, as part of that work and other work, I do population forecasts for local government areas. I had previously completed a population forecast of South Sydney, which I think a colleague at work knew, and one of her children went to Erskineville, so she asked me to look at the demographic report that was part of the department's work. I was happy to do that and I think it is an important role to participate in that sort of process.

When I read it I was a little alarmed because I think it gave the impression that forecasting is a more precise science than it actually is. I cannot remember the last time I saw a forecast that was correct. There are so many risks involved in forecasting that basically a better way to think of them is as estimates. What you try and do when you prepare a forecast is alert the reader to the risks that

might be involved, why your forecast might not be correct, and the usual way you do that is by preparing a number of different scenarios outlining the assumptions that you have followed in each of the scenarios. Most demographic reports would have a most likely, an optimistic and a pessimistic outcome and certainly ones I prepare follow that model.

I was a bit concerned when I initially read the demographic report because I think it gave an image to the reader of precision, and particularly given the nature of the task I think there is probably even a greater risk. When you were forecasting for school populations 20 years ago the task was much simpler. For a primary school, people would basically go to their local primary school and, if you estimated how many people were in the catchment area of that local primary school, you would have reasonably accurate results. Now things are much more complicated, people travel a lot further to go to primary schools. One of the particular areas of risk I identified in my short report was the notion of people actually taking their children to primary schools near where they work. I think that is becoming an increasing model for children. Certainly, as someone who works at the university, that is a model that some of my colleagues adopt where, because of picking the child up and dropping the child off, they travel quite long distances and the child will actually go to school close to someone's work. In preparing my short report I got some evidence from I think North Newtown Primary School that indicated that maybe 30 percent of their enrolments were children who did not come from what you could describe as the local area but from as far away as Liverpool and Badgerys Creek, so for that reason it becomes a more difficult exercise because, not only do you have to forecast people's residence, you actually have to say something about their workplace and how they are going to interact between their workplace and schools. For that reason I had the impression that the report was probably not holding on to each of those risks.

One of the other risks I identified was the notion of how many children are likely to move into the large number of new developments in South Sydney. Again, one of the difficulties in forecasting is that, if you are just trying to estimate how many people are going to die and how many children are going to be born, that is reasonably easy to do. Mortality and fertility do not change quickly enough that you are going to make very large mistakes in your forecasts. When you have to actually work out how many people are going to move into an area, and this is a common problem in inner city areas, where South Sydney is going to experience the largest redevelopment project in Australia's history, that makes it doubly hard because you have to work out how fast they are going to move in. One of the key issues in school forecasting is the notion of how many children are going to move into those areas.

There was a figure used in the report that was based on evidence from Ultimo-Pyrmont. I thought that perhaps a wider canvassing of what that number could be would be useful. Certainly I regard that as a key parameter I would put in a pessimistic, optimistic and most likely scenario where I would vary that number depending on some different assumptions. The figure of three percent was used in the report, again based on Ultimo-Pyrmont evidence. I think South Sydney has highlighted that they have actually done some empirical work in new developments in their area with the number of children moving into developments. In one local development, Kimberley Gardens, 39 percent of households had children and in another, I think Moore Park Gardens--

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Where is Kimberley Gardens?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Dalmeny Avenue, Rosebery.

Dr PHIBBS: In Rosebery, yes, close to the freeway.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: So it is not directly relevant to Erskineville.

Dr PHIBBS: Well, it is closer to Erskineville than Ultimo-Pyrmont is and I suspect that the residents that move in there are probably more characteristic of the people who are going to move into the South Sydney redevelopment area than in Ultimo-Pyrmont, but of course it is not directly relevant. My approach to that would be to again use some different assumptions and say, okay, if there are a lot of children moving in, I would use this assumption and I would end up with that result. I was concerned about that. I think that was a risk.

I mentioned the issue of workforce enrolments. There are going to be 20,000 people - it is a government forecast of how many people are going to work in the South Sydney growth centre - so if some of those people follow the model of sending their kids to school near where they work that could

create extra pressures.

I guess the other issue is the notion of changing preferences for schools. Preferences change over time. If you are in a situation where basically the population of the entire area had emptied out, there would be a very clear trend that there were not enough children to go into schools, but if you actually just move out of the boundary area into the Newtown area, schools there seem quite full. Again, as a forecaster, I would be a little concerned that maybe you should build a model where some of the preferences for different school use would be part of that modelling.

I think the other issue, and this is a methodology issue and it is a problem that a lot of forecasters face, is just where you draw the boundary. The boundary of that demographic study may have been convenient, but I think it might have been useful to have a look at what was happening at schools just over the boundary. I mean if you have a situation where those schools fill up, if local people or someone else want to send their children to school perhaps there would be some more demand across that catchment back into Erskineville.

I guess that is the main message I am trying to leave: Forecasts have a lot of risk. There was a lot of risk in this forecast because of the nature of the forecast. I do not think it was well represented in the report; I think it might give readers the wrong impression, and I think making public judgments about public infrastructure without acknowledging those risks, particularly where people are contemplating selling assets that might be hard to recover - I guess that is just the message I wanted to bring here today.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Jeni, you mentioned that you were involved with the department in recasting the boundaries for Newtown Public School. What do those boundaries appear to be?

Ms MULVEY: These are draft boundaries, as I understand at this stage, and what has been acknowledged is that the Erskineville community, from the Mitchell Road artery to the west, tends to relate more to Newtown, and I cannot tell you exactly but I think Mitchell Road and there is a small area of Alexandria that has been retained for Alexandria Community School catchment area, but the majority of Erskineville has now been recast, in draft form anyway, to be a catchment area for Newtown Primary School in recognition, I guess, of the feedback we have been given about the way children walk and relate in that community. I guess that would mean that the Newtown Public School would be absorbing people from the Newtown area and that remains our concern based on the current capacity of the school, and that is not just the classrooms but also the environment. I know that the school had to seek the use of an adjacent park to the school through the council because their facilities were not enough to meet their children's needs and they also have used the Erskineville site on numerous occasions for their needs as well. I have had some discussions with the department about their intent to redevelop a classroom on the site, but I do not know where those plans are at at this stage. I think one additional classroom would not meet the increased projected population based on the sort of information that Peter has given.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Mr Phibbs, you mentioned the demographers using detail from Ultimo, but you are obviously aware that they used the South Sydney Council resident survey, I think it is called, and the census data and studied the Green Square development. For instance, is it a third of the development approved for Green Square that is one-bedroom? I just wanted to clarify that because you seemed to be giving the impression that Dr Yusuf had not looked at South Sydney data and in particular Green Square data.

Dr PHIBBS: No, I guess the point I was trying to make was that the three percent comes from the Ultimo-Pymont study. The report says: "A value of three percent has been chosen as representing the figure from the Ultimo-Pymont study and being close to the figure for the Newtown area in 1996".

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: And what is that three percent?

Dr PHIBBS: The three percent is the proportion of the population aged five to eleven.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: And what is that figure for South Sydney?

Dr PHIBBS: Well, the figure for South Sydney is the \$40 question for the study, if you like,

and--

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Well, for instance, the information that I have says that at the moment in South Sydney only two percent of the population are 19 years old and younger, so the percentage between five and eleven is obviously a fair bit lower.

Dr PHIBBS: Yes, the three percent refers to the people moving into the new development.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Most of that is one-bedroom?

Dr PHIBBS: Well, some of it is at the moment, but it is mixed, some of it is two-bedroom. The point I was trying to make in the report is that, given that you are forecasting into the future, one of the unknowns is just how preferences might change as a result of price movements.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But unless the price of the properties goes down you are not going to get very many children in one-bedroom units selling for the price that units in Green Square are going to sell for.

Dr PHIBBS: You are not, but I think it is within the realms of possibility that families will move into two-bedroom units. They are expensive, but if you look at the alternative in terms of what two-bedroom semis or three-bedroom semis are in the area, there still is a price break.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What is the price of a two-bedroom unit in South Sydney at the moment?

Dr PHIBBS: It varies, but you might be paying in the 300s.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You are not going to get that many children in two-bedroom units costing \$300,000.

Dr PHIBBS: Well, if you are looking at the alternative of buying a small terrace for \$500,000, the saving actually will help. The point I am trying to make is that, as Sydney becomes basically more choked up with people, people are expressing a preference for access and we have seen that. South Sydney is one of the fastest growing LGAs in the State. People are showing a preference for access. If that continues, it becomes a problem for people about what they want more: Do they want access or do they want more space? I suspect people would prefer to have more space--

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Amongst those middle-class people who want access and who can pay over \$300,000 for a two-bedroom unit, what is the average family size?

Dr PHIBBS: The average family size?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Yes, average number of children?

Dr PHIBBS: Well, maybe between one and two children.

Dr PHIBBS: Maybe between one and two children.

CHAIR: The other point you were making earlier is that the department may plan for some development like Alexandria Park and assume that parents are going to take their children there, and that may be not in fact what the parents do. Are you suggesting they may try and go to the Newtown north school? You cannot make people go in a direction.

Dr PHIBBS: No, people basically select schools that they think are most appropriate for their child, and I think, again, 20 years ago it was a clearer cut decision, you would go to the closest school. That is probably not an assumption you could make these days.

Ms MULVEY: Could I make the point also that there is a lot of emphasis on the Green Park development, and certainly that has its impact. I have heard Peter make the point previously that in terms of the Alexandria Park school, it will probably be full to capacity with the sort of development that is around that school on that site. However, there are a number of developments in the South Sydney area, particularly in Erskineville and Newtown, that sort of catchment area of Newtown Public

School currently, that are quite substantial. I think South Sydney Council made the point the other day that there are increasing numbers of developers that are putting in DAs for two and three bedroom apartments in these areas. I would cite the example of the apartments that are still being developed, some are already in place, but opposite Sydney Park. We have counted up the number of developments in our particular small area, and for a very small area they are quite substantial and still continuing to develop. You could get a list of those from South Sydney Council.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: You mentioned the worst scenario, the good scenario of prediction. This three percent that has been used for the projection, do you see that as average or do you think that is too low?

Dr PHIBBS: I think it is on the low side. If I was a demographer doing this report, I would use that as one scenario, but I think you could probably double that figure on the other end of the scenario.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In relation to the development of the plan that was involved linking Erskineville and Newtown Public Schools and relocating onto that site and Newtown Performing Arts possibly expanding on the other side, when in the process was that plan developed and when was it put to the department?

Ms MULVEY: It was basically presented during the school closures review process. We certainly made it clear in our original submission that we were open to discussing options for positive public school models. In our first submission, however, the actual option in terms of looking at Newtown and Erskineville's relationships was raised to the Schools Closure Review Committee and we presented to them.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: And did the department seek to discuss that with you or merely you with the committee? Was there any separate discussion with the department?

Ms MULVEY: No, the department did not seek to discuss that with us.

(The witnesses withdrew)

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

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

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

MICHAEL GOWRIE WATERHOUSE, Director of Legal Services, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, on former oath:

CHAIR: Dr Boston, we note that you are moving to other places in due course. All the best for that.

Dr BOSTON: Thank you very much. Mr Chairman, we have been through the transcripts that are available, though not of the very latest evidence that you have heard. We have prepared a document which responds to the issues which have been raised, and at the end of today's hearing, if those items have not all been canvassed, we would be wanting to table the document with you as our considered response to all the issues that have been raised so far.

CHAIR: We are happy, whatever happens, for you to table that document. I think the Committee should have it in writing.

Dr BOSTON: Thank you. In our view the issue which has not been adequately examined in the hearing so far is the performance of schools in the proposal. Quality of education has been assumed, it has been asserted, but it has not been tested, and we would like to begin our presentation today with the question of school performance and quality of education.

CHAIR: Are you going to go to each of these particular schools?

Dr BOSTON: In regard to some of them, Mr Chairman. As you know, the Education Regulation 2001 Clause 5(5) prevents us from publicly revealing information in a way that compares the results of particular schools. For that reason I would ask that the initial part of our presentation be heard in camera.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Yes, we have to do that. I concur with that interpretation.

CHAIR: You wish to deal with that first?

Dr BOSTON: Yes.

(Moved by the Chair that the Committee hear the evidence in camera; motion agreed to)

(The proceedings continued in camera)

(Public hearing resumed)

CHAIR: Dr Boston, do you or other members of your team wish to respond to evidence that has been given to the Committee?

Dr BOSTON: Yes, Mr Chairman. We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the issues raised with the Committee in previous hearings. I would want to say that we do recognise that the closure of any school is a very significant issue for a school community. We have provided evidence about the steps the department has taken and the resources provided to schools to support the staff and students of schools being closed. I would also make the point that we have been driven essentially by the need to improve the standard of education available to children, young people, in the inner city area and, in doing that, given the scope of that problem, we have not been able to consider any one school in isolation from its neighbours. We have worked out a systemic response which is aimed at giving public education a long-term viable future. As I said previously, we will table the document that addresses all the issues that have been raised by the Committee in the transcripts

we have seen, but there are a couple of issues I would like to draw particular attention to, firstly in relation to Redfern, then to Erskineville and then to Hunters Hill.

CHAIR: I am just wondering whether it would help us if we perhaps had a copy. I know it is a substantive document.

Dr BOSTON: The document does in fact include that material that was heard in camera, so it would not be a public document in the sense of the previous document we distributed.

CHAIR: I was only referring to those pages that you are referring to now, but you continue, Dr Boston.

Dr BOSTON: All right, I shall.

I would like to address firstly the claim that the Alexandria Park Community School proposal is not what the community wants. I am concerned that the inquiry has been left with an impression that the proposal for Alexandria Park has not been the subject of extensive and appropriate community consultation. It has been suggested quite strongly to you that the proposal has somehow been foisted on the Redfern community without any consideration of the impacts on them or their wishes for the kind of education that they want for their children.

There were comments made by Reverend McIntyre, by Ms Munroe and by Ms Butland to the extent that the Redfern community was not involved in shaping the proposal. Ms Munroe said we need to think it through a whole lot better and engage the whole community in consultation. The impression given by those remarks is totally incorrect. It could not be further from the truth and I say that with confidence, recognising that there are some local politics which make this issue sensitive.

In the initial Building the Future proposal we proposed the amalgamation of four primary schools to build up a strong and vibrant primary school around 200-250 students offering some exceptional programs and support. At the same time we proposed the secondary school for Aboriginal students termed Wingara. During the consultation period, at a meeting in Redfern attended by 400 people approximately, that proposal was rejected and a commitment made at the meeting to come up with an alternative proposal, and one pillar of that commitment was to look at the notion of a P-12 school that would support Aboriginal students through critical transition points, particularly the difficult middle years of adolescence. Now the Alexandria Park Community School is that alternative proposition which was asked for by the community.

The proposal was developed during March-April-May 2001 through a series of open community meetings led by a group of mainly Aboriginal people, including Terry Denzel from Cleveland Street High School, Naomi Warms from Waterloo Public School, Jackie Jarrett from the AECG, and those meetings were attended by Aboriginal community groups such as the Redfern Foundation and included some non-Aboriginal people such as Professor Tony Vinson, Ms Fionie Stavert from the Teachers Federation and Duong Phan from the NESB. The proposal drew on ideas which were developed progressively by the local community from about 1992 when the community was concerned about falling enrolments and curriculum choices being restricted at Cleveland Street High School and from discussions held with principals of the four schools during 1998-99. I will table with the Committee a copy of that 1999 paper. The proposal focused on three stages - preschool to Year 4, Year 5 to Year 8 and Year 9 to Year 12 - and the vision for the new school was to be a school that offered excellence in Aboriginal education but which would be so good that it would attract back to the public education system the middle-class non-Aboriginal families of the area.

Now some members of the local community chose not to engage or determined that the developing proposal did not meet their needs. For example, the Erskineville Public School community did not involve itself in the discussions and Ms Munroe signed the attendance register of the meeting for 4 April 2001. The leadership role was taken by Mr Terry Denzel. He is an Aboriginal person with a long involvement with educational services, particularly sports coaching in the Redfern area. He has lived in the area all of his life except for four years. His mother was a founding member of a group called The Foundation of Aboriginal Affairs in 1957. Terry has been involved with social issues for Aboriginal people in the area throughout his life. His three children attended public schools in the area. He has been involved, and he has been involved with the P and C at these schools, he has been president of the school council at Cleveland Street High School. This is gold standard participation, Mr Chairman. Mr Denzel has provided me with a copy of a fax he sent to you, Mr Chairman, as chair of

this Committee of inquiry. In the fax he states: "Many thousands of hours have been spent, a real community consultation and hundreds of people, individual organisations and groups, to bring about a proposal based on sound knowledge and thorough research. Unfortunately, this has not been recognised or acknowledged by representations by individuals to your Committee". That raises the question of who speaks for the Aboriginal people of this area.

The group one normally expects to be involved in school issues is the P and C. Redfern Public School P and C did not engage in the initial stages of the consultation simply because there was no P and C in existence. The P and C was established only after the school closure was announced. The public meetings were organised by external groups such as South Sydney Council, the relieving school principal; Rodney Molesworth representing the State body of P and Cs attended at the invitation of the parents and the State Federation of P and Cs continues its involvement with Redfern through Diane Butland. The Federation has supported the school in setting up a P and C. Unfortunately, it is probably more C than P at this stage in that it is essentially citizens and we are optimistic that that will change at Alexandria Park Community School.

I believe, Mr Chairman, that the evidence you have been given on this matter is wrong, and the fax that Mr Denzel provided me with is available for distribution.

I would also like, in relation to Redfern Public School, to deal with the issue raised by several witnesses who claim that there was no relationship between the proposal and the strategies being developed by the Government under the Waterloo-Redfern Partnership Program. Now I believe that is totally untrue. I attended one of the first meetings called by the Premier's Department to discuss the partnership and education was a critical component right from the beginning. Since then there have been several meetings attended by senior representatives from the Department of Education and Training. There has been ongoing contact between the director of the project, Mr Michael Ramsey, and his staff with the steering committee for Alexandria Park Community School. Mr Ramsey briefed the steering committee earlier this year.

Last year a joint proposal was put to the Premier's Department from the Department of Education and Training and the partnership program for three year funding of a sports development officer for Alexandria Park Community School, someone who would work not only with school students but with adolescents in the community, and that proposal was successful.

As part of our commitment to the Redfern-Waterloo partnership, the Alexandria Park Community School has undertaken to accommodate a range of community services within the school forming a genuine community link for the Redfern area. Those services include Centrelink and Connect Redfern and Health and DOCS and Police Citizens Youth Club to encourage maintenance of programs when its site is closed. Frankly, I cannot think of any other school we have established that has so many community services located on the one site or one that has so great a potential to benefit its community.

I would also, Mr Chairman, like to comment on the claims by Ms Coulter of South Sydney Council that South Sydney has an alarming non-school attendance problem. She is quoted in the transcript as saying, "You can see we have a five to eleven-year-olds attendance rate based on this table of around 76 percent compared to the State average of 96 percent". Councillor Fowler of the council says non-attendance would increase and currently the home school liaison officer staffing within that region is woefully inadequate to do any of the home visits. Mr Chairman, this matter was raised with the department last year during consultations.

A table prepared by South Sydney Council was derived from 1996 census results. It uses the number of young people reported to be attending at primary school divided by the population of five to eleven-year-olds to derive an attendance ratio of 76 percent for South Sydney. Using the same approach, it also indicates that Waverley has an attendance ratio of 68 percent and Woollahra 87 percent, while for New South Wales the ratio is 96 percent. At a meeting with Ms Coulter on 14 May 2001 Mr Jack Bazeley, the district superintendent for Port Jackson, and Mr Doug White, who is our demographer, presented data to indicate that the analysis was not an indication of attendance but more a result of residents not answering questions 19 or 20 of the census questionnaire. Question 19 is: Did you attend an education institution? Question 20 is: The type of education institution. Government primary schools located in South Sydney enrolled 2,061 students in 1996 and non-government schools enrolled a further 1,044 primary students. Now, while that data is based on the location of the school rather than the residential location of the students, the total of 3,105 students compares with only 2,250

persons living in South Sydney of that age and reported as attending infants or primary schools based on the population census results.

We took this up with the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Peter Clark of the ABS provided an analysis of answers to questions 19 and 20 on 24 May 2001. In South Sydney only 1.2 percent of five to eleven-year-olds indicated that they were not attending school. This was consistent with the results for all New South Wales. Note that it is not compulsory to attend school until six years of age. The analysis also indicated that 24.5 percent of five to eleven-year-olds in South Sydney did not state whether they attended school - that is, they did not answer either of questions 19 or 20 - and that compared with 6.2 percent not stated for all New South Wales for the same age group. That advice was faxed to Ms Coulter, so the information was made plain. Perhaps there is some confusion here on her part between non-enrolment and truancy. That is a separate matter which is of great concern to the department in a number of areas across the State and home school liaison officers, of course, are working with schools to address such issues of non-attendance.

In attempting to follow through the concerns of council the superintendent sought from council the names of students alleged to be not attending school and initially some 20 names were provided. Half of them were young people who were over 15 and not required to attend school. Several were over 20 years of age. Some did not live in the area. Of those that were within the compulsory schooling age range, all were involved at local schools, some in special programs with partial attendance and the remainder had favourable attendance reports from principals. The most recent referral was of five primary aged students who allegedly were not enrolled at school and who allegedly were causing problems adjacent to the block. All proved to be enrolled at Darlington Public School, not Redfern. Three had excellent attendance records. The remaining two, from a very difficult family background, were known to the Aboriginal home school liaison officers who were addressing their needs. Now while it is of concern to me that many Aboriginal students do have poor attendance patterns, the issue is overstated in relation to the set-up of Alexandria Park. There is every reason to believe that the middle school structure will address these students' needs better than the structures we currently have in the area. The Port Jackson district has excellent systems for monitoring attendance and its attendance figures are comparable with those Statewide.

On the issue of home school liaison officer and Aboriginal school liaison officer, well, the Aboriginal school liaison officer has regular contact with many of the community on the daily morning bus run, and it is through that informal channel that information about students is gained and conveyed to the principal. There are regular roll checks conducted by the home school liaison officer to alert the school and the team to students of concern and phone calls and home visits are then immediately conducted. The Aboriginal school liaison officer also maintains regular contact with the Redfern community by attending meetings in the area, such as those for Connect Redfern, the Redfern-Waterloo Task Force, the Aboriginal Interagency and Police Community Committee, and in that way she has been able to assist in developing strong lines of communication between the police, community groups and the school. The sharing of information, of course, between agencies is of great importance in doing that.

The last point we would want to make, Mr Chairman, and these are the key ones but there are a lot of points in here on Redfern, is in relation to claims by Mr Fowler, Mayor of South Sydney Council, about the extent of development in Green Square and I will ask Mr Burkhardt to comment on that.

CHAIR: Just before you move on to that, we have that correspondence from Terry Denzel and we have copied that, but I gather we have not received a submission from him to the inquiry nor any attempt to be a witness before the inquiry. We have not deliberately excluded him, but for some reason he has not participated and I gather he did not participate in the school closures review either.

Mr BURKHARDT: Mr Fowler, the Mayor of South Sydney Council, raised a number of concerns about the extent of development of Green Square and he claims that the child rearing population is underestimated. I would just like to take the Committee through some of the demographics of this area.

The development proposed for Green Square was extensively reviewed in Caspersonn and Yusuf in their document. I would commend pages 35 to 43. There are seven pages of analysis of the Green Square development, which is more than I have seen in a number of other areas. Their study provides comprehensive details on the South Sydney growth centre, Green Square, and the whole of

the local government area. They had discussions with Planning New South Wales and the South Sydney Development Corporation in reviewing development and preparing their analysis and report.

There has been an assumption that the Yusuf report over-relied upon the analysis of the Ultimo-Pyrmont study. If you turn to page 50 and beyond in their report, they in fact base their results on population statistics in South Sydney augmented by the Meriton developments and South Sydney's own survey as well as the Pyrmont study. These are detailed on pages 45 to 50 in that report.

The South Sydney Council Resident Survey, which was a sample survey of newly completed high density developments in September 2000, indicated that only two percent of the population were 19 years of age or younger. The Yusuf report indicated that from three large developments - and I drew the Committee's attention to this in the previous hearing - out of a total of 566 dwellings in the study recently approved, up to July 2001, 319 of the dwellings approved in South Sydney or 57 percent were one-bedroom units and 195, that is an additional 35 percent, were two-bedroom units. Again, the combination of one and two-bedroom units is approaching 90 percent.

We have continued to monitor developments in South Sydney and of the 5,250 dwellings approved in Green Square in 2001 and 2002 some 1,722 or 33 percent were bed-sitters or one-bedroom units and 2,895 were two-bedroom units. In total, 88 percent of the dwellings were of the one and two-bedroom variety. Given this type of development, very few families with school-aged children will be attracted to Green Square. This has been incorporated into the analysis and projections of Yusuf who projected a scenario of 650 primary school students in Alexandria Park Community School. The school has a capacity of up to 800. If necessary, students from the southern end of Green Square could be directed to Gardeners Road which has a 2002 enrolment of 207 and it has a capacity for almost 700 students. Further, if Waterloo school was kept open it would be a school most affected by the Green Square development. Besides Alexandria Park, it is the closest. Waterloo Public School has a capacity of only 110 students and is on .76 of a hectare. Alexandria Park Community School retains both the Alexandria Public School site and the large Cleveland Street High School site with the surrounding parkland and oval. The plan to amalgamate the four primary schools into Alexandria Park Community School is a good plan and provides the best option and greater flexibility for accommodating students in Green Square.

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, with your agreement we would like now to turn to Erskineville, and there are a number of issues that we would like to comment on there. One is the issue of concerns expressed by Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre about future increased numbers of students in Erskineville and the claim by Ms Mulvey of Erskineville P and C that the school closures committee did not reflect that it had taken into account demographic advice from Professor Phibbs. I would like John Burkhardt to comment on those. Thirdly, the number of issues relating to walking distances and the importance of having a school in the village of Erskineville and a proposal put forward to this Committee that Newtown Public School should be closed and the students amalgamated with Erskineville, and I would ask Alan Laughlin to comment on those, so, with your indulgence, Mr Burkhardt initially.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Burkhardt.

Mr BURKHARDT: In terms of the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, the submission to the School Closures Review Committee indicated that Lady Gowrie Child Centre had 82 places and 92 children under two years and 28 children, two to three years, on their waiting list. The submission also provided that there were five local pre-schools and day care centres which enrolled a total of 72 four to five-year-olds last year.

The input of pre-schools in public education enrolments is problematic. These pre-schools have always been in high demand but this has not resulted in these numbers translating into our schools. Kindergarten enrolments in Alexandria Park schools, that is Alexandria Public, Erskineville Public, Redfern Public and Waterloo Public, fell from 62 in 1998 to 33 in 2001 and this year they are at 32. If nearby Newtown Public School and Camdenville are also included, their enrolments fell from 123 to 97 over the same period. In February 2002 there were 246 students enrolled across the Alexandria Public School, Erskineville, Redfern and Waterloo Public Schools. This is down from over 1,700 students back in the 1970s. There will be accommodation capacity for at least 800 students at Alexandria Park Community School. We, of course, do not anticipate that it will get to that number. There is capacity for 240 at Newtown Public School and 490 at Camdenville Public School.

Together there is additional capacity of 860 students, which allows for an increase of primary enrolments in the area of 120 percent. Because of the mobility of many young children aged under four years, they will not remain in the area. However, if all students on the waiting list remained and sought enrolments at the schools as planned, they could be accommodated. It should be noted that an increase in enrolments at Alexandria Park Community School of up to 650 was projected by Yusuf, and these again can be easily accommodated.

CHAIR: That includes primary and high school?

Mr BURKHARDT: That is the primary component only.

CHAIR: That is 650?

Mr BURKHARDT: 800 could fit into the primary component. We have retained two schools. Alexandria Park Community School is retained and it has a capacity in excess of 300 alone.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I wanted to address the issue of the arguments that have been put forward by a number of witnesses seeking to retain the concept of a school in the village of Erskineville, which it has become known as. What we have done is looked at the actual enrolments in Erskineville at the moment. There are 34 students currently enrolled, and when you look at those enrolments they really do not come from the village of Erskineville in large numbers. In fact, 14 come from Erskineville, Alexandria six, Redfern three, Waterloo two, Arncliffe two, Hurlstone Park two, Marrickville two, Newtown one, one even from Bankstown and one from Minto. So they come from quite a wide area. We spoke to the principal of the school at Erskineville and we had a definition given to us roughly of what the village of Erskineville was, and using that analysis, it became pretty clear to us that half the children attending Erskineville school are in fact not from that village area. In fact, many would be closer to the proposed Alexandria Park Community School than they are to Erskineville, and in fact it appears that seven students would have to go past Alexandria Park Community School to get to Erskineville, that is of those who are currently enrolled. So we do not think that that is a strong argument.

In response to the claim that students would be at risk or that transport would be problematic, we would like to bring these following matters to the Committee's attention. In this part of the city, the primary schools are in fact only about 600 to 700 metres apart. They are very close. Many students are already travelling across busy roads to Erskineville and further than they would if they attended the new Alexandria Park Community School. There are only about 15 students attending Erskineville who live within that village area. Newtown primary school is a close and safe option for many of those students. Erskineville students already attend Alexandria Park Community School for sport. They walked there this morning. So it is not hard to get to. The principal is, in fact, now undertaking individual consultations with parents about the safest and preferred alternative schools. We have also had five meetings so far with Sydney buses about transport to Alexandria Park Community School, and we believe that we can have positional pick-up and drop-off times and rerouting of some buses to make sure that this is a safe alternative. We are also incorporating a new bus turning circle at Alexandria Park Community School and we are buying the school a bus. We are purchasing that at this moment, and there is a connect Redfern bus as well. So it will be a school that really is very well serviced by transport, in an area where there are many private schools at the moment, very close together, with students moving across that area in quite a diverse way.

The other point I would like to raise too I will read fairly quickly. It has been stated: "Why not move Newtown primary school to the Erskineville primary school site and expand Newtown Performing Arts High School into the Newtown primary school site?" This was put forward by Fionie Stavert from the New South Wales Teachers' Federation, and in doing that, what she has basically acknowledged is the fact that we have two schools, which are not large schools, close together and they may be better off being one school. So in proposing what she has proposed, she has acknowledged in fact the direction we have been heading. When you look at the actual numbers though, Newtown primary school has some 200 students and if we picked them up and moved them to Erskineville, we would be moving 200 to build up the numbers where there are 34. That frankly did not make a lot of sense to us. Ms Stavert also spoke about the community at Newtown and the staff at Newtown supporting the concept or seeing the value in the concept. In fact, the principal of Newtown Public School wrote to us a few days ago saying she advises us of the following:

The proposal to amalgamate Newtown Public School with Erskineville Public School has not been put forward or supported by the principal of Newtown Public School. The matter has not been discussed with the staff. The matter has not been discussed with the parents or the broader school community. The matter was raised with me by Fionie Stavert, Teachers' Federation organiser, following the announcement of the closure of Erskineville Public School and the establishment of Alexandria Park Community School. Following some media comment in 2001, staff and parents sought re-assurance from the principal regarding the continuance of Newtown Public School.

That is the sum total of discussions. So I think what has been presented as being an option that the community is favourably disposed to and staff are favourably disposed to is in fact not correct, and I think it would be a very large leap of faith to in fact move in that direction. I would also say that consideration of that is outside the terms of reference of the Schools Closure Review Committee, and it was for that reason that the Schools Closure Review Committee, I am advised, did not in fact look at that as an issue.

CHAIR: That letter you just quoted, is that part of the document you will give to us at the end? Dr Boston said he was going to give us the folder.

Dr BOSTON: Yes, it is included in that.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I have copies here that I will give out now.

(Motion by the Chair that the letter from the principal of Erskineville Public School be tabled; agreed to)

CHAIR: Are there any further points, Dr Boston?

Dr BOSTON: Not on that issue. On the matter of Hunters Hill, I would comment just on one issue, on the claim that there are 72 children in kindergarten in Gladesville, and it was said by Ms Jenner in evidence that there was plenty of anecdotal evidence such as this to suggest that the school aged population is entering a growth period.

It is true there are 72 children in kindergarten at Gladesville Public School, 34 more than last year. What has not been stated in the same context is that there are now 20 fewer students in kindergarten at Hunters Hill Public School and 18 fewer at Lane Cove Public School. In all, the kindergarten enrolments in Hunters Hill High School's feeder primary schools, those in the local area around Hunters Hill have increased by only one student in the past year and only increased by 28 students in the past six years. I also understand that the increase in children at Gladesville public school in fact comes largely from the Putney area in Ryde, a school which has shown a decline of 27 in kindergarten in the last 12 months.

If we take the broad perspective, we see that kindergarten enrolments have declined by five percent over the last seven years. Over the five LGAs covering the Sydney Secondary College and the Ryde, Hunters Hill, Lane Cove areas, the kindergarten enrolments have declined from 1,708 students in 1996 to 1,630 students in 2002. Those figures, Mr Chair, do not suggest to me that the school aged population is entering a growth period.

CHAIR: From memory Gladesville school feeds into Hunters Hill High School normally, does it not?

Dr BOSTON: Yes, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: So it is relevant to the numbers of students in Gladesville school?

Mr BURKHARDT: The drawing area of Gladesville does not feed all of the students into Hunters Hill. Half of the students feed to the other side. It is a split boundary. The Gladesville drawing area is not synonymous with the drawing area of Hunters Hill and the previous Malvina.

CHAIR: Does that conclude your evidence?

Dr BOSTON: It does, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Are there any questions from the Committee members? Some may have to go on

notice.

The Hon. PATRICIA: On notice?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Dr Boston, or I am happy if Mr Burkhardt or one of the others would like to answer, one part of the transcript and part of the evidence from our previous hearing was from Bev Baker, which has not been addressed today but I would be interested in your response, was this statement, and I will just read it to you. Ms Baker of the P & C said, "and I was told by a person on that Committee" (and in that regard she means the closures committee that "If you want to change, if we gave people time to think about this they would react against it". Then she makes an editorial remark which I will not read. "And we are going to put this through because this is the way forward" - and this part in particular - "we have to have 85 percent occupancy rate." That is the end of the quote, and she was saying that in terms of utilisation of assets. Because it is so important to the whole basis of the Building the Future proposal and the Committee's terms of reference, I just want to understand if the department is working to either a formal or an informal guideline in terms of the utilisation of its property assets. I want to know if the department in relation to the Building the Future proposal has been given either a formal or an informal guideline by Treasury or some other central agency as to whether it needs to be reaching the sort of 85 percent occupancy rate that Ms Baker is referring to.

Dr BOSTON: I will ask Mr Burkhardt to respond, Mr Chairman.

Mr BURKHARDT: Chairman, in terms of occupancy rate, the figure of in the order of 90 percent is the average planning occupancy rate that we work towards. That may vary over the life of the school, and as you have seen in evidence previously, we have had schools that are well over that because in fact they have demountables, and we actually operate on a core plus principle, but on average we would expect in terms of prudent planning, that we would look at occupancy rates around 90 percent, and I can assure you I have had no instructions from Treasury. I don't think they would even know that figure exists.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In terms of the Building the Future proposal and the funding for capital works that is involved in the Building the Future proposal, no target in terms of an occupancy rate was given to the department by Treasury, as a, if you like, condition in terms of receiving that capital works funding?

Mr BURKHARDT: Absolutely not. It has never been an issue.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: No instruction from Government, Treasury?

Mr BURKHARDT: I repeat, this is a broad based planning figure. If we were planning new facilities we would anticipate after the peak enrolment has gone, that occupancy rates of around 90 percent, particularly in high schools, are what you would expect, and from time to time boundaries change to try and even that out, but it is a broad based planning figure.

CHAIR: And just to get it clear, that has been operating for some years, it is not the last 12 months or five years?

Mr BURKHARDT: At least 30 years to my recollection.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In the Building the Future proposal there was reference to a clear guideline that no school would be sold to a non-Government school, with the exception of a French school and German school. They were excluded from the policy. We have seen this week reference to the French school that is likely to purchase Maroubra High School site. When did negotiations commence with the French school about that site?

Mr BURKHARDT: Formal negotiations with the French school did not commence until 2002.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Why has the German school also been excised from any proposal about non-Government schools?

Mr BURKHARDT: My understanding is that those two schools have been seeking, in approaches to the Premier's Department and other offices, schools for at least five to seven years. It has been an issue that has been around for - it may even be longer than that.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I should put on the record that I would have made a submission in 1994 on behalf of the French school, but not about that site. In that case, have formal discussions been entered into with the German school about a site?

Mr BURKHARDT: Not to my knowledge. I have not had any.

Dr BOSTON: I am not aware of any discussions with the German school.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Just so I can get an understanding of how this process is working, why are the Building the Future schools not included in the State budget as an acquisition list of schools that are undergoing minor works, major works?

Mr BURKHARDT: There is a reference in Budget Paper 3, section 6.1, to the revitalisation of the inner city. What the papers indicate is that there is a loan facility of some \$45 million for the cash flow for the current year for works associated with those inner city schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But why would they not show up in the minor works or major works list?

Mr BURKHARDT: They are in a sense part of a loan facility and not part of the appropriations related to the asset acquisition which appears in Budget Paper 3.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So it is a separate facility?

Mr BURKHARDT: It is a separate funding arrangement.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I notice that Marrickville Dulwich have now appeared in Budget Paper 4, so have they been excised completely from the Building the Future proposal?

Mr BURKHARDT: In terms of their -

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: They have appeared in the minor works. \$600,000 each this year has been proposed for those schools.

Mr BURKHARDT: They are actually major works. They are worth a million dollars each, and that is part of the normal acquisition program. It is not part of Building the Future.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So they are now outside Building the Future, they have been given different treatment?

Mr BURKHARDT: In terms of those.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Why have they been given a different treatment? Why are they in there when the other schools are not?

Mr BURKHARDT: If I could say that a decision has been made in terms of the proposal, the original proposal in terms of Building the Future, and the Minister currently has just made a decision in relation to that, and the Government has also made the decision now in terms of the acquisition program to provide some small level of funding to those schools based on the decision that they both would remain open.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: So the others are all being treated as a loan subject to the sale of real estate?

Mr BURKHARDT: The loan is based on asset realisation.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Mr Burkhardt, when the Department of Education was asked under FOI for all documents, papers, files and e-mails to and from yourself related to the closure of Hunters Hill High School under the Building the Future plan, it was mentioned, there was the comment that a search did not return any relevant e-mail material in your files, and yet for other departmental officers there were 300 or more pages of e-mails. How could it be that you are the only person without

any communication or document related to the closure of Hunters Hill High School? It was said by the department that you hold nothing, no e-mails, no paper files on the closure of Hunters Hill High.

Mr WATERHOUSE: Could I perhaps answer that in relation to the issue of FOI?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr WATERHOUSE: My understanding is that in searching for Mr Burkhardt's e-mails, that because he had changed e-mail systems from a group wise system to an outlook system, two different systems, his e-mails can no longer be recovered from his computer. He no longer has access to them. I do not think the claim is true that he had no document. I might just say that this is the entire pile of documents, some 1500 pages, provided to the Hunters Hill P & C over their three FOI requests so far, and that among those, certainly a large number of the documents were provided by Mr Burkhardt.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Earlier on when the Committee heard evidence from the demographer associated with Erskineville school, the demographer said that when they did a projection the department used Ultimo-Pyrmont, which is three percent of the population of school aged children and that could be the low end, it could very well be six percent. If there was an occupancy rate of two bedroom units that do have children, that goes to six percent. Would the department be able to cope with Green Square having six percent of the population being school children?

Mr BURKHARDT: We are actually providing, as I indicated earlier, in that area up to 120 percent above the current enrolment. The generation of young people from the sorts of developments going on is not showing us that the six percent figure is likely to be achieved.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: But if it is achieved, would you have the capacity?

Mr BURKHARDT: Look, I haven't done that sum because you have just raised this particular figure with me, but within that 120 percent it is fairly close, but again -

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Did you take no notice of -

Mr BURKHARDT: There are over 2000 dwellings in the last five years have gone into Balmain and the enrolments have dropped by 100 in the primary school. All the evidence is showing that significant unit development of the composition and mixture that we are finding in the ring around the inner city, as I said at the previous hearing, does not have significant numbers of families. I believe that the estimates that we have made are reasonable and sound.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Dr Boston, earlier you said - I think I am quoting you accurately - that the Erskineville school community excluded itself from the committee to look at advancing a proposal around Alexandria Park, and then you referred to a revision of the Alexandria Park proposal to meet some community - the Terry Denzel proposal. Given that Erskineville excluded itself, why was the department prepared to look at a review of the proposal for Alexandria Park but not look at any proposal that was separately put from Erskineville?

Dr BOSTON: I should like Dr Laughlin to comment on that.

Dr LAUGHLIN: What we did actually was looked at certainly the community proposition that came up about Alexandria Park, there is no question of that. The people from Erskineville were certainly invited to participate in it. They indicated to us, and I think they have probably done it in discussions here, that they would see a natural affinity with schools other than Alexandria Park, and certainly we believe that given the size of Erskineville, given its unlikely ability to attract students, that the best circumstance for us to provide students of that age group, if they did not want to go to Alexandria Park, was certainly allow them to attend Newtown or other schools.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: And are you confident that Newtown is not at capacity?

Dr LAUGHLIN: I can get John Burkhardt to talk about that. In all those schools there is a very large number of non-local enrolments already. So it gives us a great degree of flexibility.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Has the department undertaken any projections, if you are

building Alexandria Park to a capacity of about 250 enrolments, when it expects to be at that capacity?

Dr LAUGHLIN: We hope it would be a lot bigger to be frank. We are building it so that it can actually take - I think John Burkhardt was saying about 800.

CHAIR: Just clarify that capacity figure for the record.

Mr BURKHARDT: Alexandria Park actually has two components. It has the old Cleveland Street High School, which has a capacity of 800. We do not envisage that it will get to 800. And it also has the old Alexandria primary school which has a capacity of 250. In terms of, if you like, the primary component it has a capacity up to 800, but we think that it will end up as about a standard primary school as we build everywhere else, such as at Campbelltown, of around 620.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: What would the DA be lodged, for how many?

Mr BURKHARDT: The DA is actually reflecting the current enrolment, but the school itself has over 30 teaching spaces. It is a significant high school. It can hold 800 high school students.

CHAIR: And they would be classes of 20 or 30 primary school students?

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes, 27.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: There are a number of issues that have come to us over the weeks that this has been under way. When did the department actually seek the demographic figures that it has used as part of the Building the Future proposal? When did you obtain your demographic figures?

Mr BURKHARDT: As I explained at the previous hearing, the major demographic information that the department uses in its planning is the enrolment information and the projections of that enrolment information. We do that on an annual basis. We do enrolment projections, or we have the capacity to do enrolment projections from every primary and every secondary school, literally at the flick of a switch.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: But you did get the Macquarie Research document dated 6 September. When did you actually seek that material?

Mr BURKHARDT: I cannot recall, but it was specifically requested for the school closures committee as a requirement of having expert advice.

Dr BOSTON: We can provide you with that date.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Was it sought at the time that the initial proposal was released by the Minister to the community? The date on it is presumably the date on which they finished their research and they would not have done that research overnight. I am just trying to find out over what period of time they would have been working on it, whether it was only a document sought late in the procedure or sought early in the procedure upon which you were making some decisions.

Mr BURKHARDT: I can get that date for you, I just do not have it in my head.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I appreciate that.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I want to correct something, that that information is a mandatory part of the School Closures Review Committee because the legislation setting up such committee demands an independent demographic report.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: I know that. That might be why I was asking the question.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Well, it might be, I mean it is hard to work out why you are asking the question.

CHAIR: Can we question the witnesses rather than make comments. Basically the point there is that you are required to do that for that review and you did it.

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In terms of the utilisation of school properties, are you only looking at the use of the schools for school purposes, enrolment of students? When we look at Erskineville and we see that a significant element of the school is now being used, for example, by the equity branch, is that a factor that is given any consideration for other uses, uses for other school activity, uses by the department, uses by community groups?

Mr BURKHARDT: We certainly look at all of those factors and would factor in alternative locations for any activities like that.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Why is the department not prepared to lease for six months the current Erskineville site to Bent Street Performing Arts?

Mr BURKHARDT: I think, given the circumstances of the closure, it would be inappropriate to set up a lease arrangement with possible expectations of a continuance beyond that period. I just do not think it would be a very prudent thing to do.

The Hon. Dr PETER WONG: Mr Waterhouse, in reply to my questions of Mr Burkhardt on the FOI document, indicated plenty of paper files on the table. I have just been informed by Ms Newton that they had none of them. Is it appropriate that Mr Waterhouse provide a copy of the paper files to Ms Newton of Hunters Hill High School P and C Association?

CHAIR: I thought you said that they had been forwarded to the school.

Mr WATERHOUSE: Yes, I will go through these documents in turn. These two documents are the 314 pages of documents provided so far under the partial determination of the Hunters Hill's third FOI. These, to my understanding, were posted to the Hunters Hill P and C on 29 or 30 May this year, I cannot remember which of those dates. These two documents are the documents made available under the first FOI which was submitted by Marjorie Ferguson, the predecessor as secretary of the Hunters Hill P and C in March 2001. These two documents were the documents provided under the second FOI. In total, taking out what I believe may be a duplication, the pages amount to nearly 1,500, 1,493 I believe, from my memory of the count. I think on file we have registered mail receipts - I am speaking from memory, I cannot guarantee that right at this point - that they have been posted. If the Hunters Hill High School P and C wishes to have additional copies of the same material we can provide those certainly.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr WATERHOUSE: Or the Committee, for that matter.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: It has been suggested that there had not been discussions with the Newtown community about the Erskineville proposal, but do you have at this stage any submissions from the Newtown Performing Arts High School for either expansion of the high school or elimination of the local component making it a fully selective performing arts high school?

Dr LAUGHLIN: What came out during discussions last year in Building the Future were quite a lot of representations from parents and from some staff members from Newtown Performing Arts High School to be either fully selective for performing arts or to retain the current structure and so what we determined was to carry out a review. It has been a fairly emotional debate there, to be honest. We determined to carry out a review and that review team is pretty much at the end of its assessment process and in all of that there has been a variety of views and submissions made, so hopefully that will reach a conclusion fairly shortly.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Notwithstanding what the outcome may be, did the Erskineville proposal that saw a movement of Newtown Public School use of performing arts space at Erskineville, et cetera, in some ways offer an alternative or a suggestion as part of that review process?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, I guess, like all propositions, they are all worthy of consideration, but what it would have meant was the movement of over 200 students to a school that they had not chosen to go to compared to 34 who would benefit and you have to balance that out. They could have all gone to Erskineville with the numbers and space available and land available. They could have all chosen to do that. They chose not to do that, so if it came to a decision to support 34 or 200 - and the fact that it had not been discussed with them, it was the idea of people who were not part of Newtown - frankly, we did not see that we could proceed on that.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: The Minister very early on in the process described decisions about closures as not-negotiable. What did that do to the department's process?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, there is no doubt that that caused a great deal of discussion at the time and it certainly made some of those discussions very difficult, but we believed that we had a draft proposal that was open for discussion and open for change and a lot of change did occur.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: In particular, Chatswood?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Chatswood, Alexandria Park, Matraville Sports High School, co-ed versus single sex, there are a lot of those things.

Dr BOSTON: Could I just say that the point that the former Minister was seeking to make at that time was that doing nothing was not an option. Change had to occur.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: There is a view by some of the parent groups that proposals that had other variations were not given due weight. Unless it focused specifically on schools that had been earmarked for closure, unless that remained on the table, then other proposals were not given consideration.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I think changes occurred in a number of schools that were certainly not earmarked for closure. I mean J J Cahill changed, Matraville changed, the issues around Marrickville and Dulwich were held over. I think there was a balance between it to be honest.

Dr BOSTON: I think if members go back to our original submission and look at the table on pages 5 to 9 where the original proposal is described, the plan announced by the Minister is described and the current status is set out, you will see very significant change in proposals originally for single sex schools to become co-ed schools and so on. There was very substantial change during that consultation process.

CHAIR: We have run 25 minutes over the original set time, so are there any other questions?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Most of my other questions relate to the material heard in camera.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Could I clarify, when you referred to the Newtown school moving 200 people and that that was not on - you said to Erskineville - was the proposal that came forward from the Erskineville parents only about locating the infants school on the Erskineville site, not the whole school?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Sorry, would you mind clarifying the question again?

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: You have said today that the idea that you could relocate Newtown Public School, which has an enrolment of 200, to Erskineville - so it was moving 200 to the smaller group school - was not on. In fact I am suggesting that the proposal that the Erskineville school put forward to the school closure committee was for the relocation of the infants school part of Newtown only, not the full school.

Dr LAUGHLIN: I am not aware of what was put forward to the School Closures Review Committee, but again, from what I understand, that proposal or any proposal related to movement of a part or all of Newtown Primary School had not been either discussed with or accepted by the staff or community at Newtown Public School.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Why did the department sit down at Alexandria to discuss the Alexandria proposal and variations, but not sit down with the Erskineville P and C and go

through the same exercise?

Dr LAUGHLIN: Well, we did appoint a project officer for the whole area, a gentleman called Paul Parkes, whose job it was to visit schools, talk to communities and try to assess and weigh feelings and what could in fact be put forward, what could be supported. So we did try to talk and reach out to all groups. Now I guess in something like this there will be groups who say you did not do enough, but in fact we did try.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: And was it that group of meetings with the project officer about which the allegations were made that the meetings were not minuted?

Dr LAUGHLIN: I cannot say, I do not know that.

The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE: Are there minutes?

Mr WATERHOUSE: Can I comment on that: I believe any allegation about that has arisen in the context of requests under FOI by the Hunters Hill P and C and I do not believe that there has been any allegation or any search for material in relation to the Redfern-Alexandria area. I am unaware of it anyway.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I understood from what Dr Boston said when he started that the department has gone through the transcript of our evidence last week and it was in fact me who asked a couple of questions of our witnesses in relation to the proposal to close Newtown Primary School and I understood that some of the answers we are getting today, in fact I think most of the answers today, related to things that are recorded in the transcript from last week.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Perhaps any further questions should be submitted on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Yes.

CHAIR: And we can discuss the in-camera evidence as a Committee.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Yes.

CHAIR: Are there no other questions? There may be other general questions on notice.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Could I just ask one question perhaps while the witnesses are here: I think, Dr Boston, you said earlier that you had quite a lot of material there which, if we did not get through, you would be able to give to the Committee.

Dr BOSTON: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I just wanted to check whether you would simply do that or whether we need some process for putting questions on notice to get that material that you have not had time to address.

CHAIR: I think you suggested at the beginning that you would give us the folder.

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, I shall give you the folder. It contains information in it which is of a confidential nature and it therefore would not be a public folder.

CHAIR: Are you referring to the material you gave us earlier?

Dr BOSTON: Indeed.

CHAIR: Well, say you take that out of the folder, because you dealt with it separately.

Dr BOSTON: I believe the rest is able to be released.

CHAIR: Would you take the in-camera material out of the folder and supply the remainder of the material.

Dr BOSTON: Yes.

CHAIR: Could we have a motion that we agree to immediately table the background material in the folder.

(Motion agreed to)

Dr BOSTON: Mr Chairman, we are also, of course, able to answer any additional questions that you wish to put to us in writing.

CHAIR: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.00 p.m.)