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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON WEDNESDAY 29 AUGUST 2001.

REECE HIGH SCHOOL - INFRASTRUCTURE AND ESTABLISHMENT COSTS FOR THE REBUILDING OF THE SCHOOL

Dr MARTYN FORREST, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

Mr SIMON BARNSELY, DEPUTY SECRETARY, CORPORATE SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND **Mr CAREY McIVOR**, DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, BARRINGTON DISTRICT, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WERE RECALLED AND RE-EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Wing) - I'd like to open the meeting and thank everybody for attending. First of all, we have no apologies but we have a change in the composition of the committee. I would ask Mr Donnelly to advise us or perhaps Mrs Napier would you like to inform us of the change and the representation.

Mrs NAPIER - I am just happy to advise the committee that Mr Rene Hidding has withdrawn from this committee based on the decision that we would like Mr Hidding to do the Public Accounts Committee and I'm the new person for the Public Works Committee. That's been done, obviously, as a consequence of the changes that have occurred within our party in relation to the leadership positions.

CHAIR - Mrs Napier, I extend a very warm welcome to you. We are very pleased to have you on the committee. I would like to express appreciation to Mr Hidding, who has retired from the committee, for his valuable contributions to the operations of the committee while he's been a member of that.

We welcome Mr Barnsley and Mr McIvor and, in addition, we are pleased to have you, Dr Forrest. Mr Barnsley and Mr McIvor have been sworn, so would you be good enough just to take the oath. For the purposes of the record, I would like to ask you your full name, residential address and occupation.

Dr FORREST - Martyn Antony Forrest, Secretary of the Department of Education and I reside at 760 Sandy Bay Road, Sandy Bay.

CHAIR - Thank you. We did seek additional information and I'd like to thank the department for providing this. Personally I found it very helpful, valid and relevant, and information that was important for our committee to have in dealing with this submission.

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Dr Forrest, would you care to make comments before we ask you any questions?

Dr FORREST - I would be pleased to do so. First of all, I welcome the opportunity to be here today. Information was sought by the committee in its letter of 22 August and subsequently, orally, the secretary of the committee asked Mr Barnsley for additional information which relates to some of the data about school usage and that has also been provided in your paper.

In my letter of 28 August, I sent you a number of documents: the first was a response to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works by the Department of Education in the matter of the rebuilding of Reece High School; the second was an attachment in the form of a map which shows the home addresses of students attending Reece, Devonport and Latrobe high schools; and the third was a document headed *Enrolment Statistics 1970-2001 - Reece High School, Devonport High School, Latrobe High School* and I would just like to confirm that everybody has those. I would like to, in response to questions from Mr Donnelly, table two additional documents. One is a graphical representation of that data that I've already referred to from the three high schools with the addition of Sheffield District High School added.

CHAIR - Thank you, we'll take those into evidence.

Dr FORREST - The other one, to complete the picture, is the 1970-2001 data on Sheffield District High School. So you effectively have, in graphical and tabular form, the enrolment data from 1970-2001 for Reece, Devonport, and Latrobe high schools and Sheffield District High School. I would just appreciate some affirmation that that was the information the committee sought so there is no misunderstandings about that.

CHAIR - I thought we sought information from the feeder schools going back to 1970 as well.

Dr FORREST - There was no reference to that in the correspondence.

CHAIR - This was a verbal request, but we'll proceed with the information we have.

Dr FORREST - I'm probably in a position to give you that information because we do have it, but maybe when it comes up and the need for it arises - I don't know if we've got all the feeder schools but we've got the feeder schools for Devonport High - yes, we do have it.

CHAIR - Thank you. I thought we had asked for that, too.

Mr BARNSELEY - My understanding with the high schools, those are certainly available and I could table those now -

CHAIR - If you don't have enough copies, we can have copies made.

Mr BARNSELEY - and of course with Sheffield District High, that doesn't come in feeder schools but certainly -

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CHAIR - No, we didn't ask for the information for the feeder schools for Sheffield, just Reece, Devonport and Latrobe.

Mr BARNESLEY - If I could make one clarifying comment on those, where a feeder primary schools feeds two high schools, in the example of Spreyton, we repeat all of the Spreyton enrolments in each high school, rather than split them between the schools.

CHAIR - So that applies to Spreyton only, does it?

Mr BARNESLEY - Oh, to any of the schools and East Devonport feeds Devonport and Reece.

CHAIR - I see.

Mr BARNESLEY - Many of the feeders feed many schools.

Mr GREEN - Does the map give an indication?

Mr BARNESLEY - No.

CHAIR - But it would show the trend though for the general area, wouldn't it?

Mr BARNESLEY - Yes, it would, certainly.

Dr FORREST - The particular information sought by the committee, in my view, from the letter, was the details of any competing development cases, including one that contemplates spreading the 1400 student enrolment over neighbouring schools in any required refurbishment of these schools, as a result. In responding to you, the department has made a number of assumptions on the basis of the previous evidence and the supplementary information asked, that the neighbouring schools here referred to Devonport and Latrobe.

In the document provided to the committee, we have firstly suggested - and this is important, I think - that we do not believe there are, indeed, any realistic development options other than the one contemplated in the original submission to the Public Works Committee, which is to rebuild Reece on its original campus. Secondly, in response to the committee's request, we've provided a hypothesis and some supporting data and commentary in which all the students presently attending Reece and likely to attend Reece over the next several years are divided between the Devonport and Latrobe High Schools.

We argue there are no realistic development options if all the matters that should be taken into account are, in fact, taken into account. These would include a number of things that I would like to just mention to you. The first is, quite clearly, the obvious issue of capital expenditure but, secondly, there is recurrent expenditure; thirdly, I think is what I would call 'proven means' of achieving educational outcomes, schools are there for a purpose and the purpose is to achieve good educational outcomes for their students and there are ways of doing that that are better than other ways and I think they need considering. The fourth point is, I think, any decision or any discussion on this should consider the views of the Reece High School community; fifthly, I think it should

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consider the views of the community more generally; sixthly, I believe it should consider the government policy in this matter; and seventhly, I think it needs to consider the balance between the needs of individual students and the needs of all students in this State. Quite often we are faced with a decision that has to balance those priorities. Finally, I think it should consider what I would call 'our experience in achieving a significant change in educational systems'. Change is not often made just by writing something on a page; it usually involves long periods of consultation, communication and negotiation to achieve particular events.

To my mind, these factors aren't exhaustive, but they are matters which have to be taken into account in developing any other development options and they were matters taken into account, by the Government, in deciding to rebuild Reece on the existing site. The matters include a mixture of tangible and intangible factors and certainly require now, and did require then, careful balancing. We have tried to bring out in the paper, especially in relation to the Devonport-Latrobe hypothesis, how some of these factors interplay. I would emphasise at this point too, that the decision the Government made was to rebuild Reece. Other issues, specifically pertaining to questions of size, to design, to focus, were appropriately left for subsequent debate, planning and consultation. I would just like to make the distinction between the two types of decisions.

Had Reece not been the subject of an arson attack, there would have been no question of closing the school and no question of considering possible hypotheses of different school provision in this area. The burning down of the school did present an opportunity to look at alternatives and, indeed, it required such a process, but this process necessarily had to take into account as many of those who have voiced their opinions have not taken into account, a wide range of factors which contribute to the educational outcomes of students and schools.

To my mind schools aren't just buildings, as if often just assumed; they're focal points for communities throughout Tasmania and, equally, students are not a homogenous mass who can merely be distributed where it is most convenient to send them for up to 13 years education. All our experience tells us that there are a wide variety of factors which contribute to successful schools and successful outcomes for students in those schools and that many of these are of relatively intangible nature, and they require careful nurturing and careful management.

In introducing significant educational change in Tasmania we go to very great lengths to ensure that the change is understood and supported by the community. I would point, as an example, to a couple of recent such consultations: one over the review of the inclusion policy where very substantial consultation built over a long period of time, substantial support for that policy, which is nevertheless controversial. I would point also to the curriculum consultation presently under way which we propose to take between three or four years to actually effect. This is a vital issue; it's an important issue and it's important that everybody - parents, teachers and indeed students - have the capacity to contribute. Our experience is that where that kind of consultation and that kind of negotiation is not done, particularly in respect to an issue as important as the closing of a school and the support and the goodwill of all the key players is not achieved, then the results will likely be disappointing.

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To my mind, this is simply too great a risk, in a situation like this, to take with young people's lives; they only go to school once, it's not a dress rehearsal. All the evidence suggests that educational achievement is the most significant arbiter of what I call a 'person's life chances'. We cannot afford, however attractive the window of opportunity, to make decisions about schooling which do not take into account all the factors known to influence the success rates of schools and students. It is for these reasons, not just the financial reasons, that we believe that there are and were no realistic development options other than rebuilding Reece High School.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Dr Forrest.

Mr HARRISS - Just reflecting on Dr Forrest's evidence, Mr Chairman. Dr Forrest, you said something to the effect that the burning down of Reece High delivered an opportunity to consider alternatives. One of the things that has challenged some members of this committee is the fact that almost immediately following the school being burned down the minister made the statement that Reece High would be rebuilt. That, in my view, is somewhat of a contradiction in terms when I reflect on your evidence to the committee just a few moments ago, that the burning down delivered an opportunity to consider alternatives. Clearly, alternatives were not going to be considered because the minister had made the unambiguous comment that the school would be rebuilt. Do you have a response to that?

Dr FORREST - Yes, indeed, I do. I believe, and I said in my evidence, that these alternatives were considered. I think you have to take into account those several facts - and I think I listed about eight of them - and I think they all lead you in a fairly single direction, that no huge analysis of a lot of these things would actually have made the situation any simpler to resolve. There were financial issues, but there were also issues about our great experience in achieving change.

Since I've been the secretary of the department there are now ten less schools than when I took over. These have been closed under both the previous Government and the present Government and each of them involved a very substantial consultation with the community and often for up to a period of two or three years. My argument is not so much that the decision was made very quickly - it was, I agree - but, I think, in that period of time, these factors be considered, but it is that to get to successfully effect a massive change like this if, for example, the committee's hypothesis was the alternative, of moving probably 200 children to Latrobe every day of the week for the next whenever, I think you could almost guarantee in advance that unless you'd taken the community through that over a period, I reckon, of at least a year to two years, it would have been unsuccessful. It would have been opposed and you'd have had disruption in the lives of those kids at that school, in the teachers, in the school community, that is too great a risk to take with such a precious thing as education.

Mr HARRISS - Am I to understand you correctly that you said all of those issues, which you mentioned in your submission, were taken into consideration?

Dr FORREST - I believe they were.

Mr HARRISS - Prior to the announcement by the minister?

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Dr FORREST - Yes, indeed. The school burned down at one o'clock on the Monday night-Tuesday morning and officers of the department including Mr Barnsley, Mr McIvor and Mr Dow went to the school on Tuesday morning, along with the minister, and there were significant discussions about these matters. These are professional educators and people who had a professional experience in asset building and so on; we have a good understanding of the buildings available, discussions were held during that day, including the possibility of accommodation at Latrobe, Devonport and Don and of keeping the kids in the primary schools for an additional year or two years and so on, these things were considered.

But to my mind, the more important things were actually an assessment of the intangibles in all of this because you just know on the basis of experience of recently joining schools together in Chigwell to form Mt Faulkner, in Queenstown to form Mountain Heights, in George Town and other places like that, you have to do this with great care over a period of time. To my mind, these were the compelling reasons and they will be backed up by an assessment of people, particularly the people in the asset area, that substantial work would have needed to have been done - say, you took the Devonport-Latrobe hypothesis - at those schools and the capital saving would be nowhere near the difference between zero and the total capital cost of redeveloping Reece. Our estimate is it could have been between \$1 million and \$4 million, but we have to say that that estimate is a very preliminary one because we haven't done the kind of work, but then you add the recurrent costs of transporting and then add in all of the intangibles, and I think this inevitably leads to one conclusion - and, I believe, if you were to ask me today, it would lead to the same conclusion.

Mr HARRISS - I guess, sitting on the outside listening to those comments, and you've just said that inevitably you are convinced that any different process would have lead to the same outcome but, nonetheless, there are so many issues which would relate to the development of a new school if indeed there was none there previously. Given the demographics of the area, given the educational opportunities which are available at adjacent or surrounding schools and it simply would be impossible, would it not, to adequately assess all of those issues with regard that school being rebuilt given the fact that it burned down? It is just impossible to consider all of those issues to make that kind of decision. You talk about recurrent issues with regard to funding and others related to demographics -

Dr FORREST - I think you're suggesting a decision-making model that I don't think is actually used in large organisations. I think it is possible to look at all those issues at, initially, a relatively superficial way so you weigh them up. You asked me the question before about whether each of these factors were taken into account and I answered, 'Yes, they were'. Some of these lead to very easy conclusions and some don't and some, if you wanted to pursue them, you would pursue with very considerable analysis. So if you really wanted to do an analysis of the bus routes, you would have to get into some very technical material about where the kids were going, on what days and so on.

But I'm saying that decision making is essentially a moving up or moving down a level of judgments as you require more information. I'm saying that the evidence, across the issues, which to an educator and a person responsible for an asset base of more than a \$1 billion, clearly points in the one direction. That's the point I was making about the decision was made to rebuild the school, but not how it should be rebuilt, its size, and all

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those sorts of things. They clearly beg of a great deal more inquiry and information and I think it was reasonable in the circumstances, taking into account all of those factors, to make an initial decision. I don't think huge analysis of any of those things would change your mind, particularly because a lot of it's based on what I call the intangibles, knowing what happens to communities when they get their educational services disrupted and knowing how difficult it is to change patterns of behaviour which would necessarily involve, for example, quite a mingling if the committee's hypothesis was followed, of very different populations from East Devonport and Latrobe. As the committee is probably aware, there are significant differences between the Latrobe community and the Sassafras community about how their education is organised. I would suggest that is modest in comparison to the cultural mix that would necessarily result from a great number of students going from East Devonport to Latrobe.

It is not an insoluble problem but it is, I reckon, a fairly intractable problem in the shorter term and it would require very much greater time - and I'm talking not about time of making the original decision, but time between from the arson to effecting the solution that just wasn't available. I don't like having all those kids in Reece High School in temporary accommodation at the moment and great parts of that are unsatisfactory. There are issues with busing and car-parking; there are issues with sharing scientific and other facilities and we've got kids on a nine-day fortnight and so on, and it is not a desirable thing. Their years of schooling are going past and they won't return, so to go back to your original question, I think you can look at the totality of the issues and you could come to that conclusion quite reasonably, but then you need a lot more work to be done and I think we would have evidence from the documentation that we've given you, that we then did a very substantial amount of work to make the best possible solution.

Mr HARRISS - And you've indicated that the officers who accompanied the minister to the site are highly qualified educators, I accept that -

Dr FORREST - And highly qualified people in terms of assets so the manager of assets, Mr Gourlay, I think, was there on that day as well.

Mr HARRISS - Yes, there's no dispute about that. Recently, in my own research, I came across an article written by Graeme Harrington in the *Mercury* of February this year. It could hardly be disputed that he is not, likewise, a highly qualified educator of some substance in this State - a retired one, yes. In the article he referred to policies of the Government such as Learning Together and what that set out to achieve and he followed up from that matter by saying, 'We're talking about excellence in education' and he posed the very valid question, I guess, as to whether the expenditure of some millions - he was quoting \$12 million, but we understand that it probably won't be that, but it may - and whether the expenditure of such a significant amount of funds could not be better used in delivering what the Government's Learning Together policy sets out to achieve. That is, by upgrading some surrounding schools which could adequately cater for the needs of, and accommodate, the displaced students. You, no doubt, would have seen the article which Mr Harrington wrote and I would value your response to some of the issues he raised and some of which I've just touched on, particularly the policy of Learning Together and the delivery of excellence in education.

Dr FORREST - I think there's absolutely no inconsistency between the case before this committee, to whit, to rebuild Reece, and Learning Together; it is a manifestation of it in

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action, in my view, so I would make that first point. The second point I would make is that Mr Harrington wrote that article, admittedly as an ex-educator, but fundamentally as a journalist with an interest in journalistic things for which he gets paid. I'm not saying that he corrupted his professional view of anything like that but he's there to write articles in the newspaper and stimulate interest in particular subjects. My job, and my fellow officers' jobs, is actually to deal with very real problems on the ground in a practical manner and I would dispute, as I said in my opening statements, that Mr Harrington and others who've ventured into journalism on this matter, have really thought through each of the issues that need to be considered in making a decision like this.

I reckon it's a very superficial analysis to say it would be nice not to spend the \$10 million at Reece and to spread it around a number of other facilities. But that misses out on the fundamentals of my argument to you, that the intangibles of changing students, parents, and teachers' behaviour is a very great risk to actually effecting those outcomes that Mr Harrington and others would claim would result from just taking, perhaps, this simpler option, and I would dispute that. I just think it fails to understand the nature of the Tasmanian community and its belief that it should be and ought to be consulted and play a serious part in all of these things and this would have been a fundamental change, this would have been a school closure by government policy and the Government has a policy of not closing schools unless the community is in favour of it and clearly the community was not in favour of closing Reece High School.

Mr HARRISS - I guess my only challenge to that response would be that you've used terms such as 'superficial analysis by other people' but, again, the decision to rebuild was made overnight. Couldn't that likewise have the allegation levelled against it of being a superficial analysis?

Dr FORREST - The point I was really making was that I think one or two factors were taken into account. I'm suggesting to you that the Government took into account a great number of factors in all of this; that was a piece of journalism wanting to focus on one or two issues and we were saying that we were focusing on all eight or 10 of the critical issues that needed to be considered.

CHAIR - Any further questions?

Mrs NAPIER - It is not my intention to ask any questions. We've already indicated our position, that we believe that the proceedings of the committee have been compromised by the attempted politicisation of the matter and we'll not be actively participating.

CHAIR - Thanks, Mrs Napier. In making that decision on the fourth day, was the position of Latrobe High School taken into account and given any real weight?

Dr FORREST - I would have to ask you for a bit of clarification of that because clearly when the officers met on the Tuesday afternoon - I think Mr Barnsley and Mr McIvor were there - they met with the principals of all the surrounding schools, all the feeder primary schools, the college, and presumably other district staff and people like the facility staff from the department and they looked at all the possibilities.

They were looking at it in two ways, as I have indicated in here, initially as how to deal with this problem in the shorter term because it was then 6 December and we had

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schools opening on 15 February, somewhere around there - I apologise, I don't know the exact date - and we clearly had a very big task to find accommodation for the population of Reece. A number of discussions took place about potential options including all of those schools, particularly those within the Barrington district, and two decisions were made. First, that the shorter-term solution should centre on the Devonport High School because, for a number of reasons, it was a more straightforward option in terms of being in the city. We were able to acquire access to the TAFE Adult Education building and we could lay our hands on a number of terrapins or movable classrooms from other schools and indeed, a local government in one case, so we knew we could do it there.

There was a prejudice towards doing this because it kept all the kids together; they had been through a fairly traumatic time and their parents had been through a fairly traumatic time with headlines in the paper, if you recall them, and so on, and there is virtue in keeping them together in these circumstances. A whole range of alternatives were considered, including using Don College, the primary schools, and Latrobe, and in the end the decision was made there. But that was an assessment, in a way, about some of the longer-term; the same thinking was necessitated.

CHAIR - I'm not asking about the question of temporary accommodation in relation to Latrobe High School, but I'm asking what consideration was given to the future of Latrobe High School, its enrolment and its needs and the accommodation that it could readily provide on a permanent basis? What, if any, weight was given to that in the lead-up to the four-day decision?

Dr FORREST - I would respond, as I have responded to Mr Harriss, that all of these issues were considered. There are number of issues about Latrobe, particularly the issue of travel, and the map we have shown you indicates the kind of disruption that a lot of people would have to suffer to get there. The question of the future of Latrobe is, to my mind, a quite distinct question.

CHAIR - Not relevant to the determination as to whether or not to rebuild Reece or what effect the rebuilding would have on Latrobe?

Dr FORREST - My formal answer to your question would be that consideration was given to Latrobe to other options, even as far as Ulverstone, I think, in the first instance. The question of whether Latrobe has a viable future is, to my mind, a separate question and will not be resolved by any action in Reece. To take the committee's hypothesis further, I think the result of busing kids from Devonport to Latrobe would be extremely unpopular, would be resisted by parents and we would either have to mandate it with a level of an imperative that we wouldn't employ elsewhere and that, in fact, over a period of time parents would actually stop doing it. What we would then end up with is having, as we've put to you in the model, redeveloped Latrobe and redeveloped Devonport to accommodate these kids and say, roughly, on a 50-50 basis, we will be constantly under pressure to further redevelop Devonport as parents were quite unwilling to send their children to Latrobe and they wanted to keep them in the city. It is a separate question then of, is Latrobe with its present size a viable school, and to my mind it is. We run a great number of schools of that size and that the place to go, given its rural community nature rather than its city nature, would actually be to look at relationships with the primary school in Latrobe and, indeed, with the primary school at Sassafras. If you

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added those numbers together and looked at a district high school, which is often the solution in Tasmania in small to middle-sized country towns, you would have more than a viable district high school so I think the chances of bringing Latrobe in as a way of succeeding on the Reece question would be very high risk.

CHAIR - Would not the chances of Latrobe failing on the Reece question, be a relevant factor to take into account in determining what should happen at Reece?

Dr FORREST - And indeed it was. Questions were considered straightaway, that if Reece was built with a new school with facilities that were state-of-the-art, it would certainly attract other kids; it might well attract them from Devonport; it might well attract them from Ulverstone, and that is a consideration that was in the decision-making process.

CHAIR - So you obviously feel that a state-of-the-art new Reece High School is likely to attract students who would like to go there instead of the schools they're attending at the moment?

Dr FORREST - No, I don't think that. I think that's a superficial argument - not your argument but the argument with parents about that - that ultimately what attracts -

CHAIR - But I put that too; I put that argument as well.

Dr FORREST - I think its superficially attractive and we have quite a number of examples around this State where new buildings in no way attract student participation. The fundamental issues for parents, in a sense, are the quality of the principal and the teaching staff, and the quality of the curriculum offered in the school. Whilst it might look good to have the new buildings, and they are important in the sense of morale, when the analysis gets a bit beyond, 'That looks a nice building', it is actually these much more fundamental and educational considerations that attract parents. The answer in Latrobe is to run a good school in Latrobe.

CHAIR - And is that not what is happening now?

Dr FORREST - I didn't say that.

CHAIR - No, but I assume that is happening now.

Dr FORREST - Indeed, and a lot of work is being done by people like the district superintendent with Latrobe. I think if you look at the population projections for Latrobe that the ABS recently published, you will in fact see in contradistinction to Devonport and the other places actually rising in the Latrobe community area.

CHAIR - When did you last visit Latrobe High School?

Dr FORREST - About two and a half years ago.

CHAIR - What is the surplus of classroom accommodation on the present numbers?

Dr FORREST - I'll have to ask Mr Barnsley to give you the details of that.

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Mr BARNESLEY - I don't have that information here.

CHAIR - Are you aware that they have a surplus of classrooms to requirements? Is it a significant number in your impression?

Dr FORREST - Again, I won't speculate on that but I would just remark that generally across the State that is our situation. On the Commonwealth data we probably have a surplus of space of about 25 per cent over the Commonwealth's definition of need, so Latrobe is not particularly different from many other schools.

CHAIR - So I take it when you participated in the four-day decision making, you were not aware then of the extent of any surplus accommodation at Latrobe?

Dr FORREST - We were well aware. The point I've already made to the committee was that Mr Barnsley, Mr Dow, Mr McIvor and Mr Gourlay, arrived with maps and plans of all the available schools. We could go away now and we could tell you any school in the State, how many spare classrooms, what the thing is and that data was readily available to the people involved and on the spot they indeed took the plans with them.

CHAIR - So you would have known about it at that time of the decision making, you personally, Dr Forrest.

Dr FORREST - I, personally, was on leave at the time.

CHAIR - Oh, I see, you didn't participate in the decision making.

Dr FORREST - No. I was enjoying the benefits of the William National Park, I have to say.

CHAIR - Oh, I see.

Mr BARNESLEY - I was going to add that you asked a specific about Latrobe and if that was a matter of information that was required, we can certainly generate that. It's a fairly flexible number because it depends on how a school chooses its timetable and uses the space it has, and schools do find benefits in extra space so it's a judgment. Devonport is running at the moment a lot more tightly than the principal might wish to do so. Would that not be a reasonable statement, Carey?

Mr McIVOR - That's very true.

Mr BARNESLEY - And there's a level of utilisation of classrooms and timetable and it can vary from 70 per cent to 95 per cent and we are very much on the upper boundary, absolutely, at Devonport. In the case of any school across the State, the superintendents are well aware of the space in a school at any time and it's a source of constant discussion. I reference the recent media story that you might have seen in the *Examiner* where Elizabeth Daly has finished a study of the schools in the West Tamar area whereby Summerdale is under pressure but there's capacity at Glen Dhu, West Launceston. We're very sensitive to pressure both where it's high and low and therefore at any time, as we did travelling up to Devonport on the day after the fire, we have plans we can discuss and what the options are. People have a very good knowledge through the principals, district superintendents, our annual work program processes and it's not as

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though when something happens we need to go back and research it all, it's a part of our day-to-day management.

CHAIR - Just to shorten discussion on this, we were told in evidence that there is a surplus capacity of about eight to 10 classrooms on the current enrolment at Latrobe High School. I don't necessarily want a lengthy answer on this but is that not a relevant factor in the decision to rebuild or not rebuild Reece High?

Dr FORREST - It's one factor. There are a number of high schools, primary schools and other educational facilities around there so that was considered. I mean, there are a lot of other schools that, if you look at the population changes over the last 20 or 30 years, have shown very significant variations. For example in George Town, we used to have a primary school, I suspect, that could take 800 or 900 children. What we are doing, as Mr Barnsley suggests, is that we take those things into account and we try to work towards a better use of the space because clearly every bit of space costs us in a sense of security and in terms of lighting, heating and so on, but it is also an opportunity for many schools to actually put on a better program as a result of their kind of space. I would argue that Devonport Primary School is a good example of that. It is a large school, large area, built for rather more kids than it presently has but the principal has been innovative - and I could ask Mr McIvor to talk about that - in using those facilities and it is an opportunity for principle as well as a potential cost.

Mr GREEN - Could I just ask - now that he has raised that - Devonport Primary and the decision in 1998 to rebuild Nixon Street, was there similar consideration given at the time?

Dr FORREST - I think that would be fair comment. Nixon Street burnt down overnight, a substantial proportion of the school, and a decision was made the next morning to rebuild it. Now, it wasn't on the huge scale of this but it was a job that ultimately, I think, was well over \$1 million and certainly, yes, the Devonport Primary offered a possibility but again the decision was made that there were cultural differences, there were historical differences, there were patterns of enrolment and behaviour that would make that a very difficult decision to effect in having a good school. I would argue yes, I accept that there is excess space at Latrobe, there is excess space, to be fair, in most schools in this State and that is one factor that has to be considered. I would prefer it otherwise but the population tends to move where you don't want it.

CHAIR - Well, you mentioned Devonport Primary, I mean there must be a lot of excess space there because the enrolment peaked in 1971 at 1 104 students and this year it is down to 278.

Dr FORREST - Yes, you can't conclude that the difference is entirely reflected in classroom space because often these peaks were taken up with terrapins and temporary classrooms, but I think that is a good indication of a problem we have. I think the average occupancy in the Arthur district is less than 50 per cent of the space.

CHAIR - And there is a general trend, not in all the primary schools but in several of them in the catchment area for Latrobe, Devonport, Reece, of decline in numbers. East Devonport primary, on the figures you have given us, peaked in 1979 at 596; it is now down to 363. The Miendetta school seemed to have peaked in 1980 at 406; now down to

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273; Hillcrest, not so much change, having peaked in 1992 at 383, down to 345; Spreyton has increased, the current enrolment of 392 is the highest it has had and there has been a steady increase; and Wesley Vale, similarly has peaked this year, but the others have declined. Latrobe High in 1976 had 699 students, down to 376 this year.

It is not surprising perhaps there are eight or 10 classrooms not used at any particular time. I am not sure what the condition of Latrobe High was when you were last there, Dr Forrest, but it wasn't good, in my view, the condition when we were there, although no doubt frequent work is being done within it. There is a lot of need there and I would have thought - and I would invite your comment on this - if a state-of-the-art Reece High School is built and the students of Latrobe High and their parents see that and compare it with what they are enduring at the moment there would be, I would have thought, a strong desire - and we were told there is already - for a number of students to want to move from Latrobe to Reece High school. I invite your comments on that and if you could tell us the capacity of Reece High School and its capability of taking students from other schools if rebuilt?

Dr FORREST - I thought I had dealt with the issue of the potential of a new school state of the art and so on. Yes, it is one important factor that I argue is superficially attractive to parents. We don't like having schools that are not well maintained and that are not up to date. I think you have got to be very careful here talking about things like what I would call the superficial fabric, as opposed to having things that are keys to good learning so schools been wired these days, schools being well heated and all this sort of thing are quite important. We would prefer, we would wish to spend a fair amount more on capital and certainly we have a fairly strategic capital program which brings the schools up to scratch in terms of need.

At any one time, with the bulk of Tasmania's schools having been built in the 1950s, that is a difficult problem and it is a problem we face every day. I think the key to a school enrolment, and I think nearly all the evidence would suggest this, is the culture and the reputation and the results that are produced by a principal and his or her teaching staff and that ultimately in the end that will be the arbiter of whether parents go to a particular school. There are examples of that from around the State where schools that maybe have a downturn in enrolments, get a principal who invigorates the school and you just see it taking off. That is, as I said, part of the frustration we have of all the time having to match the asset to the demand.

I thoroughly encourage principals to increase the quality of their school and increase the demand and I would rather be dealing with that problem than quite the reverse.

In terms of the particular capacity of Reece, I will ask Mr Barnsley to talk to the plans for Reece in the new -

CHAIR - It's just the numbers. What is it being designed to accommodate? What numbers?

Mr BARNSELEY - The long-term capacity is 500 with a maximum of 600. The constraint in its high school years are the specialist learning areas. The general learning areas of the standard classrooms obviously are quite flexible. You can use a specialist learning area as a general classroom but not the other way around. So the specialist area is built for 500 but capacity to accommodate up to 600 and the maximum capacity of Reece is 600.

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CHAIR - So it's been designed to accommodate how many on a normal basis?

Mr BARNESLEY - I expect the enrolment range will be in the order 570 to 600.

CHAIR - And at the time of the fire it was 570?

Mr BARNESLEY - Yes.

CHAIR - So there would be on that basis, other things not changing, the capacity only to take 30 students from any other school or from other schools?

Mr BARNESLEY - Yes.

CHAIR - In the details provided yesterday it says 'at no stage from the first day to the present has there been any substantial expression of concern over the proposal to rebuild'. Would you not agree that the views of the Latrobe High School are a substantial expression of concern because they certainly were expressed to this committee as such, and I understand in the submission in response to the advertisement, the Latrobe community as well as the school made a submission which I would have thought was substantial. Is it not considered that the submission opposing the four day decision to rebuild Reece by the Devonport Chamber of Commerce is a substantial expression of concern over the proposal to rebuild?

Mr Paul Evatt, a significant member of the Devonport community who was on the mayor's consultative committee we were told, was opposed to it. Can they be downgraded as not substantial expressions of concern?

Dr FORREST - I think we're perhaps arguing over semantics here. We're not suggesting that - nobody suggested - that the school should not be rebuilt. The word 'substantial' is used and that's sufficient in the sense of a large number of people from amongst those who've expressed views about it - in other words, a substantial proportion of those who responded. I quite accept that individual submissions made the point that their authors did not wish to see this as the solution and I would have been surprised if it had been otherwise.

CHAIR - So when 'substantial' is used in your submission you intended that to relate merely to numbers, is that so?

Dr FORREST - Indeed. I just point out in terms of the submission from the Devonport Chamber that actually in their submission they say they have no fixed view on the ultimate delivery of the model, size or location of the facility through which this vision can be achieved. They don't actually say don't rebuild it. They say we would like more time for consideration but they do not express a position of opposition to it.

CHAIR - Do you not agree that the weight of their submission was opposed to the very quick decision to rebuild and a desire for other alternatives to be given greater consideration?

Dr FORREST - Certainly it does but it also says things like 'we appreciate very much the difficulties in which the loss is proposed for the school community'. Yes, it certainly

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does express a preference for another solution; I don't think there's any pretending otherwise about that, indeed as did the Latrobe School. But the role for the Government is to take into account all the factors here and all the expressions. I think it would be fair to say on the ground at the time in this Parliament by members of both sides voice was given to the needs to rebuild this school.

CHAIR - It was certainly not a submission supporting rebuilding of Reece High School, was it?

Dr FORREST - Sorry, which one was that?

CHAIR - The one we're discussing, the Devonport Chamber of Commerce.

Mr BARNESLEY - I think that one thing I drew a distinction here was Dr Forrest's ... submission. The submission you're referring to was received in March in response to the Mary Binks committee.

CHAIR - Yes, 23 March.

Mr BARNESLEY - The decision to rebuild was announced the second day after the fire -

CHAIR - Oh, the second day, not the fourth?

Mr BARNESLEY - There was the fire on Monday night, on the Tuesday we were on site and working with the principals - and I believe it was the Wednesday morning in the Parliament the decision was made. The first question was in fact in the Parliament on Tuesday the 5th seeking undertakings on rebuilding and after that decision was announced, in my view there was one round of opportunity for the community and the greater public to respond to the decision.

Then three months later, with a great deal of constant coverage of what was happening next at the school with the colocation, we sought the submissions. On my analysis of the submissions that we provided to you in the second submission to the committee, there were 11 group submissions in support of the proposal and 62 individual ones. I have distinguished the group and the individual here. There were three group submissions either suggesting more time or against the proposal - the degree of being against was variable; there were three and 8 individual against. The group submissions in support were Hillcrest Primary School Council, Devonport High P and F, Nixon Street Primary P and F, Devonport High Council, Spreyton Primary Council, Reece High staff, Reece High Council, Reece High P and F, East Devonport parents of a parent meeting, East Devonport Primary School Parent Association, Devonport High staff, plus the 62. I think I was just seeking to draw the distinction between the first round of commentary, if you like, which was both through questions in the Parliament, media coverage, media debate, editorials, opportunities for people to write to the minister and so forth, as opposed to a formal construction of consultation around it on the second round.

Dr FORREST - If I can just make one other comment in respect of the Devonport Chamber of Commerce - I accept the point, as I have admitted, that their submission is not favourable to that prospect but they then make statements such as 'on the same site within the same delivery framework which existed for the majority of the last century'.

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Now, I just think that misses the point about what we were trying to achieve. We went into a substantial consultation about what people in Devonport wanted. It may be on the same site but quite a different delivery framework is being provided and much of the consultation has attended to that point.

Mr GREEN - I think that Dr Forrest has largely answered the question that I was going to put in relation to the submission from the Devonport Chamber, given that they seem to me to be basically looking at educational outcomes in the Devonport area and could well have been speaking, even though they are not spelling it out, about building one - largely doing away with Devonport High and the existing Reece High. I mean, who knows what was in their minds when they put the submission together. The point is I think that the consultation - and I would like your feed back on this - in terms of the nature of the educational outcomes on the site were what was in fact delivered as a result of the consultation process that took place as a result of the mayor's committee. Would you concur with that fact, that in fact they wanted consultation on educational outcomes in the Devonport area -

Dr FORREST - I believe that's what occurred and, in summary, the chamber commends to the minister seven points. The first is about the community consultation process which they wished to have abandoned - and clearly that was not acceptable to the Government to do that.

CHAIR - Why did they want to it abandoned?

Dr FORREST - Well, they say due to an 'emotive and irrational nature of much of the comment generated within the community'. I suspect that if you are an elected member you probably have a slightly different view about that kind of consultation. The second point is that they say, 'Decision making be conducted by experts who are required to properly consult interest in the future delivery of education,' and so on. Well, I believe we did that and I think we did it well. We had a consultant from America who was an amazing man and brought the community together to think about these issues in a very productive way, so I think we could give that one a tick. 'The decision is made with due consideration to deliveries of the world's best practice and in line with Learning Together' - I believe what we are doing at Reece will be in line with world's best practice, that is the minister's ambition for the education system, and it's in line with Learning Together, that we give consideration to the economic benefits to Devonport. That is a more subjective thing how to do, but I believe what we are doing there will bring proper economic benefits to the people of Devonport because it is not as though we are giving up education provision in Devonport. The fifth one is that we 'give to integration of tertiary educational opportunities with any developed facility to assist in developing a culture of continual learning'. Well, that is what we are doing the whole time. We have life-long learning policies, we are trying to bring on-line and open learning to as many people as possible.

They then talk about delay for six months for further consultation and then they say 'consider all innovative programs such as Intelligent Island for incorporation into any additional services to be provided in the facility with a specific reference to IT'. Well, one of our proposals in the whole policy is we have a centre of excellence, which at the moment is based in Hobart, that we will make the high school effectively a networked part of the centre of excellence. So my argument would be that, with some exception to

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the initial comment about emotive consultation, we will in fact address almost all of the points made by the chamber in the new building.

Mr McIVOR - If I can just add to finish that point off. The project steering committee for Reece High School, prior to our first meeting with this committee, met with the Devonport Chamber of Commerce to take them through the progress to date - that was with Tony Ritchie and Ray White from the Chamber - and they were very comfortable with the evolution of the project. They were very supportive and in terms talking about how they could establish meaningful links with the school in terms of business and enterprise education within the Devonport community. There was no hint of disquiet about the way it had evolved since their submission.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr KONS - Just to move away from the fact that there were statements immediately after the fire about the rebuilding of the school, the question I'd like to ask is, bearing in mind your expertise on these matters, there are fundamental principles that you make decisions on a rebuild of the school or not. That's, as you said earlier, size outcomes, transport, all those sorts of issues. I believe the suggesting you're making that, discarding those comments, that the analysis of this project was based on those principles that with any other rebuild of a project you would apply the same reasoning as was done with this one?

Dr FORREST - Indeed, that would be true.

Mr KONS - And the matter of enrolments such as the comments made by the principal of Latrobe High that if this school is rebuilt there would a shift in enrolments, that comes down to a matter of finetuning with the curriculum, the teaching and other issues and that will be a factor within the State, irrespective if a school's finding its numbers going down. It's very easy for it to have a look and do an assessment and finetune the delivery of education. On that basis, the rebuild of this school and the issues that Latrobe High may have are both easily solvable within this sort of a framework. Would that be an accurate assessment?

Dr FORREST - I would agree with that and we have policies and positions in place. We have a district superintendent based in Devonport with a responsibility to work with 29 principals, I think it is, and with a responsibility to have a principalled relationship with 29 principals in dealing with these issues. We have a three-yearly review process of each school where they plan, the work out where they need to go in terms of their school community and so on. If these things emerge as issues, as it would be reasonable to suggest that is happening in Latrobe, that is a matter that is quite resolvable, in my view, within the totality of the department's operating arrangements.

As I have said before, schools do go up and down in terms of their popularity, in terms of the strength of their culture and the strengths of their learning program and I think the issues in Latrobe can be addressed within Latrobe.

CHAIR - Was any assessment made as to a comparison of the recurrent costs of Devonport High, a rebuilt Reece High and Latrobe High School as compared with expanding Devonport High and Latrobe High and not rebuilding Reece High in terms of recurrent costs?

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Dr FORREST - I'm sorry, you'll have to repeat that. I was slightly lost there.

CHAIR - Was there any comparison made with the operating costs per annum of Devonport High as it is now, Latrobe High as it is now and a rebuilt Reece High compared with the annual operating costs if a decision were made not to rebuild Reece High but to accommodate all the students in the area in Devonport High and Latrobe High?

Dr FORREST - I don't know that in the course of before the decision was made, but I think that discussion occurred. But, as I would say in response to the question from Mr Harriss earlier on, these kinds of derailers are known to the staff because the overwhelming driver of the recurring costs of running a school is the number of students. So, so many of the factors are related.

All the factors to do with teaching, all the factors to do with teaching support, administrative staff, all the factors to do with the provision of computers and with school resource package are all student driven. They are the overwhelmingly large proportion of the recurrent cost. If you have that in two schools or three schools, the drivers are fundamentally the same. Yes, I would accept that, depending on their architectural configuration, some schools are more expensive than others but compared to the costs that are driven by enrolments, which in aggregate are the same wherever the kids go, they pale in comparison.

CHAIR - In leading up to the decision to rebuild Reece, was any consideration given to such factors?

Dr FORREST - I'm saying automatically it was given to such factors and whichever the configuration in terms of recurring costs the expenses would be very similar.

CHAIR - So the group making the decision took those factors into account?

Dr FORREST - Well, I'll ask Mr Barnsley, he was part of the decision making.

CHAIR - If so, could we be given details of that, if not now later?

Dr FORREST - It depends what you mean by details. It is known how much flows from a student. It doesn't matter whether that student is at Devonport High School or Reece High School or Latrobe, in terms of recurrent cost it goes with the student, so it's a percentage of a teacher, it's a percentage of the SRP, it's a percentage of the -

CHAIR - What I am asking is, was any calculation made on that or not in leading up to the decision to rebuild?

Mr BARNSELEY - In leading up to the decision there was not an explicit calculation because - it depends which decision we are talking about.

CHAIR - To rebuild, the one that was announced within two days of the fire.

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Mr BARNSELEY - The answer to that in the discussions that Mr McIvor and I held with the principals, we were all conscious that all of the dominant costs, as Dr Forrest has said, were teacher and SRP driven

Dr FORREST - Which are in fact student driven.

Mr BARNSELEY - And therefore the cost differential there is negligible; we knew the schools in question and we knew that that was not a significant factor. The next question becomes in the design of the school - that we have presented to the committee in the submission here - that attention was given to good design principles to minimise those costs. In broad terms I believe there is about 25 per cent less floor space in this design than the Reece that was destroyed.

CHAIR - We only have about two minutes left. I just have two quick questions. We had discussions at Devonport about the advantages of high schools with 400 to 600 students, it seemed to be the optimum number, compared with those, and there are a number in the State over 700 and the quality of education by comparison, is there any greater range of subjects available in the schools with populations over 700 than those with populations of 400 to 500?

Mr McIVER - The capacity of a school to offer a curriculum does get back to numbers of students, so a larger school would have, in theory, the capacity to offer more subjects. Why I say 'in theory' is in reality now that differential has virtually disappeared because of the availability of on-line learning so we have a number of smaller secondary schools who can access subject offerings from other sites so the kids in that school aren't disadvantaged, if you like, by being part of a smaller school.

CHAIR - And that's happening now, is it.

Mr McIVER - That's happening now.

CHAIR - And it will obviously happen to a greater extent in the future.

Dr FORREST - If I could just give you one example to finish on that, I think four years ago we had a little over 100 kids in year 11 and 12 in high schools and district high schools and we now have in excess of 700. We have only made those decisions to allow those schools to make those offerings in 11 and 12 consistent in believing we have a good curriculum either at the school or, as Kerry says, through on-line learning.

CHAIR - Thank you very much Dr Forrest, Mr Barnsley and Mr McIvor. We appreciate your help.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.