

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

PORT SORELL COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROPOSAL

Ms RACHEL BROWN, PRINCIPAL, AND **Ms MARIA PEROTTI**, SECRETARY, SASSAFRAS PRIMARY SCHOOL, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Finch) - Thanks very much, Rachel and Maria, for coming in nice and early this morning.

Ms BROWN - As we have stated in our submission we had a community meeting when the BER funding was first announced to discuss whether or not Port Sorell school, as our community felt, should go ahead. We were not really a part of whether or not our funding should go to Port Sorell because that was never addressed as far as our school was concerned. Our community meeting felt very much that if the community at Port Sorell wished to have a school then they should have a school, as a community in its own right. It was a very nice even meeting for a while but when we started to unpack that a little more and talked about the impact on the communities at Wesley Vale and Moriarty in particular, we felt very much that we needed to say that, yes, Port Sorell should have a school but so should the communities at Moriarty and Wesley Vale. So I do not know how that works or where that leaves various pre-schools or primary schools. Obviously the impact on Wesley Vale is huge. That was a feeling from our meeting.

We also talked quite a lot about the Moriarty community. We actually felt that they were really in a similar position to us. They would be as an entity in their own right even if there were a school at Port Sorell. That is where we felt we ranked. We did not think that the school at Port Sorell would impact on us at all. We thought that every community deserves a school, and it certainly is a growing community. The only other concern that we did have, and we did talk about it, was that Wesley Vale is very close to Port Sorell. I have driven that way this morning and it is a matter of seven minutes from Wesley Vale to Port Sorell and there already is a really lovely school at Wesley Vale.

CHAIR - Let us say a school is developed here. If people still want their children to go to Wesley Vale, just tell me about the restrictions they might have. Are they bound to this area if a school were established here or could they make the choice and still keep the kids going to Wesley Vale or to Moriarty?

Ms BROWN - There are school areas but the parents have the choice.

CHAIR - Would they then need to get them to the school themselves?

Ms BROWN - There are buses that run that way for the high schools. A lot of parents from Port Sorell and Wesley Vale work in Devonport so a lot of those children are dropped off by car.

Ms FORREST - As their parents go to work?

Ms BROWN - Yes. The community here has obviously been growing. I have not been here for ages, but it is right out in the wrong direction. It is not growing towards Devonport. You have to go out of your way to come here. So, for a lot of people that does not suit. I do not know about the report or the results of a survey or anything like that. I know my parents' perspective and the Moriarty parents' perspective and that of some Wesley Vale people - that is all.

Ms FORREST - We have a map here and the green dots are where the kids come from who go to Sassafras, and the red are Moriarty and the blue are Wesley Vale. Sassafras kids predominantly come from that area where Sassafras is. So it is your understanding that there would be minimal impact on Sassafras enrolments even if a school were built in Port Sorell?

Ms BROWN - Yes. We have three children from Port Sorell, two are Maria's, but they were already at school when they moved out here, and one other at Sassafras, so we do not take from that area at all.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I know this is a real hypothetical, but if there were a school here, do you think that you would change your mind and send your children here?

Ms PEROTTI - - No, I would keep them at Sassafras.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Because of the smallness?

CHAIR - If you are still teaching there?

Ms PEROTTI - I am in the office. My children only have another couple of years there anyway. I do not see the point in dragging them away from an environment where they are happy and they have their friends and everything, just to move them for a year or so. Even if they were in kindergarten or prep I would probably still keep them there.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - There would probably be a lot of parents like you that would feel the same way in that same situation?

Ms PEROTTI - Yes.

Ms BROWN - At our meeting we tried to put it into perspective and say, okay, let us look 10 years down the track when all the kids who are at the school currently have gone through the school. So all the Wesley Vale kids have gone through and we have a whole new cohort of parents. But it is really difficult to do that and say chicken before the egg or whatever. Those parents may then say, okay, the school is at Port Sorell, we will choose to send our children to Port Sorell. We thought that was fair scenario. But you still have the 75 children who live in the Wesley Vale area and the 50 children who live in the Moriarty area, plus the 25 children at Bakers Beach, wherever they choose to go.

Mr BEST - I was very impressed with the sense of community at Sassafras, particularly when you took us around that little tour and we saw the hall -

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - The shed. It is a glamorous shed.

Laughter.

Mr BEST - The music shed with the silly old cow. I could see there is quite a lot of local content. We heard yesterday of a very strong desire from Port Sorell to also engage in that sense of community in Port Sorell with the students and the parents. Looking at the chart that my colleague referred to here, it does seem that there is probably a community in and around there. I am not saying Moriarty has not one as well, but they do seem to sit in the middle a bit more, unfortunately for them. I know they are coming on soon, so they will probably give me a dressing down for saying that. Do you want to comment about that sense of community and the support that you had around the shed and things like that?

Ms BROWN - The sense of community at Sassafras is amazing. I had 15 years in high schools before I went there. I went there from Latrobe High School and they just had discussions about annexes at Sassafras Primary School to Latrobe Primary School. I thought that was a really good idea when I was at Latrobe High. I did not have a clue. I had 34 children when I went to Sassafras and within a couple of years we had taken our children out of where they were and brought them out to Sassafras. It is an incredible environment. It is amazing. We have a school association with team committee members and extra parent members because we cannot fit them all onto the committee, so we do it both ways. If we ever have a working bee, every parent that can come will come. The parents trim the hedge and maintain quite a lot of the school grounds. They built a lot of that shed. We got an initial grant - and that is why it is called a shed, I suppose - to put up the colorbond. But the parents have done the rest of it and they donated money.

Ms PEROTTI - They donated money for the inside. We asked them and they said we will all donate money to fix the plaque on the wall and that helped finish it off.

Ms BROWN - We had a community dinner in there to open it, with our Spudfest, and we had 150 or more people, and they were not all parents. They were community people. We have a community partnership with the local church and we are even in the process of building some business partnerships with local farmers who do not fit into that partnership. So a lot of the stuff that we do is community-based. That is why we have a school chaplain who works up at the local church. We have an organic veggie patch supported by local farmers. They donate the mushroom compost and whatever we need for it. We are growing 120 apple trees. We have raised asparagus for the Latrobe nursery and we will be selling that back to them, and we are looking into some business partnerships within our community.

We are investigating links with the Lorinna community at the moment. Their kids up there do not actually go to school, they so far away from anywhere, but one of the teachers at my school has a contact with that community and has just had a phone call from a lady in the Northern Territory asking if she could enrol her children with us and they would be living at Lorinna. We discussed distance and she did not realise how far it was away. We are looking at some ways of perhaps being able to meet with that community and support them because the school is the environment that they want for their children.

Mrs BUTLER - And you have 26 computers for 53 children, is that right?

Ms BROWN - Yes, we do. I cannot think of any other school that has that linkage.

Mrs BUTLER - They are going to make the road, too, up over the top of Lorinna. I spoke to the mayor on Monday.

Ms PEROTTI - That won't make it easier; it will still be a bit far away, but there are things that we can do.

CHAIR - Rachel, how long have you been at Sassafra.

Ms BROWN - Eight years.

CHAIR - So you have seen good growth since you have been there, like 20 extra students?

Ms BROWN - Yes.

CHAIR - Do you get a sense there might be some more growth in the area or is that about tops?

Ms BROWN - Our predictions keep us around where we are. We do tend to pick up children from home schooling. Every year we tend to pick up a couple of children, like the children that were picked up from Deloraine. We do not often have children from Deloraine - that far - though often from Elizabeth Town. We do pick up children whose parents are particularly looking for a small school environment. Children that we have from Frankford were in a bigger primary school but they were looking for a smaller one.

Ms FORREST - They do not come in kinder and prep so they will come later on.

Ms BROWN - Yes.

CHAIR - When we saw the boy yesterday from Deloraine, I assumed that one of his parents might work at Devonport and drop him off on the way through for convenience.

Ms BROWN - No, they catch the Redline bus at 7.30 in the morning.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - That is dedication, isn't it, to come to school.

Ms O'CONNOR - This is more a question of how you might empathise with the people who live here who want the school because when you were talking before about that community around the primary school, can you see the arguments for a school here?

Ms BROWN - Yes, totally. We had real difficulty trying to work out all the things that I talked about with the other communities. I do not think putting a school at Port Sorell will give it its community. The community has to be a part of building that school. I do not think building a state-of-the-art school, putting it here and saying, 'There you go, send your kids there', gives them a community.

Ms O'CONNOR - I don't think the community here wishes that is how it would operate with the school.

Ms BROWN - At Sassafras things have happened gradually over the last eight years but the community have built the shed and it is an amazing for them to have done.

Ms O'CONNOR - As a community member in this region, within the wider community, do you think there is an acceptance of the need for a school at Port Sorell, given the growth here and the number of children who travel on a bus every day? It is a hard question to answer because you are talking about perceptions.

Ms PEROTTI - It is hard for me because I live here and my children go elsewhere so it is hard to say that. We do some things in the Port Sorell community ourselves, but we more push towards doing activities with the Sassafras area. We do not really mix with a lot of the people in Port Sorell itself so I cannot really say. It is hard for me because we are on the outskirts of Port Sorell but do not have a lot to do with the Port Sorell community itself. Because my children go to Sassafras, they would be thinking Devonport, but they are basically with the Sassafras children. I do not know what the consensus is in the area itself. I have family members who live at Wesley Vale so I hear their perspective on things and I went to school at Wesley Vale so I am sort of in the middle really.

CHAIR - Yes. We did get a sense from evidence yesterday there there is not as strong involvement by parents at Wesley Vale as there perhaps would be if the community here had their own school and that they would be more involved with their school.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I think seeing the school yesterday, Mr Chairman, was terrific - just to see the kids.

CHAIR - I think we have a sense of how you are feeling about the situation. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Ms PEROTTI - No.

CHAIR - Thanks again very much for hosting us yesterday and giving us the chance to have a look around and I think we were all wishing that we had the idyllic childhood that Sassafras children have.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I nearly did at Winnaleah.

Laughter.

CHAIR - We are very impressed with the ambience that you have established there and the kids look pretty happy with their lot. I know that you will be interested to see our report when it comes through. I think we are reporting early October so you will see then what we are recommending. Thanks very much again for coming in this morning.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

Ms RHONDA HALL, PRESIDENT, AND **Ms NICOLA OLIVER-SMITH**, MORIARTY PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Finch) - Rhonda and Nicola, thank you for taking the time to be with us today.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - We are here on behalf of our school association for Moriarty Primary School. There was an article in the *Advocate* on 12 March which quoted Premier Bartlett and stated:

'I believe it is time to think about the welfare of the kids. I also believe that country, regional and rural schools are often more than just a school in the community. They are the life blood of the community.'

That is Moriarty Primary.

On Wednesday 25 March 2009, North-West Learning Services general manager, Malcolm Wells, said any discussion of the possibilities for Moriarty and Wesley Vale schools is now over and that the schools involved could now focus on 2009 and beyond. This was in response to the community meetings held at very short notice at which the Moriarty community resoundingly voted to keep our school open in its own right. We are a small primary school, a country school that enjoys strong community support and the benefits that come with being a school of our size. We actively teach a values-based curriculum which our whole community sees as important.

We held a Christmas-in-July event where all stakeholders contributed to formulating values and vision for our school. This was a well-attended meeting. Once this had been done the children then rated the values for themselves in degree of importance and their views were integrated into the curriculum. We rebranded the school with new values and a new logo, which revitalised the school and reaffirmed our importance to the Moriarty community. We have a whole-of-school behaviour management policy and our anti-bullying policy is very clear. Our students are very clear on expectations and can identify and deal with bullying issues if they arise. We have very little bullying in our school and our children's playground behaviour is, on the whole, exemplary.

Our new classroom was built and opened in October 2008. The Investing in Our Schools Federal money funded this. We have had minor works done to improve our school, including new carpet, new furniture, new blinds, a new shed, a new throw-ball wall and painting of some of the interior and exterior parts of the building. We have just commenced a playgroup from birth to four as we now have room in our kinder with the new classroom. We have six children in the group at present and that only started three weeks ago. We also have pre-kinder in terms 2 and 3 to enable children to become familiar with the school so that kinder is an easier transition for children and parents.

We have 82 children, or 77.5 FTEs, at our school. In 2005 we had 45.5 FTE, which is an increase of 23 in four years. I have a copy of the projections for the next five years that we have done as a school; that is not based on the Education department. They are conservative figures, but show consistently that we'll have between 77 and 80 children up until 2014.

Our children have a number of academic opportunities. We have whole-school number grouping for prep to 6; a literacy support teacher from prep to 6; Unlocking Literacy aide for 4-6; a reading recovery teacher in grade 1; a social skills group program in 5-6; music from K-6; health and PE from K-6; Indonesian from 2-6; science from prep to 6, which they really enjoy; ICT or computers from K-6; arts, which includes visual, music and drama lessons; multimedia; soccer and netball teams; swimming from 1-6; and a music van which has been provided by an outside provider. We are also involved with Aurora basketball and Aurora football and Tennis Australia. Our 4-6s go on a camp every two years. They are involved with cluster bands in 5 and 6 and all classrooms have access to computers which are regularly upgraded. We have five to eight computers per classroom.

Our academic results are solid across the school. They are measured through school-based and department-based testing and you've got the results of our NAPLAN testing in the submission. Moriarty provides a well-rounded education for our children, and staff actively seek out extracurricular activities for children. We have the Anzac Day award State winner's peace poster for Lions. We have our Apex public speaker State winner, Tayla Radford, in Perth at the moment competing at the nationals. We have our Dairy Tasmania Moriarty cow. We go to Agfest every year. The children see three performances a year in and out of school. They had a puppet performance two weeks ago. They attend small-schools sports and cross-country. They have a sports expo for 5 and 6 and a sports expo for 3 and 4. They are part of the North-West Primary Schools Sports Association athletics.

In our school demographics, 82 per cent of children are in area; 45 per cent are from Moriarty and surrounds, which includes Bakers Beach; 37 per cent are from Squeaking Point. Out of area, we have eight students from Port Sorell, six from Latrobe and one from Devonport. We must make the point that all our Port Sorell students were originally in area and then moved to Port Sorell; we have not taken any children out of area from Port Sorell. We have a very high retention rate and very low turnover of students at Moriarty Primary School.

The *Advocate* on Saturday 11 July had a government must-do list for the remainder of 2009. The last box on that list stated:

'Start to get some early results to improve Tasmania's student literacy, numeracy and boost potential in qualification rates.'

Well, we could tick that box off for you with our NAPLAN results and our retention rates. We don't need to be closed. We need to be left to operate as the wonderful, high-achieving, values-based and community school that we are. There is no logical reason to close the school. It has a growing role and that achieves academic and social results such as we do. Please consider our children's sense of community that is a direct result of attending a small rural school with a very cohesive, highly qualified and very highly valued team of teachers and staff such as Moriarty has. We are not against a school at Port Sorell but not at the expense of our wonderful little community school. In the words of one of our parents we ask that Moriarty Primary School's uniqueness be recognised and conserved in this process.

We would also ask that in your deliberations about our school you consider the effect that this whole process has had on our children. It has been extremely unsettling for them and we are working very hard as a community school and as parents to lessen the impact on them, but this has been extremely difficult in the last week or so as the children actually saw the architects' plans and were shown where things were going and what was going before the BER funding is pooled, so it had actually got to the architect stage and surveying and Department of Education -

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, the principal showed us what was happening there yesterday.

CHAIR - Were the kids excited about the renovations?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Absolutely, and then it was 'No, we can't do it again'.

Mr WHITELEY - It is on hold.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Well, it is on hold.

Mr WHITELEY - To tell them that it will not be done would be a wrong message.

Ms HALL - The only problem with Moriarty Primary School is the design of the school and it has been neglected for quite a few years, unfortunately. This is why it is a perfect opportunity for us to take this. We are very proud of the Rudd Government to introduce this to Australian schools and we were really excited about it until we heard about this.

Mr WHITELEY - It was about \$300 000?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - For us?

Mr WHITELEY - Yes.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - It is a total of just over \$900 000.

Ms HALL - Also this map is not quite up-to-date. There are actually a few more families from the Bakers Beach area and also Squeaking Point. We also have more from that area than is actually showing on this map.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - We have 25 students from Squeaking Point.

Mr WHITELEY - How many from Bakers Beach?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - There are eight from Bakers Beach.

Mr WHITELEY - And 28 from Port Sorell according to the Education -

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - No, Port Sorell is eight.

Ms HALL - We only have eight from Port Sorell.

Mr WHITELEY - The Education department says 28.

CHAIR - Is Shearwater separate?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - We have Moriarty 32.5, and that is 29, and Squeaking Point is 25 -

Ms HALL - Squeaking Point is what they would be classed as -

Ms FORREST - They would be counting those in the Port Sorell number.

Mr WHITELEY - They have a total of 42 others, which is not far off your mark so we are talking about 42 others.

Mr BEST - I reckon what they have done here is added the figures from Squeaking Point.

Mr WHITELEY - Anyway, these are the Education department figures.

CHAIR - We have 77 here as the number at Moriarty Primary.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - There are 77.5 FTEs.

Mr WHITELEY - So 25 at Squeaking Point, Bakers Beach eight and Port Sorell eight, so that is 41. That is about right. They have the total of that right.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Can we also talk to the survey or feedback things? Rhonda has some information on that. I went and spoke to Mike Gaffney last Friday evening and got some information from him, which was good, but a total of 1 958 forms were forwarded to homes in our area and 208 of those forms were returned plus the extra 15 on the Internet. I just found very interesting the fact that the original lot of forms that went out was about 1 300 or 1 400 to the postcode. There was apparently a glitch from the post office and then they had to send a few more out. That is an interesting statement because our postcode for the area is 7307, for most of the entire area, so that was interesting.

Ms HALL - I got one but the lady around the corner from me did not receive one and she is the same postcode.

Mr WHITELEY - Feelings about the Moriarty school are not in question - this is my personal view. I do not think we are here to debate whether or not the people of Moriarty would have voted to keep their school. I think that is a no-brainer.

Ms HALL - No, that is the thing you see. Port Sorell people, too, were actually on that survey and that is why out of all those surveys, how many were returned?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - They got 208 in hard copy -

Mr WHITELEY - A bit over 10 per cent

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - What they have done is because some are signed by Mr and Mrs they have doubled that number to 350-400 returns, which still gives it a very low percentage rate anyway.

Ms HALL - That proves there are not as many people as interested in a school at Port Sorell from that survey.

Mr WHITELEY - From the whole area?

Ms HALL - Yes, because he put that survey to Port Sorell people and to us, all direct areas, to focus on all of us.

CHAIR - What the questioning?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I question how many he has back. I work for the Health department and if we put out a survey or feedback or whatever you like from the Health department to our customers and do not get a 60 per cent return then it is classed as a field survey. So that is around a 10-20 per cent return even if you double it.

CHAIR - So whose survey is it?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Latrobe Council.

CHAIR - Latrobe Council sent it out and they have published the results?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - No, this is the Latrobe Council's submission. Mike was talking about it the other night and saying that he would double that because some of them have signed Mr and Mrs.

Mr WHITELEY - That is right he gave that evidence yesterday. If they go through and they are signed Mr and Mrs that is fair.

Ms FORREST - At the end of the day the survey is only one aspect of the whole story here, and surveys are only surveys. The purpose of our inquiry is to look at a new school at Port Sorell. I appreciate the importance of Moriarty school to the community there but I would like you to give your opinion about what impact a new school at Port Sorell would have on Moriarty, and even Wesley Vale for that matter, should a new school be built here. What do you think that would potentially do to the school community at Moriarty?

Ms HALL - The farming communities would be devastated because as far as I am concerned rural children have a right to accessible education as much as other children do and you are actually taking away two or three -

Ms FORREST - We are not talking about the school closing. I am asking if Moriarty continues, assuming the school does not close. If Port Sorell has a school, Wesley Vale has a school and Moriarty and Sassafras continue to have a school, what impact do you think a new school in Port Sorell would have on Moriarty?

Ms HALL - I have been told from the plans that a new school at Port Sorell would not cater from kinder to grade six.

Mr WHITELEY - Let us just clarify before we get off track. Our reference is to look at a new public primary school in Port Sorell and the evidence given is K-6. So let us go

back to Ruth's question. If a school was built in Port Sorell what do you think the impact would be?

Ms HALL - You would have some siblings going to one school and some siblings going to another, which would be a nightmare for the parents.

Ms FORREST - So let us say that a K-6 primary school is built at Port Sorell.

Ms HALL - If that were the case I would still keep my children at Moriarty. I like the small school; I think it is a better education. I have seen too many children fall through the cracks of these bigger schools. I have also been told by the committee from Wesley Vale school association that they have truancy problems at Wesley Vale. They are not very big problems but he is afraid that if a school goes in at Port Sorell then the truancy problems are going to fly out of control, being a coastal area. I was shocked because we do not have truancy problems at Moriarty; it is unheard of. It is a positive thing for the modernisation of Port Sorell but it will take away from the good standards of education for children.

Ms FORREST - The question I am wanting to drill down into is do you think it would mean that you would lose a lot to Port Sorell, potentially threatening the ongoing viability of the school?

Ms HALL - I do not think that we would lose many - probably about eight from Port Sorell and that would be it.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - But then those eight from Port Sorell have moved there since they started at Moriarty, so I would suggest that they would continue to come.

Ms HALL - A lot of rental families live in Port Sorell so to say that they would stay in that area is a question mark, whereas I have bought land at Moriarty and I plan to stay there for a good while. A lot of people in our area are in the same situation - they buy to stay.

Ms FORREST - If the footbridge is rebuilt back across from Squeaking Point to Port Sorell and that more directly links Squeaking Point to Port Sorell, and if a school was built here, do you think potentially you would lose the 25 kids from Squeaking Point?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I do not think so because they are farming, rural children and they deliberately come. They could actually go to Wesley Vale if they chose to - go to the bigger school - because the Education department is pretty good with allowing us to go through zones. So I do not think we would lose them because they come to Moriarty particularly for the smaller numbers. I think that is a big thing for our school.

Ms HALL - We have just had children from St Pats coming to us because they like the smaller school society. We are like one big family out there. You would have seen it yesterday. It does not matter what year they are in, they all look after each other. It is such a rare thing. I feel very privileged to have my children at a school like that because I came from a big school. To see the difference in the smaller school is just amazing. If I could have had the same education for myself I think it would have been really wonderful.

Ms FORREST - I do not think anyone is disputing the value of a small country school here. I am just trying to ascertain -

Ms HALL - Sorry, I am a bit passionate about it.

Ms FORREST - That is all right. Most people and witnesses have agreed that Port Sorell deserves a school. It has a big enough population; there are enough kids here.

Ms HALL - We are not totally against it. We just do not want it to be the result of -

Ms FORREST - I am just trying to determine what negative impact there could be on Moriarty.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I do not think it would take our Squeaking Point children, because they are rural children. I think there is a generational thing that is coming through in the farming communities as well. You have grandparents there who now have grandchildren at the school. I think there is a lot of that in that area. With a new school at Port Sorell, people are going to look at the opportunities there. But people will also look at the curriculum. We have a really good curriculum at our school. So I think, on the whole, parents look at what you have to offer. We are a rural school. We offer rural opportunities and I think that they would take that into consideration.

Mr WHITELEY - I would just like to follow up on some questions from Ruth. I would like to just say to both of you that it would appear there might be some misunderstanding in relation to your view of what we are about here today and your role to try and save your school. Can I just assure you that that is not what this committee is about. The terms of reference are very clear in that we are looking at the educational issues within the region. It was driven by the legitimate push by those in the Port Sorell-Shearwater area to have their own school. Never have they given evidence that any of the other three schools should close. Nor have we asked questions that would point to that. If that is the message that is indirectly being given to your parents and friends and so on, that is an incorrect message and will not help this process one little bit.

We are about looking at the need for, the legitimacy of, and the benefits of a school in Port Sorell. I do not disagree that you may very well keep every one of your children. You have 41 acknowledged students that do not actually live within the Moriarty precinct - and these same questions will be given to Wesley Vale when they step up shortly. Let us go halfway and say 20 would think about or actually make a change. Let us just go halfway and agree that some would go. That takes your school back down to 55 or somewhere about that. So let us just suggest for one moment that that happens and in two years' time we are sitting here having a cup of coffee and your school has 55 children. On your projections it would not grow any more than that, and it could continue to go backwards, given that once a school was here, as people put their kids into school, they may very well decide otherwise. Let us just say that. What would then be the impact on the school - this comes back to Ruth's question - once we look back in two years and that is where you are at? You are at 55 kids, the school is going well, the educational outcomes are still brilliant, which they are now. What do you think would be the impact on the school? Does it still have a life? Is it still viable? Do you think the community would still own it and love it, or would it be detrimental?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I think numbers would probably be a little detrimental. But would it part of the community? Absolutely. We have only been involved in Moriarty for two years, personally, and it is a really passionate community. We have people whom I did not even know had children going through the school but because they had been invited they came along. A lot of community-based things go on at Moriarty to do with the school and the community. Could it affect their education? I do not think so, because we are up there with our NAPLAN results.

Mr WHITELEY - So the same situation would then apply to Wesley Vale. If a new school is built, they may be left with - let us give it the benefit of the doubt - say, 90 children. So 90 children at Wesley Vale and 55 at Moriarty. What is the relationship between Moriarty and Wesley Vale? Given you then have about 100-120 kids between those two schools, and about four-and-a-half kilometres between them, how do you think they would be able to work together? Do they work together now or would that open up more opportunities by necessity?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I know that Simon Payton and Jerome Pape have a really good working relationship, because on student-free days they have been out there working with Wesley Vale and the kids have been in there for day care. I know that our children attend a lot of functions there - small-school sports and all those sorts of things. They have a really good relationship with Wesley Vale.

Mr WHITELEY - So do you think there might be more synergies into the future? Would there be more synergies between those two schools, more so than probably the coastal facility at Port Sorell?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - With the facility at Port Sorell, you have to realise that people would have to drive or put children on buses to get back. You have a lot of travelling for us to get children to Port Sorell.

Mr WHITELEY - For whom?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - For our area children.

Mr WHITELEY - Do you think there would be more synergies between Moriarty and Wesley Vale into the future than there would be between Moriarty and Port Sorell?

Ms HALL - Definitely, especially because of the farming lands as well. We are more connected with Wesley Vale than with Port Sorell.

Mr BEST - You do not oppose a school at Port Sorell?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - No.

Mr BEST - So you obviously have no opposition to a school being put at Port Sorell?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I was quite excited when somebody said that Launceston Grammar or Scotch were looking at putting a middle school in there. I thought that would solve all my problems with our 10-year-old daughter. She could go up there and then to Launceston. And a modern facility, yes, absolutely, but not at the expense of our school.

Mr BEST - You believe there is a very strong argument for Moriarty School. The rural element and other little things that you cater for are not possible elsewhere?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - I am not a teacher but we seem to cater for a lot of things. The kids have access to a lot of computers. My daughter has a cluster band - all sorts of things that cost a lot of money to implement in the bigger schools. Children at Latrobe do not have as much variety. I said to Tracy, 'Find out why'. So she went to the principal and she said it comes down to dollar values. We cannot supply them for a bigger school like this because it costs too much money.

Mr BEST - I also heard that you do have a good relationship with Sassafras; you work together quite well.

Ms HALL - Yes, we do a lot of sports with Sassafras because we are both small schools. It would be a shame in a way to leave Sassafras or any small school out. Then they would have to travel further for sports to compete with other children. We always group up with Sassafras. We have local soccer clubs and hockey clubs together. If there is not enough for the teams, we get together with them to make a team. We have always done that with Sassafras. We have a very strong, very good history and relationship there with Sassafras.

Mr BEST - Do you ever cross over at all? Does the Indonesian teacher assist at Sassafras?

Ms HALL - Our PE teacher does. They do daily PE at Moriarty. Once a week we have an actual PE day when the PE teacher comes in and she does a lot of local schools. She has got us involved in other things, such as with the Devonport club. We have done things with Devonport schools. On cross-country day we went out to Ulverstone and we came third for small school sports. That was a good outcome because we had only eight children competing against other schools that had their whole school there. For our eight children to pull off a third place I think was pretty amazing.

Mr BEST - I don't really understand the hours or what has been arranged with the Indonesian teacher - just using that as an example - so is that person permanently at the school?

Ms HALL - No, she's not. She comes in part-time.

Mr BEST - So that person could be available, say, for Sassafras, except they would have to pay for those hours?

Ms HALL - Yes.

Mr BEST - But you do share some things?

Ms HALL - Yes, we do.

Mrs BUTLER - You talked about the stability in the area, that there's not much turnover of families. Would you like to expand on that aspect of your school community? They're farming families and you would see that as a pretty static sort of population base?

Ms HALL - Yes. We are very strongly based on generation growth. But in saying that, we also have a lot of newer families that are committed to the area and want to stay because they love it. They are lifestyle changers. Not everyone is moving to the coast; people are moving to the farmlands for a new lifestyle and trying to live the green way.

Mrs BUTLER - So there is no further subdivision, is there?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Not at the moment, no.

Ms HALL - We have had blocks available and they sold pretty quickly. I have been told that there are some more building processes in the works. I have been told that a few more families are planning to move in and around that area.

Mrs BUTLER - Following up on what Brett was talking about, I wonder whether you have thought about a federation model of working with small schools? Do you think there are more possibilities for working together?

Ms HALL - Yes, I would like to look into that myself.

Mrs BUTLER - What do you think can be gained through that?

Ms HALL - Especially for the children for their sports. They could learn more social aspects with other children in sports.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - You have the education you could do. If we were going to look at something like that, what I am seeing there is sharing class time and making bigger groups. It is therefore more cost-effective and time-effective and that would be wonderful. I went to boarding school and we did that. We went down to St Augustine's and they came up and shared class facilities and it worked very well. You could have electronic linkages with other schools.

Mrs BUTLER - Can you see any other possibilities for partnerships in the area?

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - We are very open to partnerships.

Mr WHITELEY - Yesterday in a passing comment someone mentioned the similarities in the potential of Wesley Vale and Moriarty as specialised focused rural schools such as Hagley. They compared it to the Hagley Farm School, which is very successful and very popular with parents. Many people I know, like my sister in Hadspen, were sending their kids out there. If there is a school at Port Sorell it will have probably 300 kids and it will have an impact. With the synergies between Moriarty and Wesley Vale - we will leave Sassafras out of it at the moment - do you see that there would be an exciting possibility into the future where both retained their identity, which the community would obviously want? Could they hypothetically become a single school with a rural focus, with a campus at Moriarty and one at Wesley Vale? The sort of stuff you just described would be very good, and now you could have the video hook-ups across the paddock. Then you have a vibrant school with 120 kids or maybe a fraction more. Would you see that could be an exciting option? It is not necessarily in our brief but I would be interested to know. You would probably end up with one principal and administrative staff looking after both, which would be the economies of scale that I suppose the

Education department would eventually be looking for. Could that still retain the community feel and the ownership? You still have your kids at Moriarty but there is an exciting prospect of working with another school to build a future, instead of falling backwards.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Absolutely and I think that is a really good thing to do. I work at Mersey and our HDU links into ICU at Burnie.

Mr WHITELEY - That is right. It works well.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - It is a great resource and it is good to know that you have that back-up there and that information sharing. We have a meeting on 27 July between Launceston, Burnie and myself. I think it is great. I think communication between areas, whether they be schools or hospitals, is fantastic. Anything that gives our children more opportunities and gives them a better education and allows them to retain their community school, would be the way ahead.

Mr WHITELEY - That is well answered. Is that, for you, the real issue here: it is about what is good for the kids and what is the best outcome? Again, this is hypothetical. In the end you have 120 kids between two campuses across the paddock, so it is not about having your own administrative staff or own tractor. It is just about having the campus there. The kids are local and you are not terribly fussed whether the principal works between two campuses and if the administrative staff are centred at Wesley Vale or vice versa; that is not the issue. The issue here is educational outcomes.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - Yes, and I think the only parochialism we have is that we would like to retain our school.

Mr WHITELEY - That is my point.

Ms OLIVER-SMITH - The rest of it is out the door and we could work towards that.

Mr WHITELEY - Thanks very much.

CHAIR - Nicola and Rhonda, thanks very much for your presentation today.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

Mr ADAM BROOKS, CHAIRPERSON, AND **Mr SIMON PAYTON**, PRINCIPAL, WESLEY VALE PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

Mr BROOKS - I am Adam Brooks, chairperson of Wesley Vale Primary School Association. It is a relatively sensitive subject once you bring up school diversification and opening and closing. From a school association point of view, I felt that if we came up with a preference it would not be the reflection of the parents, because it could be split 80-20, 60-40 and so on. I do not actually know because I did not want to ask the question because I thought it would open up a whole new can of worms. Given the time frames that we had for submission we felt that we would do better to leave it in your good hands to make the decision. But we thought it would be imperative for us to come up with what we felt the impact would be.

CHAIR - We will not in fact be making the decision; we will be making observations and recommendations to the State Government.

Mr BROOKS - To allow the Government to make a decision.

CHAIR - Or be guided.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - They have to take some ownership of the decision.

Mr WHITELEY - They can reject reports; they do it often enough.

Mr BEST - It is easy when you are in opposition or an independent.

Laughter.

Mr BROOKS - That is all right; a decision will come, I am sure.

From a school association point of view, we do not have a preference and we do not want to make a recommendation. We feel it is important, though, for us to explain what impact it will have on the school or what we feel impacts will be. Some are negative and some can be seen as positive, but we will leave that up to you to factor into your report and recommendations.

If you put a school out here there will be a slight increase in the year it opens but I do not think you will lose that many students straight up that are currently at the school. I think what you will have is a tapered reduction effect. As new families move in they will send their kids to the brand spanking new local school or do they leave them up the road, or as the younger kids come through to school age I would be surprised if the majority continue to send their kids out to Wesley Vale. Wesley Vale is a fantastic school but obviously the economics of where you live is a contributing factor to where your children go to school. So based on that we have come up with what we think would happen.

Currently 230 of our 300 students live in the area. That area includes Hawley, Shearwater, Port Sorell, and Squeaking Point. It gives us 14.8 teaching staff to 300

students. We feel that it would drop to 70 students over a period of five years after opening. Based on Simon' s figures, because I do not understand how the teaching ratio works, that would give around 4.5 teaching staff. Obviously that will have difficulty in funding specialist music and PE staff. It will give us under-utilisation of capital resources, such as eight empty classrooms, and excessive grounds. There would be higher costs per student for cleaning and grounds. The maintenance costs associated would still be the same to maintain the buildings. However, we feel that the carbon footprint will be reduced given that we do not have to cart 230-odd students all the way to Wesley Vale for school.

Additionally there could be a loss of rural outlook and the significant history associated with the existing school of Wesley Vale for many students. Obviously they lose Wesley Vale and will never see it. There is the inevitable increased risk associated with off-campus absences that are currently the case with the existing school.

Mr WHITELEY - Once they are out your way they have a four-mile walk.

Mr BROOKS - That is right, and good luck to it.

Ms FORREST - That is why I never ran away from home.

Mr WHITELEY - You shoot them before they get to the fence.

Mr BROOKS - You have signs running the gun line as well -

Laughter.

Ms FORREST - Just while we are on that point, could I ask about your absenteeism rate, because that was a claim made by another witness - that there was a much higher rate at Wesley Vale than there would be perhaps at Moriarty or Sassafras and some of these smaller schools. Do you have those figures?

Mr WHITELEY - Is it a big problem?

Mr PAYTON - No, it is not. We had notification yesterday about four students who have had protracted absences. We chased up two of them and it was just that they had illnesses and their parents had not notified us. With the other two, the parents are on long-service leave and they are travelling around the country.

Ms FORREST - What about your off-campus absenteeism, like wagging?

Mr PAYTON - There is nowhere to wag.

Laughter.

Ms FORREST - There was a claim made that there was high off-campus absence at Wesley Vale and I would just like to clarify whether that is the case or not.

Mr BROOKS - My kids go to Wesley Vale and they could not be bothered wagging because there is nowhere to go. There is a highway there and they know that I am driving up and

down it fairly often. If I see them out there I will go and tell them what is what. It is in the middle of nowhere, pretty much.

Ms FORREST - Following on from that, in Port Sorell there are a number of other potential sites for them to visit in the school day -

Mr BROOKS - Opportunities.

Ms FORREST - Opportunities - do you think that would be an issue?

Mr BROOKS - It is not a good enough reason not to build a school there - because we cannot control our kids, let us not do so. However, I tend to agree that there could be an increase in truancy. There could be more of an opportunity for them to sneak off around the corner.

Mr WHITELEY - No more than 98 per cent of other schools.

Mr BROOKS - Yes; at the end of the day how many other schools' location is based on that issue.

Ms FORREST - The claim was made that bigger schools have a much greater problem with this, but location was not the issue. You would say that location provides the opportunity?

Mr BROOKS - I would be interested to see the location of the bigger schools. I presume they would be more in the cities, more in heavily populated areas, and therefore then you need to compare those and say, 'Is it that or that?'. The bigger schools may have a problem but it could also be a lot to do with the social demographics in the area. My father was principal at Ravenswood High School and he told me certainly a lot fewer students turned up there than used to turn up at Reece.

Ms FORREST - Yes, you have a bit of a demographic there too.

Mr BROOKS - Absolutely, and I think you need to take that into account if you are looking at truancy or wagging.

Ms FORREST - That is fine. I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr BROOKS - I would not consider it. I do not know whether that is the view of the school association; some way disagree.

The unique situation that exists currently due to the minimal damage and vandalism at Wesley Vale Primary School would be lost due to the relocation into a more populated area. That probably runs very close to the discussion we just had. I think it could also be affected by the social demographics of the area. Reece obviously was vandalised because it got burnt down, but since then has been relatively vandalism free, though again I am not 100 per cent sure. So at the moment there is pretty much no vandalism or very little, mainly because no-one can be bothered going out there. You have teenagers located in here and they all tend to go and write on the toilet wall rather than go out to the school, from my understanding.

Ms FORREST - Another witness made a comment about ownership of the school. If the community is involved in the building of the school you are less likely to have those sorts of problems - why would you vandalise a property that you had a part in creating?

Mr BROOKS - That's right. I don't see that as a reason to not build a school. You can put controls on places, particularly with a state-of-the-art school that is custom built. You can certainly factor that in in the construction and design phase, where you can put adequate lighting and security in. Even if you want to put CCTV in, it wouldn't cost much more in a construction budget to do that, whereas if you look at other areas there may be that issue. I tend to think that given the relatively small population of Shearwater/Port Sorell compared to Sydney, Melbourne or even Hobart, you are going to have fewer people who are inclined to write on walls anyway. My understanding is that socially it is not a huge issue here. There are a few who play up a bit but -

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - They're everywhere.

Mr BROOKS - Well, it is possible it might increase but -

Mr WHITELEY - Tranquilliser guns work well.

Mr BROOKS - Yes - whether that is a consideration for you that will have any real impact on the decision is another matter. For me personally, I wouldn't let it affect it, based on that. You can't let fear stop you from making a decision to do things.

The current planned infrastructure improvements would run the risk of being underutilised, that is relating to the BER funding. This was submitted before the BER funding was put on hold. My opinion on that is that it is only \$2 million - that is a minister and his two cars, so it is no big deal with Federal government money. But they are right, if we spend a bunch of money on there it will be underutilised. Again, that policy was developed outside the State system; we didn't set the criteria for it, neither did you kind people.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I am curious when you talk about that. My understanding from speaking to Simon and having a look yesterday, which we appreciated, was that most of that funding is going to be spent on the hall and that is a community hall anyway, so it will always be utilised. Is my understanding correct?

Mr BROOKS - Without going into the policies that set the BER funding, the main reason for the hall upgrade is for the students of the school. If you look at the population of Wesley Vale, I am not sure how many community groups within that area would want to use that, outside of hours, anyway.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - There was a dance there last Saturday night, I believe.

Mr PATTEN - There is a monthly dance circuit.

Mr BROOKS - You're looking at one use. I don't know how many others use it, but that hall will still be there.

Ms FORREST - Even with fewer children, if they halve the number of kids at the schools, you would still need the hall.

Mr BROOKS - Absolutely. They still have a hall, it is about improving the infrastructure, the long-term use by the students as well as allowing the community to use it. There is also updating the library there within the BER funding application.

Ms FORREST - That is needed regardless of the number of kids.

Mr BROOKS - There is an open-room base, upgrade of the toilet block and redevelopment of the office block as well. That was included in the BER funding application and from the school association's point of view that will then be underutilised if we go ahead and spend the money. Is that the best investment of taxpayers' money? Is that a reason or not to do that? That is what we feel an impact would be. It would be less utilised if a school at Port Sorell went ahead. Whether they build a new school hall there or now, which, when we submitted this, was still going ahead, that will be used less than it would if there wasn't a school at Port Sorell.

Mr WHITELEY - I think that is a very honest inclusion in your submission, to be quite frank.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - My take on that is that it may be utilised by fewer numbers but not necessarily on fewer occasions. The dances are still held, the kids are still there and you still need to have assemblies, presentations, sport on wet days and those things, so yes, the numbers are fewer but it will still be utilised.

Mr BROOKS - You are absolutely right in regard to the hall but the BER funding wasn't just for an improved school hall. It included, in addition, I think, two classrooms or two open space rooms and redevelopment of the office.

Mr WHITELEY - So there might be a portion of it that is still well and truly justified, while with another you might have to say that that might be questionable.

Mr BROOKS - Yes.

Mr PAYTON - I was going to say that the hall is that 1950s building and the 1930s building that we walked up yesterday, that is the area that we are really looking to redevelop because it is freezing cold in winter and it is stinking hot in summer. So we were going to improve thermal efficiency, lower the ceilings and improve insulation. Then, on the backside of that, we were going to have multipurpose classroom off the hall, a new toilet block, specialist offices and a specialist music room with some degree of sound-proofing. Yesterday you would have seen the music room at the end of the corridor. Once music is up and running, the rest of the corridor becomes a bit -

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Mr Chairman, thank you for your indulgence, I might be getting a little bit off the track, but other than that long, cold building, as you talked about, the rest of those things that you have identified are all integral to a community and the number of children, whether it be 50, 70 or 90, that are still there. Upgraded toilets, a wet area and a music room are all integral to a school community anyway.

Mr PAYTON - That is right and those figures that we had there, if the school did get down to 70, for example, then you could run your school all in that older 1980s building and you could maybe rent those ageing classrooms out for accommodation or old people's homes.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Yes, but I can assure you, Simon, that some of my schools would love to have a 70 number and we are wondering how we are going to cater for 70.

Mr BROOKS - I think they feel, if we spend \$2 million on an upgrade and a school goes out there - and this was a concern raised by the association - that would be underutilised over a period of time. I think it would. It would certainly be used less, certainly in numbers. We could say let us all use the new bit, but then we have the other extension of \$900 000 which we spent in 2000. That section will not be utilised as much either and that was the point of the association and that is what we are trying to raise as an impact to consider.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - But I like your analogy, a minister and two cars, I like that.

Laughter.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Mind you, it is a Federal minister, not one of ours.

Mr BROOKS - Absolutely, or Kevin's jet fuel - but we will not start on that one. Situated in the midst of the rural landscape, many environmental and agricultural programs have been run successfully from this school over a time span of more than 100 years. So environmental programs run have gained national recognition for excellence. That will be difficult to replicate or continue if the numbers are reduced. Absolutely, there is the opportunity for a remote campus to work in with Moriarty and possibly Sassafras. I think that would be excellent. However, as the submission is based on the impact directly to Wesley Vale, we tried not to speculate as to what you could do because I felt that was not what our job at the time was. It was more based on, this is the impact that will happen if a school goes out here, that those programs will be lot harder to run based on they will have 4.5 teachers rather than 14.8. So that is where we are coming from, from that point of view.

In saying that, we have gone off a little bit and talked about a possibility that it could be developed for a centre for excellence in the area of environmental learning or a centre for learning for specialised rural enterprise to enhance the ideal of clean and green Tasmania. The next generation obviously will have problems to resolve regarding environmental issues. If the proposed school goes ahead in Port Sorell this will make it harder to develop these programs at the school. It may make it easier, depending on government policy on campuses and pooling resources. But given the fact that we are not privy to that decision, the impact will be again based on the reduction from 14.8 staff to a possible 4.5 staff. They will again be hard to initiate, harder to run, harder to manage those programs.

CHAIR - Sometimes it might come back though, Adam and Simon, to the skills that the various teachers might bring. Their skillset might suit an environmental program, just as it or might suit a music program or a PE program.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Like Moriarty talked about with the Indonesian and the science and the music.

Mr BROOKS - Absolutely. I think education is not just about getting a bunch of teachers in there. It is about living for education and developing. I was brought up in that environment. Whilst I used to consider it a waste of time when I was 14 -

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - At that age we considered everything a waste of time except us.

Mr BROOKS - I now consider that, yes, maybe it was not the right road for me to tell my father that.

Laughter.

CHAIR - If my memory serves me correctly, too, I think it might have been Sassafras - somebody help me here - where the teachers who have special skills would do extra programs.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Moriarty.

CHAIR - Moriarty. So if they had a special interest they would spread that and have an allocation of time to do that across the school.

Mr BROOKS - Absolutely. I think the issue around this is not that we will not get the teachers. I think it may attract some teachers wanting to work in the smaller schools. I think, if you look at the ratio they were funding against student numbers, it will diminish the ability for the school if it wants to implement that program without specialist teachers to bring in. I think that is more our point from that. We are not saying it cannot happen but we are saying it will be more difficult to implement.

Ms FORREST - With the possibility of sharing those sorts of resources - I know there is still a cost-factor involved, and you have to be able to find it somewhere within your budget - if you had three smaller schools - Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras - that are able to share a drama teacher or a music teacher or a PE teacher and pool those resources as well as using the skills that you have with the staff that you have, that would see some of those programs potentially not lost, do you think?

Mr BROOKS - I think so. I think it would obviously come down to how the schools got on and what was in the best interests of each school as an individual organisation. From my understanding they already work quite well together. They do share some things.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - We heard that.

Mr BROOKS - Also I think there is certainly the possibility of it in the management side, if it meant maintaining those numbers. That certainly, I think, may have been an attraction.

Mr WHITELEY - It is a very good point about the pooling of the talent, but I would have thought that, within, say, five or 10 kilometres we should not rule out the ability, if a new school was built in Port Sorell, to utilise the skills of the teachers there. I think we

suddenly see four schools, not three, that have the potential for the school at Port Sorell to send someone out - you know how all that works - with difficulty, yes, I know. But it is much easier to send one teacher out to the school for a period of time during the week to be a specialist drama or language teacher or whatever. So it should not just be about the three schools because there is a potential for four schools to actually share those resources. Would that be fair?

Mr PAYTON - Currently, for example, our PE teacher does two-and-a-half days with us and she does a day at Sassafras. So that is sharing. Our music teacher does two-and-a-half days with us, and two-and-a-half days with Devonport Primary. So we do not have to get staffed with whole people. We can get staffed with 0.5 for music, 0.5 for PE.

Mr WHITELEY - So you really have a staffing community amongst the schools in a little cluster?

Mr PAYTON - Yes, so really each school would get something like a staffing allocation based on their numbers. Then it is up to the schools to decide what arrangement they want to have.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - How they choose, what the priorities are.

Mr PAYTON - Whether you have bigger classes and more extras, or you have smaller classes and fewer extras - that is just a school-based decision. If you had four schools run by one administration you would still make the same kind of decisions.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - It already happens all over the State. Heather and I have all those schools.

Mr BEST - I think there is a shared view on the committee that everybody would like every player to get a prize as that is pretty much the view that has been expressed over the last few days.

Laughter.

Mr BEST - Of course we will make some recommendations and no doubt there will be those views expressed. I cannot talk about the deliberations of the committee here because it would be inappropriate but, at the end of the day, there is going to be qualified advice. You are a very successful and astute businessman and you know how these things work. At the end of the day there will be qualified people who will give advice to government about good educational outcomes, what is the best use of infrastructure and what is the best way that we can deliver certain things. I imagine there will probably be a couple of scenarios and one would be a staged scenario if there was to be a school built at Port Sorell, which I would imagine would be a quite painful exercise and maybe costly. The other one might be to build and close, but I would expect that would be difficult to see how - and this is only my view and I might be shot down in flames when we get advice - I would be hard pressed to see anyone providing advice about a new school being built here who would actually be saying, 'Fine, let's have five schools now'. You might not want to comment on it but that is what we are here for - to talk about it.

Mr BROOKS - If you are asking my personal opinion, I am quite happy to give that and how I think it will play out, but this will not be the view of the School Association because I did not want to ask them because I thought we would still be arguing about it now.

Mr WHITELEY - Very wise.

Mr BROOKS - There is the old saying, 'If you don't know the answer, don't ask anyway'.

Mr BEST - I guess what you are saying is, based on what could be a 40-60 or an 80-20 case, that there would be some upset if there were an absolutely hard and fast decision -

Mr BROOKS - An example is the issue that the Government currently has around Waratah - we cannot even close that school with eight students or six students. If you even mention Moriarty, you will have tractors parked up and pitchforks out the front of Parliament House. It does not matter what side you are from there is going to be some upset. I am not criticising that, I am just saying that, in my opinion, this is what is going to happen if any government decides to do this. At Wesley Vale I think you would get some strong opposition, probably not as strongly as my own -

Mr WHITELEY - Not as many tractors.

Mr BROOKS - but you would get a bit of a fight on your hands as well. As soon as it comes to closing schools it is a very emotional issue and I understand that completely. As I said, both my parents were teachers and I copped it every night about public education.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - You are not a teacher then, Adam?

Mr BROOKS - No.

CHAIR - That is why he is not a teacher.

Mr BROOKS - I joined the navy. Three weeks out of grade 10 I was out of there.

Laughter.

CHAIR - You got a real education.

Mr BROOKS - I did, too, actually. But the funny thing is that eventually I think if you put a school down here and put it to the market and let the market decide whether there will be enough numbers to sustain the three schools - Sassafras, Moriarty and Wesley Vale - within a 20-kilometre radius of Port Sorell, I think the Government of the day, whoever that is and I do not know, is going to have to make a decision and say, 'We've put a school out here, the numbers have decided and there may have to be some tough decisions made'. Based on looking at the numbers if you wanted to count votes - not that I would say anyone here would do that - you would be on a winner by putting a school out here based on the fact that this is where the population is. If you close Wesley Vale you may lose a few hundred but you may pick up 2 000, but that is reality of how the world works. That is how everything works and, unfortunately, you need to take into account the emotional side but that does not mean it is the right business decision to make.

It is a very touchy subject and there will be an argument to keep everything open but I think eventually, it might be five years or 10 years, the Government is going to have to sit down and review how many schools we have in this area. One of them may have to go to another asset. A suggestion was made that Wesley Vale could become a possible regional or country high school, focusing on that type of horticultural and agricultural learning. That is one possibility. It is a good use of the asset. Another suggestion was that a private school might pick it up out there. When you look at the recommendations, whether you want to deal with that now or not is up to you. If you do it with any school closures, it is going to be a touchy subject and you are going to open a whole new level of discussion and debate. Eventually the government of the day is going to have to have that discussion and say, 'The numbers just don't stack up'.

I am a little bit concerned about the issue around Waratah with the four students. The Government elected by the people can't close that, and that is a concern. Sometimes you have to make a decision and say, 'That's what we're doing. That's the end of it. It doesn't make sense. Let's move on'. The Government is there to make decisions and do what is right for the long term, as well as what is right for the community. I think sometimes consultation drags that out and you don't make the right decisions, even though some of them are tough and you are going to upset some people. It again comes down to dollars and cents and eventually how you run government without making decisions. That's the way it works; that's what you are elected to do. You are elected to represent everybody but you can't make everybody happy. I think in this instance, in this issue, a decision will have to be made. Whether you want to have that discussion now or not, I don't know, that is up to you, but if you do have that discussion you will hear about it. That is my personal opinion; that is not the opinion of the school association.

Mr BEST - This is an important issue because it is affecting many people in the community. I think you're right; even though we are here to look at the Port Sorell school, it does impact and will impact on other schools. I think there might be a case when you look at some of the figures that have been presented. They talk about Wesley Vale in the context of 'other' - being 35. I can't say we just leave the Wesley Vale figure out of there, or the 23. There could be a case, then, as to what might occur with Moriarty and Sassafra in regard to those figures. There could be a case as to what might happen over a period of time with those schools, perhaps.

Mr BROOKS - Obviously the numbers will support one or two regional schools for the long term in that region. If you put a school in the Port Sorell-Shearwater area, then whether you need three regional schools in that region is an ongoing debate. I would say you would definitely need one to two as a minimum. I think it is really going to depend on the numbers and where the market decides they want to send their kids. I think that will be pretty imperative, or a visual indication, within 5-10 years of opening a school here. You're going to see the numbers drop from a certain school. If Moriarty starts to drop, say, five kids then that help them make the decision and that's the one that will need to go. If everyone sends their kids to Moriarty and they leave Wesley Vale alone, then that is a decision. If the numbers are split, that is where you're going to have difficulty making that decision.

Mr BEST - It would be good if there were some leadership on that, maybe some formula as to how people could work it amongst themselves.

Mr BROOKS - There is but again it is going to depend on whether you want to have that debate right now or not. Is that the same issue as this? I understand the committee brief is not to look at that, however you should at least take that into consideration and at least have a rough idea of what is going to happen.

Whether the Government is going to set a policy on it or whether the Government is going to set a protocol on that, I do not know. I would be surprised if they do. You need to at least have a rough idea of what you are going to do in the long term. For me that is the case with everything. Most people in their personal lives should have a plan of where they want to be in five to 10 years. Yes, you may adapt to that and change it as things change but I think that you should at least have a rough idea what you are going to do.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Bit hard in this job to know where you are going to be.

Mr BROOKS - Absolutely and I understand that things can change, but you can have a fair idea of where it should be heading and where the money is going. Most people elected are reasonably sensible and intelligent. If you open this up for the upcoming election then it is going to be messy. If you put it out to public debate, then which school goes and which school does not? I do not know. If you look at the numbers then Port Sorell-Shearwater should have a school. The numbers support it but it does not mean you do not have to make a decision about what to do with the other ones.

Ms FORREST - That is made on 20 March next year.

You did make reference to Waratah Primary and that is the school that I am familiar with. I put it to you that that school is a good 45 minutes from Ridgley on a good weather day. The road can be closed and it is quite a treacherous road at times. We are looking at a situation there that is quite different from what we are looking at here where you have only a few kilometres between campuses. I refer you then to the situation in Burnie where we have three schools -

Mr WHITELEY - Three going to merge into one.

Ms FORREST - and they are relatively close, but they are probably as far apart as these schools.

Mr WHITELEY - Not quite.

Ms FORREST - They would be getting close.

Mr WHITELEY - Brooklyn, Acton and Upper Burnie; there are only a couple of kilometres between them. You have the same principles involved.

Ms FORREST - Yes, and you were asking whether the Government is going to make a policy on this. I do not believe that you can. That is one of the problems here because Waratah is a completely different kettle of fish from Burnie, or potentially the situation here.

Mr WHITELEY - It is about commonsense at the end of the day.

Ms FORREST - Yes. The question you asked was whether we should be having that debate now about what the long-term future is and at what point you start to do that. Do you think there is any room at all for the community to lead that rather than us around this table or a government of whatever colour to lead it? In Burnie, the communities did it themselves. They said, let us look at this. There is an opportunity here to build a brand spanking new school. We have dropping enrolment in a couple of those areas, and older schools. Do you think that is something that the community should be encouraged to consider, rather than us?

Mr BROOKS - We did sort of test the water in regard to the BER funding debate. We got a fairly strong resonance when we asked the Moriarty community what they thought. We got what I felt was not an accurate reflection of what Wesley Vale community thought and that was due to factors outside my control. Sassafras was pretty much left out of it. The issue is going to be: how are you going to decide that? If you are going to have a referendum within the area then it will win in the Port Sorell area because that is where everyone lives. But that does not make it fair or equitable or reasonable given that a referendum does not take into account the exceptional circumstances, such as the Waratah school. They have six kids and eight staff and they cannot close it. I simply think that is an easy decision but then I do not know the individual circumstances because I do not look at things like that. I have other stuff to do. There is a 45-minute travel time between the schools and is that making it a non-viable option for parents to send their kids to school? But I do not know that and I would hope that Government would look at that and make the right decision. But then how they get their message across is a different story because that message is not getting across up here, though that is the issue. I did not know it was an issue. I just thought it was how it was going to be.

Again, with the debate of how you let the community decide, we have seen the guys here who are very strong advocates for the school here, based on the numbers. They do not want to see schools closed and people upset, but economics also have to take into account where we are going to head with that.

Ms FORREST - Should the economics or the educational outcomes be our primary focus here?

Mr BROOKS - It should be but, again, if educational outcomes were the issue then every student would have a laptop and a personal teacher. It is not viable to be focused completely on educational outcomes because you still have to pay for it. You still have to balance it and make it reasonable.

Ms FORREST - What should be the overriding factor? Should the educational outcomes be the predominant decider or should the economics of a situation drive it?

Mr BROOKS - I think it has to be balanced. I think you cannot put one or the other. It is a bit like reporting on schools, and I know there is a big debate on that at the moment. Some parents are aghast if you do that, whereas my opinion is very different. I say, what is wrong with a bit of accountability. But, again, it is not the same. It is a completely different equation. Do you place economic value over education? No, in principle you should not, but at the end of the day we are running a deficit of whatever it is, so

sometimes you have to. Is a police department more important than a school? Is a hospital more important than a school? Again, this is the Government's decision to make because they are elected to make these decisions. To make a definite outcome based on putting a higher priority on educational outcome, and not worry about the money because we will fix that later, is fine. But in 10 to 20 years time you will have to pay for that. There should be a minimum standard where you say this is what we expect every school to at least produce. Every student leaving school should be able to read, write and add up and all those things.

However, based on that, we also need to look at how much money we are going to spend on that because we cannot allocate a teacher to every student. That would improve educational outcomes but no-one is going to do that because it is not viable financially. So I think it is about getting the balance right. I do not think you can put one above the other. I think you need to take them all into consideration and make that decision based on individual circumstances, but have a general idea on where you want to head with it. You may say, right, we are going to seriously look at the educational outcomes because that is why we have schools. However, we still have to pay for this. So what are we going to base our decision on? Does that make sense?

Ms FORREST - Yes, but you really did not answer the question about the community.

Mr WHITELEY - Are you suggesting, Ruth, that if the committee were to make a decision or a recommendation that a school be built in Port Sorell, then the community should be involved in the obvious issues that come from that - which involve the three others? You were not saying, let us go to the community? It sounded like that.

Ms FORREST - No.

Mr WHITELEY - That might make it a bit easier.

Ms FORREST - If a school is built the impact will take many years because people already have their kids at Wesley Vale or Moriarty. Most of them, particularly if they have a kid in grade 4, 2 or prep -

Mr BROOKS - They will finish with them.

Mr WHITELEY - Five years is the number.

Ms FORREST - Some of them will not, but a lot of them will continue on. It is the new families coming into the area.

Mr BROOKS - I would not send my kids to the new school; I would let them finish out there.

Ms FORREST - Yes, with their friends and all that. So if you have a decision to build a school in Port Sorell, inevitably there will be impacts on other schools.

Mr BROOKS - Yes, absolutely.

Ms FORREST - Do you think that in the future, once that is done and dusted and you see what the impacts are, the community can then take the charge on that?

Mr BROOKS - I think it will be. However, the market will also help determine that. If you have 50, 50 and 50 across the three regional schools, and 300 or 250 here, is each community going to say, 'I want my school left alone'? There is going to be no clear direction from the community because the community is going to be split. I think that is the issue you are going to have. It is going to come down to what the market will decide. If Wesley Vale drops down to, say, 10 students or 20 students and Moriarty has 70 then I tend to think that the community has decided and has voted with its feet. That is where they are going.

Should a school go up at Port Sorell-Shearwater? I think the numbers support it, absolutely. That is my personal opinion and not the opinion of the association. But the issue then is, once that happens what are we going to do in five or 10 years' time when most of these schools have no kids?

Mr WHITELEY - I think your previous comment pretty well summed it up. Over that period, the market - to use that word - will determine it and the community will decide.

Mr BROOKS - And that is going to be the base of the Government's decision on what it does from there. I do not know what will happen.

Mr WHITELEY - Well said.

Mrs BUTLER - I notice quite a few children coming in from East Devonport. Is that a growing cohort? Why do you think that has happened?

Mr BROOKS - I will be brutally honest in my personal opinion here. I grew up in Ambleside. I went to Miandetta Primary. I did not go to East Devonport. I still believe there are social issues around that area, not as bad as when I grew up there but certainly I think that contributes to the parents not wanting children to go to East Devonport School. I also think that the regional education system or the standard at Wesley Vale is very high. It is attractive to a lot of parents and it is regarded very highly. I think that is why they want them to go there. If I were a parent who lived in East Devonport, I would not want my kids to go to East Devonport - based on my experience when I was growing up in that area. That might be right or wrong, but again that is my opinion.

I went to school with one who is vice-principal of a high school now. A lot of my friends now have kids at the school from when they grew up in the area. I know they probably have the same views as me now: 'We are not going there'. I even spoke to him about Latrobe the other day. That could be a contributing factor but I think the bigger contributing factor could be that they want them to go to the regional, agricultural-style schools with more opportunities. They have the Landcare and they have the ducks and all the other animals that the kids come home and tell me about. I think that is more of an opportunity for some parents and that is why they send them there.

Mrs BUTLER - Is that cohort growing?

Mr BROOKS - I am not sure what the numbers are.

Mr WHITELEY - Thirty-five 'other', but that would not be all East Devonport. I think Malcolm said it was about 15.

Ms FORREST - If you look on the map there you can see the dots around that area.

Mrs BUTLER - It does not say how long that has been happening. I was wondering about the trend, whether you are going to get more of that in the future.

Mr BROOKS - I know when I grew up there were a few kids that I knew in East Devonport who used to go to Wesley Vale. Moriarty was more of a centralised school then. I would tend to think that the main reason they go to that school is for the rural side of it and the high standard of education. There may be some preconceptions about East Devonport - whether they are right or wrong - but they are based on when we grew up. I think we all tend to have -

Ms FORREST - Baggage.

Mr BROOKS - Baggage, yes. That is right, and I'm moving on from that. I went to Reece. I reckon it is the greatest school in the world but apparently my kids disagree.

CHAIR - Surprise, surprise.

Mr WHITELEY - Does that sound familiar?

Mr BROOKS - Simon may know why parents from East Devonport send their kids to Wesley Vale.

Mr PAYTON - We've had some families living out this way who have moved in there. Some living in that East Devonport area are farming-type families.

Mr WHITELEY - They're out towards Pardoe.

Mr PAYTON - On the back of the hill. We had one child recently enrol from there because of concerns about being bullied. I wouldn't like to say that East Devonport is a bad school.

Mrs BUTLER - Is it a growing trend, do you think, that they're coming from there?

Mr PAYTON - I haven't noticed that, no.

Mr WHITELEY - I will put the same question to you as to the other schools and they have all answered in the positive. Irrespective of all the issues that would impact, maybe adverse or otherwise, on your school, given all the evidence that obviously you are both privy to, do you understand the push for a school in this populated area? Am I correct in assessing that you are not against the construction of a new school in Port Sorell? You just want us to understand that there will be an impact.

Mr BROOKS - The school association's position is that we are not for or against a school. We feel that we can't represent the parents effectively because we don't know what most

of them want. I would say it was probably 60 per cent for and 40 per cent against, if we talk about the parents. They haven't said they are against it. No-one on the committee has said they're against a school going in there, however some are very much against missing out on anything for Wesley Vale. You are going to have discussion on that one if a government decides to close it and you are certainly going to have some protests and negative media coverage over it.

So the school association isn't against a school going in there. Some have raised some concerns. Some are very concerned that they will lose their BER funding and some are very worried about losing a lot of their educational programs if the school goes in out here. We prefer not to have an opinion because then we can't be criticised down the road, which is a luxury we can have. We don't feel it is our duty. I didn't want to open the debate because we'd still be arguing with parents about it. We had a week to put our submission in from when it was raised at a meeting. We said, 'Let's not say yes or no. Let's say this will be the impact it will have'. However, we are not saying it is good, bad or in the best interests. That is a decision for you guys to make and for us to portray an independent viewpoint as to what will happen. It is very hard for us as an association to say, 'No, we don't want a school', when 80 per cent of our parents live here. They may not send their kids here because they are already going to Wesley Vale but the next generation or the people moving in may want a school here.

Mr PAYTON - I don't have a position either way. I am here to support Adam in his role as the association chair. The figures I have put together will give you an indication of what would happen to the school over a period of time. As new families come on board obviously you would want to go to a closer school, so that will have effects on Wesley Vale down the track. Whether it becomes small enough to warrant closing or amalgamating, they're decisions for the future.

Ms FORREST - But if those decisions could be led by the community that would be a more preferable option.

Mr PAYTON - Yes. We are entering the realms of my personal opinion now. I think that might be quite difficult to do given the strength of feeling at Moriarty in particular. The strength of feeling isn't that great for Wesley Vale as a whole school, although at our public forum the strength of feeling of the 45 people who turned up was running strongly in favour of having a Wesley Vale school at all costs. There are a few vocal people but with the rest of the community I get the feeling that they think it's inevitable, that it will happen. They didn't bother coming to the public forum because they thought, 'It's going to happen some day. It just makes sense'.

CHAIR - It is up to the strength of the argument in the community as to whether they can put their case strongly to the government of the day to, in spite of the numbers that might be down to 70, 60, 50, retain that school in the area.

Mr PAYTON - I gather the community had the view that last time was an opportunity to get something for Port Sorell, but for whatever reason the decision was made to put it in Wesley Vale. All those people who had been drivers of that then thought, 'Oh well, by the time it comes around our kids will all have left' and they have faded out of the equation. Now it has come to the fore again and a new generation of people are interested in driving this.

Mr WHITELEY - And a greater number of them, obviously, because 11 years later the population has increased

CHAIR - Simon and Adam, we appreciate very much the amount of time you have given us and the thought you have put into your presentation today.

Mr BROOKS - I also sent a submission on behalf of MSS.

CHAIR - Yes, I have read that.

Mr BROOKS - That is, again, more my personal view than the company's point of view. It is a different perspective of where I am coming from

CHAIR - We appreciate that submission as well. Thank you both very much.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

Ms JULIE PATTERSON, DIRECTOR, SHEARWATER CHILDREN'S CENTRE, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Julie, thanks very much for joining us this morning. I am sorry about our late start for you but we needed that break as it has been a bit of an intense morning. We are looking forward to hearing your evidence. We are happy to offer you the time now to make a presentation and then we will ask you some questions.

Ms PATTERSON - I would like to say that I come here before you today to talk about how vital it is that we embrace a local school for Port Sorell. I have been the director of the newly built childcare centre in the new subdivision of Club Drive and there is a set of standards that I need to abide by to be an accredited centre. These standards clearly state many times of the need to embrace our community, to become community aware, but without a local school this makes our position as childcare workers very difficult.

We have no links to any schools although I have tried to break many barriers. I think the distance between our centre and the existing schools is far too great and we miss out on the vital connections. We cannot use their facilities, we cannot piggy-back on any of their performances or use their buddy system that allows schoolchildren to attend our centre and join in reading and other activities within our centre.

We cannot slowly introduce the children in our care to the school they will eventually be attending so that they can get to know their teachers and become familiar with the surroundings as well as to visit their older siblings.

The schools themselves take no ownership of us either and, although I have advised them of our vacation activities for school holidays and pupil-free days, they have never included this information in their newsletters. We have had very few students from Wesley Vale Primary School attend our service, which is available before and after school as well long-day care.

Local centre staff who work at our centre have also expressed the need for a local school for their children as they cannot simply slip off in their lunch break to attend performances or sports days as the time travelling to the school is too great.

The most important issue is the school bus from Wesley Vale Primary School. This bus service refuses to drop children off at our centre, making staff walk or take their own cars up to the main road roundabout. This is not only inconvenient for staff as it takes them away from caring for the children in the centre but it also makes our staff ratios sometimes border on being a licensing issue by having to have extra staff available just to pick up children from the bus. If the weather is inclement we have to take sometimes two cars to provide the safety that is needed to transport these children, many of them only five years of age.

If for some reason an emergency within our centre should occur this would leave children as young as five on their own with a major road to cross and make their own way down an industrial estate with no paths to walk on. This is a major hazard that we are confronted with everyday.

We also have children in care and families would like to use our centre for after-school care but refuse to put a five-year-old child on a bus travelling a major route taking up to 20 minutes of time on sometimes overcrowded vehicles.

I just want to close by saying that we had researched all the statistics on children in the district and Port Sorell before opening the centre. We feel that we have not grown as quickly as we probably should have. We put this down to families not taking ownership of a school and in turn the childcare centre has reflected this as well. Families working outside the district end up picking schools on their way to work or in close proximity. If we had a local school they would take ownership of it.

CHAIR - How long have you been established here, Julie?

Ms PATTERSON - Close to six months now.

CHAIR - So it is only a new facility and you are getting a feel of the pros and cons. In relation to your comment about the school bus service - on the face of it, it seems a little unreasonable that they would not cooperate with a service such as you offer

Ms PATTERSON - We have tried every avenue. We have contacted politicians about it and have had all sorts working on it for us. Because they have the one bus doing -

Mr WHITELEY - Two runs.

Ms PATTERSON - Two runs and the time that it takes them because of the distance that they have to travel to get back to pick up another lot of children they leave staff/teachers waiting there with them and they want to get home too.

CHAIR - Sure.

Ms PATTERSON - That is one of the reasons that they refuse to do it.

CHAIR - How far out of the way is it?

Ms PATTERSON - Where they drop the children off is 1.6 kilometres return if they were to travel that distance to drop the children off.

Ms FORREST - It is a private contractor that runs that service?

Ms PATTERSON - I think so, yes.

Mr WHITELEY - On a tender with the Government.

Ms FORREST - Yes, it is not like a Redline or something like that.

CHAIR - No. How many children are you dealing with?

Ms PATTERSON - In after-school care we have about six or seven at times so we need to take two cars at times. We are on the main road and he wants us to go across the roundabout onto the other section because the road is too muddy and hard for him to pull

up on. As I have said, it is a major road that the children will have to cross. There are lots of different things in licensing when you have to cross major roads.

CHAIR - Yes, I was thinking more in terms of your total number of students.

Ms PATTERSON - There are about 25 a day.

CHAIR - And the potential is there, of course, with the growth of Port Sorell for your service to grow as well.

Ms PATTERSON - That is right. We have an outside school hours facility that is hardly used at all, probably about five children and we can take up to 15.

CHAIR - If a school is built in Port Sorell, would you relocate your childcare centre?

Ms PATTERSON - No, it is in the new Club Drive section, so it has just been newly built. We are hoping that the distance is not so great that we cannot walk to the school or if OneCare's bus is provided, they could probably use that as well if they offered it to us. It is not going to be as great as the distance that there is between schools now.

Mrs BUTLER - Julie, can you give us an idea of the profile of the students who come to your school? Where is the bubble?

Ms PATTERSON - Sorry, what do you mean?

Mrs BUTLER - Are there more babies or are there more three-year-olds? What are the numbers?

Ms PATTERSON - More at this stage from three- to five-year-olds.

Mrs BUTLER - You would have done your research before the centre was established?

Ms PATTERSON - Yes.

Mrs BUTLER - What understanding did you have about how the bus was to run?

Ms PATTERSON - I didn't know about the bus. As the director, I am only under the Stepping Stones management. Chantal, our CEO, would have done the calculations. I did myself because I was looking to open up a childcare centre in Port Sorell well before Fairbrothers built one. The statistics were very high that there were a lot of children in the area but we are not receiving that in our childcare centre because a lot of them are leaving because their parents work out of the community. They take no ownership of any school because one is here, one is there so why don't just take them somewhere closer to work than drop them off to their local - they take no ownership of any local school so they just pick any school to take their child to.

Mrs BUTLER - Can I explore the vacation program a bit?

Ms PATTERSON - Yes.

Mrs BUTLER - What sort of advertising did you do and what do you think was the problem?

Ms PATTERSON - We have the local gazette that the council puts out, a paper that advertises and I fax through our vacation program to the schools and let them know that if they have a pupil-free day, we can offer a service to them that we can keep the children on those days.

Mrs BUTLER - You didn't advertise to the broader community - holidaymakers or other people coming into the area?

Ms PATTERSON - No, not on radio or anything like that.

Mr BEST - You had been in the community for some time before the establishment of the business?

Ms PATTERSON - No, I am not a local person, I come from Sheffield. I bought land in what I saw as an area with potential and I love it.

Mr BEST - Obviously then, even though we have talked about six months being the situation for the childcare centre, you have had quite a lot of contact and very much the clients are here, aren't they?

Ms PATTERSON - Yes.

Mr BEST - There are families with young children in Port Sorell?

Ms PATTERSON - That is right.

Mr BEST - What are they saying to you about a school?

Ms PATTERSON - We have families that use our long-day care who don't use our outside school hours care because they do not want to put their five-year-old on a bus, travelling that distance on a main road to our centre, and I can understand that, too. Sometimes if the buses are overcrowded I suppose they are looking at safety issues as well and that is the feedback I am getting.

Mr BEST - Would you say there is an overwhelming feeling of opinion in Port Sorell about the need for a school at Port Sorell?

Ms PATTERSON - Yes, definitely.

Mr BEST - Thank you.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I think the submission was adequate and you have certainly backed it up with what you have said, Julie, thank you.

CHAIR - I think you have really cut to the chase with the evidence you have given. We have an understanding of your situation commercially and we appreciate the fact that you will be as close to the opinions of people as anybody would be by virtue of the fact that you

are dealing with the parents who will use or are using your facility. Is there anything else you would like to share with us, Julie?

Ms PATTERSON - I think I have covered the majority of it. I definitely feel that we would have grown a lot quicker if we had a feeder - a local school close by - and been able to have those community links. I think that familiarity is really important to some children because it makes them feel comfortable.

CHAIR - What is the capacity of the facility that has been built?

Ms PATTERSON - Sixty.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Julie, obviously the establishment, Stepping Stones, would they have had perhaps as assumption or some indication that there was going to be a school? Do you know if that is the fact?

Ms PATTERSON - I am not quite sure but I know that Chantal has many childcare centres and we probably have not grown as quickly as many of the other ones that she has opened up and she would have done the statistics to find what children are in the area and whatever. You do not realise that you are going to come across these things until you do and obviously the bus thing was a really huge thing that we did not expect to happen.

CHAIR - The business is not predicated on the fact that a school is going to go here?

Ms PATTERSON - No, I hope not.

CHAIR - Just on the numbers of young people here.

Ms PATTERSON - Yes, that is right.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I just wondered if they had been given that sort of indication.

Ms PATTERSON - No, it has always been in the air, I think. It has been in the air for a long time and people thought that it was going to happen many years ago.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - For about 10 years, I think.

Ms PATTERSON - Yes.

Ms FORREST - If a school were built here there would still need to be a bus to take the after-school kids from the school to your centre anyway.

Ms PATTERSON - It would be more locally. It would not be on the main road going through -

Ms FORREST - They would take them straight to it, I would imagine.

Ms PATTERSON - Yes, that is right.

Ms FORREST - And eventually it could be a bus that then goes on and takes kids home out of the immediate Port Sorell area - those that cannot walk home or whatever.

Ms PATTERSON - That is right.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Squeaking Point.

Ms FORREST - They would be riding their bikes across the bridge.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Yes, but not every day.

Mr WHITELEY - That is where I am retiring. I might be a volunteer at the childcare centre.

CHAIR - Julie, as we are starting to get out of hand I think it is time to close.

Laughter.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, we appreciate your evidence.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

Mr MALCOLM WELLS, GENERAL MANAGER, LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH-WEST) WAS CALLED AND EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Finch) - Malcolm, thank you very much for this second bite of the cherry. We have appreciated your background work up in helping make our work much easier. So thank you very much for that.

Mr WELLS - I did notice that you have some of our literature, which I think is what we would have forwarded to the Latrobe Council. Some of it is duplicated in what I am going to give you. So I understand that.

I have brought along the presentation in full that I and people from my office made to the communities when we put forward the proposal on how to address the issue. I felt that if I quickly talked you through it then it would give you a pretty good sense of the perspective and the approach that the department took around the BER funding, the issue of a school at Port Sorell and the discussions we had with communities et cetera. I thought it was as good a way as any of your getting a sense of what we were suggesting was an opportunity.

CHAIR - Malcolm, when did you make these presentations to the schools?

Mr WELLS - The exact date I cannot remember, Kerry. I would be some months ago.

When the BER funding was announced with its focus particularly on primary schools for the twenty-first century component of it, one of the things that we looked at was, rather than individual schools just going ahead and spending, longer term projections, population projections in particular. They suggested that might not have been the wisest thing to do, so we decided to take a proactive approach. The most obvious example of that is in Burnie where three schools, under a fairly short time frame, agreed to merge and construct a new school on a new site. That was much easier because in that community it has been known for some time that there was perhaps an overprovision of public education. Two schools in Somerset merged and they capitalised on the BER funding opportunity to help fund the amalgamation onto one site.

The third one that we thought existed was out here at Port Sorell because we did believe that there was an issue with respect to the provision of public education in the municipality, the population growth rate out at Port Sorell et cetera. So we came out and did a similar kind of thing, for want of a better expression, out here with these school communities.

As you know in the time frame that we had we did not get a strong enough sense from the communities that we consulted that, 'Hey this is a great thing, let's go'. We got a very mixed picture and you have probably heard different views about how and why that occurred. On that basis we were not going to proceed. Then other events took over and your body has been constituted and indeed here we are.

That is the background. The department started in Burnie because that was the most logical. We worked with Somerset, which was under way. We came out here and we only got it to a certain point and at that point it stalled. Then it moved into the political domain, hence the inquiry.

This is the PowerPoint slide show that I used when I spoke with the community. I know other people from my office did as well. I presented a presentation to the Moriarty community and this is basically what I did.

On the front page there is a description of what I was going to share with them. Over the page to the section on opportunity and challenge, the point that we wanted to make to the three school communities that we spoke to was that we were aware of the desire from the local government here to have a school at Port Sorell and it was part of their strategic plan. The chicken and egg thing is a reference to a bit of a discussion, I think but I am not sure, with Mike Gaffney. On the one hand, some people thought it was an older demographic profile; the flipside was that the absence of a school out there might be holding younger families back from coming and settling.

We expressed the view at our meetings that for all of our public school communities it is a very significant issue because if a private school sets up out there then that will have an effect on public education in the broader municipality as well. This was not a new issue and I know you are aware that it goes back seven or eight years or even longer.

Then we moved to do our best to explain to the communities concerned that there was an opportunity because building schools is an expensive business and you have to make very sensible strategic decisions with limited capital available. The BER funding provided us with an opportunity to do something and capitalise on the availability of that Commonwealth funding. There was a brief explanation provided to communities about that. You will note that the sheet refers to 'notional allocations'. Every school was keen to get every single dollar that was available to it, but it is up to those amounts.

You will note that the sheet I have given you includes both Latrobe High School and Latrobe Primary School; broadly you are looking at \$6.3 million investment in education infrastructure in this municipality. As far as Moriarty and Wesley Vale are concerned, the schools that we have always felt would be most affected and involved if a decision is made with respect to Port Sorell, there is \$3 million of Commonwealth money available in the event of an amalgamation and an agreement that might be forged. As you know we did not get to that point earlier in the year.

That was the background that we presented to communities in the presentations. We then moved into what we thought were the specifics. We then looked at student numbers. I know you have had a look at that -

Mr WHITELEY - That is the stuff you gave to us over the phone.

Mr WELLS - That is just the table that we presented and we spoke a little bit about that table. The enrolments and projections table was one that I did have quite an interesting discussion about and received some feedback when I was at Moriarty. I think, from our perspective - and I do believe the data supports it - Moriarty's expansion into the 80 territory is directly linked to the growth out at Port Sorell or certainly at Squeaking Point. I think that yesterday Jerome pointed to those percentages of his school population. I think it is reasonable that if a public school were at Port Sorell, people would be assuming that the Squeaking Point area is as much the neighbourhood for the new Port Sorell school, even though I know Moriarty will say it is only five minutes away. That is

my view of it anyway. So we were trying to suggest to Moriarty that, yes, it is a school with about 80 students, yes, it has grown, but the long-term effect might well be that it goes back to being a school of 50 or even fewer, but I know that there is some conjecture in that.

As you can see, as far as Wesley Vale Primary School goes, the general consensus seems to be that that population number of around 300 is the sort of size of school that we are talking about.

Then we moved on and talked with people about where the children come from and I think you have that map, so I will not go into much on that. But I think it clearly shows where the concentrations of the populations are. It shows some odd enrolment anomalies but, broadly speaking, you can see quite clearly the distribution for the three schools.

Then we went on and broke that map down in our presentation - some people like the visuals and some people like the numbers, so we shared with people some of those percentages. I think you also have this information that we provided to you as well. But we shared that with the communities.

The final part of our presentation to communities was to say that we do have some broader goals here. Yes, BER funding is important and it provides great opportunity. But underneath that, it is about quality of provision and these are fairly generic goals. I think we would say these to any community of schools about the things that we want to get out and they are expressed there. The bottom one is a critical issue for us in education going forward. It is a challenging one, I know, for individual school communities, but having strong, viable schools is a really important issue for us. We have a dispersed population right across the State, certainly regionally and you need to maintain some smaller schools. I understand all of that. But there do come for us, real challenges around viability and quality of programs and there are difficult decisions to be made in an environment where we are not exactly flush with an endless amount of money. So there are some real challenges for us there.

We looked at the Latrobe municipality and saw that there were 700 students currently enrolled in our primary schools in the municipality.

Mr WHITELEY - So that is in this region?

Mr WELLS - That is in the Latrobe municipality. What I am really talking about there would be Sassafras's school population, Wesley Vale's, Moriarty's and Latrobe Primary School's.

Mr WHITELEY - So that is four? To be achieved, three?

Mr WELLS - Yes. We thought the proposal would be 700 and then you could look at 700 students being catered for, K-6, with three primary schools and obviously the kind of primary schools we would want to see is described there. Over the page - and this is all in the context of the opportunity that the BER funding provided - the proposal in this municipality would be for a school of around 300 in the town, one out here at around 300 and the capacity for a smaller school and that would accommodate the 700 students. We thought that the smaller school was at Sassafras. I know that is a view that is most

certainly not supported by the Moriarty community - they believe that they have a very strong and viable school. I understand that and it was made abundantly clear to me.

CHAIR - Abundantly clear.

Mr WELLS - Although, I must say, it was made abundantly clear to me in a very fair and respectful way that is how they -

Mr WHITELEY - A point of clarification, through you, Chair: to be achieved through three excellent government primary schools does not take into account the potential to build a new school at Port Sorell.

Mr WELLS - Yes, I am trying to capture that, in the presentation with the community, we have moved on: this is the situation. A model that could be achieved, capitalising on the Building for Education Revolution funding, would be this: if you wanted to have a school at Port Sorell, that would be school 1; school 2 would be at Latrobe and school 3 would be the smaller schools.

Mr WHITELEY - Out of three into one.

Ms FORREST - Three into one. That is right.

Mr WHITELEY - This is my point, yes. So we are not talking about the amalgamation of Wesley Vale and Moriarty. We are actually talking about Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras?

Ms FORREST - No.

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, but to be achieved through three schools. So Latrobe is one, Port Sorell - the new school - would be two. Which is the third.

Ms FORREST - Sassafras is the third.

Mr WELLS - In the smaller school at Sassafras.

Mr BEST - It does not mean it has to close.

Mr WHITELEY - No, so Wesley Vale and Moriarty - it is not the amalgamation of those two schools, it is the amalgamation of those two into Port Sorell?

Ms FORREST - Yes.

Mr WHITELEY - Right, okay.

Mr WELLS - I think it is the same concept as the one we are talking about in Burnie where Acton Primary School, Brooklyn Primary School and Upper Burnie Primary School have agreed to amalgamate for the purposes of the construction of a new school on the site in Burnie. So if you want to use 'closure' as a word, I suppose the end result is those schools are not there any more. But they have agreed to amalgamate for the purposes of

the construction of a new school. That is the only way, as I understand it, you can use your BER funding to build new schools, because they allocate to existing schools.

Mr WHITELEY - I have just misinterpreted what that was saying.

Mr WELLS - So that is what we were proposing. And then a bit of a summary at the end to say if you chose to go this way with the support of BER funding and also from the State Government then we would end up with other (*inaudible*) for the Sassafras and an amalgamated Wesley Vale-Moriarty to enable the building of a new school here at Port Sorell. Then the final point was perhaps just trying to link it back to the numbers and show how it would fit. As I said at the start, at the end of that process across the three school communities - and you can see really the impact on Sassafras in what we are providing isn't significant - my read of it was real clarity about how Moriarty saw the situation and did not see a need to amalgamate to effect a school at Port Sorell. We did not really get a satisfactory, clear indication, I think, from the consultation process we ran at Wesley Vale.

Mr WHITELEY - As Simon said earlier, the passions were not as high as Wesley Vale as at Moriarty.

Mr WELLS - Personally, I was not there. There has been a lot of discussion about it. There were not anywhere near the numbers of people. So certainly, for a start, you did not have the breadth or scope of people, whereas at Moriarty, they quite clearly had the opposite.

Ms FORREST - I can understand why the Moriarty people, when they came to present, felt they had to save their school, particularly when you read those last couple of slides. Can you talk about the economics of it as well? You have to operate things under a budget, which is not a bottomless pit of money. So if a new school was built at Port Sorell, in your view, can you still financially support and provide a school at Port Sorell, a school at Wesley Vale, a school at Moriarty, a school at Sassafras and a school at Latrobe?

Mr WELLS - Again, from my personal opinion and what I have learned working in the role I have worked, I just do not think that is justifiable. I look at it from the point of view of a responsibility to provide quality public education efficiently and effectively. For the number of students that we have and the consequential impact on the populations of the schools that you would maintain that would go into decline, I do not think it represents a sensible thing to do with public money, to be honest.

Ms FORREST - So that is the money side of it. Are you a teacher?

Mr WELLS - I was a teacher.

Ms FORREST - Not that that is all that important. It is in some respects obviously, but that is the economic side. What about the educational outcomes side of it? I would like you to explore for me where you, as an educator with a variety of experience in this area, and as an administrator as well as a hands-on teacher, think we can ensure we get the best educational outcomes? Do you believe that that comes through perhaps some amalgamation and closure?

Mr WELLS - I am not trying to be obtuse, but I think the best educational outcomes are directly linked to the quality of the instruction. So whether I am educated in a school with 70 children or one with 270, every piece of research nationally and internationally says the number one thing that makes a difference is which teacher teaches me. That is the single most important thing. The second most important thing in the school context that the school can influence is the quality of school leadership. The issue is about getting better outcomes. Picking some data and saying, 'We are going well' is simply snapshot in time-type stuff. The major factor that will affect the quality of education is the quality of teaching.

If I could just make one other comment about that - and I know this is debatable and that is why it is complex - my personal view is that the challenge for the smaller school is to provide in an ongoing way the quality of professional learning and support and to support the professional growth of teachers that is more easily done in schools that are a little bigger.

Also, what is people's definition of a school that is small? For most of Australia, outside of the extremely isolated of Western Australia and Northern Territory, a primary school of 200 is seen as small. In a lot of the literature people see schools of 100-150 as really small schools.

Ms FORREST - Can I just explore that a bit further with you Malcolm? You are saying that what determines your educational outcome is more the quality of the teaching staff and that direct interaction. So if we have great quality teachers at Moriarty and Wesley Vale, if those people were then subsumed into one establishment you do not lose that good teaching. Do you agree with my statement here? I am making a statement based on what you have said. If the educational outcome is based more on that rather than the size of your school, should the economics then be the determining factor here in deciding the best way forward to provide public education in this region?

Mr WELLS - That is a hard question, isn't it? Are you saying, 'Should the economics override the -

Ms FORREST - No, no. You are saying the educational outcomes are more dependent on the quality of your teaching staff and leadership in the school.

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Ms FORREST - So should we not worry so much about because educational outcomes will improve anyway when you have got those things in place? Should we be basing our decisions then more on what is economically most sustainable and viable? As individual members, we do not hold the purse strings of the State. You have a budget to operate in.

Mr WELLS - I think that I understand where you are coming from. On that basis it is more of a consideration of about what is a responsible and sensible decision to make -

Ms FORREST - Using public funds.

Mr WELLS - for the provision of public education in the municipality. I do believe that the quality issue - especially when we are talking about establishing a school which is a

medium-sized primary school of 300-350 students - will be attended by the quality of instruction and teachers. So yes, I do think that it is about viability, about sensible provision of public education for the number of students in the community. It is more that kind of decision than it is one purely based on educational outcomes for students.

Mrs BUTLER - I am interested in how you see the financing of this particular school. Where do you think the money should come from if there should be a Port Sorell school?

Mr WELLS - I have to qualify my remarks here because the landscape has changed quite significantly, even from a couple of months ago. Our proposal a couple of months ago was predicated on community agreement - and that was named up front in all the schools we worked in: this is about community consultation and we need communities to agree. Here we were saying, we would fund the building of a public school at Port Sorell if we could get that amalgamation because that amalgamation would enable us to put more than \$3 million, or whatever that figure was on the previous page, of Commonwealth money into the construction of a school of that size.

We were saying that if we could get that then we would be prepared to take that course of action. I am not here to make a comment about whether if there were no BER funding the Government would go ahead and just build one anyway, that is not for me to say today. It is not in my jurisdiction to make that judgment. But I think that is the situation, Heather. We went in a couple of months ago saying that BER funding provided an opportunity and we would seek full community support with respect to Wesley Vale Primary School too. You saw the school, it is not in bad condition; there is some work to be done but there are plenty of others that need more work than that. It is in very good condition and it is only nine kilometres away. So there is a lot of financial stuff underneath all that because you have that property and that building that you have invested in as well.

We said to the communities that with BER funding, asset sales from the properties and the State Government finding the balance, a new school could be constructed at Port Sorell but it would be predicated on Moriarty and Wesley Vale not existing and their BER dollars going into the project.

Mrs BUTLER - If part of the land was sold off at Wesley Vale School, would that be enough?

Mr WELLS - I do not know what the property values are. I am not sure - and this is a very uninformed observation - that either real estate, from that point view, is really of an enormous asset sale value to us. If you were suggesting that we sell off part of Wesley Vale but keep the school going, while we built one out here, that would be a totally different model because if we keep the school going we have no Commonwealth BER funding going into the construction out here.

So our whole proposal was predicated on this scenario: we will support this - we will have asset sales, BER funding and a State government contribution and that will enable us to build a school. A greenfield site, maintaining the other ones, is a totally different and infinitely more expensive option and I have not come here to -

Mr WHITELEY - That becomes a very political judgment and that is not what we are here for either.

Mr WELLS - From a financial point of view it would be a really significant financial ask - a 300-student primary school. I know that a 450-500 size school costs in the \$10 million to \$12 million range. So a 300-350 primary school is an \$8 million-plus venture and then maintaining the two schools as well and not getting any Building Education Revolution funding and then looking at your broader infrastructure needs across both primary and secondary schools in Tasmania is very problematic, I would have thought, when you put all that information on the table.

Mrs BUTLER - Yes, but governments can buy ships too, can't they?

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, I think that is a very good point.

Mr BEST - I did ask this of the President of the P&F and he was very careful in his answering because he could not, on occasions, answer for the P&F because there had not been a collective view. I think there has been an approach that every player should get a prize and, as much as I would love to see this, I think that is a very difficult thing. At the end of the day, as a committee we will have to make some recommendations. With the BER funding - are there any strings attached to that in the context of the Port Sorell school with this presentation? I think you posed as a question, that if the community agreed, this is what could be possible. Apart from the fact that this money has been allocated specifically to the schools, if there was to be this money put to a Port Sorell school, obviously that money does not then go to the other schools, does it? Perhaps I am not explaining this question very well.

Mr WELLS - I think you are. The way I understand is that the money is allocated from the Commonwealth to those individual schools. It is administered through the State but it is allocated to the schools based on a formula for how many students they have. The only way that money can be redirected, say, to the construction of a new school would be if we could show the Commonwealth that we have a genuine amalgamation on and then that money could be redirected. But there is nothing else that we can do with the money outside of that. The BER time frames, as you know, are all driven by the goal of stimulating the economy, so we are on very tight time frames. So all we could do was say to communities, there is enough momentum to amalgamate. We would need a commitment to that. Our minister would need to see that there was a commitment to it and then we could move to an amalgamation and that would enable us to use the funds on a new site. Without that we cannot do anything else. I do not know if they are strings so much, but that is the reality and we have to go back to the Commonwealth and say, 'We have these amalgamations definitely on', and show that with the process we have firmed it up. Obviously the minister has to say, 'Yes, the amalgamations are happening', and then on that basis we can redirect the money from the amalgamating schools into the construction of a new one. I do not think there is any other thing that we can do. Andrew Finch from our department would know more of the specifics but I am sure in broad terms that is the only way in which we can operate, directly into a school for your school and your school community, or you agree to amalgamate, maybe onto the site of my school, in which case your money would come across and that would enhance what we do on this school to build this one up. But yours would close. That is what we are talking about.

Mr BEST - I am assuming, when you mean 'genuine amalgamation' what you are saying there is that it is pretty much overwhelmingly a vote one-way within the schools. Or could there just be a decision? What could constitute a genuine amalgamation? I think it would have to be something that people would really want to see happen, wouldn't it?

Mr WHITELEY - This goes back to your leadership question earlier.

Mr BEST - I mean, we are going to make recommendations. It is all very well for the committee - for us - to make recommendations. The fact is that you have to have the responsibility with the recommendations. Anyway, I am just interested in what might constitute a genuine -

Mr WELLS - We only had the BER time frames in which to operate, frankly. So perhaps the phrase 'genuine amalgamation' is not particularly helpful in that context. As I said to you, with Burnie it was able to be done because people have been saying to us for three or four years, 'Someone has to do something about this'. The community predisposition was strong and it carried the day. There was not really a need to have formal votes. In this time frame, if you are going through that process you would need a much longer time frame to consult in an authentic way so that people were engaged in the discussion. We could not do that. So we came to communities and we actually said that to them. We said, 'We know the time frame has only been short. We need get a sense today when we talk to you and we talk to school associations: is there enough momentum? Yes or no? If there is, we will work hard to make it happen'. It happened in two other places, we just did not get that sense of commitment to amalgamate in those time frames, from the consultations we did here. It is the only way I can really describe it.

Mr BEST - Yes, I understand.

Mr WELLS - If we had a whole lot longer time we could run a two- or three-year, or a 12-month process. I do not know what that would produce but, if we are going to capitalise on Commonwealth BER funding as part of this, we only have a narrow time frame to do it in.

Ms FORREST - It is interesting, Malcolm, because when you say two other opportunities have been successful, I put it to you that Somerset is a situation where there has been a discussion between those two schools, which are 900 metres apart, that they were already working on that when the BER funding came. So they had already reached the point where they could see there was a need - if it was a need - or a benefit in actually amalgamating. The decision then became: which site? That was not an easy decision but the school communities resolved that themselves effectively. So I just want to clarify what you were saying here, Malcolm. I think I have understood you but I need you to clarify. You are saying that, if there is no agreement to amalgamate and effectively close Wesley Vale and Moriarty, the department will not have the funds to build a school at Port Sorell?

Mr WELLS - I do not believe so. But as I said, I have not come here today with control of the broader agency's capital works decision-making. I have only come here to talk to you really about the process that we ran and the approach that we took with the communities. But I think the key point I have to make is that whole approach was

predicated from a financial point of view on an injection of approximately \$3 million towards a new school here and also making it very clear that, from our point of view, to build one there meant that the viability of Wesley Vale in particular and also Moriarty were seriously threatened to the point where it would not be responsible for us to maintain both those sites and build out there. I think that is the position that we took. Some of those finer points about dollars, where that all has to go from the State coffers, is a broader decision about our total capital works program.

Mr WHITELEY - Which is a big budget.

Mr WELLS - But specifically, around here it was based on the BER realities from our point of view and what was needed.

Ms FORREST - This is possibly a politically-loaded question so I do not expect you to answer it if you feel it is outside your remit - that is fine. You do not have the minister sitting beside you, or the Premier, who would take it. The question we are facing here in this committee is: should there be a public primary school at Port Sorell? Whilst we are cognisant of the issues that lead to the impact on other schools in the area, should this committee determine that, yes, a school should be built at Port Sorell then it comes back to the political decision-making of how we fund that. You suggested that one way was to go through the amalgamation process and to have that \$3 million-plus from the Federal Government to assist in the funding of that. But you also thought that it was irresponsible to continue with the other schools as a drain on the coffers. There are potentially other ways that a school could be funded here. They could find some bucket of money under some hollow log somewhere. I am not quite sure where that is.

CHAIR - Oh, the hollow log comes with a new government, does it?

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - Sale of TOTE.

Ms FORREST - The thing is that there are potentially other ways it could be funded if it was deemed to be that important so we are not just reliant on an amalgamation of Wesley Vale and Moriarty and closure for this to happen.

Mr WELLS - I think that most of it requires a response from someone other than me. However, the current environment that I am operating in suggests that there is not a hollow log and we are in very difficult times at the moment across all government areas in relation to finances. Secondly, I believe that in terms of my responsibility for the provision of public education on the north-west coast that I cannot see the sense in trying to maintain Moriarty and Wesley Vale primary schools and a brand new K-6 primary school at Port Sorell. I think in the long term that is not in the best interests of the provision of public education because of the dispersal effect, the slow decline in populations of other schools. That concerns me from an educational point of view about best quality provision.

The financial decision making, the funding, that is not in my domain.

Mr WHITELEY - Personally, I could not agree more. But I think that where Ruth was going was that, at the end of the day, this committee has a reference to determine whether or not there is a need and there would be a benefit for the community in having

a school. So we will deal with that. Ruth is quite correct in that after that it becomes purely a political decision of where on earth do you get the money. What is interesting about this is, and as an example I would be interested in your feedback, Reece High burnt down, highly political. The Minister at the time turned up and did what most ministers would do - I might have done it if I had been the minister too - because emotions were high. But we had evidence that everybody knew was just as real then, that we had two high schools within whatever radius, Latrobe and Devonport, that were totally underutilised and could have sustained it.

Mr BEST - There was a process though.

Mr WHITELEY - I am not saying that it should not have been built I am saying at the end of the day there is no insurance on schools, it comes from the funding

Mr BEST - The Government self insures.

Mr WHITELEY - This is my point. At the end of the day you make political decisions. I am not saying that it was the wrong one; I am saying that I would probably have made it as well. But a political decision was made -

Mr BEST - It was not entirely.

Mr WHITELEY - A political decision was made to rebuild Reece High. My point is this, political decisions are made and you then reprioritise the funds that you will have over the next three to five years. That is just the way that it is, isn't it? Money had to come from somewhere.

Mr BEST - You have put him in a difficult position. It is totally ignorant to the process. I do not want to debate it with him but you need to go and study what happened at Reece High School before you make comments like that because that is not

Mr WHITELEY - Comments like what?

Mr BEST - That it was a political decision. There was a steering committee that was formed through the council, there were submissions made, there was long and extensive consultation about the process of -

Mr WHITELEY - No, that is not right, Paula Wriedt turned up the day after it burnt down and said, 'We will rebuild the school.'

CHAIR - Order! That is extraneous to what we are dealing with here. Malcolm, do you want to respond to the question?

Mr WELLS - I am nervous about my response. Are you allowed to have some sort of qualified response on questions?

Mr WHITELEY - Of course you can. I was not trying to trap anyone. I was just making a point that this becomes a political decision.

Mr WELLS - I think the tension that I feel in it is that I am well aware of the need that exists in a whole range of other schools, in secondary schools, that had not really been part of the substantial wave of Commonwealth funding for Primary Schools for the Twenty-First Century. So I can see underneath it a bit of a dilemma in the department or a minister saying, 'Yes, there is a need there, so we will build it'. In difficult times when we are faced with a contracting economy and there are not buckets of money, it just becomes another added pressure. So, that is the tension I feel in this issue. I know I sound like a bit of a broken record here but that is why the BER component was so critical to us because it gave us a level of additional resource which would have at least taken a bit off the edge of that funding pressure and tension that all governments will feel with provision of public education infrastructure. So, that is probably the only comment I can make.

CHAIR - If Moriarty and Wesley Vale stay open and continue, the BER funds can only be directed to them? So it could not be that we say, 'Okay, we will put those opportunities that the BER presents on hold for you, we build the school at Port Sorell using those funds at this time?'

Mr WELLS - I would ask that you clarify the rules with Andrew Finch, who I have mentioned earlier. I do not believe that is possible under the guidelines of Primary Schools for the Twenty-First Century. I do not believe that is possible because what we would then have to do is negotiate with those school communities to say that we do not want them to exercise their right to have Commonwealth money to improve their school. That is a very complicated thing. But I do not believe the guidelines would allow us to do that.

Mr WHITELEY - So they would not allow a deferment?

Mr WELLS - You would probably have to clarify that with Andrew Finch. I know that the Commonwealth time lines are incredibly tight on this. We have sought, as you know, a bit of a delay here to enable this hearing to occur but we are under very clear direction that if we do not get to a certain point - and I do not know exactly what date it is, around September or whatever - the opportunity will have passed.

Ms FORREST - The money is not available and that is it.

Mr WELLS - If the committee needs the specifics on Commonwealth requirements, Andrew is the person to talk to. But on the general things I am saying there I am sure are pretty right. I do not think you can pick up another school's money and say, we will use your money and your money and we will construct a new school over here, but you stay here. I do not think that can be done with BER funding and I know the time frames are somewhere around September, October for the three rounds of Primary Schools for the Twenty-First Century to be done and submitted because I think projects need to be constructed by 2011 or because of the economic stimulus time frame.

Mr BEST - I was going to help clarify that point that my colleague over there and I had a bit of a shot over the bows about. But I think it is fair to say that the department saw this as an opportunity with the BER funding and that with the BER funding, it is something that potentially could happen tomorrow, if there was a decision that way. If there were no BER funding and if the committee said that there should be a school at Port Sorell, it

would be something that would happen in the longer term. Looking at the history here, the last opportunity was 11 years ago when the upgrade occurred at Wesley Vale. So one would assume that you are looking at a decade, perhaps, depending upon what happens on the horizon.

Mr WELLS - I think if your recommendation is outside of BER funding then that would be something that would have to be put on the table with all of the other recommendations and infrastructure projects that the Education department has to think about, going forward. That is about the only comment I could make about that.

Mr BEST - Yes, sure, I understand that.

CHAIR - Could I ask something about zoning and before I go to the hypothetical situation, just how does the zoning work in this area now with the schools?

Mr WELLS - Each school would have an established area.

CHAIR - Are there lines on maps?

Mr WELLS - You can access those zones off the Internet. We would have those and I can get those for the committee if you want to have a look at them. So each school has what we call a 'designated home area' and the fundamental right of a parent who lives within a home area is to send their child to that school. Then we have processes that we ask parents and schools to go through if they apply to enrol in a school and they are outside of the home area. Ultimately, a parent can access a school that is outside of their home area if there is a space available. But we use the home area and the zoning to try, as best we can, to maintain viable schools in communities rather than have population swings that then have to be catered for - you would be building all the time as people move around to try to swap schools. It is not a manageable model. Schools have a zone, you are in the zone and you have an entitlement to go to that school. If you are outside the zone then each of the four geographic areas have out-of-area enrolment processes in place for people to go through if they want to enrol out of zone.

CHAIR - Does it come through to you eventually?

Mr WELLS - These days at different times it is an issue. We have 55 schools, and in most cases it is negotiated between principals. Often the focus of the discussion is what is best for the student. There are times when it might be best that this student actually goes to that school over there. There might be very compelling reasons around family circumstances why it is best that they do not go to that school and they go to this school. But we start with the premise of your first port of call is your neighbourhood school and after that, if you want to go to another school, we need to put some process in place so that we do not have wild swings and roundabouts based on perceptions or whatever else that make capital planning and building and those sort of things very difficult to do.

CHAIR - I was going to head down a hypothetical path of suggesting that if we did have a school at Port Sorell and then you freed up the zones in the area for the other schools just to see where people dealt with their schooling situations and voted with their feet. But you were talking earlier about the slow demise not being a good outcome.

Mr WELLS - I would be really worried about, for want of a better word, a lack of direction/leadership on that. I do think that we put some schools into really difficult situations. With 75 per cent of Wesley Vale Primary School students living in the Port Sorell area, there has to be progressive decline. Then the school is under pressure to adjust class sizes, what is it going to do with its teaching, how can it plan in a strategic kind of way in that kind of a scenario. Personally, I think that would be a difficult ask of those schools and I do not think that is the best way to go.

Mr WHITELEY - But would it not be fair to say that though that may well be true - and I do not necessarily disagree - that should not in any way, shape or form stop us as a committee from reaching whatever decision we see fit? Irrespective of what you just said being the truth - that is, that leadership will be required, not from this committee but from the Government, the minister, the department or whoever are the people who are given that responsibility and that it will be tough - that should not preclude a committee that has been given a specific reference by vote of the House to say that the evidence is compelling enough, irrespective of all those other things, for a school to be located in Port Sorell. Is that a fair comment?

Mr WELLS - There are few things in there. On the zoning issue, which is what I think you were referring to, I believe that we would need to clearly establish the zone for the Port Sorell school and that would mean that we would need to revisit the existing zones for Moriarty and Wesley Vale if we agreed that Moriarty and Wesley Vale were going to co-exist with the new school. As you know, I do not see anything sound in our having a primary school at Port Sorell and a primary school at Wesley Vale and a primary school at Moriarty.

Mr WHITELEY - But that is a decision that the department would then have to make post a recommendation of whatever it is by this committee. That is a departmental decision after that.

Ms FORREST - I think this is where you were heading Brett, but I am not sure. If a school at Port Sorell was built you would have the home zone around that for the first six years or seven years because you have kinder to six, would there not be a need for a degree of flexibility because families who may live in Port Sorell who have their kids already at Wesley Vale or Moriarty or wherever, is it not reasonable to expect that those families could continue their children at that school? Rather than having to go through a whole process of applying to various principals or whatever the process they have to do, to enable to go to a school that they are already at?

Mr WELLS - We would not do that. You know my view about keeping the three schools. If that happens we do not go in and take kids out of schools or break sibling connections. I only gave Kerry a brief summary of the enrolment process. But we would not do that. If, and you know that I do not agree with it, but if there was still a school at Wesley Vale and I had one child already there and I wanted the other child to go there even though I lived at Port Sorell, the sibling connection is a valid reason for us to continue our enrolment there.

Ms FORREST - So there would be no argument with the department over that if that were the case?

Mr WELLS - No, there would not be. But it would be a sign that we lost the other one. As you know, I do not believe that it is a viable model anyway.

Ms FORREST - I know.

Mr WELLS - But in a hypothetical scenario -

Ms FORREST - That is right. That is what we are talking about here.

Mr WELLS - Hypothetically, no, we would not be getting into splitting families and saying, 'No, you now have to come back to that school because we have built it'.

CHAIR - Malcolm, is there anything that you would like to say in conclusion?

Mr WELLS - No.

CHAIR - Anything you would like to reiterate?

Mr WELLS - I think I would probably just like to say that there are some significant financial implications here depending on what decision you make. I have not come equipped to speculate or contribute to that part of the discussion.

Mr WHITELEY - Can I clarify you on that point?

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Mr WHITELEY - That was a very definitive statement, that there are financial implications on the decision-making. I would contest that that is not a correct statement.

Mr BEST - Rubbish.

Mr WHITELEY - Excuse me. We are asked to provide a recommendation that a government can take or leave, reject or accept. So I just want to put that on the table.

Mr BEST - If you are backing the school, your are going to have to make some decisions, aren't you?

Mr WHITELEY - We are not the Government, mate. You might be a lucky member to be part of it.

Mr BEST - No, that is all right. You have your member running around Lyons.

Mr WHITELEY - I am not even the member here, so it is not a problem for me.

CHAIR - The hornets' nest was just starting to buzz a little bit there. Malcolm, we appreciate very much the thought that you have put into this and your contribution. We understand it is a fairly weighty process for you, and an interesting one, no doubt, to try to help the situation and to capitalise on this BER funding and try to appease and deal with the various communities. But we appreciate your time here today and we thank you very much.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I appreciated especially yesterday having the opportunity to look at the schools, considering that I did not know the area as well as others. I thought it was really useful, thank you.

Mr WELLS - No worries. Thank you.

Ms FORREST - Schools and hospitals are always a difficult topic.

Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER - I did say, Malcolm, in the last presentation that some of the schools in my area would love the opportunity to have 70 children at them.

Ms FORREST - Waratah would too, I am sure!

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.