

**THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MET AT  
SHEARWATER COUNTRY CLUB RESORT, PORT SORELL ON WEDNESDAY,  
15 JULY 2009**

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**PORT SORELL COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROPOSAL**

**Mr BRENT ARMISTEAD, Ms PENNY ARMISTEAD, Ms DAYNA DENNISON,  
Mr MICHAEL RATAJ, Mr STEVEN DICK, MS ALANIE CRIPPS,  
Mr JASON MARTIN AND Mr GRAEME HAY WERE CALLED, MADE THE  
STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.**

**CHAIR** (Mr Finch) - You understand what our reference is about, the provision of public primary school education for the four schools?

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - If you want to start presenting and then we will ask questions.

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - Firstly, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Brent Armistead. I am the Secretary of the Port Sorell Community Schools Committee, probably the first and only secretary to do touch typing with two fingers! I am also the Assistant Principal at Latrobe High School and I live in Shearwater and have two children, one who is five years old and one who is 18 months.

Beside me is Penny Armistead and also Dayna Dennison and they are both teachers from Wesley Vale Primary School and they both have young children and live in the Shearwater area.

We three represent the wider Port Sorell community and we are a part of the Port Sorell Community Schools Committee. We are here to prove to you, beyond doubt, the vital need - not want, but need - of a state-of-the-art public primary school for Port Sorell. We strongly support that the school should be built at the Camp Boomerang site. This is outlined in the Latrobe Council's strategic plan for the Port Sorell area.

Today, when I came in here, I was a little bit nervous and anxious, yet I speak regularly in front of 500 kids. I have thought about it and I think the reason I am nervous and anxious today is that we see this outcome as so important to Port Sorell, but also I am really excited. I am excited because I know that for once this is an opportunity for this community to get what it needs.

No doubt you are aware that we have a population of around 3 500 to 4 000 people. What I would like to do is hand out a document, if that is okay, if you would like to look at that. You will notice as you look through the sheets that the most important point is that, out of the 3 500-4 000 people that we have in the Port Sorell area, 263 primary school-aged children travel out of the Port Sorell area to attend public school in the Latrobe municipality. Also, this does not account for all the students that are attending

Devonport schools or who have taken up private education. At the moment we know that there are 263, but we are not sure of how many others that there would be. No doubt a considerable number of these students who are travelling out to Devonport schools or private education would choose to attend a state-of-the-art public primary school at Port Sorell if that existed.

Also, of the 300 students that are currently attending Wesley Vale Primary School, 230 - which is about 76.7 per cent - are from the Port Sorell area. One of the arguments against a public primary school that you will no doubt hear over the next two days is the impact that it will have on the enrolments of existing schools in the area.

I would say that is a definite. There is no doubt that of course it will impact on the enrolments but that also highlights the need for one at Port Sorell. As mentioned, Latrobe Council has listed that Camp Boomerang site as the preferred location for a school. It is our understanding that it may be there for either a private or public school. This decision as to whether it is a private or public school has to be an equitable one.

Public schools we know are inclusive of all and benefit the whole community where it is my belief that private schools, at times, can be exclusive. We know that they will not cater for everyone in the entire Port Sorell population. It is also my belief that the Port Sorell primary school students have a right to be educated in their own town so that they feel connected to their community.

If a private school were built here, it would still have a large impact on the enrolments of Wesley Vale or Moriarty. The entire community will only gain, I believe, infrastructure, the social structure and the educational benefits if a public primary school is built. Equity for the Port Sorell community in the area of public education is a must. A public primary school at Port Sorell would be the hub of all community learning, a chance to open up the school to the whole community from birth through to adult learning. When this committee was being set up, Sue Napier stated in the *Hansard*, 'You can do so much more if you know that you have the community living in and around the school'.

When you are driving around today, as you have done so, or even tomorrow, there are a couple of questions that I would like you to consider and ask yourselves. These are: what opportunity is there for the Port Sorell community for lifelong learning? What opportunity is there for after-school study? What opportunity is there for utilising local facilities? What opportunity is there for on-line learning facilities at present?

I believe that up to 4 000 people in this area are disadvantaged. Due to isolation and small population base, Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras cannot offer these opportunities to the Port Sorell community - neither would a private school. I would like now to hand over to Penny who, I think, is going to follow on that one.

**Ms ARMISTEAD** - Brent has introduced me as Penny Armistead and I teach at Wesley Vale Primary School. My role here today is to represent the children in our community and to highlight a number of reasons why they deserve the primary school here. Our children are really lucky they live in one of the most beautiful areas of Tasmania, they have access to beaches, walking tracks, bike tracks, reserves and parks. It is wonderful, yet it is not these assets that help these children form links with their community. It is

typically felt that our local children are disjointed. They are bussed out of town to school, they leave the town to play sport or to train and they leave the town for other interests on week nights and weekends. They are out of the town for more daylight hours than they are in the town.

Therefore they do not have that essential base or that connecting network that a school would provide for developing their sense of belonging to Port Sorell. A public school would allow real opportunities for us to partner with Latrobe Council to provide valuable community facilities that our children are in dire need of. It could provide an on-line access centre. Not every household has the Internet yet it seems that everybody assumes they do - from the teachers setting homework to the list of companies offering competitions. Everyone is told to 'log-on, and just go to www.' So they children in this area need access to the Internet to keep up. It could provide a community library. Not all children are the type to hang out at our one skate park; some of them would relish the opportunity to lose themselves amongst the books. It could provide sports facilities - a basketball stadium or an outdoor court where we could run structured rosters and training programs for these kids or they could simply meet there and be active. It could provide an all-purpose room suitable as a dance, music or arts centre where clubs could be formed to teach children dancing, music, gymnastics or performing arts. All of these facilities would provide ample opportunities for our children to interact with community members, seek their help, be coached by them, supported by volunteers, meet new friends - all of these forming the links that would develop their sense of belonging to the community.

A public school would provide opportunities to promote health and wellbeing awareness in our children. It would allow a huge percentage of our children to walk to school or ride their bikes, with their carers, parents and siblings walking with them. This is very realistic. We have a new footbridge being constructed across Squeaking Point, to link Squeaking Point and we have satellite parks all the way to the end of Hawley Beach. Immediately we would add approximately 30 minutes of physical activity to their day. Our school could promote the government initiatives of Walk to School Day or run an active after-school community program. Due to the current location of Wesley Vale and our other schools and transport issues, we are unable to run these programs. Providing sporting and performing arts facilities, as mentioned earlier, would allow many more children to be actively involved in healthy wellbeing activities after school and on the weekends as they would not have to rely on their parents to transport them to Devonport or Latrobe clubs.

At the moment we see many families move into town as their children grow older so they can participate regularly in sport. Some endure hours of taxiing back and forth and some families do nothing and impose the belief on their child that physical activity is not a priority in life.

**Ms DENNISON** - And when we refer to 'town' we are referring to Devonport.

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - A public school will provide many opportunities for our young pre-schoolchildren. The Launching into Learning program for children from birth to four years would be held on our own school campus. Presently it is held in the Port Sorell Memorial Hall, even though it is facilitated and organised by Wesley Vale Primary

School. One of the reasons for the choice to hold it there was based on the huge number of pre-schoolchildren in our area and the program would not be as attractive if they had to travel to Wesley Vale to attend. I wish I had taken a photo on Tuesday morning at our Launching into Learning program. There were at least a dozen toddler bikes and bikes with carryalls on the back at our local Port Sorell hall.

Currently our pre-kinder program for four- and five-year-olds beginning kindergarten is only available to parents who can transport their children to the Wesley Vale school. This is not an option for parents who only have one car, when the working parent is using the car during the day. I know of a case last year of a child who really needed the interaction of this program but his mum didn't have the means of transport and he couldn't get there. There would be ample opportunities for pre-schoolchildren to be involved in the school. They could visit on cultural performance days and school functions. They could become familiar with the grounds, play in the playground or visit and attend regular assemblies. For the majority of community members all of these would be available within walking distance, no transport required.

A public school would eliminate the many current transport concerns. I have been told the New South Wales Department of Education and Training suggests that a primary school should be located within 1.6 kilometres of road distance to the bulk of its drawing area to minimise the demand for buses. Wesley Vale is 10 kilometres away. You know the data - we have to get 230 students from this area to Wesley Vale. They either travel by bus - most of them - or car. Our bus system is crowded. It operates on three buses - a big, a medium and a little bus doing return trips in the morning and night. In speaking to a large number of parents, I find that many of them refer to the bus system as an issue. If your child is to catch the first bus that means they have to be at their bus stop by approximately 8.05 in the morning. This gets to Wesley Vale at 8.20, then they need to amuse themselves until their classes begin at 9 o'clock. If they are on the second flow of buses to go, they arrive at school at a sensible time of 10 minutes before the bell.

**Ms DENNISON** - And they don't have a choice as to which bus they catch. It is zoned according to where their residential area is.

**CHAIR** - So they could go on the early one and come home on the late one?

**Ms DENNISON** - No. For example, my daughter catches the first bus at 8.05 in the morning, so she's the first one to be dropped off in the afternoon, but she still doesn't get home until 3.15 p.m.

**Ms ARMISTEAD** - If you wish to make any changes to your child's bus, you need to ring our bussing person. Once you are on that bus, you are on that bus. If you need to go to your auntie's for the afternoon, you would have to make a phone call to the bus gentleman to make sure that there is room on that bus for your child to change buses.

They arrive at a sensible time, just 10 minutes before the bell, but at the end of the day the second bus children then need to wait until approximately 3.30 - 35 minutes or more after the bell - amusing themselves in an asphalt area until they can be taken home. Our son used to be on this second bus and he was not arriving home until after quarter to four, that is 50 minutes from when his school day finished, for a 10-minute trip.

Kinder children are not encouraged to catch the buses until term 2. This means for the first 16 weeks of their school year, their parents are relied upon to transport them - to take them in, drop them off and return. That would be four trips a day, making approximately 40 kilometres of travel.

My personal bus concern: my son was changed from the second bus as it was over capacity. We now have to have my five-year-old up, dressed, fed and walking to the bus stop by 8 a.m., and that is not an easy feat for a five-year-old who is very tired. When I queried the bus driver, he explained that they want him to put on a bigger bus but if he upgrades to a bigger bus he would have to have a bus with seat belts. If he has a bus with seat belts, he is no longer allowed to fit three children in each seat. Hence his seating capacity would decrease; he could fit more on his little bus where he can squeeze them in.

My question is: how does this current bus system cater for the projected growth of our area? Do we put on more buses and do you want to talk about the carbon footprint that this traffic is unnecessarily going to cause?

In conclusion, a contemporary state-of-the-art public primary school at Port Sorell would provide our local pre-schoolers, children and our youth with more space to call their own. It would provide more opportunities for them to be active in sport and healthy activities. It would provide more opportunity for them to mix with other community members and develop relationships. Most importantly, it provides the essential base and a connecting network that they need to develop their sense of belonging to their home in Port Sorell.

**Ms DENNISON** - I am a teacher at Wesley Vale Primary School; Penny is my teaching partner, and we both work part-time on our grade 3-4 class. When we are not at school we are filling our most important roles as mothers of our two young children. Penny has two boys and I have two girls and the eldest is seven, so we are very much at the forefront of this whole development.

My husband and I have two daughters, one in grade 1 and our youngest is in kindergarten, and they are both enrolled at Wesley Vale. We moved here nine years ago because we thought it was the perfect place for us and our family to grow. I think this is a very exciting time to be living in the Port Sorell district because our town is at, what I am calling, a turning point. We have grown to the point where we are branching to the next phase of growth from what I see as currently a semi-self-sufficient town into what I see in the future as a fully-fledged hub where no longer will we need to spend unnecessary time and energy accessing daily necessities outside our own town boundaries. Our town is certainly still in its growth phase. So what does this mean for the future education of our children who will be the community leaders of tomorrow? There are already 230 students who head to Wesley Vale Primary School every day of the week to spend between six and seven hours per day outside their community. This equates to a full-time primary school-aged child spending more time out of their community during daylight hours than what they spend within their community during daylight hours. What effect does this have on them? Well, the 230 students I mentioned who travel to Wesley Vale every day are the children that I see every day at my place of

work and they are four-year-olds to 12-year-olds who have very limited connections with their town residents.

Last October, as part of our work on our community, Penny and I arranged for our class to spend 36 hours at the Camp Boomerang site for an overnight camp. That is the site we plan to see our school built on. We had parents drop their children off at 8.30 in the morning of the first day to save a \$120 fee in bus hire to get them here if they were not dropped off - that is \$120 from Wesley Vale to Port Sorell. Even though they were carrying sleeping bags and overnight bags, two children still enthusiastically walked to their campsite from their homes and many more were excited about the opportunity and novelty of riding their bikes to the campsite, an activity which is usually only after school and at weekends.

Twenty-two of the 25 students who were in our class last year at that camp were residents of our community, and two were from East Devonport and one was from Latrobe. In 36 hours we connected these children with seven different community organisations that cost us zero dollars and opened these children's eyes to the value of volunteers in our community. These children, 22 of them who were locals, had no prior knowledge of the involvement of these groups until the time spent on our camp. We had children on their knees - and I am a very visual person so I want to be able to bring these children to you - digging out the marram grass from the estuary and learning about the effect it is having on our waterways and the importance of coast care.

They walked the Aubrey Luck Reserve with members of the Lions Club and learned about the significant contributions that Aub Luck had made to our community. They had morning tea prepared for them by the residents of the Panatana Retirement Village and shared stories and conversations with these elderly people. They then stayed and worked odd jobs for them - washing cars and chatting and building relationships. Adelle Rist, our Latrobe Council Youth Development Officer, met with them and talked about the important role youth play in our district.

Discovery Ranger John and wise volunteer, John Bowden, walked around the bushlands with the students and monitored the activity of our wildlife. The Rubicon River Arts conducted a nature artworks shop with them all at no cost. They volunteered their time to come and spend their hours with our students.

We hosted a camp concert and family barbecue which was attended by 100 per cent of the parents before the children went home. During the three years that I have taught at Wesley Vale Primary School I have never had anything that was attended by 100 per cent of parents. Due to many reasons they simply will not or cannot travel the return trip of 20 kilometres to be involved in their children's education at the moment.

In conversations that we have had with Maree Febey, who is the Director of the OneCare aged facility in the new development here, she has highlighted to us concerns she has for the elderly residents who have no young family living within this area. They can suffer from bouts of depression and feel a lack of purpose. We envisage the opportunity of classes at our Port Sorell school to adopt wings of the One-Care facility. Buddy programs can exist where long-lasting valued relationships will be built between the

residents and our children. Shared experiences, like school library visits, assemblies, concerts et cetera will all build bridges between the generations within our community.

The learning opportunities that exist right here on our doorstep are endless as well as educating our children about community. When we have our state-of-the-art public primary school here in Port Sorell we will build a sense of pride in our young children. By having them involved from a young age in community projects such as Landcare, constructing and assisting in planning new community walking tracks, sports facilities, arts projects, volunteering with the elderly, we are creating responsible citizens who understand what makes a community special. They are less likely to graffiti a bench seat if they helped construct it when they were younger. They are less likely to be involved in antisocial behaviour if they have relationships with adults in the community that are familiar faces to them, and this goes both ways. The adults in our community who currently do not have interaction with these children will have the opportunities to see every day what I see at my job, and that is what these little hearts and hands can do.

Teachers always try to offer an exciting and enriching curriculum to guarantee the best possible learning outcomes for their students, and excursions are one of these ways to extend the opportunities for children, but in the three years that I have worked at the Wesley Vale Primary School I have only ever seen one local excursion. That was last week when I took my class to one of the farms. We require police escort to cross the Port Sorell Main Road and again on our return. Every opportunity for excursions at Wesley Vale Primary School currently requires buses as there is not anything in Wesley Vale to visit by foot, except for farms and the cemetery. A bus costs a minimum of \$100 return from Wesley Vale for an average class of 25 students. Let us think for a moment. That is \$100 that comes straight out of classroom budgets. It is not an endless, bottomless pit that is just available for transport that the school provides. It comes straight from the parents' levies that are paid into classroom budgets and funds at the start of each year - \$100 from our class resource budget, intended for educational programs. This \$100 can buy 200 exercise books, but that is how much we have to spend on a bus to go anywhere outside out school gates.

Excursions from Wesley Vale Primary School are very expensive. In fact, so much is right on our doorstep. A state-of-the-art public primary school for Port Sorell makes educational sense as the best way to build and to nurture strong, clever, community aware, passionate and enthusiastic children for our future.

**CHAIR** - Thanks very much Dayna, Brent and Penny.

**Mr DICK** - I am a councillor of Latrobe and chairman of numerous committees, including the Port Sorell Advisory Committee, Marram Grass Watch Committee, Port Sorell Hall Committee, a member of the Port Sorell Lions Club and on the Port Sorell Community School Committee.

Today I am going to give a very brief overview from discussions held with the Port Sorell business community that was carried out by Michael Baxter from Shearwater IGA Supermarket and Cheryl Williams from LJ Hooker. Unfortunately, both Michael and Cheryl had previous commitments interstate and were unable to attend and wish to pass

on their apologies. From those discussions, all business said that they fully supported the building of the state-of-the-art, twenty-first century, public primary school at Port Sorell.

The Port Sorell business community believe that for this town to be functional and sustainable into the future, we need a school. The Port Sorell business community is fully supportive of the need to invest in our youth for the benefit of the community by providing sponsorship and scholarships, fund raising for educational and sporting equipment and club building activities, providing leadership and training through school visits and early workplace learning and by providing business enterprise workshops and guest speakers.

From the increase in population from young families moving to the area we see an increase in business activity from further growth. It would increase business to expand the type of services currently offered, increase employment opportunities and training for not only our youth but also the community as a whole, thus helping to build this community.

The school helps us and we help the school. We will build a functional, sustainable community that we can all be proud of for the future and the youth are our future.

**Mr MARTIN** - Thank you for your time. I am sure you are all very busy and we see this as important meeting. I live at Hawley. I have been a resident of this area for more than a decade. I am married with a three-year-old and a four-year-old. I am also one of the owners of a Port Sorell-based business and I also have a business that consults widely to a lot of other local businesses here. I have been asked, on behalf of those other businesses, including the big ones and the little ones, to put forward a few points on behalf of the commercial side and the relevance of this school.

The growth of the Port Sorell area has surprised me, both the rate and its duration; it has been growing well for a long time. The community and local government have recognised that this growth is likely to continue. As a result, the community and council invested heavily in the recent strategic planning exercise, which had a huge local attendance and which really put an ownership stamp on it. This strategic plan for the future has grown investment and business confidence in the area through strategically sound planning and 'predicability' - a key word. This review had a lot of input from all elements of the community, including business. The strategic plan, which you have probably heard about, identified two key infrastructure priorities. One was a new, larger town centre because we have outgrown this one and commercially that is putting constraints on the community. The second was a school.

The first stage of the new town centre have been built; that is up and running. Business confidence is out there building that stuff now, prior to funding. The Port Sorell School represents the last significant piece of key infrastructure for this region. The Port Sorell School would complete our vibrant community and as a result would raise investment confidence, more than many realise - that is commercially and from a sponsorship point of view. There are plenty of businesses here that want to donate money but they often donate it elsewhere because we don't have the ability. The Port Sorell School will lead to many commercial benefits for the area. There are lots of examples but one key one is all-year-round sustainable trading. We are almost there on that front. Some of the



bigger businesses, the real estate agents and supermarket et cetera, can sustain the winters. This place has been a holiday area and it still is because, importantly, the lack of a school holds back young families from residing here. If they are here, they come with the school and they are the people who are here all year round. With the greatest respect to the baby boomers, they spend the winter in Queensland so they are spending their money up there during the winter. That is why some of these smaller operators start and stop and you can still see that. We lose 40 per cent of retail spending which leaks from this community. The people who live here spent 40 per cent of their money somewhere else because they go elsewhere for work and to take their children to school. With this commercial confidence that comes from a school, there will be better jobs and more jobs. The new town centre has an aged-care facility which brought significant jobs and with that comes a lot more confidence.

These are commercial benefits that are over and above the educational and social benefits that we have heard here today. The statistics that you have heard will show that Port Sorell is growing quickly and is continuing to. This justifies the need for a school. It's a commercially logical investment right now.

Twenty-five years ago I was a child sitting on that school bus, getting bussed to a school away from my family home here at Port Sorell. Next year my son will be five and he'll start on that bus, so fixing this problem is well overdue. You people here have the ability to make an impact on this Port Sorell School and help make it happen. Let us take advantage of the large amount of investment money that's out there at the moment for schools and invest it wisely here in Port Sorell. There has never been a better time to find the money. There is momentum at the moment. It would be a shame if my four-year-old was sitting here in another 25 years saying the same thing as I am, so let us fix the problem now.

**Mr HAY** - Thank you for your time this afternoon. I am the co-owner of LJ Hooker Shearwater with Cheryl Williams, who couldn't be here today. Michael Baxter and Cheryl have done an immense amount of work on this. I am speaking on their behalf and on behalf all the rest of the business community that Cheryl and Michael spoke to.

Why is Port Sorell per capita the fastest residential growth area in Tasmania? Why does it have five times the residential growth of average Tasmania? Because it has the natural and progressive development elements and more that contribute to an idyllic lifestyle for people of all ages. What are these elements? Environment, clean air, temperate climate - look at today -

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - I was about to say look out the window.

**Mr HAY** - beaches and waterways and of course a backdrop of national park and bushland. Its location is set on beaches and on an estuary. It is your classic sea-change location and only 15 minutes from major facilities including the airport, *Spirit of Tasmania* ferries, Mersey Community Hospital et cetera. Lifestyle, location, environment and topography combine to offer an idyllic environment, and this is the coupe de grâce, the appeal to all the senses that this offers - beaches, walking tracks, a playground for all water-based pursuits and activities, fishing, boating, cycling and more. It also offers security and a safe and healthy environment in which to raise children.

Progress and development: there is a new subdivision of land being opened up. Jason mentioned the aged care facility and a new town centre. There is a childcare centre, a doctor's surgery that is being completed, and commencing shortly are a major supermarket and speciality shops. This is all work in progress. There is also ongoing planning in progress for a marina alongside the Port Sorell boat ramps, which are now the busiest in Tasmania. There is also planning for additional residential living with positive responses emanating from all these projects that we are heavily involved with.

As a real estate agent I get to talk to people who visit the area for the very first time. The first thing that I like to do is put them in the car and for 15-20 minutes give them a Cooks tour of the area. Why? Because I know that at the end of the tour the area has sold itself to them it does not need me.

The area has that added intangible component. Everyone comments what a beautiful place, what a nice place, what a nice feel it has so it must be nice to live here. Of course I always respond that it is, but I do say to each and every one of these people to ask any local and they will give you the same response - the area sells itself.

Approximately 30 per cent of all our real estate inquiries come from young families who would ideally like to live here, and they can be from Devonport or transferring to the north-west for varying reasons. The first two questions from this group are always the same: is there a doctor's surgery and is there a school? Sadly the lack of a school initially dismisses approximately 50 per cent of these progressing further.

On the other side of the ledger we experience a certain amount of younger families moving out of the area once the children reach school age. Reasons are usually the same: distances required to travel daily not only for school but also school-based activity relating to sport and other interests. The time and costs of continued travel in many instances are prohibitive. Why is a public state-of-the-art primary school necessary? I do not think that the question even needs to be asked. The fastest growing residential hot-spot in Tasmania with a base population of approximately 4 000 people is a target area for family migration and it has no school. We need a change of demographics favouring young families to balance the population and the answer is a public primary school. It would also be a very effective way of providing a multipurpose venue for all ages from infant to adult education.

A school would turn around the social interaction between kids and the business community. How? Well, we do not know the kids. They are bussed out and they are bussed in and their focal interactive point usually is just the skate park because there is no other structured facility for them to congregate at. We need to turn around the social interaction between kids and the community, and in particular the business community. The business community would embrace, participate, interact and take interest in and provide monetary contribution by way of sponsorships and assisting in school fund-raising activities.

As a small business, there are two dozen groups that we sponsor. Out of those, there are only two here - rugby, the surf club and the joesys - that have that provision to allow us to

sponsor them. We would obviously put our total focus into assisting all groups in a combined school community.

It is our fault - the fault of the community - and also the fault of the State Government for letting this happen. A school offers growth, employment and skills, and employment opportunities within the business community. It is apparent and evident from our experience that what is sadly lacking to contribute to the community process, moving forward and catering for all those in what is a fast-growing, caring and unique public-spirited community, is a school. A school would become the heart of our community and the community would take ownership of our school. Currently it is one of the fastest growing residential areas without a school and this will leave a sad and unforgivable legacy for the community if allowed to continue as such.

**CHAIR** - Graeme, Steven and Jason, thanks very much for your evidence.

**Ms JOANNE COATES** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**Ms COATES** - I am a parent of teenage children, a teacher working in the area of early intervention and a community volunteer who has watched the local surf club grow from a membership of 65 to 220 in two seasons. I am not sure if I am considered a local yet but I have lived in this community for 20 years and I attended meetings 10 years ago on this very topic - local schools for local communities.

The thrust of all of our submissions has been that this community can only flourish socially and economically if it has a school as its heart. We know that kids need good schools and strong parents but we often forget that many people need a supportive, engaged, diverse and thriving community around them in order to be the best they can.

I had a day at work where I have been in about four households in different communities on the north-west coast, working with families who are disengaged, who have mental health problems and children with disabilities who are isolated economically. When I go to their homes, they see me as coming to help them. But when I leave, they do not realise that they have helped me to be the best I can because I am engaging with community. It is community that helps each and every one of us to be the people that we are and I think that is what we are striving for this community to be. It is just something that I thought as I was driving here today.

**Mr WHITELEY** - We are pleased you did not stick to the script.

**Ms COATES** - As you heard from previous speakers, and I am sure witnessed first-hand as you drove around our community, the area is packed with homes less than 10 years old and there continue to be land and property packages opening up to entice people into our area. But where is the school to help prospective buyers make their final decision? Just as important, where is the place that this new community member can go to to connect with other parents, to drop in for support, to begin to form social networks and to help them be the best they can? Currently our community lets its newcomers down.

The Victorian Government has recently recognised social isolation and community infrastructure as a priority by creating community hubs within the grounds of primary schools. Behind this idea is that primary schools have two functions: first, to educate; and secondly, to act as a supportive community resource. The schools as a community hub is a relatively new concept in Australia but overseas it has been quite successful in assisting communities who have been faced with limited facilities and infrastructure, family isolation, who have an ageing population and businesses with uncertain economic viability. Community hubs aim to bring people together and provide them with the support and resources they need in order that they can be the best they can.

The Tasmanian State Government, in conjunction with the Federal Government, has recently announced a development of eight child and family centres over the next four years, and I believe the closest one to us would be East Devonport. They are similar in concept to community hubs but nowhere near as inclusive to the whole community. I say here an opportunity exists for the State Government to partner with local government, not

only building a public primary school but also to be proactive in helping the wider Port Sorell community be the best it can, to really develop the concept of a community hub.

A new state-of-the-art public primary school that has the ability to capture the community could have significant extra space to accommodate regular service providers such as counselling, support agencies, family and parenting support services, on-line access centres, preschool music and kinder gym activities, meeting rooms for community groups and youth clubs, homework clubs, adult education and employment training providers, and even a place for bingo. It could also be a place for art and theatre presentations, a gymnasium and a library accessible to the community in and out of school hours.

It is widely recognised that schools remain underutilised during evenings and holidays, so give our community the opportunity to use a public school to its full potential, to share this resource with the community and in return have the community wrap itself around the school and begin to share in the responsibility for our young children. It will become a respected community asset that helps everyone to be the best they can.

So what will this public school bring to the table in its role as a community builder? We will have facilities. Public schools are, and always will be, a place where communities can meet. We can view these rooms, the meeting rooms within the school, as incubators for community ideas and activities, as well as for community service programs. The library and gymnasium facilities would be well utilised by other groups. The school will have technology, technology that can be accessed by outside organisations and enable education and training opportunities for many groups within the community that can utilise the state-of-the-art IT equipment within it.

Schools have purchasing power. Goods and services available in our community will be purchased by the school - from the local bakery, from the supermarket, through to the post office - and opportunities will arise for locals to develop new businesses. Staff working at the school will spend at local businesses. Having a local school also brings with it some financial capacity for community groups to apply for funding grants by linking their programs with a school partnership. A public school will bring people, people into the community ready to build family life, people into the organisations such as a surf club or Apex - clubs that need new blood to remain viable - and people into schools who are eager and willing to volunteer their skills and knowledge with local children. A school will bring people together who want to find connections, who want to bring some meaning into their life; people young and old finding ways to be the best they can.

Finally, a public school will bring an opportunity for integrating the community organisations and facilities that already operate in our own backyard by working in an ongoing way with Landcare, Coastcare, Neighbourhood Watch, Senior Citizens, Apex, the Fire Service, the Lifesaving Club. The children will have meaningful opportunities that help them to better understand and love the community in which they live. The school will have planned and integrated use of our fantastic but currently under-utilised local facilities - tennis club, bowls club, surf club, Camp Banksia, the beach parks, the walking and cycling tracks - and we are blessed with them, but what a great outdoor education program we will develop once a school is on our doorstep.

In winding up I would like to take on board the perspectives of those who hold Moriarty, Sassafras and Wesley Vale primary schools deep in their heart. I know that for many of these families, over generations even, the school has given them a sense of belonging, a shared interest, it has been the heart of their community. But as a growing suburban community of around 4 000 people we have the right to a public school of our own. As Graeme mentioned earlier, Quantum Market Research states that the two most important facilities that a community needs in terms of livability are medical services and a school. We have two medical centres, an aged care facility and even a childcare centre. We are large enough to have a police station, a pub and even Subway but, sadly, we have no opportunity for our community to nourish and celebrate our greatest asset - the children who travel out of here each day.

Please support our local community by giving us a public school, by giving us a heart and by helping us to be the best we can.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Joanne.

**Mr RATAJ** - Again, thank you for your time. I am Michael Rataj, a local resident and nearly local for 25 years on the scene.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - And only five years to go, Michael.

**Mr RATAJ** - I am a waterside worker, but I am feeling quite unwell today and that has enabled me to be here today.

*Laughter.*

**Mr RATAJ** - I am an active member of the community. I am a member of the advisory committee. I am a life member of the Fire Brigade and I am an active member of the surf club. I am, what is referred to by one of my work colleagues, simply a concerned citizen and that is my role here.

On behalf of the community I would like to highlight to you that this current push for a school at Port Sorell is not five minutes in the making nor has it come about simply because of the BER funding issue. As a member of the Port Sorell Advisory Committee, I can advise you that we have had the school on our agenda for some several months now leading up to now and with the combined support of full council and the mayor, we are about to mount a strong campaign push for the school in line with the council's previous strategic plan.

The fact that the BER funding arrived out of the blue with such stringent time frames and conditions has really accelerated that process and we now find ourselves in this exciting position with a real opportunity to make a difference in Port Sorell. As Brenton will attest, the Port Sorell community pushed very hard for a school some 10 or 11 years ago and except for a change in government at the time and an election promise by the then Premier, the late Jim Bacon, not to close any schools under his premiership, I am quite confident that we would not be in this position now and that we would have had a primary school up and running for several years at Port Sorell.

As you have been informed many times there are many and varied valid reasons Port Sorell warrants and deserves a school so I will not reiterate those, I will plead my case on personal grounds in the hope that mistakes that were made 10 years ago are not made again now.

As I mentioned 10 years ago - probably 11 years ago - the then Education minister, Sue Napier, verbally agreed to a school at Port Sorell. The Wesley Vale School Association and the chairman, Gary Simms, supported the new school, as did several hundred residents that we managed to get to two public meetings at the Town Hall at that time. The Education Department also had the school on its planning scheme through its district works committee and then there was a change of government and the school was wiped out for what, I believe, no other reason than the late Jim Bacon's political promise.

We believe the community was done a serious injustice then and the time is now right to correct that injustice. As a joint parliamentary committee, covering all aspects of government, you have the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past and I implore you to make the only logical decision that can be made, that is, to recommend that a twenty-first century state-of-the-art public school be built at Port Sorell.

I mention logic in the decision-making process as I believe there are no logical reasons that anyone can give for there not to be a school at Port Sorell. The only arguments that been put forward are based on emotion and sentiment and I do not believe this town should be denied what is the right of any community with a population of approximately 4 000 people, and that is local education.

As you no doubt would have seen on your familiarisation tour today, much of the capital works, infrastructure and amenities for a public school are already in place, all within walking distance of the proposed site of our new school. Firstly, we have the land; we have five tennis courts; three sporting grounds, suitable for footie, cricket and soccer; a golf course and the beach. We have clean fresh air, uncontaminated by industry or chemical-laden farming practices. It is all there - I put that in as a last thought.

*Laughter.*

**Mr RATAJ** - It is all there. Some of it may need upgrading to enable it to be better utilised but the basic structure is there.

The importance of the decision your committee must reach cannot be stressed highly enough. Quite simply, if you recommend against the primary school for Port Sorell, you will be condemning our town to probably never having a public school - not for the next 20 years at least. You will be condemning our town to an existence without a heart or soul, a town where kids will never have pride of ownership or a full sense of community. You will be stifling ongoing building and development, economic growth and jobs creation.

Construction of a school and its flow-on effect would provide a much greater ongoing economic stimulus to the area, and the State in general, and any one-off BER funding

scheme. As Jason Martin mentioned, what a fantastic commercial investment it would be.

By not recommending a public school at Port Sorell, you will knock down the door and provide a clear pathway for a private educator provider into the town and this in itself will have serious ramifications on the public school facilities in the area. I think previous speakers alluded to that.

I mentioned earlier the infrastructure and resources already exist in the town and I omitted one very important resource that we have. It is more valuable than all those facilities combined, it has a much greater dollar value than any classroom structures that will be built and that is right here, right now, we have, ready to walk in or ride their bikes to school tomorrow, approximately 300 kids in this community ready to attend our primary school at Port Sorell. What more can we, as a community provide? What more do we need? Quite simply, it is all there. This is not something that could happen, this is not something we are planning for, it is here. Everything is here, the kids, the infrastructure, it is all there. This is where I was supposed to stand up and stamp on the floor but I am not that sort of person.

*Laughter.*

**Mr RATAJ** - In your decision-making process you must ignore sentiment and emotion, you must concentrate on the facts, figures, logic, reason and just plain commonsense. There is only one recommendation you can make and that is Port Sorell must have its own twenty-first century state-of-the-art public primary school in the town and the time to provide that school is right now.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I am interested in asking Dayna and Penny about the psychological impact on the children who are here who have to make this daily trip. How is it affecting them?

**Ms DENNISON** - My personal opinion as an educator and, most importantly, as a mother of two - a five-year-old and a seven-year-old - is that they are tired. Yesterday I had a staff meeting until 4.30 p.m. so I put them into after-school care at Wesley Vale. We were driving home at 5.30 in the evening and my seven-year-old said to me, 'I'm tired, Mum. Do we have to go anywhere else or can we stay at home? I really want to have some time at home'. I was about to jump in the car and go the gym and I thought, 'She's right. She misses being at home'. If there was a school here she could leave 10 minutes before school started to arrive at school on time, she could be home 10 minutes after the bell enjoying the fresh air, the physical activity and the beauty and wonder of our community.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Do you think that the journey and the ongoing nature of it affect the educational outcomes of young people here?

**Ms DENNISON** - Definitely, I think so.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Are you speaking as a parent or as a teacher when you say that?



**Ms DENNISON** - I say that as both. Kids will be kids, but bullying is an issue on every school's agenda, and we have an unsupervised 15-minute trip at a minimum that can turn into 30 minutes where kids are unsupervised by any adult other than a bus driver. These kids are five and seven years old sitting on the same bus, three to a seat, with children who are 12, on a really difficult road. If they're at the last bus stop they are on there for significantly longer than the first ones, not to mention the fact that the children on the first bus arrive at school at 8.20 a.m. They have 40 minutes more of amusing themselves. Yes, teachers are on duty in their classroom but we are running around getting our classroom activities organised for the day. There is one person outside covering all of these students. Again, at the end of the day, the children who are on the second bus are asked to leave the classrooms and there is one teacher out on the asphalt area. My five-year-old came home reciting the most horrid poems - and these are things he learned while waiting for the bus.

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - Cassy, on your educational question. I am a big believer that Wesley Vale offers a really good educational program. However, the issue is that they can only get it to a certain standard because they're in an environment where they're isolated and the students are learning from the teacher in the classroom, whereas the opportunity to learn from a wider broad base from the community is impossible through travel. If they were in this area they would have the service clubs, sporting clubs, old people coming down and working in the classroom on literacy and numeracy programs. Because of their isolation they're learning from a teacher and we know that we all learn in different ways and we learn from as many brains as possible and, at this stage, they learn from one person with maybe another aide in the room.

**Mrs BUTLER** - I'm not sure who would be the appropriate person to answer. I think you've all spoken very eloquently and given us a real sense of what it means for people in the community. I wonder if any thought has been given to different models of schooling? Have you thought about a district high school? Is there any limitation on the size of the school that you would envisage? I have only heard you talk broadly about a primary school.

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - I suppose the brief that we had was around public primary school education in this municipality. So we concentrated on that. Yes, there may be, with growth in the community, a possibility of even stretching that further and going into a K-10 school or a birth to 10, or even a birth to 11 or 12. At this stage I am pretty sure the brief was about public primary school education in this community.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I think the Latrobe Council's strategic plan is only for primary, is it not?

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - Yes.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I have been to the property we are going to visit in a moment, but I do not think there would be enough footprint there for a -

**Mrs BUTLER** - There are two possible sites.

**Mr WHITELEY** - There are two possible sites.

**Mrs BUTLER** - And the Latrobe information does talk about a high school itself.

**Mr WHITELEY** - A high school is possible but it is not their preference though, is it? It is their priority for a primary school, is it not - from memory?

**Ms DENNISON** - As part of our written submission as a committee we did mention the comparison. We realise we cannot compare apples to oranges, but we looked at Penguin as a community which has less population at the moment than we have. They are able to sustain a primary school and a high school, averaging enrolment of around 300 at both campuses. They have a basketball stadium and the other things that we listed as part of our written submission. So I would like to refer to that as well.

**Mr WHITELEY** - And they have a private school.

**Ms DENNISON** - Yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - There is quite a bit of land but there are also, through a lack of planning over many years, quite a few wasted areas, like tennis courts at Camp Banksia and tennis courts at Camp Boomerang. There would be, I would imagine, plenty of space to rationalise over a period of time to facilitate a staged development, initially starting with the primary school. With the amount of land around, and even golf course areas et cetera, that is physically possible over a period of time.

**Ms FORREST** - One of the first three speakers made the statement from data that it is preferable to have the main population attending a school in a 1.6 kilometre radius.

**Mr WHITELEY** - New South Wales. I think it was Penny.

**Ms FORREST** - Do you have copies of that data or a link to that data?

**Ms ARMISTEAD** - That data came from a conversation we had with one of our committee members as a community. That is why I put 'I have heard'. I did try to find an exact quote for you on the Internet last night. I could not find the exact policy but I did find a lot of reference on the New South Wales training and education web site. A lot of individual schools referred to that 1.6 kilometres.

**CHAIR** - Some substantiation might be helpful.

**Ms ARMISTEAD** - Yes, I can get that for you.

**Mr ARMISTEAD** - I think that might have even been mentioned in Latrobe Council's report in the submission. Latrobe Council will be able to verify where they obtained that.

**Mr BEST** - I do not want to rake over old coals but I think it is pretty questionable, talking about Michael's contribution in regards to the survey of interest, to go back 11 years in regards to what people's ideas were. I cannot recall the exact format of the survey but I think it talked about interest in keeping it at Wesley Vale or an alternative school or something else. There were questions, as I remember, going to the public meeting at that time, about how that survey was conducted. I suppose it is pretty clear that the

consensus of opinion, based on the submissions that we have had, is towards a new Port Sorell school. I think we have heard also from Mr Armistead about potentially where Wesley Vale or Moriarty might be. Based on these figures, you would probably say -

**CHAIR** - Do you have a question, Brenton?

**Mr BEST** - I am sorry. It is a question. I guess there are going to be some changes as to what schools would stay in the mix and those that would not. Does anyone want to comment about that?

**Ms DENNISON** - I strongly believe that, if a public school does not come to Port Sorell, then a private one will. Then we have no control whatsoever over the impact that that will have on surrounding primary schools. I believe that if a school is built here tomorrow then, regarding the enrolments from Wesley Vale, speaking as a teacher from there, there would obviously be some families that would choose to leave their children enrolled at Wesley Vale if they were in grades 5 or 6. It would be a slow process before they felt the full impact of the enrolments. However there are still 80 children enrolled there this year who travel from the Moriarty, East Devonport and Wesley Vale region. There are two other schools in our area which are fully sustainable with an enrolment of fewer than 80 or around 80. So yes it will have an impact but I do not think that we need to be talking about closing schools.

**CHAIR** - If I could just ask a question of you, Michael, and your reference to the late Jim Bacon, there was a decision not to proceed with investigations about a school here because they did not want to close any schools. What was your understanding at that time of the schools or the school that might be impacted?

**Mr RATAJ** - I appreciate your question, though we are not here to discuss the possible effect on other schools. We are here to concentrate a school for Port Sorell. Yes, we acknowledge that there will be an impact on the other schools; that is undeniable. But our focus is that we have a township here of 4 000 people in the district and we have no primary school. That is our primary focus.

**CHAIR** - Michael, at that time what was the suspicion of the late Jim Bacon?

**Mr RATAJ** - I guess the concern that turned the Wesley Vale school association was the feeling in Wesley Vale that they would lose their school. Realistically I think that we are only probably talking about the Wesley Vale school impact at that time. It was going to have an impact on Wesley Vale; that is undeniable. If you take 260 kids out of a population then -

**Mr WHITELEY** - The proportion would have been the same.

**Mr RATAJ** - Yes, the total figure then was 240

**Mr BEST** - Chair, can I just assist by saying there was an amount of money put on the table for Wesley Vale at that point in time.

**Mr RATAJ** - That came up; that is right.

**Mr BEST** - I just thought it might help your answer.

**Mr RATAJ** - In the midst of all this, funding became available to spend at Wesley Vale. Our push at that time was just too late. The moneys were allocated to be spent at Wesley Vale. Nobody was going to turn around and say, 'Sorry we are not going to spend that money at Wesley Vale'.

**Mr WHITELEY** - There is a bit of deja vu going on here.

**Mr RATAJ** - That is right; here we are again.

**CHAIR** - It is probably raking over old coals there.

**Ms DENNISON** - You are probably already aware but next year we are looking at the strong possibility of having compulsory three-day a week kindergartens introduced into all primary schools. At Wesley Vale currently there is not the place to house them. We have an enrolment at the moment of 293 and we are at our capacity. Last year we had 11 classes this year we have 10, so we do have one multipurpose space at the moment; last year we had none. We are very much under pressure. If this community continues to grow at this rate we are not going to be able to enrol these children at Wesley Vale anyway, so money is going to need to be spent somewhere, especially given that kinder days are increasing as of next year. We already have that issue to consider as well.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Dayna.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

**Mr GREG HALL WAS CALLED AND EXAMINED.**

**Mr HALL** - I really appreciate the opportunity to give evidence this afternoon. I listened to all the evidence given by the Port Sorell School Committee - an excellent submission. They really did get down to the nitty-gritty and covered a lot of the very pertinent issues. My views are more perhaps those of the local upper House member. I do appreciate and acknowledge the passion and commitment shown by people like Mike Rataj, who I think needs a medal for the work that he has done over the years. This whole issue has a long history. Before 2000, decisions were made and that is the way it went. So we have to move on.

I was first elected in 2001. I first door-knocked this area as it then became the electorate of Rowallan after some electoral boundary changes. It was very apparent to me then that the prime issue was that a school was required at Port Sorell. Again in 2006 all of those issues came to the fore.

Back in 2003 I decided to try to do something about it. We re-formed the action group and Mike Rataj and some of the other people here were on that group. We did surveys and here is my file on the Port Sorell school. I am using the vernacular here, as you quite often like to do, but it is as fat as a doctor's wallet.

*Laughter.*

**Mr HALL** - Therein lie all the survey forms as well. We did a survey from my own resources at that time. Mr Best talked about a survey just a while ago. It was a fairly simple one. It stated that the action group for a Port Sorell community learning complex has been re-formed. The population growth of the Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley area is one of the fastest in the State but still lacks the learning facilities enjoyed by other districts. Infants are currently bussed to Wesley Vale for schooling. This group believes the Government should develop a community learning complex on Camp Banksia crown land to include the infants school, adult education, library, on-line access centre, sport and conference venues. This survey is to gauge the opinion of residents on this proposal and to present its results to the State Government.

Then there were four basic questions: do you believe the Government should develop a community learning complex as described - yes, no or undecided? Second question: how often would you or your family use one or all of the facilities of such a complex - daily, weekly, monthly, rarely? Third question: do you have children of an age who would attend an infant school at Port Sorell? If so, how many? Fourth question: how many kilometres do you have to currently travel to access one of the facilities in the proposed complex?

The results were that 94 per cent of those surveyed strongly supported the construction of a community learning complex at Port Sorell. This complex - at this stage we talked about early childhood education - would cater to childcare facilities, library, on-line access centre and aged outreach centre. The second interesting statistic at that time, and remember we are going back a few years now, was that 140 children would attend an early childhood education facility at Port Sorell. We gleaned that from our survey.

There are 142 children in the area aged between nought and three, which indicates a solid

future enrolment. There are 165 children in the area aged between three to 10, which indicates a solid current enrolment. The demographics highlighted a large population base of couples with families, aged between 25 to 45, and the next highest was a population of 60 and over.

This whole issue has always had a lot of attention, particularly in the *Advocate*, and I have consistently raised the issue of a school at Port Sorell with a letter to the minister each year and at budget Estimates. I have been like a cracked record, a squeaky wheel, but unfortunately nothing has occurred. They have all said that it is a very good idea but at this stage it is not going to occur. In addition, I presented a petition to Parliament. There were over 500 signatures - that is more than 500 households. It basically says, 'The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of Tasmania showeth that your petitioners are gravely concerned at the lack of an infant school and other related learning and community facilities at Port Sorell'. It ends up 'and your petitioners in duty bound will ever pray'. So there you go. I do not know whether the lower House still has that in play.

**Mr WHITELEY** - We are a little bit more contemporary.

**Mr HALL** - We went to a better finishing school up where we are.

*Laughter.*

**Mr HALL** - The bottom line is that 500 households responded to that, which is very significant. Since lunchtime today I have talked to a few constituents, young mums with families and older residents, on that little litmus test people are still very much supportive of a school.

We have talked about the BER funding from the Rudd Government and I do acknowledge the good intent of all that. I think it is very good but I have criticised it before. I think there has been a lack of strategic planning in that some of it had to be spent too quickly. The *Weekend Australian* about two or three weekends ago drew some examples. One was a small Aboriginal school in WA where there were only a few kids but they had to spend \$200 000 on an assembly hall when there were clearly other needs. That school was saying we need to do it a bit differently.

The second point is the recent change in electoral boundaries. Port Sorell has moved back from Braddon into Lyons and that has changed the political dynamics again, not to mention a looming State election. I do not intend to be facetious when I talk about that at all but I would like to congratulate Mr Hidding on his reference to this committee. I think it was strategic and timely and it is good that we have a joint House committee that covers the whole political spectrum.

This issue is not about closing Wesley Vale, Moriarty or Sassafra. It is about a school for Port Sorell. When we did that last survey we talked about K-2 as a start-off in that early learning style, rather than a full primary school, but I have listened to what the committee have heard and I can see the rationality behind their wanting to go to K-6 first up. Back at that time we were talking about one step at a time and letting events take their course, but that is something I certainly would not die in a ditch for.

Fewer students over time will force governments of whatever colour to make decisions about the smaller schools and natural attrition will sort that out. I will talk a little bit about that later. Some of us can probably remember the CRESAP business of many years ago and the great unrest that caused in the smaller communities - Meander, Mole Creek and lots of others in my particular area.

I came at 2.30 p.m. and heard the very comprehensive submission put forward by the school community, and I think they have researched all aspects very thoroughly and I don't intend to go back over those again. The only other thing I will note is that the Latrobe Council's very recent survey done in a different format from ours of six years ago mirrors almost exactly the same result, and that is that 90 per cent of Port Sorell residents surveyed want the school. As has been mentioned, there has been exponential growth in this area. It is certainly the boom town of the north-west coast. It is my view that for a very substantial community now such as Port Sorell not to have a school as part of its fabric is somewhat of a travesty. Not only is the lack of a school very concerning but, as a local member in the Legislative Council and knowing the area well, I am concerned and have expressed concerns on several occasions that a community of this magnitude does not even have the essential facilities such as an online centre, a Service Tasmania shop, library, Adult Education, adult learning - and the list goes on. I recently called on the Premier to consider extending the LINC, which is the learning information network centre program, to cover Port Sorell and use it as the opportunity to deliver many needed services to this area. As we know, LINC's are aimed at bringing together a range of government and community organisations in a single facility with particular focus on continuing education.

The terms of reference are that the committee is to inquire and report upon the provisions of public primary education for this area. As I said, with the previous submission, the case is compelling and I can find no real disagreement with any of their presentation. In my view of it comes down to the fact that there is a burning need for a primary school at Port Sorell. I think the issue of the existing schools at Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras are a separate matter and are not really part of my deliberations on this subject. It is certainly not my contention that any of these schools should close. The issue at hand is whether there should be a new school at Port Sorell. It would seem that by dint of lower birth rates now and in the future, we are going to see demographic changes in the number of school-age children, particularly here in Tasmania and Australia and indeed in the western world. That's just a fact of life. I remember recently when we had the government business enterprise hearings we talked about Metro and I asked the question of Metro, 'Why aren't you getting enough people on seats?' and they said, 'It's quite simple. Demographics are changing. There are fewer students and fewer kids' - and that has become a real issue with them.

Therefore, whether we like it or not, I think by the mere fact of attrition and fewer students there will be a lot of pressure on many small schools to remain viable. That is a given and future governments will have to make some tough decisions. It's not new - I think I can look around my own local district and identify smaller schools that have closed over decades. Not only do future governments have to make decisions on economic grounds with regard to the number of schools in the State but also a more important factor is the quality of education that's able to be delivered, particularly to younger students. I don't think that's an issue at this stage at Wesley Vale, Sassafras and Moriarty, but I can identify some schools in my very large electorate, which goes right

down to Bothwell, where the critical mass of students has diminished to such an extent, I think, that they are really struggling to produce the education outcomes and students are disadvantaged to some extent when they have to move on and travel to a larger secondary school. I think that is a concern. Then perhaps it is only a matter of time and governments will have to make that hard call. It is a hard call because coming from and still living in a rural area, I am aware that small communities are fiercely protective of their local school.

Mr Chairman, there has also been the talk over the past two or three years - and this was mentioned before by someone on the committee - of the possibility of a private school being built at Port Sorell. In essence, I have no philosophical objection to that scenario but my preference is certainly for a public school for many reasons but particularly that the community might piggyback off those facilities a public education system can offer. I am not aware of where that mooted private school is at, and the committee might even have submissions on that, I do not know. But ultimately of course that is a commercial decision and I suppose there is always that real chance that a private school could well fill the vacuum here at Port Sorell, particularly if a government does not get off its backside properly and commit to a public primary school.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman and members of the committee, I feel it is very self-evident that the fact that a community of this size does not have a public school is somewhat of an enigma. I know this area well. Over the years I have spent a lot of time staying here and have observed the quite amazing growth and what makes the place tick. The matter that stands out in my mind, and the very constraining factor to the development of the social fabric of this place, is the lack of a school. Without the proud identity of having your own school, then I think this area, generically known as Port Sorell but divided into three parts - Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley - will struggle to realise its sense of community and all the social benefits that flow from that factor.

I can think of many similes or analogies to conclude here, but they might not look too good in *Hansard* but Port Sorell without a school is like a dog's eye without dead horse and if I can translate that it is like a pie without sauce.

*Laughter.*

**Mr WHITELEY** - We were waiting for something like that!

**Mr HALL** - I wish the committee all the best in their deliberations but at the same time urge them to strongly consider recommending that a new public primary school be built at Port Sorell. The issue has gone on long enough; it is time to act.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mr Hall. Committee members, any questions of Mr Hall?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Mr Hall, I know a number of representatives have made the same point that this is not about shutting down other schools, it is about what is needed here. Do you acknowledge that you cannot actually separate the two questions: the need for a school here and the fact that most likely Wesley Vale is going to be extremely adversely affected and be non-viable?



**Mr HALL** - I acknowledge that. There certainly will be an impact. I think when I originally talked about that early learning from K-2, that that would be a phased-in development. At that time I thought that would have a lesser impact on Wesley Vale. I suppose if you think about it it might take - even if this committee does recommend and a future government does build a school here - some time but it will certainly have some effect on Wesley Vale.

**Mrs BUTLER** - You talked about Camp Banksia in your original proposal, have you shifted to a preference for Boomerang?

**Mr HALL** - No, I got mixed up there, I always do that. I get confused between the two, I know where both of them are.

**CHAIR** - Greg, thank you very much.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

**Mr RENE HIDDING MP WAS CALLED AND EXAMINED.**

**Mr HIDDING** - Mr Chairman, can I first thank the committee for its prompt attention to the reference from the House of Assembly. I think what we have here is a tripartisan agreement at least, and certainly a strong interest from the Independents, that we have a situation here that needs fixing. Something has developed over a 10-, 11- or 12-year period that needs to be fixed. It will not be easy to fix but nevertheless it needs to be fixed.

We should set aside why we are here. We should set aside why it was that money was on the table back then and on a 50-50 situation, rather than going this way, we went that way, because the money was on the table for Wesley Vale Primary School. Whether it was a bad decision or not is not really for us to decide. It has turned out to be a very bad situation but we should not really reflect too much on it because we cannot change it anyway. Rather than finger-pointing, we need to deal with what we have. We have the same catalyst though, there is another amount of money on the table which, if expended in the way it was proposed to be expended, it would nail down a bad situation into a much worse situation. We now have to be brave and move forward.

On this question of whether there is anywhere else in Australia where there are 4 000 people living in a community where 300 children have to be bussed out to a school 10 kilometres away, I have not been able to find another one.

What I did was e-mail a few Liberal parliamentarians in three States and asked, 'Can you think of anywhere?'. They simply could not, and neither could we find the 1.6-kilometre rule or anything like that because, as somebody in South Australia pointed out, surely politics would take care of that.

If you had a community of 4 000 people and they did not have a primary school, they would be going off their chops and it would have been fixed well before that. But, of course, when I explained the situation, they could see what had happened.

But if I cannot find anywhere else in Australia where there is a community of 4 000 being treated as though they are Distance Ed families then it will be that none exist. I thought Hadspen might be one but that is 2 000. Hadspen is quite an extraordinary situation but that is only 2 000 people, and this is 4 000, and it is going to 6 000 - there is no question about that. So if we do not fix it now, no doubt another community development committee, not that long into the future, will be sitting here facing an even worse situation.

The Wesley Vale Primary School is a good school with good facilities; it is just that it has turned out to be in a very bad position for more than 75 per cent of its students.

I am very impressed by the arguments today on the community development matters, whether it be commercial or straight community development, your committee is the community development committee. It is not just about primary schools, it is about what primary schools would do for the rest of the community.

This then is a submission of the State Opposition. The main points are that we recommend that the committee find that a new public primary school should be built at Port Sorell.

Secondly, we believe that the committee should find that the Moriarty Primary School is a much-loved and local institution, which has a good rural focus that benefits the whole school community, and that this school should continue to exist.

We believe that the committee will find that the Sassafras Primary School is a classic rural local school with an active school community. It should continue its happy existence. It is a substantial distance from these other schools and it is, in reality, closer to Latrobe than anywhere else.

We also believe that the committee will find that the Wesley Vale Primary School is a modern, substantial facility that could continue to exist in a much smaller state, should it lose its Port Sorell Distance Ed students. We cannot hide from the fact that it is going to be a different school; it will change completely. But neither can we avoid the fact that it is somewhat of a contrived school, that it is a hybrid school, that it is isolated from where its students actually live. But it will survive, particularly with the compulsory three-day kindy, which changes the nature of public education as of next year. The first round of schools will be next year and I think the other half of the schools will probably be the next.

To talk about the first recommendation, about a new school in Port Sorell, I want to just touch briefly on the private school option. I have made some phone calls and at least one school has admitted to me that, yes, they have cast a weather eye on this situation - after all, why would private schools not. Not that they are about being expansionist but it is very good for private schools to have other campuses, particularly in teacher development terms. They are always looking for scale and they are interested.

If it was a recommendation that there not be a public school built in Port Sorell, it is axiomatic that when a vacuum exists, a vacuum attracts and/or sucks something into this area. It will likely be a private school, and it will set up a divided community where only well-off locals will be able to go this private school and the less well-off people will still have to travel 10 kilometres each day. There will be a massive inequity set up, unheard of in our relatively class-free society. The net result would be a deliberate avoidance at a parliamentary level of the need to give all our children in Tasmania access to public primary education locally. Paradoxically the argument for Moriarty and Sassafras schools to continue is a local argument. Surely the same local argument which makes those two schools viable and ongoing makes the Port Sorell option an absolute game-over, done-deal option.

We recommend that this committee not be sidetracked into looking for some clever interim, halfway-house option. I must confess that we Liberals proposed at a previous election that an infant school be first built here. I am now persuaded by the families of the some 260 kids of Port Sorell that that would be a disaster. Two schools for one family. Different finishing times, different drop off times, some kids at this school, some kids at that school - it is just a bad idea. It was a bad idea then and it is a bad idea now and I would ask that that not be considered. This community is now well overdue for a public policy recommendation that they should have a K to year 6, twenty-first century,

state-of-the-art public primary school with expansion capacity as the town increases from 6 000 to 8 000 in the next years.

Could I just briefly talk about what I believe this inquiry should not have to spend its time worrying about and that is about money - where we would find the funds to build this school. I do not quite agree with the gentleman earlier who said that there is plenty of money around for these things. Our shadow-treasurer will give him a call tonight.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Find that log, let us know where it is.

*Laughter.*

**Mr HIDDING** - We recommend that the committee not seek to resolve funding questions which would flow from the implementation of a recommendation to build a new school at Port Sorell. While it will be tough and we have not resolved the matter from our side of politics, a long way from it, we do not believe that the funding challenge, when compared to the urgent need, will be insurmountable in the medium term for the Tasmanian Government, regardless of which party is in power. So it should not be within the remit of this committee to, for instance, say, 'Oh well, it will be too expensive.'

What we have here is three levels of government. In the Federal Government Kevin Rudd is saying, 'Here is some money, but get your act together in this area.' With local government, council is not just on board it is actually leading the way on this. I congratulate the Latrobe Council for the urgent study that it has done on the Port Sorell area. It is a ripper. It is what all councils should be doing in their areas. It provides leadership and in this case it has even identified a great property. It is a beautiful patch of land with a lovely patch of bush adjacent to it, two minutes to the beach. It is absolutely central for this community and it is a cracker. I know when I stop talking you will be allowed to go around and have a look at it.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Yes, right, a bit dark.

**Mr HIDDING** - What we are looking for is a policy decision for equity for all kids in Tasmania. The issue, lest I be asked the same question that the member for Franklin -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Denison, thank you.

**Mr HIDDING** - Denison. I keep thinking of Ralph's Bay when I look at you, that is why. I am sorry about that. Lest I be asked the same question about the consequences of building a new school here, I believe that it would be very wrong to say that there are no options to operate schools effectively following the building of a school here. There will be problems, there will be consequences. Are they fatal? No they absolutely are not. Secondly, are those issues the problem of the Port Sorell community? No they absolutely are not. And it is very unfair of any member of parliament to expect - and I know that you do not - this community to somehow do without what every other community in Australia has because of concern for a contrived situation that was set up 10 years ago.

It is not for this community to resolve those issues. It is not beyond the wit of a government or a bureaucracy to sort out the consequences of a proper public policy decision. The nay-sayers here will be the bureaucracy that was at the heart of the decision 10-11 years ago. It is the very nature of bureaucracy to back themselves up and also to prevent problems for themselves down the track. I do not blame the bureaucrat. If we said right now that we are thinking of building a school at Port Sorell, he would go pale and shiver at the knees. 'W-w-what will we do then?' Well, that is why we pay these people the amounts of money that we pay them. There will be a solution here. It will not be easy but they will find a solution and we, as members of Parliament, will help them find it. It is simply not good enough for bureaucrats who will simply say it is too hard. I notice there are none here now. I would have thought that some members of the department would be here listening -

**Mr BEST** - They were here.

**Mr WHITELEY** - They took us around the schools. They are not here to hear the evidence.

**Mr HIDDING** - The point is, I suspect that you will have someone from the department before you saying that this is simply going to be really hard. Despite the fact that it is hard, that is exactly what we pay them to do, not suggest that we should not make equitable decisions around Tasmania.

With that, I thank you all very much for taking up this inquiry in a very practical and helpful way to respond to the challenges which are before us. I feel very strongly about this. When I lost this area some time ago and handed it over to good representation from the Braddon people, I hoped that it would be resolved in that time. I am not surprised that it was not because it was still so fresh after having spent the money on it then. That is now 11 years ago. That is no longer a brand new school out there. It is not as though it was done yesterday. That was now 11 years ago and we have a whole brand new situation. This is a town of 4 000 and it is definitely going to 6 000 - and that is not speculation - and more than likely going to 8 000 in a fairly short period. I strongly recommend that this committee bite the bullet and do the right thing.

**CHAIR** - Mr Hidding, thank you very much for your evidence.

**Mr BEST** - I want to see a Port Sorell school, the same as you. I was in the chair in Parliament when the debate was on, so I could not participate in it. I do not think you have probably seen this graph.

**Mr HIDDING** - Yes, I have.

**Mr BEST** - When you look at it, you have the red dots indicating Moriarty and then you have the green dots representing Sassafras.

**Mr HIDDING** - Yes.

**Mr BEST** - It seems to me that, on the face of it, Sassafras seems fairly well located in the conglomerate of students. Moriarty seems split. I am wondering what your thoughts might be. I hear what your policy is but I think at some stage here someone is going to have to bite the bullet and we are just going to have to be honest about this situation -

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**Mr HIDDING** - I am prepared to talk about the elephant in the room.

**Mr BEST** - Okay. Before you do, can I ask what your thought might be about the possibility of one of those schools surviving, Moriarty or Sassafras? I hear your policy but, realistically, when you look at the figures, Moriarty is going to be split in half.

**Mr HIDDING** - That is not the problem of this committee. The first problem of this committee is to address the inequity that exists because there is no school here. I am happy, once we are through that gate, if we have talked the socks off that, now we will move to the consequences. But I do not want the consequences to affect, at all, this issue over here.

**Mr BEST** - I can put on the record for you that my mind has moved past the consequences. But I think we have to be honest about what the consequences are.

**Mr HIDDING** - The people of Moriarty tell me that it is a rural school. They are rural people sending their kids to a rural school, with a good, strong rural feel about it. For that reason, it would survive, they feel, a new school at Port Sorell.

**Mr BEST** - With half the amount?

**Mr HIDDING** - No, it would not be half the amount. There is no suggestion that they are all going to bolt to Port Sorell just because a new school is built there, particularly if it is a rural school. But for all that, if you were to construct an argument where that was happening and the school was so good that it was going to attract all those red dots into that school, yes, Moriarty is low and Wesley Vale is low.

**Mr BEST** - Sassafras?

**Mr HIDDING** - I think Sassafras is so far away that it is not an issue.

**Mr BEST** - Yes, I know.

**Mr HIDDING** - I think they are completely safe. If I could have a crystal ball, the Moriarty school people will realise they are probably not sentimentally attached to the old school buildings but they are attached to the Moriarty School. Whether that Moriarty School exists in this set of buildings or in those set of buildings, it becomes a bit of a bun fight about what the dam thing is called. We do have an opportunity in Wesley Vale to turn that into something like the Hagley Farm School, which is a cracker. I do not know if anyone has been there but it is a ripper, an overtly rural school. There is an opportunity where it is placed to develop that sort of special-school status.

I am only speaking as a local member. I am not an educational bureaucrat, not a demographic bureaucrat, so my views on this are simply looking over the horizon to see where we might go. Whatever my views on that, none of them are fatal to the notion of what has to happen at Port Sorell. I do not think that any situation we might come up with as a consequence should be fatal to that. Certainly they are not the problem of the people of Port Sorell.

**Mrs BUTLER** - Mr Hidding, the situation at St Helens - a district high school that went from 485 to 630-40 in two years, a 30 per cent increase in two years - is in my head where you have this sort of development racing. Maybe we ought to keep our minds open to something beyond the primary school. How would you feel about that?

**Mr HIDDING** - I would not want to muddy the waters by saying let us have a two-year inquiry as to whether there should be a district school here. From a planning point of view we can all accept there is a chance that we could extend to a high school. Having sat on a Public Accounts Committee that looked at the Reece High School, we found that the Latrobe High School and Devonport High School were low in numbers. These are unpopulated schools and you cannot claim there are crowded schools elsewhere. The provision of high school education is a completely different animal from the provision of primary school education because, all around Australia, for high school kids from 13-16 years of age it is not such a big deal for them to travel 10 kilometres, but it is a massive issue for five-year-olds. I would rather that we focus on the primary school but we should keep a weather eye on the other. Your committee might consider making that point in its recommendations wherever it looks at land or options and what have you. When I look at Boomerang I do not think it is hemmed in that badly. I think you will find space should it be necessary. It is a very good point you make but I would hate for it to muddy the water.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

**Mr GRANT ATKINS WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.**

**Mr ATKINS** - My contribution will be somewhat brief. It is purely as a community member that I would like to bring forward some of the points in my written submission. First of all it is very important that Port Sorell does have a school. Probably no other towns in Tasmania of a similar population do not have schools. It would seem very deserving and appropriate if Port Sorell has a school. I know it has been talked about for a long time. I hope coming from this inquiry something will happen and we'll see a positive result. Having a school at Port Sorell is very consistent with the models that exist within this area at the moment, schools such as Sassafra, Moriarty and Wesley Vale. They are local schools and pupils go to the schools in their areas. It is often said that a school is the heartbeat of a community and I think that is very true. It helps to develop children's pride in their community and gives them a sense of belonging to the local community. A school enhances the development of out-of-school activities and the formation of other clubs, youth organisations and cultural happenings. There is concern, and justified concern, about the wellbeing of Port Sorell children travelling on the bus frequently to Wesley Vale and other centres. I think with the amount of traffic that travels that road it can be said the safety of the road is questionable. We have a lack of infrastructure in Port Sorell and I am sure that by some partnerships arrangements with the local council that facilities at the school could be used to multipurpose and meet a variety of needs by the local community. If we had a facility such as that it would help with the growth in educational opportunities for people in this area.

As was mentioned previously, the Latrobe Council is to be congratulated on the zoning of the piece of land, or the setting aside of the piece of land for this facility. It's an ideal area and provides a number of great environmental and learning opportunities for students. In my view we do need a school at Port Sorell and I would hope that that could happen at the earliest opportunity. Listening to earlier evidence, I would say that the school vacancy at Port Sorell could be quickly taken up by private schools. I was nominated to chair a committee to look into the establishment of an Anglican church school in Port Sorell. We went as far as having a group of people formed for that committee. The Bishop of Tasmania met with the Premier some 12 months ago and was told that this issue was going to be given serious consideration and for that reason our committee was put on hold. We don't have a desire to build a school, we would prefer to see a public school at Port Sorell but, if it were never to happen, the situation would be reconsidered.

**CHAIR** - With your interest in bike riding I am sure you would have been keen to listen to all the parents extolling the virtues of riding bikes to school, and producing future stars to represent Australia or Tasmania, even in the Tour de France. Do you want to speak on that?

**Mr ATKINS** - No, that's obviously another benefit. There is a whole host of benefits and I'm sure your committee has heard all those. I just want to reinforce how important it is for us to have a school here.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Grant, your local knowledge is second to none probably in relation to your involvement at a leadership level and we always appreciate your input. We are here

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about whether or not there should be school in Port Sorell, but with your local knowledge would you like to comment on that, knowing the area and the municipality as well as you do? What do you see in your crystal ball should a recommendation be to make a school available here and that a government of any colour pick up that recommendation, the ramifications? Do you want to make a comment?

**Mr ATKINS** - As I said, I think it would be logical for Wesley Vale to look at an annexe out here. Maybe it could be done that way. I think certainly Sassafras school probably captures a different area - certainly to the east of Sassafras. Moriarty is probably a bit more difficult. But I would not say that Moriarty should not have a school. I think the question is about having the school at Port Sorell. We should be addressing that issue.

**Mr WHITELEY** - So if I can just clarify, you are saying then if there was to be a continuance for whatever period - indefinite period - of time that what was left is the population of a school at Wesley Vale and they could act as an annexe of the bigger Port Sorell school?

**Mr ATKINS** - I have not heard it mentioned but it probably has. I have not been involved in the debate in recent times. But it would seem to me that maybe Wesley Vale could have looked at setting up an annexe to get them going again. I do not know if that is possible - maybe with administration sharing or something like that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We have seen in some of the submissions the projected population growth in this specific area. Given your local knowledge - and I am just thinking about those other schools - is the wider area experiencing population growth? Or is it more coastal?

**Mr ATKINS** - It is to some extent but the zoning does not allow that to happen because it is a residential area with lots of opportunities for development. So that is naturally where the development is happening. The rural areas are prime agricultural land so therefore they have not been set aside for housing, and quite rightly so. I think you will find that every building that is in those rural areas is probably occupied. Where people are allowed to build, new houses have been built. So it is a general growth, but it is not going to happen there because of the planning restrictions.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Obviously you are very supportive of a primary school at Port Sorell but if, for some reason, the Tasmanian Government determined not to fund a school here, how certain are you that the private school sector would move in to fill that gap? I know you were speculating on it before but I want to narrow it down a bit.

**Mr ATKINS** - I think it will happen because there is a market here. But it is not the wish of myself or the people that I was involved with. But it will happen because, if you take the Anglican Church, they run throughout Australia what they call 'low-cost Anglican schools' - not your grammar schools, but more of a low-cost model. I know that the diocese have been keen for some time to operate in Tasmania. So I am sure they would want to probably really look at that question. But I state quite clearly at the moment that that is not the intention. We want to see a public school there.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I understand that.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Grant, I go back to your submission that you made to the committee. You talked about this community benefiting from a modern community complex with an auditorium and a theatre et cetera. Obviously they are things that are often in partnership with local government. I know that we will talk to the council tomorrow, but do you see that there is a role for a partnership here, if this is a successful outcome for the community where the council may contribute some funds and provide some of these - perhaps a step up from what is normally provided at a school? I do not think an auditorium and a theatre are something that is pretty general around schools in Tasmania. Do you see an opportunity there?

**Mr ATKINS** - I think there is a great opportunity and there are examples in Tasmania. When I was general manager of Kentish Council we became involved with the Sheffield School redevelopment. The council made a contribution towards that multipurpose facility which, I understand, works very well. It is the way to go today, sharing of resources. I know that our senior citizens club here and a lot of other groups and people are looking for a multipurpose facility, which does not exist. So this is one way hopefully of being able to get that. But what the council's policy on that is, I do not know.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - It is certainly a good one to ask tomorrow.

**CHAIR** - Mr Atkins, our previous witness, Mr Hidding, talked about the land at Camp Boomerang that is available, or has been earmarked for a public primary school if it goes ahead. Mr Hidding talked also about the possible expansion and that there might be the opportunity for it to progress, if the population grows, into a high school situation. I am really interested in the parcels of land that we are about to go and inspect. What is your assessment of a circumstance where a high school might be an extension of what the community is hoping to develop here?

**Mr ATKINS** - That would be excellent if it could happen. I am not aware of the requirements for a high school but it certainly is a very similar piece of land for a school. As was said previously, it is adjacent to a bush allotment which is a public reserve and it is very close to the beach, which opens up a whole new area of education for students. It is also alongside Camp Banksia, which possibly could be used in some way in the future with this whole development. So I think it is an ideal site.

**CHAIR** - Thanks very much for your presentation today.

**Mr ATKINS** - Thank you very much.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW**

**Mr GERALD MONSON** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STAUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMIINED, AND **Mr MICHAEL GAFFNEY** WAS CALLED AND EXAMINED.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I would like to give you some background information about the last decade in the journey of trying to get a school at Port Sorell. I have been on council since 1994 and the mayor for the last eight years. One of the things that was highlighted in our 2005 strategic plan was to lobby for a school at Port Sorell. It was one of the things in our strategic plan which was for the use of the community. The then Minster for Education was Paula Wriedt and I would take any opportunity to travel around the State to attend community forums to say we need a school at Port Sorell. Unfortunately the first response from her minders or people around her was that if you do that then you are going to close two or three of the other schools in the area. I said no, that could be an option, but it is not the only option, as is the case today. Our 2006-11 strategic plan changed to support a school at Port Sorell. To come up to date fairly quickly, when the Rudd stimulus, the BER funding, came about for schools, I was contacted by Malcolm Wells. Malcolm and I have a really good relationship. Sorry, I will go back two years when the Premier was the Minister for Education.

**Ms FORREST** - Still is.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Still is. I went to him and said that we do need a school at Port Sorell. He said, 'What can you do?'. I told him that we were going through a strategic planning process at the moment to try and find an appropriate site. What we have done in the last 18 months with our strategic plan is find a site. It was to go back to the government. I contacted them just before Christmas to say that we now had a place for a school at Port Sorell and we need further conversation. Then when the BER funding came onto the table it changed the ball game because it brought everything ahead very quickly.

We had interest from non-government schools, as we have had over the last three or four years. We held community forums here and an Anglicare school probably three years ago, so it is not an unknown scenario. With the BER funding, Malcolm Wells contacted me and said we need to have a meeting with all the primary schools in the municipality to talk about the BER funding. I told him fine and we had that meeting at the council chambers. We met one Monday. The principals and the P&F association presidents were there. They were asked to go back to their schools to discuss their BER funding and how they felt about whether that was suitable for their school and whether they would be supportive of a school at Port Sorell.

I have to make it clear that the only two schools that were asked to do that were Wesley Vale and Moriarty. Sassafra Primary were not asked to consider their BER funding. That brought everything to a head a bit quickly because the feedback we got firmly from Moriarty, and fair enough, was no, do not touch our funding, do not touch our school. Wesley Vale did not have as many at their meeting, it would be fair to say, because it was not publicised as much, but still the message came back. That put council in a situation where to the State Government and to the wider community perhaps people were happy with the way it was. There was not to be a school at Port Sorell because neither of them was prepared to give up their funding. We did not think that was correct because when we had gone through the strategic planning process with the community

only 10 months before one of the things that came through all of the presentations was the need for a school at Port Sorell.

We went to Port Sorell Advisory Committee, PSAC, and asked do you or would you think of a strategy that we could use to try and get the information out there and get a bit more back. PSAC said that they were happy to do whatever council felt was right and that was where we came up with the survey. It is just a feedback form; it is not a survey. I contacted both Malcolm Wells and members of the non-government sector. The questions were fairly simple. Are you supporting the school? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Any other comment? We did not want to get into government versus private or a non-government school situation because we, as a council, just need to know whether they were supportive of a school at Port Sorell.

We had a good return, more than 200 returns came back in and with probably two adults per form, so I would say we probably had responses from 350-400 people. Of those, 74 per cent of the people said they wanted a school at Port Sorell and then we listed the advantages and disadvantages.

I know very well we have excellent schools in the municipality - Wesley Vale, Moriarty, Sassafras and Latrobe primary schools and the high schools. So we are very well served with St Pats and Geneva as well. That is not the issue; the issue is whether they are the best places for the next 20 years, the next five years or the next three years. The council's position is not for any of those schools to have to close because they are good schools and they can survive. Council's position now is that we are very supportive of a school at Port Sorell. If the Government decides not to put a school at Port Sorell, then if a non-government or private school came to the table, as a council we would accept that because we need to provide an educational opportunity.

I am sure this has been pointed out, but Professor David Adams has said that the most important thing within a town is a doctor and the second most important thing to make a town viable is a school. We do not have a school here. We have a growing population, as you have seen and it deserves a school. The demographic survey analysis by Natalie Jackson suggests there will be 5 000 people here within the next few years.

Port Sorell now is perhaps bigger than Latrobe township. There are probably 3 500 people in this area, 3 000 in the town, and so it would be like saying to people in Latrobe, 'Okay, you've got a town there but your kids are all going to have to go Spreyton, Miandetta or East Devonport'.

**CHAIR** - What is the population in Latrobe?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - About 3 000. I tell people from away that we have 9 000 people in Latrobe - 3 000 in Port Sorell, 3 000 at Latrobe and 3 000 in rural - but the truth be known I think it is about 3 500, and is growing, as is Latrobe. That is where we are at.

I must admit that the thing we did not want to do was make this a political discussion. My municipality is divided on this because people understand that if a school goes out here, that is a threat to the other three schools and we want to be really sensitive in that if that happens how can we arrange it so that we cater for the needs of the kids who are

currently in those schools. So if your child started at Wesley Vale Primary School and is now in grade 2, there is uncertainty about that.

Moriarty Primary School - and you will meet with them tomorrow - had nearly 100 per cent of their parents attend their meeting the day after we met with Malcolm Wells. I think there was a misconception in the community that it was the council that had to advertise those meetings. We made it very clear at that meeting that it was not because we did not want it to be a community fight or disagreement; we wanted each school to have their say and come back to us. That is what happened. Not everyone was approached and had input into it - that was important for us to do the survey. I think if you go through the statistics, a greater response was from the 50 and over brigade and most of them would not have children of primary-school age - they may have grandchildren - but most of them were supportive of a school at Port Sorell. So we have a site, a strategic plan for the whole area, we have surveyed the community - which we think is our right. We have put it in our strategic planning, we have mentioned our partnership agreement - the first one we had - and we have quite a lot of information that we have passed to you. I think what we have tried to do, to make it easier, is for this report to detail in minute form all the responses from here.

I must highlight that there is one that we put there, but it is not something that council agrees to. It is the one that had the graph submitted by a resident and we could not condense that any way so we thought that had to be included but it is but it was not our position to say how the school would be formed or what grades we could take. That is about it and I am quite happy to answer some questions.

**CHAIR** - The question that I would ask or maybe something that I would highlight is that Latrobe Council, particularly here in the Port Sorell area, is well blessed with land available for a site for a school.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes and that has not just been by chance. That has been by a lot of work by council undertaking to support different ventures and whatever. Even when we made the decision to move the village up with the OneCare site and medical centre and childcare centre, it created a lot of angst within the community. But we realised with the demographics that it is going to grow that big and the current village is too small to cater for that and we did not want OneCare, our aged care facility, stuck out on the borders without any supports around it because that happens sometimes. So we had a greenfield site that could cater. But it important to note that where the school site is, if you put a two-kilometre circle around that, it would cater for nearly everybody. So, kids and families would be able to walk to school and there would be a much greater community feel where they are passing each other on the road and they are cycling and our footpaths and cycleways will connect into the school. We were left in limbo if our strategic plan identified the school site and what I was concerned about, after the feedback from the primary schools, should we have a school site? What do we do with that site? Do we get rid of it so that it is not part of the plan? But obviously now, from the feedback form and comments around the community, there is a need for a school and that is probably the best site for it.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Briefly, Mr Gaffney, you have identified the land and clearly spoken to the Government about having identified the land. Without wanting to prejudice any of the work of this committee - and the Government would know that this committee is

going to make a series of recommendations - has there been any indication from the Government that this is an open possibility?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, I have to say that the Government have been very supportive throughout this process. When we first had a site valuation in 2007 there were two sites considered. We went through the strategic planning process in 2008 and the one that is the strategic plan, we sent a copy of that because the Government wanted to know, 'Michael, where do you want the site?' All right, we have found the site, so we sent that off to the Government and we were in discussions about how to further this because we were still supportive of a school at Port Sorell and then, suddenly, the Rudd funding brought a whole different element to it and the next thing we knew it was before the Parliament and that is why we have the standing committee. It quickened to pace to a certain extent because our undertaking to our community was that when we had the results of the surveys, the feedback forms, that we would come out and present to the community and that is what we had undertaken to do. So we were thinking that the end of May was a good time to come back and then, suddenly, the BER funding came around which has increased the flow, and so now we are here. It has been on our web site for two or three weeks.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I know you were talking before about a private school to fill the vacuum if a public school was not forthcoming and that council did not necessarily have preference. Would it be fair to say, though, that council would strongly support a public school in Port Sorell? Is there any distinction at all in council about the desirability of public over private?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - The gut feeling is that most people out here would want a government school I think because there are a lot more opportunities. But, from council's point of view - and this is with my mayoral hat on - if the government school was not forthcoming and we had a non-government or private school saying they want to build here then it would be silly for us to say, 'No, sorry, we are going to hold on for a government school.' I think the Government would be very aware that if a non-government school did get going out here, then that could in fact decrease the numbers that are going to go to their own schools anyway, so it is death by a thousand cuts, to a certain extent.

**Mr WHITELEY** - With no control over it.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - In addition to that the advantage of a government school is that there will always be people-pressure to make certain that the next two or three grades or the next whatever is put in. If it goes to a non-government school, and they might have, say, K to year 2 - and I am not suggesting a model - but if they did, then they may have a school down the road, that is years 3 to 6, which could be 15-20 minutes away, and so there is not the pressure on them to extend, whereas if a government school was here there would be fairly quickly, I believe, the numbers to support a K to year 6 or K to year 10, but that would be another 20 years, or whatever, down the track.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Mike, just a couple of questions, to follow-on from Ms O'Connor's query: the commitment by council is obviously strong for a school, and you have just clarified the preference, with your mayoral hat on - and I think we all agree with that. But that

same land then would be available under your strategic plan - but probably under different circumstances, fiscally - to a private operator?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes.

**Mr WHITELEY** - So your commitment is that you are not going to be prejudiced against a private operator. If they say, 'We want to build a school, Mike', you say, 'Yes, we have some land there, we've set it aside, we'll sell it to you', okay.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I am going to have to confer here, if that is all right.

**Mr MONSON** - Certainly the discussions I have had with a couple of community groups, the strong preference is for a public school.

**CHAIR** - Of course, it is, yes.

**Mr MONSON** - However, if that was not forthcoming, they believe that a private school would be a better option than having no school. But also with the concerns that the mayor highlighted, there already have been some discussions with a private school about the situation that you have discussed and this council is placed in a very awkward position. So at the moment, we have deferred all those on the basis that the outcome will be determined. So we have put that on the backburner, waiting to see what your recommendation is and what the Government's decision is - but there is certainly a strong interest in the public school.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I am sure there would be. So for clarification, the land that is there now would be made available, basically, free of charge to the Government for a public school or you would sell it to the State Government?

**Mr MONSON** - We would have to negotiate.

**Mr WHITELEY** - How deep is the commitment?

**Mr MONSON** - To give you a bit of the history, going back before my time, over 20 years ago, the Government owned Camp Boomerang and the council owned Camp Banksia - it was a land swap.

I guess we are currently looking at the future of Camp Banksia - we have a strategic plan review going - and I guess all those things would be put on the table for future discussion.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - To help with that, the land swap was also to involve the Port Sorell Bowls Club, which was crown land at the time, in some extra dollars, so that is why that happened.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Mike, you are in a unique situation because you are a teacher, you are a councillor, you are the mayor and now you are a parliamentarian, so with all those hats on, would it be fair to say that as other evidence has been given today and other suggestions put to the committee that we are not here to discuss the adverse impact or whatever, we are here to look at a brief of whether or not Port Sorell deserves a public

school, would it be then fair, once that recommendation was made - let's presume it was made in the positive, yes, there should be a school - that in a way that would bring Moriarty and Wesley Vale to the table to discuss their own futures anyway without any interference from this committee or from the Government. They would have to sit down and work through what that will mean for them, either separately or collectively?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think it would be fair to say that all of those schools are very aware of the impact, but they are really worried as well, and to expect those schools to sit there - the P and Fs to represent themselves and so on, you need to get a working group together to go through those issues and have a look at where to go and help direct because I know there are schools around the State, probably between the sizes of 25 to 60 that are viable, good schools in their communities. They have the one in Sassafras and in Moriarty it is my understanding that enrolment was as low as 42 kids and now it is up to about 80, I think, and is a viable school.

So just because they may lose some numbers, it does not mean they cannot be viable. I think that is really an important aspect. We have the students that come from out-of-area to go to those small rural schools because they want their children to go to places where it is smaller and they can get what they believe is more connected. But that is not to say Port Sorell should not have a school either.

That is the thing with this municipality - each of those schools are good schools, and Port Sorell will be a great school as well so I do not have any concern, but I think over time the schools will start to begin to say that they are not viable now and what are they going to do?

**Ms FORREST** - Death by a thousand cuts.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I have another question which is a little bit left field but I just picked up on your comments about the survey and the feedback from the over 50s, and I think we have had some other evidence today. It just occurred to me that at the moment it has been a seachange for a lot of people who have retired here. It is a great place to retire and I have it on my own agenda - that is where I would like to be - but in a way as the older people retire they leave their families in Devonport, Burnie, Ulverstone or wherever because probably the services such as the school are not here and I am getting to a point. In a way we have some other issues, too, because if grandparents come here to age and maybe become unwell or whatever and there is no reason for their family to come into this part of the municipality because there is no school, do you think it opens up other challenges then for the provision of health services and care for older people because their families are further away? Do you reckon that is what is driving that group to say, 'Please give us a school because maybe my daughter and son-in-law and my three grandkids may in fact want to come here but they will not. But they would and they are going to be close to me and I know I can ring them up if I am sick'. I know it is a bit left field but -

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think part of it is correct. I think the demographics of this area show that it is an ageing population as it is all around Tasmania, however, I think there are 230 students who bus from here as well and I think one of the leading factors of people I have spoken to in Devonport is that they would consider coming here now if there was a



school because they could see that they would not have to do all that travelling to get the kids in sports teams and they could actually see it as a base.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I have heard some people, not on this committee, who say, 'That's just an aged care facility out there at Shearwater', that is in the cohort, because that is where the older people go. Yes, that is true but it does not have to be that cohort. I am attracted as a 49-year-old and I am sure we all are to come here if the services were here and if we have kids who need primary school education so in a way there has been this perception built up because there is no incentive for maybe some of those other younger families to move here en masse. Is that fair comment?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - We have really good medical services here and I think that we could attract other professional people who want to come and live and work here if there was a school -

**Mr WHITELEY** - That is my point, we will not get those people to come in without the school. All it will do is perpetuate the aged cohort because, at the end of the day, they will be the only people who will be really enticed to come here.

**Mr MONSON** - On page 9 of our submission on the demographic analysis it says in that that most of the region's growth occurred in ages 30-plus during large parts of the net migration. At the same time there was some gain in residents aged 0 to 14 so some of those younger families are coming out here -

**Mr WHITELEY** - Sure, but not in the mass that you would probably would expect them.

**Mr MONSON** - Probably not in the mass, but there certainly is growth of the younger families.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Yes, but we also heard evidence that they come for the first five years and then they are suddenly confronted with this issue of, 'Now I'm going to have to send my kids to wherever', -

**Ms FORREST** - Yes, I was going to question that witness, but we ran out of time.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Yes, then they often say that they will move back into town because that is where the sport will be and whatever.

**Mr MONSON** - It was also said that there were some losses at ages 15 to 24. They could be having three or four children in the family and as the older ones are looking for work will be travelling they then leave the district. I just note there there is some growth at those younger ages with younger families moving in.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I suppose I went a long way around for a short cut but to build a fuller, more wholesome, more balanced cohort will only happen, in my personal view, if there is a school here that will attract on an equal basis the younger families. Without that my personal prediction is that it will continue to be an out-of-balance cohort.

**Mr MONSON** - Also part of the strategic plan we did and certainly part of the economic development identified that there was a lot of opportunities for light industrial and that

brings young families. For example, the One-Care Centre brought probably 40 to 50 workers often with young children so in part of our strategic plan review we have rezoned quite a substantial part of land to light industrial. Through the Department of Economic Development they basically believe there is an opportunity to double that type of industry here which again will bring young families into the area.

**Mr WHITELEY** - If there is a school.

**Mr MONSON** - Yes. We certainly support a school.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Thanks

**Ms FORREST** - I just want to follow up on some of the comments you made about the impact on the other schools. You said it's not the council's view that there should be a closure of any existing schools and that they will survive. Surviving is one thing but providing an education that is appropriate for the kids is another. There seems to be a lot of difficulty in establishing what is a most effective size in student numbers to ensure that kids at that particular school get an appropriate education. As a teacher, does that raise concerns for you? You say Moriarty, for example, was down to 40-odd students at one stage. If this school was built it could go back to that potentially. If you look at the figures and the number of kids who come from Port Sorell to Moriarty, it could potentially go back. At what point do you think it becomes unsustainable in the educational, rather than the financial, sense?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - It is interesting, I think Sassafras Primary School has about 58 or 60 -

**Mrs BUTLER** - It is 53.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - You couldn't find a better school in the State with the education outcomes. There are a lot of studies that show that the best size for a primary school is between 250 and 300 because you can offer more experiences. Sassafras Primary School probably won't be impacted as much as Moriarty, I am guessing there. There are quite a few kids who come from Bakers Beach to Moriarty Primary School. I think once the school has realised what is happening there is a greater chance for those four schools - Port Sorell, Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras - to look at their staff that might be music teachers or specialist teachers, to share in the municipality so that no school will be missing out. It would be wrong of council to come in here and say, 'We want a school at Port Sorell and we understand you're going to close two of these schools'. That is not our role because that is not how we see it.

**Ms FORREST** - But you do acknowledge though that it could be like a death by a thousand cuts, slowly and surely they could be eroded away to the point that they aren't offering the best educational opportunity for the children that go there? Do you accept that?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - No, because I don't equate numbers with best educational opportunities.

**Ms FORREST** - But some of the number crunchers will at some point, though, won't they?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Well, they might. I know there are a few schools around the State that have 15, 25 or 37 kids and they are good schools.

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**Ms FORREST** - Yes, I'm not saying that, I am asking if you accept that it is a possibility that we could see that.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I would like to think that the school community would say, 'We are not providing the type of education that we want for our kids in these areas because of our numbers and this is what we need to do'. I would rather that come from the school community than somebody in Hobart saying, 'We've got to get rid of 20 schools so let's get rid of these two'.

**Ms FORREST** - I hear what you're saying, Mike, but look at Waratah. I know this is a separate argument, but we have four students at Waratah and the community is still saying that that is appropriate.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - And you're asking me whether their education is going to be less. It depends on the variety of the program, it depends on how you organise that program.

**Ms FORREST** - My point is that a community is always going to say, 'Our school is good. It's viable and providing a good education' - whatever that is. It is a challenge, though. The proposal before us is a school at Port Sorell but you can't ignore the potential flow-on effects.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think you'll find that when you are presented by Moriarty, Sassafra and Wesley Vale tomorrow they will equally say, 'The school is the hub of our community and you're going to close it. Then what happens to our community?' Right next to the school at Moriarty is the fire brigade and emergency services. They have their Christmas party in there and the whole school and the community is there. It is a real focus.

**Ms FORREST** - That's my point. But you accept there will potentially be an impact on them?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think everybody, even the principals, accepts that there will be an impact but it's how you respond to that impact and at what level it becomes detrimental to the students. That is yet to be seen. I did not agree - and it wasn't Paula, it was some of her minders - their first response was, 'If there is a school at Port Sorell, we will have to close others.' There were no studies, no research undertaken for that, just a mindset. I think we don't need to have that mindset.

**Ms FORREST** - Graeme Hay talked about how people come here when their children are babies and youngsters but when they get to school age they leave. Can you qualify that at all or whether you can support that comment? If they do, where do they go and why do they go? In realistic terms you could say someone living at the back of Somerset will have to travel further than 10 kilometres often to get to their school but they don't leave that area because their kids get to school age.

**Mr WHITELEY** - To be fair, Ruth, Graeme said that some do; he did not say all. If that were the case there would be no kids left here.

**Ms FORREST** - No, I'm not saying that, I'm saying that he made the comment that some do.

**Mr WHITELEY** - Some of the feedback was that it's too hard. He said when it particularly got to an issue of after-school sport and those sorts of things.

**Ms FORREST** - Yes, I am just asking him to clarify if that is the case from his experience.

**Mr MONSON** - You hear some of that but I think that can happen to all communities. I lived in Scottsdale and when our kids became teenagers we spent all our time on the road to Launceston. They were good at sport so we had to make a decision that we'd probably be better off in Launceston. I think that happens in every community around Tasmania, it depends on what the interests of your children are. If they are good at sport or music or something else, and it is burden with travelling you would probably make that decision. We don't have any statistics to back that up but anecdotally there would be some people who would make that choice.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - We have tried to list the major advantages and disadvantages as highlighted by the respondents. Port Sorell Main Road is quite good, but people don't leave themselves enough time to get from point A to point B and it doesn't help when you have buses there at crucial times holding up traffic. That becomes a bit of a frustration, I think, for the travellers on the Port Sorell Main Road who go to Devonport. The other advantage is if you have 230 kids cycling and walking to school that is so much healthier than the situation we have at the moment. Port Sorell would lend itself to cycling and walking and having those kids going to and from school with their parents, a perfect situation. We don't have that at Moriarty and Sassafra because of the nature of the schools, because they draw from farmlands.

**Ms FORREST** - You wouldn't let your kid ride a bike on one of those roads, either, not with the trucks and things on it.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - No. There are some advantages to having a school here population-wise and for the future. We have to look at emissions, costs and carbon footprints.

**CHAIR** - Do we know how many kids travel by bus from the Port Sorell area to Wesley Vale?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think I said 230.

**Mr WHITELEY** - I think someone said there were 30 kids who were taken by car and I think the other was 200 on buses.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - There are 300 kids at Port Sorell.

**Mr WHITELEY** - And about 200 of them go on buses and about 30 are taken by parents.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Some of this information is probably a tad out of date because I noticed on page 11, where it talks about 'Port Sorell has very few local jobs', would the aged-care facility have changed that percentage number reasonably?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think what they were saying is that there wasn't a really big industry in Port Sorell. Most of the people travelled out, although there are some tourism ventures, but now with the aged-care facility they say that one bed is worth one job indirectly -

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whether it's the cook, the cleaner or whatever. It is a 60-bed - it is not there yet; I think it's around the 20 mark, but don't quote me on that. Right next door now is the childcare facility, which can cater for 60 and the medical centre has moved to there, so there is a hub beginning. I think when people say, 'Oh, medical centre, school, what more do we want?' Three years ago that wasn't the case. Even though it is a little bit out, it is probably correct. There is not one big employer but they are starting to get infrastructure that will make it a very good town, similar to some of the ones on the east coast.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - I did note in the submission from the childcare centre that they talked about not really being able to reach their full potential because people continue to drive out and it's probably easier to take a child in the car with you into Devonport rather than drop them off here. It's probably an extra hour less that you have to pay for them to be in care and that ends up making a difference to what you can get from working. So a school would assist all those potential areas to grow more.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think that is when we had a lot of responses from the over 50, 60 and 70 group.

*Laughter.*

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I was trying to cater for everybody. A lot of them noticed that with a school there is a chance to have further education opportunities for adult education as well for those other LINC programs, an on-line access centre. And wouldn't it be great to have a school situation where you could at least cater for all these things and have that the hub so you are going to start a school where they will see adults and lifelong learning happening all the time because we were able to do that. That is unlike a lot of schools where you have to add on things or there is not the room. We have the perfect chance here to make sure that we get it right from the word go - first up.

I think that is why there were a lot of positive responses from older people because they could see the advantages to the community as a whole. They could see their grandchildren coming out and a lot of the grandparents out here want to walk their grandchildren to the school and be involved. It would provide a real connection for our elderly people here and that is why I am really pleased we have the aged-care facility because here up to three years ago people had to go into other aged-care facilities outside. There was no transport, so for the final stages of their life they were moved out of the community they had lived in and their friends could not visit them because there was no transport. They were well looked after but they were sent somewhere else to die when they really should have been able to do that here.

**Mr MONSON** - The other thing is that you do have very strong community groups out here. The Rubicon ladies have a waiting list to get in - there are 60 or 70 ladies in that group - the Probus club of 70-80, a very strong Lions Club and I am sure that a lot of those groups would be active with a school. We have very strong Landcare groups so I think that they would also support that community building.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Have those groups not engaged with the Wesley Vale school? That is what I glean from the submissions - that the local people here just did not connect with Wesley Vale. The Lions Club did not spend time there -

**Mr GAFFNEY** - They did because the Lions Club the Rotary Club and the council in Wesley Vale, for example, they have a wetlands area there that has received a lot of support and when the school fair is on there are a lot of people who help, but there is not that hands-on touch because a lot of the people in Landcare and such would have to travel to Wesley Vale and it is a lot of mucking around. But if the school was right here, it would be a different matter. The Pitcairn reserve right next to it is one of the areas that the Lions Club and the Landcare group here look after. So to go and get your grade six kids or grade four kids and take them across there, we have community gardens here. We have a whole lot of learning environments that are not being accessed because the kids are up to 15 kilometres away in another building.

**Mr BEST** - I really have only one question but I just wanted to say a couple of things first of all. I think that the council planning for this area with regard to how you have mapped it out has been exceptional. I know that it has been very difficult because I have had a few people in my office and it has been a tough thing working a way through that so I say hats off to the council for the forward planning and strategic planning for the area. I think that it is good that you have held onto the school site or land for this school.

I was interested because we have had the map tabled today, provided by Mr Armistead, and it is a colour chart of students. Those attending Wesley Vale are signified by the blue dots. The green dots are Sassafras and the red are Moriarty. We had a contribution which I thought was pretty much on the mark from Ms Dennison earlier on about the connection of students in the community and the connection between the students at Port Sorell not having that sense of community in going to Wesley Vale.

It seems to me that there probably is strong argument and community connection above all else and when we are asked to look at the issue of Port Sorell school that the committee has been asked to look at, I will be happy to do that and make a decision based on what we have heard.

I think that there probably will still be some separate discussion further on - so let us break the issues up as we have been asked to do - but there may be some ongoing need for discussion about what would be the education models if you looked at two areas. I am wondering what your thoughts might be on that. It is a tough one. We are going to have representation tomorrow but do you think that there is a community connection geographically at Port Sorell with regard to the school? If that does exist and we accept that that is true and we should act on that, does that then mean that the same thing might apply at, say, Moriarty and Sassafras?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think you are right. I think Port Sorell, Moriarty and Sassafras have a good drawing power. I think Wesley Vale is to a large extent drawing from Port Sorell. If you look at Sassafras Primary School, you will see that that draws people from Panatana, Parramatta - out that way - so that is needed there. That has always been the case and it will survive. I think eventually you will see where the patterns of growth are and I think that that is a possible way forward.

**Mr BEST** - Sure, I am not trying to -

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I do not see Moriarty's numbers decreasing dramatically but there will be some.

**Mr BEST** - I think you are right, it probably will have a new intake. If you had a school here, current people who would be going to Moriarty would probably keep going.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - We are getting a little group at Bakers Beach now but those councils will have to make a decision about whether they take them back to Port Sorell or whether they continue through to Moriarty if they work in town.

**Mr BEST** - That is okay. I guess all I was after was that there is probably going to be some work that needs to be undertaken, separate to this decision.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I am very aware of the time, but I wanted to give the mayor an opportunity - it is almost a Dorothy Dixier - to paint a short visual picture of the difference that a public school at Port Sorell would make economically and socially. So short and sharp, how would it transform this place to have its own school? I know we have heard lots about that in submissions, but the core of what it would do to transform this town.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think we will have 5 000 people here by 2020 and I think if there is a school here over the next two years, I think we will have 5 000 people by 2015 or 2016. I think it will accelerate the growth rate of this area no end because I think it is the only thing that I can see that is really holding the area back to becoming a community, regardless of the age of people coming in, because older people want to see schools as well. They want to be involved with young people and youth. I would see it probably would be a four or five-year increase to the numbers.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, good time to close. Thank you very much for your time.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW .**