

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN THE BOARD ROOM, SHEARWATER COUNTRY CLUB, PORT SORELL, ON THURSDAY, 25 AUGUST 2011.**

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**PROPOSED PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE PORT SORELL AREA**

**Mr ANDREW FINCH**, DEPUTY SECRETARY, CORPORATE SERVICES, AND **Mr BRUCE CAMERON**, GENERAL MANAGER, LEARNING SERVICES NORTH, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION; **Mr MICHAEL RATAJ**, PORT SORELL COMMUNITY SCHOOL COMMITTEE, AND **Mr HEATH CLAYTON**, ARTAS ARCHITECTS, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Harriss) - Thanks gentlemen and welcome to the hearing.

**Mr FINCH** - This project will see the return of public education to Port Sorell. A school was established in Port Sorell in 1937 with the relocation of a school building from East Sassafras. In 1956 the teacher, Mrs Hammersley, retired due to ill health and the school closed. There is a long history of representation seeking a school and as far back as 1865 the Board of Education considered whether to establish either a Catholic or Protestant school in the area.

The current proposal has its genesis in considerable community support for the provision of education within the local areas of Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley Beach. Community leaders were keen to have an education facility that was more easily accessible for families, particularly those with younger children. Acknowledged as a growth area in terms of population, the extent of community support and need is reflected in the recommendations of the 2009 Joint Standing Committee on Community Development and the subsequent budgetary commitment by the State Government that was made in 2010-11 Budget with provision for the new school.

The Joint Standing Committee on Community Development recommended a five-kilometre radius for the catchment area and that no school would be closed immediately as a result of the new school being established. It also recommended that steps be taken to assign an independent task force to work with neighbouring schools to develop an appropriate educational model for students in the operation of the schools in a cluster or campus modelling into the future. With this in mind a future directions group has been established with representation from the Wesley Vale and Moriarty school communities and has commenced looking at the longer term implications of a new school in Port Sorell. That committee continues to meet.

The Latrobe Council has been heavily involved with this proposal and has identified a site, the Camp Boomerang site, and has agreed to transfer the land for the new school to be built if approved by the committee.

Currently most school aged children within the Port Sorell, Shearwater, Hawley Beach, Northdown, Squeaking Point and Thirlstane township areas attend Wesley Vale Primary School, and Moriarty Primary School to a lesser extent, and the majority of these

children are transported by bus. The enrolment, based on the first term 2011 census for Wesley Vale Primary School, is 311 on a head-count basis, and at Moriarty it is 73 on a head-count basis. Based on that first-term census there are 322 students who reside in Port Sorell and those neighbouring township areas. Of those 322 students, 250 attend Wesley Vale and 40 attend Moriarty, whilst the remaining 32 students go to numerous other schools. The official home area for the new school is yet to be finalised, however the school will draw students from these townships. Initially the targeted population and capacity for the school is 350 children.

In terms of consultation, we've had a number of groups established to provide for extensive consultation. We've had a steering committee that has been overseeing the development of the new school, a project working group to develop the project brief and support the building project, and the future directions group that I mentioned earlier. Each group has community and education representation, while the steering committee also includes members from the Latrobe Council and the Department of Sport and Recreation, given that we are looking for community-based outcomes.

A comprehensive website has also been established to inform the community about the project and we've updated that site on numerous occasions as things have been updated, like the plans and so on, for the school. We've held two well-supported community forums at the Port Sorell Community Hall. One of those was in February and we gained input from the community about their expectations, hopes and understandings about the development. The meeting was well supported with a broad range of discussions about aspects such as the impact of the development of neighbouring properties, the loss of the Camp Boomerang site, ways in which the schools would complement and add value to existing services, the amenities that the school development would bring to the local community, school and community interaction, and architectural design. Feedback was analysed by the project working group and uploaded onto the website for public information. A further community meeting was held recently in July. Members of the community were able to see a range of the site plans and building designs, as well as talk with Heath Clayton, the architect for the project.

There is considerable excitement about the development of the new school at Port Sorell but a number of issues have been acknowledged and form the basis of much of the work of the future directions group. The development of a new school at Port Sorell will potentially have an impact on the level of enrolments at Wesley Vale and potentially to a lesser extent at Moriarty. The transitioning of students from the existing schools to the Port Sorell primary school is also an issue that we'll need to work through. Establishing the home area for the Port Sorell school is also something that we need to address. As the development at Port Sorell is not the result of an amalgamation of existing schools, as has been the case in all other developments of new schools in recent times in Tasmania, there will be the need for the appointment of a new principal to commence work on developing the school culture, learning and teaching and community links, prior to the school's schedule opening in 2013.

The establishment of an interim consultative group to support and advise the principal during 2012, prior to establishing a school association in 2013, will also be undertaken. The association is unable to be formed until early 2013 given that staff will not have been allocated to the school until late in the 2012 school year.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Andrew. Does any committee member wanted an overview from Heath from an architectural point of view before we simply go into questions?

**Mr BOOTH** - We're pretty right. Andrew, to get my head around the feeder pool for this school, I think you said there was a target of 350 students that this new school has been designed for. If you look at the table on page 5 it looks like there are about 670 students from areas which are in fact beyond the 5-kilometre pool radius anyway, but of those schools listed about 670 now attend state schools. What is the intention for the future of those other schools with regard to this? Constructing a new school here obviously will pull some of the critical mass away from these other schools but obviously it is not adequate to cater for all of the children who would, if those schools closed, end up coming to the school if they want to go to a state school. What is the plan to maintain sufficient capacity for those 670-odd students whilst at the same time potentially threatening the critical mass of each of those schools as well?

**Mr FINCH** - This is a case of responding to changing demographics. When the existing schools were established many years ago there has obviously been a different pattern of demographics around this local community. I guess the investment of a new school does respond to the change in demographics. There are, as we have said, in excess of 300 students who live in this immediate area and the new school is being established to cater for those students.

In terms of the other schools in the area, we do have that future education group, future directions group, that is working through what the impact of the new school will be on those schools. Our goal is to continue to work with that group, around what they see for the future operations and educational delivery for their schools.

**Mr BOOTH** - Have you considered specifically the consequences, then, of the loss? It is going to pull 300-odd students out of the current pool at those current schools. I think I am right in saying that. So what is the effect going to be were this to proceed? On the day it opens, what is going to happen to Wesley Vale, Moriarty, Sassafras and Latrobe given that presumably those students will come from those currently going to those schools?

**Mr FINCH** - As I mentioned we will continue to work with those schools through that directions group. Obviously the biggest impact will be at Wesley Vale, given that most of the students currently attend Wesley Vale Primary, but again we need to continue to work with the school communities through that group about what we do at each of these schools into the future in the context of new schools.

**Mr BOOTH** - What will happen to Wesley Vale if you know that those students will come back to this school? The number of places in the proposed new Port Sorell school is not adequate to cater for the 670 total. Is that right?

**Mr FINCH** - No, that is not right. I think in the figures there are also 300 students from the Latrobe area, so the number of students within the immediate area is more in the order of 500 students.

**Mr BOOTH** - Setting aside that that number I worked out from your table, and given that you had put them in the report there, they appeared to be part of the demographic that

you are looking at of available schools to cater for those numbers. I am really interested whether the department has actually considered and is able to tell the committee what will happen, if this school opened tomorrow, to Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras. Presumably Latrobe has a big enough critical mass to not face losing its critical mass if some students from there came to Port Sorell or stopped going rather to Latrobe and stayed in Port Sorell or came to Port Sorell.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - Are you able to tell us the effect on those schools?

**Mr FINCH** - Not directly in the sense that we do not want to pre-empt the work that we are doing with those school communities.

**Mr BOOTH** - Was it contemplated in the design of the new school, or the concept of putting in a new school, that those schools would then close?

**Mr FINCH** - No.

**Mr BOOTH** - So the effect it might have on other schools wasn't considered?

**Mr FINCH** - No.

**Mr BOOTH** - It was simply a desire to put in a new school, without reference to what might happen to current facilities?

**Mr FINCH** - Obviously there will be an impact on these schools in the immediate area but, again, we need to work through that with the school communities. We need to establish, firstly, which students will attend Port Sorell and that's a process that we will be working through and then work with those school communities as to how many students they will have and how we will best cater for those students. That's why we have established a specific consultative group to work through those issues.

**Mr BOOTH** - That's been established in the last few weeks but this decision was made some time before that. What work did you do when you originally decided that it would be a good idea to build the school here? What information do you have available for the committee about the effect it would have on the remaining schools that would potentially lose their critical mass?

**Mr FINCH** - The future directions group has been going for a number of months. It first met in term 3 last year, so it's been going for nearly 12 months. It was formed soon after the announcement of the new school.

**Mr BOOTH** - I'm sorry, you're talking about the future directions for this area not the general whole-of-State?

**Mr FINCH** - No, we have a specific future directions group that involves the Moriarty and Wesley Vale school communities. That has been established for nearly 12 months.

**Mr BROOKS** - But there was no modelling done on the impact?

**Mr FINCH** - The Joint Standing Committee on Community Development looked at the demographics of the surrounding areas and came to the recommendation that a new school be established in Port Sorell.

**Mr BROOKS** - But since that announcement, since it has become government policy and we're sitting today, has the Education department modelled the impact on the other schools?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, we have. We have presented information in the submission about the current enrolments in schools in this area. We need to work more closely with parents about what their choices will be, about the schools their children will be attending, so that we can then determine the specific impact.

**Mr BOOTH** - It's fair to say they might not have a choice. If, for example, the school opened tomorrow and Wesley Vale lost its critical mass, you're not going to keep it open with 30 kids, are you?

**Mr FINCH** - We will work with the local community about that.

**Mr BOOTH** - So what you're saying is that you might keep it open with 30 kids?

**Mr FINCH** - Again, we have undertaken to work with the community about it through that future directions group.

**Mr BROOKS** - Will it be zoned for families moving into the area?

**Mr FINCH** - There will be a home area established for the Port Sorell primary school. We haven't done that yet but that is something that's on the group's agenda.

**Mr BROOKS** - So new families moving to the area will have to send their kids to Port Sorell because the school is built?

**Mr FINCH** - We'll have a determined home area and if you're in that home area, there would be an expectation that you would attend the Port Sorell school because you'd be within that chosen home area.

**Mr BROOKS** - Which then will impact on Wesley Vale?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, it will.

**Mr HALL** - Was there any consideration given to a staged project, say here at Port Sorell going from kindergarten through to grade 3? That might then mitigate the effects on Wesley Vale and Moriarty in the short term. Was there any consideration given to that model rather than going from kindergarten to grade 6 straight off?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, there was consideration given to that in the very early stages of planning for the new school. Feedback from the community representatives was that their preference would be for the school to open with a K-6 presence, given that a partial opening would impact on sibling arrangements. They may have one child attending a

different school in grade 4, for example, and one in grade 1 attending the new school. The preference was for the school to open in a full format and we did have discussions about that.

**Mr HALL** - Through your consultation, was that generally what people thought from other school communities as well, or just from here? Did the other school communities agree; was it a general accord?

**Mr FINCH** - That was with the community consultation that we were doing with the Port Sorell project. From the people who were going to be directly affected, that was the feedback that we got. Bruce is a member of the future directions group too - are you the chair of that?

**Mr CAMERON** - Yes, I am.

**Mr FINCH** - Bruce chairs the group so I might get him to speak a little more about that as well.

**Mr CAMERON** - A lot of the options that you discussed are the options that are being laid out on the table with the future directions group. Quite a deal of the work that the group has done so far has been put on hold at the moment because of the Ministerial Reference Group on school viability. We have discussed and looked at a lot of models around home areas because the initial recommendation was the 5 kilometre radius from where the school would be built. That cuts through some of the townships, we call them townships - Northdown, Thirlstane and so forth.

We have looked at a range of different models that would logically fit a home area for the Port Sorell school and trying to fit in with the department's policies and guidelines around enrolments so that what seemed to be fair here is what would seem to be fair in other parts of the State. That is around areas of entitlement; if you live in the home area to attend school, out-of-area enrolments.

It is interesting that you raised the issue about whether we could consider a K-2 or K-4 start-off. Very clearly coming through is the need to maintain friendship groups and that is impacting on some of the suggestions that are being put forward to the future directions group about transitioning because from the table here, a significant percentage of children who currently attend the Wesley Vale school reside in Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley Beach. Input into the future directions group has been around what transition processes could be in place, particularly for those students who are in grades 5 and 6 at the existing schools and a survey is being sent out to families this week, which the future directions group has put together, to get some initial data from families about what their intentions might be. We will be looking for firmer intentions when it gets to around this time next year because obviously needing to know numbers will impact on staffing and the level of resourcing for the school, and what class configurations could look like and what the range of curriculum opportunities could be available as well.

**Mr HALL** - If this committee approves construction of the school, it should be ready to roll at the start of the 2013 school year. How dramatic will that immediate effect be on Wesley Vale and Moriarty numbers?

**Mr CAMERON** - Again, with reference to the table on page 5, looking at the percentage of children who currently attend the Wesley Vale school from the Port Sorell area, which is Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley Beach, it is around 80 per cent. That is based on first term census enrolments in the school. Without being able to project accurately forward, it is about an 80 per cent impact.

**Mr BROOKS** - I have had several e-mails from members of the future directions group with some criticism and I want to gather your feelings on that. I will go through some of the feedback I have and it is more based on the consultation. You have referenced community consultation often in your opening comments and now. The feedback I have in an e-mail is that one member of it was beginning to draw the conclusion that the group has been set up as a procrastination tactic under the guise of gaining community involvement, instead of the principal purpose of working out what is best for our children's ongoing educational needs. He also comments that within the school community there seemed to be a perception that the decisions on all aspects of the new school at Port Sorell have already been made, giving the impression to the school community that providing any feedback at this time will not have any impact. He would encourage quite a majority of the contributors to speak up. He also says that the level of communication and consultation between the future directions group and the school communities is disappointing. A member of the community is saying that it has not been good communication or consultation at all.

**Mr CAMERON** - I am not aware who that person is. The membership of the committee is probably eight to 10 people.

**Mr BROOKS** - He did send you the e-mail. Whether you have read it or not, I am not sure.

**Mr CAMERON** - Yes. Of those eight to 10 people, eight of those would be regular people. Those people were originally drawn from the school associations of the Wesley Vale School and the Moriarty School, so by virtue of their presence of that group they are representing the schools associations of Moriarty and Wesley Vale. They bring to the table comments, concerns, suggestions from their school associations and also from the communities that they live in. Another group that they also represent are those families who do not even have children at school yet, or people who live in the community but no longer have children at the school. Those people either opted to be on the committee or were asked to be on the committee because they were representative of a range of community groups. So they are seen to be representatives and they are feeding information back out through the school newsletter, through the Latrobe Council newsletter, so it is two-way information.

The future directions committee meets regularly. It has been meeting almost every fortnight or every three weeks, so there has been a constant level of input from those eight or 10 very dedicated people. I do not think that they would see their ongoing participation as being a charade because we are dealing with very sensitive issues, as you certainly are bringing forward here, and considerable and considered thought has to go into any decisions that get put out for testing.

**Mr BROOKS** - Also on that, I received feedback that meetings are normally during the day, which does not suit those that work. Another comment was that the amount of education

employees are disproportionate to the overall group, effectively saying that the numbers are stacked anyway with teachers or employees of the Education department. Can you tell me how many are employees of the Education department and how many are not of that eight to 10?

**Mr CAMERON** - I would say that the majority of the people on the group are Education department employees, but they are representatives of the school associations. They did not come onto the committee by virtue of the fact that they are department employees but are there as representatives of the school associations or the committees of those schools.

**Mr BROOKS** - Are they also constrained, though, in what they say? We saw today where the media were not allowed to go near the school - and we welcome them here today. Are teachers afraid to raise significant issues with the department for fear of Mr McKim going on a power struggle again and try to get rid of the noisy ones or instruct principals not to speak out? Is that another case in this area?

**Mr FINCH** - Teachers and principals are employees of the State Service and operate under a code of conduct that is outlined in the State Service Act. What we do as senior officers of the department is ensure that our staff members are able to operate under the requirements that are outlined, not by the Department of Education but by the State Service Act, which is an act of parliament, so that is how we operate. We have no alternative to operate other than that because what we would be doing is putting our staff into a vulnerable position in that they would be essentially acting outside of the provisions of the State Service Act.

**Mr BROOKS** - How dare they criticise the Government, effectively? The point is that the numbers are stacked towards education employees and the meetings are held at a time that does not suit a lot of working families or parents. That criticism appears to be fairly valid. Part of the consultation period is involving parents that want to be involved, but you have not done that in this case.

**Mr CAMERON** - Membership of their group was dominated by respective school associations, in my understanding, right from the outset so there are people on there who may well be department employees but they also represent different groups within different parts of the community. The timing and the schedule of those meetings were set up last year. Generally at each meeting checking is done with members about their availability. Those meetings have not always been held in the afternoon, but are generally around child-care requirements because a number of the people on the committee do have younger children, but I take your point on board.

**Mr RATAJ** - As a member of the project working group, Adam, I have made it my business to attend the meetings. It is an important process and I have made it my business. I have taken days off work; I have taken a day off work today. If people are committed to an outcome then they ought to make themselves available.

**Mr BROOKS** - I understand that but obviously in the current economic climate people do not have a choice. They cannot demand of their boss that they want a day off or they want time off. Some people have that opportunity, others do not. Certainly it is a considerable impact on families, especially if they are casual workers. Some simply



cannot afford to be on those committees and we should try and get as many people involved as we can. That is the point I am making.

**Mr BOOTH** - I am interested in looking again at the demographics. You have mentioned that the township population within a 5-kilometre radius of Port Sorell will grow to between 5 000 and 6 000 within the next decade.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - Have you done a demographic study of the growth in areas outside of that and that would be within the feeder zones for the other schools that would be affected if Port Sorell was built? The underpinning reasoning of why you would justify that Port Sorell school is based on a township population within a 5-kilometre radius of this school, or radius of Port Sorell rather, being a feeder zone for this area. Justification for the school is based on this astonishing growth rate. Do you have figures that we can look at that compare the population growth rates in areas outside of that 5-kilometre area and that would be servicing Wesley Vale and Moriarty or any of the other schools - Latrobe for example?

**Mr RATAJ** - I would suggest that those areas - Sassafras, Moriarty, the Wesley Vale township itself - are basically rural areas with limited or negligible prospect of growth. That would be my observation. They are rural farming areas. They just do not have any growth potential as far as housing growth is concerned.

**Mr BOOTH** - New housing growth?

**Mr RATAJ** - Yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - My experience with rural areas and rural schools is that the school population can change fairly rapidly. If you have a family move in that has three or four or five kids then suddenly sometimes you have a 10 per cent increase in the school population, so there's a lot of potential for increase if you had a change in the age group of people in those houses. Have you looked at that demographic? You may have an ageing population around those areas that will be moving out over the next decade and being replenished or rejuvenated by young families with children, for example.

**Mr FINCH** - There was a demographic study commissioned by the council as part of the planning work for Port Sorell, as part of their master planning arrangements. It was commissioned through Dr Natalie Jackson and it showed that in recent years the annual growth rate had been 3.4 per cent, which compared to an annual rate of growth of 1.6 per cent for Latrobe and 0.7 per cent for the total of Tasmania.

**Mr BOOTH** - Although significantly that's based not so much on population. I think that's based on housing units or capacity, but significantly 25 per cent of those were holiday homes so they wouldn't be people who would be utilising the Port Sorell school.

**Mr FINCH** - No, that was based on people and the projections indicate that the possibility of the region's population increasing over the next decade was well within the bounds of expectation, getting up towards that 6 000.

**Mr BOOTH** - The same paragraph you're quoting from talks about 'of these 25 per cent were holiday homes and 23 per cent on rural divisional lots', so within that demographic area we're talking about, the pool of township population within 5 kilometres, according to this document presented to the committee, 25 per cent of that are transients who wouldn't be sending their kids to school.

**Mr FINCH** - The department undertakes 'enrolment projections' - once a student enrolls in a school we project them out through the year cohorts. If they are in kindergarten, for example, we roll them through grades 1, 2, 3 and so on. We have some projections for the immediate schools. At Sassafras the enrolments projection would be stable -

**Mr BOOTH** - Just to clarify that for the committee, that's based on enrolments today. You have no idea tomorrow how many people may or may not enrol in those schools, it's based purely on the enrolment and projections of where those children will travel?

**Mr FINCH** - Plus an estimate of new students who would be from birth data, within ABS collectors districts, and making an estimate of where they will attend school and projecting that out to kindergartens as well.

**Mr BOOTH** - So you use that birth data from ABS to include it in the projections?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, we do.

**Mr BOOTH** - Are those figures easy to provide to the committee?

**Mr FINCH** - I can get something formatted to provide to you.

**Mr BOOTH** - I think if we could get that data it would be worthwhile.

**Mr FINCH** - We see some growth, and I think it was evidenced in our visit to Wesley Vale, where the school has been expanding in recent years. The estimate is that given the population, it would continue to expand with more students, not obviously taking into account the establishment of the Port Sorell community.

**Mr BOOTH** - The age demographic in some of those pools, especially in the smaller feeder areas, is quite important because of the point I made before about if it is a typical rural area, you would probably find that with the age demographic, the homes of older people who no longer have children at school and maybe not even at home then become homes for new families and so you could suddenly have a rapid transition from a demographic that has no children to one that has heaps of children. I am wondering whether you've factored that into the analysis.

**Mr FINCH** - If we take all the schools together, we are projecting an increase in this area and, as I said, we can provide some figures that support that.

**Mr BOOTH** - That would be useful. The other question with regard to that is the growth. Noting that 25 per cent of that 5 000 to 6 000 population increase apparently is holiday homes, what about the rest of them? What is the demographic in Port Sorell in terms of family unit and age demographic? Can you give us a breakdown there of the age of these people and whether they have children, or are they retirement homes? I don't live

in this area and I'm not making a judgment on it, but it's my understanding that it is an area whose principal driver has been lifestyle, retirement and shacks. If you're attracting a whole lot of retired people at Port Sorell, it's a bit of a fallacious basis to then project on an average across the whole State that that will ipso facto mean that you'll need more spaces in schoolrooms because if they're retirees, they presumably haven't got children who'll be going to the school.

Do you have a breakdown on the age demographic in that 5-kilometre radius as well?

**Mr FINCH** - No, we don't have that level of data available but we do know, obviously, the numbers of students that we need to cater for within this area and the fact is that in excess of 300 students do live within this immediate area.

**Mr BOOTH** - So that's the current ones or ones that you've projected into the future based on that growth rate?

**Mr FINCH** - As we said in the report, as at February 2011, the first term census, 322 students reside in Port Sorell, Shearwater, Hawley Beach, Northdown, Squeaking Point and Thirlstane.

**Mr BOOTH** - And what about in five years' time?

**Mr CAMERON** - The other source of data we have is early years programs that are run out here at Port Sorell that the Wesley Vale school runs and a significant percentage - I gather it would be close to 75 to 80 per cent - of the children from typical families participating with children in that birth to four age group are actually living out here.

**Mr BOOTH** - And they'll be the feeder pool for the school then?

**Mr CAMERON** - Yes.

**Mr BROOKS** - Mike, I might get your comments on that from what Mr Booth's been talking about. I think there has been a demographic change lately of younger families. Did you want to talk about that, Mike?

**Mr RATAJ** - Part of the evidence given to the Joint Standing Committee on Community Development was from the local real estate agent. I won't quote figures but a significant proportion of their inquiries are from young couples. The first question they ask is what medical facilities are in the town and, the second question, is there a school in the town? When they hear there's no school in the town a high percentage of those inquiries from the younger families slip by and they don't progress with their inquiries.

So the point I make with your demographics and a retirement village perhaps, we are catering for the older generation residents with the aged care facility - with other aged facilities. We haven't ever catered for the younger population in the town by providing a school and Adam makes the point, there has been a change; everybody is becoming more mobile or whatever, so there are more younger people coming out. You just drive around and see the amount of new housing; they're not all holiday shacks, they're not all retirement units for the older generation. There is a move for a younger population

coming out here and as far as the growth of that is concerned when the school is provided, you can't determine that. I'm hopeful it'll move with a younger population.

**Mr BOOTH** - Potentially then, if it hasn't been factored in, the presence of a school will drive a demographic change of young people who are currently, say, asking the agent if there's a school and they say no, so they're walking away. It could put the projections for the 350 target completely out, couldn't it? It could be 700 or whatever.

**Mr RATAJ** - The 350 target caters for more than the current population. Each of the buildings we have provided allows for an additional classroom, so that's an additional three classrooms for potentially another 100 students.

**Mr CLAYTON** - Each of our pods is allowed to expand by an additional classroom and we also have an additional capacity in the early years area, so we could potentially grow the population to around 450 if that was the potential outcome.

**Mr BOOTH** - So that 450 would max out the capacity of the school if you put additional classrooms on there?

**Mr CLAYTON** - It depends on how many you want. Basically we're working our designs around a 25-student classroom, but we have abilities to cater up to 28. You add that in so it could be more than that. I think 450 seems to be the upper end of the population for a new school. That's the information we've been working on. That's why we have said 350 is the immediate demand, but as part of our design process we have allowed for a capacity to expand to 450.

**Mr FINCH** - And the site is definitely large enough. The site is a 5.5 hectare site and the standard for a school of even 400 would be about 2.8 hectares. I think it's 2.6 hectares for the targeted population, so there's more than sufficient space.

**Mr BOOTH** - If what Michael's saying is right and he is expecting a boom - and he didn't deny that perhaps it could double - doubling the target would bring it up to 640, or 700 if you're going on the 350 target.

**Mr RATAJ** - That would be an unworkable primary school and you would need a second one.

**Mr BOOTH** - That's the point I'm making, so how good are the projections for the future demographic? You've made the point that a school might cause the area to boom with all these young couples staying here. You've only got capacity to increase it by another 33 per cent on the current -

**Mr CLAYTON** - That's the design as it stands now. We have accommodated so that it can be expanded easily but, as Andrew said, there is more room on the site if you wanted to increase the population. That would have to be a decision as it occurred in the future if that was the best course of action. I would imagine that a doubling of a school population would take some time and there would be steps in place to look at that.

**Mr FINCH** - I think you're talking about a significantly longer time period.

**Mr RATAJ** - Yes, not an overnight thing.

**Mr BOOTH** - With respect, house prices are changing rapidly downwards at the moment. If you have an area with an ageing population, they tend to throw up a lot of vacancies through natural attrition - a desire to move back home or whatever. If the house prices dropped, you could potentially have a lot of young people who would be wanting to utilise the school. I don't think it's unreasonable to expect to have some sort of projections on that.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, but as Heath has pointed out, we could cater for up to 100 very easily, and that might come from 300 households, for example. There would need to be probably 300 more households to get that number of students, so I think we have a good basis on which to enable the school to grow at the moment and then respond in the future if need be.

**CHAIR** - On the demographics, because it's an important matter when we consider what we have seen at Wesley Vale and Moriarty, at the head of your presentation, Andrew, you indicated that establishing the home area is an issue. Why is that so? As a casual observer, I would have thought establishing the home area would be a fairly simple process. Why did you make the comment that it is an issue?

**Mr FINCH** - It's something we need to address. I don't see it as an issue or a problem, but I was noting that we do need to address the home area for the school. Every school has a home area established so that we can identify students who should attend each school from a home area. It helps us in regulating enrolments across schools, so part of the process of establishing the new school is establishing the defined home area for the school.

**CHAIR** - Going to the tables which have been referred to a number of times through the presentation, if we did presume that the 250 students currently living in Port Sorell and who attend Wesley Vale then enrolled at the new Port Sorell school in the event that it is approved, that reduces Wesley Vale to an enrolment of what?

**Mr FINCH** - Sixty-odd.

**CHAIR** - Given that it is a school with the capacity to accommodate about 350, Kim asked you about the danger of Wesley Vale then closing. You said you would need to work with the community and you have given an undertaking to work with the community regarding that. If you have a school sitting there capable of accommodating 350 and they have 50 or 60 only, is it not axiomatic that in fact it would close, given the criteria which were published recently as to the minimum enrolment which deem a school viable - around 100. What is the department's position?

**Mr FINCH** - As I mentioned, the department will continue to work with the local community about the future directions for education in this area. We have an established process and that is what we will commit to continue to work through with the local communities. During the last 12 months we have also been working with the community about how the BER expenditure took place, and we saw that today. Obviously with the BER project, as we know the Commonwealth Government allocated money to every school. That was the decision by the Commonwealth Government to make money available for every

school in Australia, the 9 672 schools throughout the nation. Wesley Vale had \$2 million available to it and had a project running to spend that money. As soon as the new school was announced in the budget in June 2010 we put a hold on the BER project and sat down with the local community to review the project as it was. Some changes were made to that project to ensure that the expenditure did not add to the permanent footprint of that school. So even over the last 12 to 18 months we have been working with the community to get the best outcome for the money that was available for the school and the future needs of the school. So the process has started and that is an example of how we can work with a local community to ensure that we get agreed outcomes moving forward.

**Mr BOOTH** - Was that through the future directions group?

**Mr FINCH** - No, not at the time. We did not have that group established at that point.

**Mr BOOTH** - So how did the consultation take place?

**Mr FINCH** - Basically myself and the general manager of services north-west, Malcolm Wells at the time, met with the local community. We had a fairly large meeting one evening here at Wesley Vale School and then from that we formed a sub-group. We asked for nominations for a sub-group which had community representation. We worked through the issues with that sub-group. Given that we needed to work with architectural plans and work out the project, we obviously needed to work with a smaller group about that. That is how we undertook that process. Then we had an agreed project moving forward, so we re-started the project. What you saw today was the final outcome of the project. I guess the important point there, and the challenge we are dealing with, is that the demographics were such that for 2012 they need extra space before the new school would become available. To cater for that we have actually put in that impressive portable double classroom that you saw there today. It can actually be moved to another school in the future, so that was a very wise investment.

**Mr HALL** - Just following on from that, outside those portable classrooms would it not, Andrew, have been perhaps wise or circumspect to have deferred the rest of that potential BER funding spent on Wesley Vale and Moriarty and put it into this project? Was that possible?

**Mr FINCH** - We approached that. That would have required specific approval from the Australian Government given that the funds were allocated to each school. We did, in respect of Wesley Vale, discuss that with the local community but the local community's view obviously at the time was that the funds should be expended to bring Wesley Vale up to an equivalent standard of other schools. I think that is the important point. Whilst we did not add to permanent new footprint, some of the areas of the school were fairly substandard - the administration area, some of the classrooms, the hall, toilet facilities and so on - so we were able to spend money on virtually maintenance things really to bring the school up to an appropriate standard.

**Mr BROOKS** - I was aware before entering Parliament of the circumstances around that and there was a significant discussion around the BER funding and whether it should be spent on Wesley Vale Primary or allocated towards a potential new school, and the parents of Wesley Vale were fairly significant in that decision. The money had been allocated to

the school and the overwhelming majority of parents supported that money remaining and being spent on the school. I think also the other consideration at the time was that the Port Sorell school had not been funded or announced around the time line. Yes, it was a policy of the two major parties but it was not certainly a definite. That was the discussion around that. The fact that it took them so long to get their act together and do it is a different story but a couple of years ago that was the debate.

**Mr HALL** - Mr Brooks makes an excellent witness.

*Laughter.*

**CHAIR** - Andrew, you have indicated that when the project was announced in the Budget last year certain action took place with regard to the continuing funding under the BER at Wesley Vale. I then go back to 2009 when the Community Development Committee addressed its mind to the possibility of a new school at Port Sorell. So even though it was not announced until the Budget last year which then focused the department's attention, it is fair to say, isn't it, that it is a matter which has been on the agenda for some time? I then raise the question with you about the judicious decision, notwithstanding that the Federal Government had allocated money to all schools, of the approval for the expenditure of a large amount of funds at Wesley Vale with the backdrop of the possibility of a school at Port Sorell which would take away a huge slice of the enrolment at Wesley Vale. At what stage or when did the department start the modelling for a possibility of a school at Port Sorell?

**Mr FINCH** - Again, it is very difficult to work on possibilities. So if there is money available for a school community, the decision is to obviously look at the money available on the known set of circumstances and factors that exist at the time. When the BER money was sought in respect of Wesley Vale Primary I think that was between February and May 2009, in excess of a year before the school became a reality. So we were seeking the funding. The BER funding would not ever have been available for a new school entity. The only way it would have become available for a new school entity would have been if there was an official amalgamation of schools that had existing BER funding. We were 15 months in the planning of the BER project for Wesley Vale before the school was announced in June 2010 and as soon as we had the announcement and the school had become a reality - so it was more than a possibility - then we worked with the local community about reviewing the expenditure of that funding.

As Mr Brooks said, we discussed the use of the money at the new school but it was the local community's preference for the funds to be spent at their school. The Australian Government had already allocated the funding in respect of Wesley Vale so we pursued the allocation of the funds and the expenditure at the school. But what we did, I guess, was make sure that the expenditure incurred had an eye to the future and we did not establish new permanent buildings, that we focused on making sure we could cater for the enrolments that needed to be catered for up until a new school would be available at Port Sorell, and also made sure that we improved the amenity of the existing classrooms. The school has students going through every year group at the moment that deserve the benefit of good facilities otherwise they would have a period that they would miss out on the same level of facilities that students are enjoying at other schools.

**Mr HALL** - I went to the opening of the Wesley Vale one recently - only a couple of months ago. Do you consider that if the new school at Port Sorell opens in 2013, those schools - both Wesley Vale and Moriarty - could have made do with what they had up until that time, instead of expending something like \$2.1 million at Wesley Vale and perhaps almost close to another \$1 million at Moriarty - \$3.1 million - which is considerable? I am putting to you that it is a considerable amount of taxpayers' money to have spent for a short-term transition, if you like.

**Mr FINCH** - Again, the money was available, it was allocated before the new school was announced and we have endeavoured to spend it in the best way possible. The investment has been made and does exist in those sites and we will continue to discuss the future of the sites with the future directions group.

**CHAIR** - On the back of that, though, I do not think that anybody sitting at this table would argue that the money hasn't been well spent - what has been delivered at those two schools is commendable. But against the backdrop of the possibility of their closing, given the criteria - and people will make their own judgments about that; I expect it is not for this committee to determine anything to do with that - it is for this committee to determine the reasonableness of the proposal before us given that at a stone's throw away we have two schools which have had substantial money spent on them which now bring them up to contemporary standards and they can accommodate the short-term projected enrolment increases.

**Mr FINCH** - As I mentioned, the demographics have changed. Those schools were built probably in excess of 50 years ago - I haven't got the exact years - when the demographic circumstances were different. The population is now in this immediate area and I think what we need to do as a department, moving forward is respond to changing demographics. We have an old, in most cases ageing, infrastructure that in many cases is not set up in the correct areas for where students now live, and this is a good response to one of the fastest-growing places in the State - there is a response to establish a school.

**CHAIR** - You have just mentioned ageing infrastructure, and it doesn't respond to changing demographics. Is that a comment which you would align to both Wesley Vale and Moriarty?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, for certain aspects of it.

**CHAIR** - Even with the BER?

**Mr FINCH** - The BER has enabled it to be brought up to an appropriate standard. Even at Wesley Vale we didn't spend a lot in the old building component with the old hall where the library is, so there's still a fairly aged infrastructure that will have a high maintenance component to it into the future.

**CHAIR** - Does the department have a policy on desired maximum travel on school buses for primary school students?

**Mr FINCH** - No, not a definite policy.



**CHAIR** - Is there any indicator whether it's a definite policy or not? Is there an indicator which is a desirable matter to take into consideration?

**Mr FINCH** - I think the work of the recently announced school viability group will consider issues such as that. That's what some of their work will be. They will look at what criteria should be taken into account.

**CHAIR** - I take from that that you don't have any published guidelines or indicators?

**Mr FINCH** - To the best of my knowledge, at this stage I don't think we do.

**CHAIR** - Still on the demographics, as to the recommendations flowing from the Community Development Committee, there was one on operating the schools in the areas on a campus model. Is that something that the department has considered, given the proposal to build a new school here at Port Sorell?

**Mr CAMERON** - Certainly that's been one of the many possibilities that the future directions group has worked through. Quite a deal of our time has been discussing the way federation models exist, not only in this country but also in other countries where schools work together. That can range from a hard federation where there might be a single principal covering a couple of campuses right through to a soft federation where there is the sharing of resources across campuses - maintenance of grounds or buildings, administration staff and specialist staff. They are a number of possibilities that our group has looked at. Further actions of that group will be informed by the recommendations that come out of the school viability reference group. We are not in a position to preempt what that group might recommend because that's not just a blueprint for this geographic area but for the entire State.

**Mr BOOTH** - I understand the current policy is that children are allowed to nominate out of what they might call an 'area school'. It is proposed that the Port Sorell school have a catchment area that would be a 5-kilometre radius around the school or around Port Sorell?

**Mr FINCH** - I think the Community Development Committee suggested the 5-kilometre radius. That would be considered further in determining the precise home area for the school.

**Mr BOOTH** - Is it the current policy that you can travel out of area to another school if so desired? Would it be the policy, if this school proceeds, that parents who live within that home school zone or feeder zone would have to send their kids to Port Sorell?

**Mr CAMERON** - In line with the department's policy on enrolment, there is information on the department's website about what constitutes a home area and there are maps of home areas for each of our State schools. Parents or families are actively encouraged to support their home school but there is certainly provision for out-of-area enrolments. Whether it be for employment or family connections or other reasons, there are processes to enable out-of-area enrolments, but we actively encourage families to support their local school.

**Mr BOOTH** - So what would the case be here, then, given that you have the demographic? My understanding from submissions to the committee is that there is a considerable cohort of parents who want their kids to continue to go to the schools that currently they are going to and not go to Port Sorell school at this stage. What would happen to those children? Would they be required to go to the Port Sorell school if they were within the zone?

**Mr CAMERON** - These are not formalised recommendations as yet, but the input that the future directions committee has had is to consider family connections, friendships and loyalties that families and children have to their current schools. One of the possibilities is that once a home area is established there could be transition arrangements for those families who still want to maintain a connection with their current schools. That would be a discussion they would have with the current principal. Conversely, considering that the plans are for a new school to be established here, there would be families who potentially live outside the designated home area for the Port Sorell School and who may wish - again for family reasons, work reasons, whatever - for their children to attend the school here. So there needs to be the same sort of process for families who want their children to attend here as well as for families who want their children to be enrolled in schools outside the home area.

**Mr BOOTH** - How many students, or parents of students, do not want to go to a different school and who currently attend these schools? If you built this school tomorrow and if parents had the option to continue to send their kids to whatever school they wanted to, how many are actually going to agree to come to this school?

**Mr CAMERON** - That has not been quantified as yet. A survey from the future directions committee is being sent home. The plans are for it to go this week so that we can get some sort of indication at this stage. Also there is the opportunity there for parents to say what their concerns are or what further questions they have, what the considerations are within the family if they have a number of children at either Wesley Vale or Moriarty but they live here, and what those concerns might be. In 12 months time we will be asking for a firmer commitment. So I am unable to quantify that response for you.

**Mr BOOTH** - But isn't it pre-emptive in a sense to contemplate constructing a school that will be taking students away from those current schools, and to retain for those parents and children the option to continue to go to the current schools, without any understanding of the quantity of parents who will actually choose to send their kids to this school? It is possible you may have no students in the school if nobody decided to shift. Therefore you would have to force them.

**Mr CAMERON** - The Port Sorell school is being constructed with the idea of what is known but also with what can be predicted. We are making those more accurate assessments based on where families currently live and also the percentage of families with pre-school aged children who are enrolling their children into the currently available options.

**Mr BOOTH** - But you will not know until you have done that future directions report and survey whether any single child will voluntarily attend Port Sorell school at this stage.

**Mr CAMERON** - The expectation would be, but has not been defined as yet, that once a home area is established for the school then families would support that school. This works with every other State school.

**Mr BOOTH** - What does 'expectation' mean?. Does that mean that they will be required to send their children there?

**Mr CAMERON** - Generally that is the case.

**Mr BOOTH** - They would be required to.

**Mr CAMERON** - Yes. In other State schools that I am aware of, particularly in this learning service, the percentage of children or families who apply for out-of-area enrolments for a huge number of reasons is not a significant percentage.

**Mr BOOTH** - But this is an unusual circumstance. From my superficial inspection of those schools, they seem well equipped, they seem to be in good condition, they seem to be providing a good educational outcome for the kids and there is now a proposal to construct a school that will actually take children out of those current schools and from what you are saying force them or require them to go to another school so that is quite a different situation to where there is not a new school being built and parents decide to send their children out of area for a whole lot of various reasons.

**Mr CAMERON** - When you use the term 'force' that is not in a physical sense.

**Mr BOOTH** - I think you used the term 'require'.

**Mr CAMERON** - The recommendations that will come out of the minister's reference group, which was referred to earlier, on the current enrolment procedures may well through the process of public consultation throw up a whole new set of conditions around enrolment. People like Mike, who live in the local community, would have a finger on the pulse as to what the level of support potentially is for the future of a school here.

**Mr RATAJ** - Again, probably unquantifiable but I think if parents had the choice of a brand new facility with the newness and the locality of that school to their home I think that surely would be their first choice. You may well have opposition or motions from detractors or people that are not going to do that but I think it would be human nature that you would send your child to the closest, newest and best facility available to you.

**Mr BOOTH** - I do not dispute what you are saying; if you moved into this area cold and if there was a brand new school you probably would send your child down the road. But with the current demographic and the way school communities work, in my experience with rural schools there is a very strong allegiance to a school that their children are going to. Often their parents might have gone to that school as well. There is a close cultural connection there. It is the hub of the community. They contribute a lot more than just a place to go to school. They provide a whole lot of things that often bigger schools do not provide.

I am not so much interested in who might enrol tomorrow who does not have a connection here, as in the current demographic in regard to the kids who go to the

schools that are currently utilised. How many of those kids are going to willingly end up in the new school and what are you going to do about it to force them to go if they do not want to because obviously you would have a problem, wouldn't you, if the school was built and tomorrow there were not enough children to fill it?

**Mr RATAJ** - Well again that is the subject of Bruce's survey that is going out this week.

**Mr FINCH** - The expectation would be, as Michael put it, that we have a situation where a large number of students are travelling 11 or so kilometres on a bus up and down every day and once the new school is established there and is up and running and it is within walking distance or cycle distance you would expect that people would just want to come. Again that is just an expectation of establishing new facilities.

**Mr BOOTH** - You hope that they will want to do that and it is probably not an unreasonable hope but what is the mechanism then if they do not want to? What are you going to do? Given that there is a proposal to spend \$13 million or whatever it is on a new school, what is your plan B if people decide they want to stay in their current schools given that the only pool at the moment is the current pool?

**Mr FINCH** - I think you are talking more about a short-term problem or potential problem. As Bruce alluded to, the infants now - the ones attending the early years program - will be wanting to establish an association with the new school and then come through the new school environment.

**Mr BROOKS** - So there will be a TAFE?

**Mr FINCH** - Sorry?

**Mr BROOKS** - Potentially a TAFE?

**Mr FINCH** - There may be.

**Mr BROOKS** - The kids in grade 3 may not want to change schools but the kids that are going in -

**Mr FINCH** - Yes.

**Mr BROOKS** - That is what you are advising - that the parents of the kids who want to start are indicating that if there are schools here they may go there?

**Mr FINCH** - That's right. What we try to do is work with local communities to get the best outcomes.

**Mr BOOTH** - What's the mechanism for encouraging parents who don't want to send their kids to the new school, hypothetically? How are you going to make them go to Port Sorell?

**Mr CAMERON** - I think a broader way of approaching it is what the incentives are for families to participate in learning with their children. The birth-4 program for the Wesley Vale School has been operated here at Port Sorell for a number of years, so there

is that association for the majority of families who attend the Wesley Vale School. The school association at Wesley Vale was quite forward-thinking in saying, 'We need to deliver a service closer to where families are'. At the moment that's operating out of the Port Sorell hall, the community centre. That will transfer to the new school once that site is established, so there will be the developing of the relationships and not just with the staff. We will be working with the younger people and also that association with the buildings.

**Mr BOOTH** - What about the buses? Will the buses turn around and bring kids here rather than taking them to the other schools or turn around and bring those kids this way? Will you still be allowed to get a bus from Port Sorell to Wesley Vale or Moriarty?

**Mr CAMERON** - DIER monitors the usage of the buses. At the moment the buses service Wesley Vale and Moriarty and the continued provision of that service would be based on usage of the service.

**Mr BOOTH** - But you'd have to turn them back the other way, wouldn't you? They would be carting kids to school here rather than carting them home? Currently if a child goes from Port Sorell to, say, Wesley Vale on a bus, so you would be contemplating reversing it and bringing them from Wesley Vale to this school?

**Mr CAMERON** - Potentially, if the major intake of students is in Port Sorell, Hawley Beach and Shearwater, the provision of bike and walking tracks assists the majority of children to get to the new Port Sorell school rather than the provision of buses. The provision of transport is something that, as we work further into the project, will become more apparent and DIER, through the monitoring of the use of their transport services, will be in a better position to decide whether that service is still efficient.

**Mr BOOTH** - Will you still provide a bus service from Port Sorell to Wesley Vale, Moriarty or Latrobe - I'm not sure which routes you currently provide - will the current routes still be provided or will there no longer be the ability of parents to put their kids on a bus and send them to a school which is currently their local school but will become an out-of-area school?

**Mr CAMERON** - The continuation of that service will be determined by usage.

**Mr BOOTH** - If nobody wants to come to Port Sorell, how are you going to make them come to Port Sorell? If the bus is still there they get on the bus in the morning and go to their school, are they still going to be able to get on that bus and go to their current school - in other words, travel out of their home school zone - or will you be closing that service down?

**Mr CAMERON** - Quite reasonably there may well be a time, whether it is two years, three years, four years, depending on what the transition arrangements are, as Mr Brooks mentioned, that it is deemed by our consultation processes that transition arrangements will exist for children currently in grades 4, 5 and 6 and beyond that, children will be expected to enrol at the Port Sorell School. That is when judgments about the viability of the bus services continuing will be made. It may well get to the point where it is not economically viable or sustainable to continue with those transport options, but DIER will make those decisions.

**Mr BOOTH** - But you will not allow children to get on that bus who are currently going to that school - in other words, if there's new arrival in the 5-kilometre area and they want to go to one of these current schools, you won't allow them to get on the bus then, is that how it'll work? It's a pretty simple question and I really wouldn't mind an answer so that I can understand what control mechanisms you have contemplated to ensure that you have enough children who end up going to Port Sorell school, given that we currently have schools that appear to be well-attended and a lot of submissions from people saying they don't want to send their kids to a different school? There are a lot of supporting submissions and, it is fair to say, there are others who do want a new school. I'm interested in the control mechanisms to ensure that if you decide to build and if it does go ahead, how you will make sure that it works.

**Mr FINCH** - Again, we'll work with the local communities to get the best outcomes for the communities. That's what we want to do, through that process.

**Mr BOOTH** - To make it clear, the question I asked was will they be able to get on the bus if the Port Sorell school is built tomorrow? The day after tomorrow if a new person arrives in that feeder zone, will they be able to put their kid on that bus to go to an out-of-area school or will they not? In which case that will, of course, become self-fulfilling prophesy that the bus route will obviously become unviable because there simply won't be any more new children getting on that bus.

**Mr FINCH** - I think we answered it pretty well already and that is that we don't expect -

**Mr BOOTH** - No, just that case. I just want a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Will that be the situation?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - So they won't be allowed to get on the bus.

**Mr FINCH** - If the question is that on day one will a bus still be going up the other direction, I'd think the answer will be 'yes, it will'.

**Mr BOOTH** - But the question wasn't that, the question was on that bus, if a person chooses to enrol their children in the out-of-area school, will they be able to get on that bus or won't they?

**Mr FINCH** - Again, we're not looking to have different policies here from the rest of the State and the issues of sustainable transport and student enrolment are spread across DIER, as Bruce mentioned, and education.

**Mr BOOTH** - So what's the answer?

**Mr FINCH** - The answer is we do enable students to attend schools out-of-area.

**Mr BOOTH** - So that's 'yes' then.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, but again we'll monitor the usage over time and continue to work with the local communities about it as well as our colleagues in DIER.

**CHAIR** - Can I suggest that the committee has had a fair run on the demographics, and it's important that we do because of the close proximity of two other schools, which we've looked at this morning, which have had substantial funds spent on them. The proposal would be that we break for lunch at two o'clock for half an hour. There are a number of witnesses who have indicated that they would like to give evidence to the committee and we're going to try a process of putting two or three of those witnesses at the table at a time. We'll see how that works out because there are some common threads in the submissions which we've had and we'll work our way through that.

So for the moment I think we should move to matters related to the project funding and, Greg, you had a question first of all regarding that.

**Mr HALL** - Yes, thanks, Mr Chair. We have an overall capex here of \$13 million for this project. When we look at projects, this committee normally takes into account that the contingency component is normally about 10 per cent of the project, yet in this case I noticed it is \$500 000. So, by my quick maths, that's probably only about 4 per cent. So why is that so lean when normally the contingency is around 10 per cent?

**Mr FINCH** - I think we'd also look at the post-occupancy commissioning works, which is on page 27. We have a couple of items of contingency at this time.

**Mr HALL** - So that \$350 000 is a contingency?

**Mr FINCH** - Essentially, yes.

**Mr HALL** - Basically that's a contingency component?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes.

**Mr HALL** - Okay.

**Mr FINCH** - I guess contingencies - and this is the whole process of a capital project - are fairly volatile. The planning and the budgeting depend on the outcome through a competitive tender process. We are currently in the tender process.

**Mr HALL** - And in that process at the moment, because of the downturn in the building industry would you expect to get some pretty competitive tenders in?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, that would be our expectation.

**Mr HALL** - You would have quite a number of tenderers at this stage?

**Mr FINCH** - We have had a significant number make inquiries but we have just extended the tender period by a week, again to cater for feedback that people wanted more time to finalise their tenders. A number of parties requested that so, again, we are wanting to get the best outcomes so we are not wanting to do anything that may be adverse to that.

**Mr HALL** - You are confident that the \$13 million, given the current economic climate and everything else, and your contingency model in there will cover everything?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, we have the \$500 000, we have the \$150 000 for possible cost escalation and we have the \$350 000. We have also then got a \$1 million budget for furniture and equipment which is our estimate of what will be needed but, again, we can work with our project management committee to get the best outcomes with the expenditure of that funding within the available budget. Heath has done a great job up to this point to make sure that what we put to tender is realistic in accordance with the funds available.

**Mr HALL** - Given that we have an almost level greenfield site, if you like, how does this project stack up? Is there a yardstick? I think you mentioned it was modelled on a couple of other models of schools which were already in existence. How does that \$13 million stack up with those? Is it lean or is there much fat in it?

**Mr CLAYTON** - It is probably sitting on a similar path. If you are referring to Somerset and Romaine Park, which I think you are, and which we were involved with as well, it is a little bit different in context. The Somerset school was a smaller-type build and Romaine Park is slightly bigger, and if you look at the cost per square metre and the size it is sitting in about the middle of those. We have had our quantity surveyor undertake estimates on where the works are and we are within our budgets at this stage, but as you alluded to we are in a very fortunate position where the tender market is extremely competitive.

**Mr BROOKS** - Are there any local tenders being provided or is it interstate or southern based?

**Mr CLAYTON** - All the contractors are local, all the tenderers are Tasmanian, I think, but there were two other companies registered with Treasury that could have tendered but they are not tendering is my understanding so they are all local contractors - head contractors anyway.

**Mr BROOKS** - I certainly do not want to open the debate up about tendering and on locals and things that. That is for another day I am sure, but obviously some do tender. The head company might be local but they still bring in materials and many workers from other areas to try to backfill it.

**Mr CLAYTON** - Obviously we are governed under Treasury guidelines and contractors pre-qualified with Treasury are eligible to tender. That is what the case is.

**Mr BROOKS** - But also there is the Treasury advice that local contractors should be encouraged.

**Mr CLAYTON** - As I said, all the tenderers that are tendering for it, the head contractors which are the builders that we are liaising with during the tender process, are local contractors. I cannot comment on the subcontractors under that because we are not privy to who they are obtaining prices from, but given the interest in the area, it would be very surprising if local contractors were not heavily involved in it.

**CHAIR** - Anything else on funding?



**Mr BOOTH** - No, just on design. With the design there, what is the star rating - the energy efficiency against the type of building?

**Mr CLAYTON** - As far as a star energy rating is concerned, we are working through the Green Building Council of Australia rating which is an overall sustainability rating, I suppose, for a general term. It is not just a straight energy rating like a domestic house would be but in saying that, we are aiming to achieve a five-star Green-Star rating which is Australian best practice.

**Mr BOOTH** - Aiming to?

**Mr CLAYTON** - We are in the process of putting it all together. Basically, Green Star is a complex process that we have to go through, working through various components of that - there is some information on the background of Green Star in the submission. You cannot go through it until you have completed the design work because there is a lot of modelling and a lot of information that we are working through. At this stage we look like achieving that but it is still subject to review by the Green Building Council of Australia as part of that process.

**Mr BOOTH** - How does that compare with with the six-star building code? They are contemplating requiring buildings to achieve six-star rating as -

**Mr CLAYTON** - For residential, Mr Booth?

**Mr BOOTH** - Yes, for residential.

**Mr CLAYTON** - Basically, when you are talking about a five- or a six-star rating under residential, that is purely on thermal performance. That relates to insulation, glazing, heat loss and control like that whereas Green Star looks at various things around management, indoor air quality, energy, transport, water use, material use, land use and ecology, emissions and innovation. They are the categories that we work within and it is a series of spreadsheets where we get points for achieving set things. We get two points for some things, one point for others, and you get points out of a point system based on what you do with the building.

**Mr BOOTH** - What if you just compare the building based on a six-star energy rating proposed for domestic, would the building itself be able to meet a six-star energy rating for construction?

**Mr CLAYTON** - Comfortably - well over.

**Mr BOOTH** - What would it achieve?

**Mr CLAYTON** - You can't really compare it because if you look under the energy ratings for a domestic building, it talks about habitable rooms, and things like that, and how you use it. You cannot pick that up and place it over a commercial building. It doesn't work like that; it's not that simple. If you wanted to try to compare it as best you could, if you look at the components that make up the residential thermal energy rating, it relates to thermal efficiency which is the insulation in the walls, the mass of your slabs, the double-glazing,

and things like that. If you look at all the components that we need to do under Green Star, then we would be doing probably well above what is six star.

**Mr BOOTH** - Right. So all the building components will have double glazing right through the thing - on doors, windows. What about the glass area ratio?

**Mr CLAYTON** - All that sort of stuff, basically overhangs and natural ventilation. We are looking to achieve a 4.7 R-value on our roof and a 3.7 in a wall. For example, with a six-star energy rating you are probably looking at around a 4 in your roof and a 2.5 in your wall, so we will exceed that. But the Green Star through the Green Building Council is a much larger beast than just a straight thermal efficiency.

**Mr BOOTH** - What is the requirement for air exchange in a building like this?

**Mr CLAYTON** - I don't know the exact number off the top of my head but I know that under the Green Star requirements there is a base level under the Building Code. If you exceed that by, I think it is 25 per cent, you get a point; if you exceed it by 50 per cent, you get two points, and that is all about turning over stale air and things along those lines. We are working through that but we are well above Building Code requirements, so we are looking at one, maybe two, points, so that is still being modelled at the moment.

**Mr BOOTH** - How do you ensure in this design that there is sufficient air exchange to make sure that you don't have stale air, as you call it?

**Mr CLAYTON** - We are working with that in two ways. We are utilising energy recovery units which are basically through the winter months when you generally don't open windows, which is forced ventilation. It forces and it is filtered, so it is forcing fresh air that has a pre-heat component. It is not the sole source of heating for it; it is purely about natural ventilation and bringing ventilation in. It sucks in it through the roof, treats it and puts it in, and it also sucks it out. So you are constantly turning over the air -

**Mr BOOTH** - You grab the heat out of it as it goes out.

**Mr CLAYTON** - That is exactly right. In summer we obviously have opening windows, big doors, bi-fold windows to encourage natural airflows where we can. Our highlight windows are controlled electronically with sensors, so as the temperature increases they automatically open and dump the hot air out, so once again we are forcing the air out through those means.

**Mr BROOKS** - Just on your heating and air-conditioning, on page 23 your heating is a VRF system of cooling operation locked out to functional spaces, but then on your air-conditioning you have provided it only to administration officers via dedicated VRF systems, so is it there or is it not there? What systems have you used for your air-conditioning and are they reverse cycle or different systems?

**Mr CLAYTON** - There are two areas. We have the general learning areas. Within that we are using the reverse cycle heat pumps as a heating-only requirement and we are locking it out. It does have the ability to turn on if need be but we are finding that in a lot of instances they have been overrun and the energy costs are getting out of hand. We have done that to meet the Green Star requirements, so we are locking out the cooling

component. As I was saying earlier about the use of passive and natural ventilation through the dumping of hot air and turning over the heat, we believe that for all but a few days the comfort levels will be adequate. In the other areas, such as the administration area where someone is sitting day in, day out and not moving, then it is fair to assume that you can provide them with a heating and cooling system because they are not getting up and moving around, opening doors and moving from other areas, which you would be in a student classroom environment.

**Mr BROOKS** - The windows are double-glazed and those sorts of things?

**Mr CLAYTON** - Yes, they are and they have all been calculated. We are looking at the double-glazed system that allows the sun to penetrate. In Tasmania we are a little bit different from the mainland. We want to encourage as much sun into our buildings as we can. The inside pane helps keep the heat in through the winter months.

**CHAIR** - We will take a break for lunch.

*Short suspension.*

**Mr BROOKS** - On the design, I want to talk about unisex toilets. There were representations made to me regarding schools around the Burnie area. Parents were concerned about the unisex style and, from my understanding, there was one model that didn't create as much controversy or negative feedback as the other. One culminated in a petition being tabled in Parliament by me. Whose idea was it to put unisex toilets in primary schools in the first place? What consultation has gone on about that? These plans have them in there as well.

**Mr FINCH** - Firstly, we don't put unisex toilets in schools; what we put in schools are new, modern toilet facilities. Our classrooms are flexible learning areas and can be used in a number of ways and are a lot more modern in design. In a similar way, toilets have changed.

**Mr BROOKS** - They're marked on here as 'unisex'.

**Mr FINCH** - That decision hasn't been made. They are toilets that can be used differently and that is up to the decision of the local school community. As we mentioned, we don't yet have a principal for the school. When we do, and closer to the time, we will work with the local community about how the toilets should be used. The important thing is that we are building in these schools new, flexible facilities that can be used in a number of ways to suit local communities. The decisions about how they are used are best made by the local communities.

**Mr BROOKS** - Certainly the local community west of Burnie didn't feel they were consulted. The first they heard about it was when they took their kids to school on the first day. There was substantial negative feedback to my office as the local representative. I see they are marked on the plans as 'unisex'. The plans are submitted by the department and you and they include 'unisex' toilets, so what consultation has taken place with the community about that?

**Mr FINCH** - Rather being written on there as 'male' or 'female' they are written as 'unisex' for the purpose of showing that there are toilets available which can be used either as male or female toilets or as unisex toilets. As I mentioned, we will work with the local school community to determine how they wish to use those toilet facilities.

**Mr BOOTH** - Can I just clarify that they are not unisex in the sense that they are a multicubicle room with a couple of wash troughs in the same area?

**Mr CLAYTON** - No, that's what I was going to clarify as well. They are individual toilets with a hand basin inside. You go in and snib the door closed in a secure environment, use the toilet and then wash your hands and go out. This was a lot of the concern around the other schools you have been speaking about. It was envisaged that everybody shared a traditional open school toilet block, which wasn't the case. In many instances the feedback I have got from those schools is that, whilst there was some opposition to it, there is now a lot of positive feedback because the anti-bullying and other antisocial behaviour that can occur in a toilet block arrangement has now gone. If you talked to those schools there may be a few detractors but in general terms they are much happier with that. When all that occurred, we were in the planning process of this school and we talked about the pros and cons associated with the toilets and how we should do it and everyone on the working group was unanimous that the way we are doing it is the way we should be going.

**Mr BROOKS** - Is that this working group or the other school's working group?

**Mr CLAYTON** - This was the working group on this school.

**Mr BROOKS** - My comments on that remain the same, that it is stacked with Education department employees. The thing with the toilets had hundreds of signatures on that petition and it was driven by the parents of the school. They felt they had little option and they were told that was what was happening so get over it. In my opinion that's not open and honest consultation and I think this one is not being consulted with the wider community on what they want for their school. I think to now pin it on the principal and say it is his or her decision is not what Nick McKim stands up in Parliament and talks about. As the Education minister, he likes to claim credit for his department. Can you confirm that it's the principal's decision or the department's decision?

**Mr FINCH** - We said that the principal, when appointed, will consult with the local community about how this school is operated. That is the same as how educational programs are delivered and what the pedagogy of the school is and so on. There is a whole range of issues that will need to be determined when a school leader is appointed and when that school leader has a staff and works with the local community - and this will be amongst those. So there'll be a whole range of things that need to be worked through in consultation with the school and the local community, and that will occur.

**Mr BOOTH** - And the design of the toilets is such that if the school wanted to they could designate a toilet as a female and another as a male for that exclusive use but the reality is that they are not mixed at all, are they? The foyer area is not mixed.

**Mr CLAYTON** - They're not mixed, no.

**Mr BROOKS** - I believe the feedback I have from those schools is that they would be quite happy if you change the signs from only male and female signs on them to allocated male or female, and that was the latest discussion I've had with them.

But I also wanted to talk about the design of it and the original submissions, going back a couple of years, about adding in community services within the school. Was there any discussion about that in the design stage?

**Mr FINCH** - Could you be more specific?

**Mr BROOKS** - Some felt that the opportunity for a significant spending on infrastructure in the local community there would be an opportunity to include things like the possibility of Service Tasmania, community libraries - those sorts of things - within the design and within the building of the school. Was that considered?

**Mr FINCH** - No, it wasn't considered in the sense that I guess the suggestion was made by a number of groups in a similar way, for example, to a child and family centre. But obviously there's a priority process and a decision-making process about those centres and where they need to be to service communities and obviously there is a limitation around funding and a capital works program. We all know the state of the State Government's budget at the moment so what was announced is what is being delivered, which is a school for 350 students that will have significant areas of interface with the community and areas that can be used by the local community, but none of those other services that you refer to.

**Mr BROOKS** - Okay. Was it considered at all or requested? Did the Education department make a request to other departments saying, 'Look, we're building this, did you want to put something close by or in the vicinity of it?'

**Mr FINCH** - No, not officially.

**Mr BROOKS** - Unofficially though?

**Mr FINCH** - No.

**Mr RATAJ** - Those sorts of things, Adam, I see as being community-driven. The school is the number one priority of this \$13 million that we have to spend. All those other things would be lovely from a community point of view, but it's now for the community to work through council and through the Government to provide those other facilities in the precinct that we are developing down there with the school, Camp Banksia across the road and the other sporting facilities around. That has to be a locally-driven thing from here.

**Mr BROOKS** - From my understanding, it was certainly mentioned in the original request stage and I know it was included in those submissions. Did the department or the Government ultimately consider all that and the answer is 'no' so that's why I was questioning it. I know they are on the submissions but why weren't they considered at all by the Education department? One of the problems I have is that there is a lot of feeling - and we've seen it previously from this committee - where it's 'not our

department, not our problem, don't worry about the long-term requirements', and the Devonport Police Station is a classic example. There was no discussion about other services being applied to the same building and, quite frankly, I think we need to change where we sit, from parliamentarians in a society, we need to look at the future requirements of the next 10 to 20 years, not just an election cycle and part of that is if we're spending \$13 million on a school, why can't we spend \$13.1 million and build a bigger library that can include the community library as well? That's the point that I'm getting to and that is where I think we need to go. Part of it is that I want to find out whether that is a departmental issue or is it further up where ministerial representation has to be made to get more communication across departments.

Wesley Vale Primary school budget is cut by \$90 000 next year, give or take a few dollars. So their budget has been cut significantly. How are you going to fund the running of this school the following year with cuts like that.

**Mr FINCH** - In the overall cost of running the Wesley Vale Primary school that would represent about 2 per cent of running that school with the teachers, educational facility attendance and administrative staff and so on that work around that school. So, again, we have tried to limit any budget cuts or efficiencies on schools wherever possible and this budget was the first budget where we have had to do that. In terms of establishing the new school we will work to staff it according to existing policies that apply for staffing schools and there are certain policies for each employment group. There is a school resource package process that has a formula and delivers an allocation so the school will receive an allocation in the same way that other schools receive allocations.

**Mr BROOKS** - Is that budgeted or is it not budgeted yet?

**Mr FINCH** - It is budgeted, yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - Just within the design and I am talking about potential savings by having a greenfield site developed with modern buildings with high energy conservation design and so forth, are there significant energy savings through this building and are there significant maintenance savings as opposed to retaining the current schools?

**Mr CLAYTON** - Obviously we have not run the exact modelling of what we think it is going to cost to run, but with the systems and the design that we have in there with the access to solar, the use of the energy-efficient heating systems, the natural ventilation, the high levels of insulation the running costs should be considerably less than what is traditionally known in a school. To quantify that is probably hard until we are actually up and running but as part of green star requirements we do have to monitor all those so we will know everything we are doing.

**Mr BOOTH** - What is the design life of the building?

**Mr CLAYTON** - In what way do you mean?

**Mr BOOTH** - The design life of the building in terms of its capacity to be refurbished. With some modern industrials some years ago they were working on a 20-year design life for example for a hospital not even a major hospital. Certainly many multistorey buildings are only designed for a 20-year life. You cannot get the plumbing out for example and so

forth because it is captured in the slabs. Has this thing got a design life that will be 100 years or 20 years?

**Mr CLAYTON** - I don't think an exact time frame can be ascertained because we do not know how education is going to evolve.

**Mr BOOTH** - No, sorry, just the actual physical design of the thing and the structure, not whether or not the demographic will be right. I am talking about the building itself.

**Mr CLAYTON** - The building itself is contemporary construction. As to the design life, obviously there are factors associated with the ongoing maintenance but also the impact of day-to-day use that will need to be ongoing, but I do not know off the top of my head what the actual life is - 20, 30, 40, 50 years, I am not sure.

**Mr FINCH** - I think from an accounting perspective because we do bring assets to account in the department's financial statements we would look at a 40-year life cycle in terms of depreciating the asset. So 2.5 per cent depreciation per year.

**Mr BOOTH** - So is it designed so all the electricals and plumbing can be replaced? If you have problems with copper corroding away for example - I do not know if you are using copper - can you physically replace those things or are they designed to be external and easy to get at or in cavities and conduits? Or are they cast in the slab?

**Mr CLAYTON** - There is a degree of things that have to go through the slab and that is just the nature of construction but we have created service areas where all the things like hot-water cylinders, your outdoor heat pumps and other types of electrical switchboards are located in a central location. We have created voyage through the ceiling spaces and areas like that so it is easier to get at those sorts of things.

Obviously with any building there are some areas you cannot get at internally, where you need tea-making facilities and things like that, but we have tried to keep that to the minimum. We have tried to keep the design as flexible as possible so it can adapt as it needs to over time.

**CHAIR** - Can I intervene for a moment, members, to extend some courtesy to other people who have indicated that they want to give evidence today. Can I get an indication from committee members as to whether there is a further bank of questions which you want to visit with the department? It might be productive and courteous to others if we went on and had, say, groups of three come to the table but if there is not too much more that any member wants to question the department on, we might then conclude rather than going the other way that I am suggesting.

**Mr BROOKS** - Chair, I am fairly happy with that.

**Mr HALL** - I have one very short question.

**Mr BOOTH** - I am done.

**Mr HALL** - On page 17, once again on the budgetary side we had landscaping and the site works - I think, I cannot find it now, \$1.6 million or thereabouts. Is there a quick breakdown on how much is spent on landscaping and how much is spent on site works? You have an oblique through it at the moment.

**Mr CLAYTON** - I am on page 27.

**Mr HALL** - Page 27; I knew there was a seven in there somewhere.

**Mr CLAYTON** - I suppose the reason that has been lumped together is that a lot of our landscaping features are the site works so site works includes things like car parks, covered ways, seating, and then it is a blur between what is a path - is a path part of the landscaping or is it part of the site works? That is why we have kept the site works and the landscaping as one budget but that covers everything from your car parking, to paths, to the grassed areas, to play equipment, through to the trees and the shrubs and the grasses that get planted. That is all encompassed within that budget.

**Mr HALL** - That answers my question, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR** - The indications from other committee members are that they are done with questions so we thank you, gentlemen, for the evidence and the response to questions. Just in casual conversations over lunch it seems to me that we will not need you to stay particularly to be called back for us to follow up anything which may flow from other witnesses. That is the way I see it. Indeed, if we need to walk down that path, we can convene a further hearing in Hobart maybe on a sitting day of Parliament, so we can facilitate that if need be. At this stage we thank you.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**



**Mr ERIC MOBBS AND Ms EMMA FITZSIMMONS WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.**

**CHAIR** (Mr Harriss) - Welcome. Mr Mobbs, let's hear from you first.

**Mr MOBBS** - I am here as a private individual, although I am well known as being President of the Devonport Chamber of Commerce and also a member of the TCCI Education, Employment and Training Subcommittee, so I have a very strong interest in education in general and as a taxpayer, I have a very strong interest in ensuring that government funds are not wasted.

When I saw this I was most concerned because when the Commonwealth announced the BER funding for Wesley Vale school I objected at that point in time, and it is on the record in the Senate - in *Hansard* - raised by Senator Richard Colbeck, objecting to the money being spent when it had already been announced that there was a new school proposed for Port Sorell. To me it was absolute economic vandalism to have both running and at that point in time I suggested that \$2.5 million, I think it was at that stage - it has been cut back a little - that was to be spent on Wesley Vale should in fact be put to the new Port Sorell school. That was ignored by the Education department and although they did put a temporary halt on the building, they had by that stage already demolished a toilet block and I think a couple of other buildings. They then decided to proceed with spending the rest of the \$2.1 million.

My objection is not to the new school as such but is in terms of it is the wrong time to be building a new school. We have a budget that seems to be very constrained and just because I am given a \$25 000 limit on my credit card it doesn't mean that I have to spend it, and my objection is to that \$2.1 million. Yes, it was offered by the Commonwealth. It didn't have to be spent. It made no sense at all when they knew there was a new school being proposed. That is my main objection. I believe the matter should be deferred until such time as the new Wesley Vale school with its expanded capacity of 350 is fully utilised because the new school is not going to offer any larger capacity than Wesley Vale offers.

The other point that I have grave concerns about is the authority of this committee - its powers appear to be being usurped. The grounds for the new school have already been prepared so that money has been spent presumably without the stamp of this committee; buildings have been demolished, the asbestos has been removed - and that is already underway. The rumour around - and I get lots of phone calls from concerned parents, probably because they know I get my views heard in the paper fairly regularly as the President of the Chamber of Commerce - I get numerous phone calls and some people in this room today have rung me saying, 'What can you do to stop the new school? It's the wrong time to be building it'.

There was a newspaper article written by Mike Gaffney MLC in the *Advocate* on 26 July, claiming that the tenders would be let in August and work commenced in September. I cannot see how that can happen if this committee has not even finished its hearing yet. Here we are on 25 August - it is going to take you, I would imagine, several weeks to finish your deliberations and issue your report and yet here we have one member of the local council and also an MLC claiming that these building tenders will

be let by the end of August. To me, that is usurping the power of this committee. I don't think there is anything else I wish to say.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Are there any questions of Mr Mobbs?

**Mr HALL** - Eric, you talk about deferment. Do you have a time line in place?

**Mr MOBBS** - It would be largely based on economic factors. We have a budget at the moment that is, by the Government's own admission, in a black hole and I think a two-year deferment - minimum - would not be out of the question, particularly as my understanding is that Wesley Vale and the proposed new school would be running in parallel for a minimum of two years, probably three. So we not only have a capital expenditure being spent now in a black hole, we also have two to three years' doubling up, maybe not quite doubling up, but certainly additional operation expenses taking place because we will need staff at both schools. There is no way that the staff at Port Sorell will be able to totally manage the school at Wesley Vale, and vice versa, so there will be additional expense incurred for a two- to three-year period at a time when we have dire economic problems, other schools have had their budgets cut back and some of the essential services in the Education department have been cut back and here we are spending \$13 million, which will have to be borrowed money because it's not in the kitty - it may be budgeted for but budgets have been known to be changed and I believe that's one area where it should be changed.

**Mr BOOTH** - Eric, can I take it then that you supported a school here at Port Sorell initially?

**Mr MOBBS** - I did support it initially, prior to them spending the Commonwealth funding but having now seen the results of the Commonwealth money, I don't believe the new school is warranted at this point in time.

**Mr BOOTH** - Why would it become warranted in two years then?

**Mr MOBBS** - I am thinking in capacity terms. Maybe in two years' time the capacity forecast is such that the 350 will be exceeded. I want to point out that my wife works at Port Sorell. In case you think I'm putting forward a case that she doesn't want to do the travelling, by the time the new school becomes operational she will have retired, so that's not a consideration that I am putting forward. I was asked five or six years ago to assist the principal at Wesley Vale with her budgeting and I am well aware of the enrolment numbers over the last five to six years and they haven't grown at that sort of rate which would suggest that they are going to be out of capacity within the next three years.

**Mr BOOTH** - So you would contemplate possibly with capacity increase in three years' time that we might need a school there?

**Mr MOBBS** - Possibly.

**Mr BOOTH** - It would be a bigger school perhaps than what is proposed at Port Sorell?

**Mr MOBBS** - Yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - So you think that in three years this school potentially might not be adequate in size?

**Mr MOBBS** - If you go on numbers, there's a reasonable chance that that is a possibility. I think a deferral of two years will be more than adequate because, if you were looking at a 12-months' interim time frame between Wesley Vale having exceeded its capacity and the new school being available, there are plenty of schools that have demountable classrooms for a period of 12 months and that could be done. There is room at Wesley Vale for that to be done.

**Mr BOOTH** - Did you support the construction initially on educational grounds?

**Mr MOBBS** - Yes, on educational grounds. I think there is a need for a new school but it is a question of when. I am not against the building of a new school, I am against the timing of the building of that new school.

**Mr BOOTH** - Had the BER money not been spent there -

**Mr MOBBS** - Then I would have been quite happy to support the Port Sorell school, but it is a waste of \$2.1 million of taxpayers' money that I am objecting to if they go ahead right now and build the new school.

**Mr BOOTH** - Can you see any educational reason that you would proceed to build a new school here now that the schools have had the BER money spent on?

**Mr MOBBS** - No, it's only capacity. In terms of the quality of the education, which is excellent at Wesley Vale, it has a very good reputation. There is no vandalism at Wesley Vale and I will venture to suggest that there will be a lot more when it moves to Port Sorell, including things such as condoms and drug needles with people hanging around the premises. That doesn't happen at Wesley Vale; there is virtually no vandalism at all because of the area it is in. The students have an excellent facility there and I don't see why we can't continue to use it.

**Mr HALL** - You also include the BER money spent at Moriarty?

**Mr MOBBS** - I'm not aware of what the department's plans are for Moriarty.

**Mr HALL** - No, but there's been money spent?

**Mr MOBBS** - Yes, there has been money spent there as well. I think the department thinks, 'There's some money there, we'll take it', irrespective of whether it was needed or not. I think it is economic vandalism.

**Mr BROOKS** - Eric, regarding the investment and infrastructure in the area, there is some argument that now is the time they should be spending money on projects like that to help the economy. What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr MOBBS** - Not when it's borrowed government money. If the money was in the government coffers, you wouldn't hear a murmur out of me, but it's not in the

government coffers, by the Government's own admission, and I don't see why we should put more on the credit card when it's not necessary.

**Mr BROOKS** - If the Government's financial management were to change and there was money in the coffers but there still wasn't a need capacity-wise at Wesley Vale, would you support a school being built here?

**Mr MOBBS** - No, I would not. If the capacity requirement is not there, and even if the money was, I would not support it. The capacity at Wesley Vale has been upgraded and it can now accommodate 350 students.

**Mr BROOKS** - We heard evidence earlier that if they build it they will come, so what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Do they invest now for potential growth or do they wait until that growth might happen?

**Mr MOBBS** - People have been ringing me because they know I get in the paper a fair bit and my letters to the editor are usually published. Parents from Port Sorell have been saying they do not want the new school at Port Sorell, they want to be able to continue to send their kids to Wesley Vale. I've had one call from a parent in Wesley Vale. I would probably have had 10 to 11 from parents in Port Sorell saying, 'What can you do to help us not get that school built?'

**Mr BROOKS** - And what reasons are they giving you as to why they don't want the school?

**Mr MOBBS** - They believe it's a waste of money.

**Mr BROOKS** - So it's only on economic grounds?

**Mr MOBBS** - Yes, 'It's a waste of money', unquote. Nine times out of 10 that would have been the argument.

**Mr BROOKS** - Do you feel for the long-term benefit of the area that there should be a school here?

**Mr MOBBS** - Probably.

**Mr BROOKS** - But not yet.

**Mr MOBBS** - Probably but not yet.

**Mr BROOKS** - Not at the moment.

**Mr MOBBS** - No.

**Mr BOOTH** - So when you supported the school a couple of years ago, you didn't think of advocating for re-spending some money, refurbishing these other schools?

**Mr MOBBS** - No, I did not because I was led to believe at that point in time that a community survey had been done. I've yet to find who contributed to that survey and who was surveyed because my information is that the parents of Wesley Vale school

weren't surveyed. The community at Port Sorell may well have been surveyed - the old people's home and places like that. I was led to believe there was a survey indicating that there was a desire for a school at Port Sorell. I since very much doubt that information.

**CHAIR** - Are there any further questions? If you'd like to speak to your submission too, if you wouldn't mind please, Emma.

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - I'm here today as a parent. I have two children currently at Wesley Vale and I also have an infant, so I have another one who, potentially, will go to Wesley Vale as well. Following on from Eric, I also think it's a bit of a waste of money at the moment, considering how many houses you see for sale out here and the lack of jobs around. My husband's job isn't looking very viable at the moment and he's been looking at employment around the local area and across Tasmania but has also been looking interstate because of the lack of employment here in Tasmania.

**Mr BOOTH** - You live in Port Sorell, do you?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - In Shearwater. We moved down from the mainland.

**Mr BROOKS** - There's a difference - there's a line.

*Laughter.*

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - There's a lot of us.

**Mr BROOKS** - No, no - Shearwater and Port Sorell, a huge difference. Sorry, Ms Fitzsimmons, I was just having a joke with you.

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - I am concerned at the moment that it isn't a viable time to build a new school considering that we have had renovations at Wesley Vale. It's a wonderful school, it's a unique school, and when we first relocated here, we looked at where the schools were before we purchased our house and the school is only 10 minutes away - it's nothing, really. I know the children can't walk to school or cycle to school, or most of them can't - there are a few families that do live in Wesley Vale - but to us it's a lifestyle of where we live and what we want our children to have. It is a wonderful area to live. There is not a lot of vandalism around here and it's a very safe area to live, and the school is also safe.

It's just a fabulous place to go to school and I'm very concerned that if a new school does open up out here Wesley Vale school will be closed and the children will be made to relocate. But currently the children are talking at school as to what happens if the new school opens, 'Where are my friends going to go?'. Some will stay there, some will come out here, so they're uncertain as well as the parents and I'm just worried that the money that has been spent on the school is wasted and considering that we are going to have education cutbacks in all the schools, where's the \$13 million going to come from to build a new school? What's the justification there? Why can't we have that \$13 million distributed around the current schools and keep the services we have there?

They are my main concerns.

**Mr HALL** - I acknowledge what you say about the current state of the economy and the fact that there are a lot of houses for sale et cetera in the Port Sorell area at the moment. However, of course the worm turns, and if you look to the future, when the economy turns again this will, once again, become a growth area so would you not then acknowledge that a school with a sense of community is needed here?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - Yes, they do but how long does it take for the worm to turn? At the moment, things aren't looking good and you don't know how long they're looking good for. Possibly in a couple of years we might need a school; it might be longer, we don't really know, and that's what my husband is concerned about in looking at employment.

**Mr HALL** - So are you agreeing with the proposition when I asked the question of Mr Mobbs that a two-year deferment is a possibility? Is that something you would be more comfortable with?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - I would say at least two years.

**Mr BROOKS** - You have said in the opening line of your submission that it is a minority who are pushing for the school and they are also the loudest. Can you explain what you mean by that?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - Being at the school for a number of years now and speaking to the parents of the children in the school, most of the people I speak to do not want the school to go ahead. It is just a few whom I know of that want the school to go ahead and they seem to be loudest. They are the ones that seem to be driving it.

From the parents' point of view, there has been nothing said at school. We have not had, as you say, any surveys put out to the parents at school. There was a survey dropped in the letterbox but I am not quite sure how many people responded to that. I know one family has five properties and they received five surveys, so how accurate can that be. It just seems that we are not very loud. I am too scared to tell people that I am not for the school because I do not want people to hold that against me. I find a lot of parents are like that and did not want to tell anyone that they were talking today because, even though we feel very passionate about it, it is putting a divide into the community at school at the moment and now it is filtering through to the children, which is not a nice feeling for the children and not a nice feeling for us either.

**Mr BROOKS** - The people that give you feedback about the school, can you explain their main reasoning behind their issue?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - There are two main reasons. One, the monetary value; secondly, we have a great school. If it is not broken, why fix it? One of the main reasons everyone is worried is that if Port Sorell does open then Wesley Vale School will eventually close. It has been going for such a long time and it is a great school and we are scared that it is not going to happen.

**Mr BROOKS** - In your submission you said that opening a school at Port Sorell would mean certain demise for not only Wesley Vale but also a number of other smaller rural schools. What do you think will happen if they put the school at Port Sorell?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - It depends on the zoning, I suppose. I am not certain what the zoning is.

**Mr BROOKS** - I think we are all uncertain after today.

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - We saw Sassafras was mentioned by the Education department as going to be closed down.

**Mr BROOKS** - Mr McKim?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - Yes, so I am a bit worried about that. So if the new school goes ahead they might say that now Sassafras people have to move; the zoning might change and they will have to come out here to Port Sorell. Also there has always been talk about Moriarty. We are grouped together, Moriarty and Wesley Vale, so that if Port Sorell opens they might close Moriarty as well. Then you are losing three schools, not just ours.

**Mr BROOKS** - So you think it will have an impact?

**Ms FITZSIMMONS** - Yes, definitely.

**CHAIR** - Thank you both.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

**Ms JILLIAN TONELLI AND Ms HEIDI RADCLIFF WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.**

**CHAIR** - Ladies, welcome.

**Ms TONELLI** - I am here, like Emma, as a parent. I have two boys - one currently in prep and one in grade 2, so if the school goes ahead in 2013 it will affect me greatly. I also live halfway between the two schools so travelling either way is not a big issue for me. Personally I do not agree with this school. Like Emma said, if it ain't broke don't fix it. I think the school at the moment offers great opportunity. I think we have a wonderful environmental area. I am very passionate about environmental things with my family and my children are passionate about it as well. I like the fact that it is safe. I feel I can put my children on the bus and not worry about them for the rest of the day. We have no vandalism, no loitering, no truancy. I feel that if the school goes ahead at Port Sorell we are going to get vandalism, loitering and truancy. It is more exciting for children to go down to the beach than go to school. These things do concern me.

Another concern I have is the fact that it is next to the caravan park. I am not opposed to caravan parks in any way. I have stayed in many myself on family holidays but the people are floating in and out and we do not know who they are. They come in the summer time. It does concern me in that state as well.

One other thing that has bothered me is that if this has not been finalised then why the destruction and everything that has taken place. At the new proposed site, why the demolition of buildings - which I know were very run down - but also the environmental area out there. I have not seen any environmental impact statement. I am assuming that one has been done but I would be curious to see that. These things really bother me. I know that we have significant endangered species around these areas like the eastern barred bandicoots and also there is a burrowing crayfish. I was interested to know if they have been surveyed or taken into account.

At Wesley Vale we have Andrews Creek and this is a very important area of our school. It gives children the opportunity they would not always have to experience this environmental side. My father is a very well known environmentalist around this area and he takes many children on environmental trips down to these places. I am very proud of that and I am proud that my children get to experience that.

Being halfway, even if the bus services to Wesley Vale stopped I would continue to send my children there, even though it would be inconvenient. I like the fact that it has the security and a good family atmosphere. I know that there is a lot of disheartenment amongst staff at the moment. They do not know where their jobs would be and what would happen and that sort of thing.

I just think it is a huge waste of money. Maybe in years to come it will be viable but I know the numbers have not increased significantly over the years and I just do not see the financial benefit of it. I think we would be better off building a community centre that can house things like a Service Tas or give local children and teenagers somewhere to go and hang out - like a basketball stadium or something like that. I think that would be much more beneficial.



People move out to these areas knowing there is not a school in this area and it takes approximately seven minutes from the new site to Wesley Vale. That is nothing, not even as far as travelling from Latrobe to Devonport.

I do not agree with it and I will not be moving my children. If I feel I am forced to move my children because of zoning then I do not know where I will fit because I am halfway. I will not be happy. I will support Wesley Vale, 100 per cent.

**Ms RADCLIFF** - I am probably a bit like the others. I do not necessarily oppose the school being built out here if we actually need one but I just can't see a need at the moment. At Wesley Vale I believe the numbers were supposed to be around the 325 in this past year. I think we are around 310 so it is almost a whole class that we are lacking. I could understand if both Moriarty and Wesley Vale were bulging at the seams with nowhere to put the children and we desperately needed a new school. I know that is happening on the mainland because I have friends who have children at schools where the numbers are absolutely enormous and they do need new schools. At the moment, in this current economic climate, I just feel that it's very irresponsible to be spending \$13 million on something that I can't see is needed at the moment. I think the \$13 million would be far better spent on something that is important, if the \$13 million is even there. I think between Wesley Vale and Moriarty there has been almost \$3 million of the BER money spent. You all saw the schools this morning. They are fabulous, they don't want for anything. Maybe the only thing they want is for their budgets not to be cut next year. They have been refurbished to a point where they are both absolutely fantastic schools.

Something that concerned me greatly was a few weeks ago when Minister McKim announced the impending closure of about 20 schools, and I believe there was a bit of an uproar. I felt it was a bit of a rash budget cut, especially when you're thinking of building a new school in an area where there are already two schools, so why would you want to close 20 others? That is a trade-off so we have the money for it. Also, I think part of that was the travelling. As everyone has mentioned, it is not particularly far from Port Sorell to the Wesley Vale school. We live in Wesley Vale and I have children at Wesley Vale school. We have a farm in Wesley Vale so my husband is the farmer and I'm the farmer's wife. We open our farm up to children and that is an excursion they can do that is of no cost, which at the moment is fairly important when there is no money around for expensive bus excursions.

People are always talking about Tasmania being so progressive. I have been here for about nine years, I am also from the mainland, and in those nine years nothing has happened really. The population hasn't gone up. We also have a small shop and I meet a lot of people. A lot of new people come into the area and the ones I talk to are nearly always retirees, so it's a bit disappointing. I think Emma also mentioned the number of houses for sale and the fact that businesses are being shut down. There are no jobs, people are leaving and possibly going to the mainland.

I know this is one of these things that was an election promise - and we don't like to go back on election promises - but if the decision was made to delay the project, I think two years probably isn't enough. I don't think the economy is going to recover in two years, I think you have to give it a bit more time. Revisit it in three to five years and have

another look at it and then maybe our numbers will have gone up and we may need a new school. I think that would be a very responsible and sensible decision to make.

**Mr BOOTH** - I think you have both covered it so well that I don't need to ask questions, other than to confirm in my mind that you are saying that at the moment you're both totally satisfied with the educational opportunity and the delivery of that at the current schools?

**Ms TONELLI** - Definitely. I know all schools could do with a lick of paint and a bit of a touch-up, but really it's not the paint, it's what's underneath and what is provided with it and it's the teachers who can give us that. My oldest is in grade 2 and I am very happy with the way he is progressing. I can't afford to send my children to a private school but I am very satisfied with what they are receiving at this school at this time. I think the opportunities for them will be as beneficial as if they were going to a private school or a new fancy one. It would be lovely to have all these nice new libraries and things like that but especially my eldest child has been in tears thinking, 'My school is going to close. Where are my friends going to be? What if I'm the only one left here?' I also feel that with a much smaller school, if this one stays open in the interim, the benefits for children diminish. There is less funding, fewer sporting opportunities et cetera. The children were in the eisteddfod the other day, they were the biggest group, they stood up proudly and were fantastic. It is a whole little community. I think if this goes ahead it will be, 'I go to Port Sorell', 'I go to Wesley Vale', and there will be a rivalry, especially with children who have been friends. The decision that will be made will be through their parents so the children may end up being teased because of what their parents decide. We are all on the same plate, we all belong to the same area and I think it's good to keep that community spirit instead of separating it.

**Mr BOOTH** - Do you think that the glue that holds the community together currently would be broken by -

**Ms TONELLI** - I think it could be, I really do, definitely. I am a Latrobe girl, born and bred in Latrobe. I grew up there, lived away for a while, travelled, but I have chosen to come back here and raise my family. I am happy with it, I think it is a great area; it is a safe area. We have bit of land, we have baby wombat which is the school mascot - she comes into school all the time - and it is lovely being able to do those things with our children and feel that I can drop them off and they are safe. They have nowhere to wander and Jo Blow down the road is not going to be hanging around. There are too many positives; I can't think of any negatives to justify a new school, and the money that has been spent has really put the icing on the cake as far this school is concerned for me.

**Ms RADCLIFF** - Just adding to that, I think the BER money has been fantastic for Wesley Vale. Some of you were at the opening - the atmosphere at the school is amazing. Everyone is loving the new works that have happened. I think it has been great and it would be a pity to, I suppose, almost waste that wonderful work that has been done, or only have it for a couple of years, basically.

**Mr BOOTH** - Did you have that opinion prior to the reconstruction works, the BER money?

**Ms RADCLIFF** - There has always been a fabulous atmosphere, apart from the fact that everyone knows everyone, the families are very included, the parents are very welcome

to join in the classes and help out, and there is a really good community spirit. It doesn't matter that we are not here in Port Sorell being the community, we are being the community there.

**Ms TONELLI** - We had an assembly the other day and all the students from the school were in the hall - I assume you went into the hall when you were there - and they weren't jammed together; everyone fitted. It is not like we are bulging at the seams and saying, 'We need a new school'. I think with Moriarty and Wesley Vale combined there are probably only 400 students, so it is not even a huge area. My sister's children go to a school in Hobart and they are at a very big school and they are not even really a student; they've become a number. At Wesley Vale they are not a number, everybody knows them by name, and I think that is really important.

**Mr BOOTH** - Would you be happy then if there was a demonstrated need for more capacity in that school to just have an addition added to that school?

**Ms TONELLI** - Yes. We have two vacant classrooms there at the moment, and we have all that land. I think in time maybe it will be necessary but at the moment, when it is not even filled to capacity as such, I don't see the worth of it. I just think it's a big waste of money that could be better spent elsewhere.

**Mr HALL** - Jillian, you noted that you were concerned about the lack of consultation?

**Ms TONELLI** - Yes.

**Mr HALL** - In the department's brief it talks about the forums that were held, and also I presume that you would be in touch with your school association, so being the devil's advocate, surely there was enough time for you to have some input into this?

**Ms TONELLI** - For me, personally, I know that there were a couple of meetings but I have a husband who is away a lot and I can't get babysitters and in the evenings I haven't been able to go. I remember speaking to the principal last year and she said to me, 'Early next year there'll be a survey out ...'. Well, it is going out today, which is rather convenient. So I think they are taking the bull by the horns - it seems a bit too coincidental, I suppose.

I am a bit like Emma, I have been a bit nervous to talk because such and such doesn't agree with this. I had a letter published in the paper the other day - it was one of the first ones that was published regarding not wanting the school - and I had one nasty backlash, which is fine; everyone is entitled to their opinion.

**Mr BOOTH** - Welcome to the human race.

*Laughter.*

**Ms TONELLI** - I think everyone is entitled to their own opinion but, as Emma said, if I am going to speak out I have to think, 'Oh, someone might say something or have a go at my kids'. I don't know, I'm probably being a bit paranoid but these are the things that are going ahead and it is people who are not informed. Regarding the lady who had a go at me in the paper, what she was writing wasn't even factual. She made it black and white, 'Yes, you just move your kids, you follow your teachers'. It is not going to be that easy.

People say, 'I'll go where such-and-such teacher goes'. They don't even know where they are going.

**Mr HALL** - Would you also accept the proposition that we have a vibrant community here, and it has been expanding even though it is tempered at the moment, and that a new school would, despite the virtues of Wesley Vale, Moriarty, et cetera, give help with that sense of community for this area?

**Ms TONELLI** - Yes, it possibly would and I would not say that it doesn't, but I know that you still get your sense of community from out there because everybody's children go from that. We could get the same sense of community by, as I say, putting in a community centre and giving these opportunities because young kids and teenagers, who do not drive, are sort of stuck here. There is nothing really for them to do. I would like to see something for the whole community - as I said, it is just not the school - when we have a perfectly good school. I have made wonderful friends out there and my children are very happy. I know friends who move out here as well, but there is a tie. 'My kids go there and my kids go there.' It is only a coat of paint and I just do not see at this current time that it is necessary.

**Mr BROOKS** - Jillian, in your submission towards the end you said, 'I do wonder why we are having this public hearing if the decision has been made'. Can you just explain what you mean by that?

**Ms TONELLI** - I feel as if the decision has been made because the grounds have been demolished; that is the main thing. If the decision has been made, the grounds are done. If it has not been made, why has it been done? I cannot understand that. That would be the main thing.

**Mr BROOKS** - I might ask the Chair to highlight that obviously the decision of this committee has not been made.

**CHAIR** - Yes, that is a given.

**Ms TONELLI** - So why has it been done? Rumours are flying everywhere, but I have heard that it was done without consent.

**CHAIR** - That cannot happen. No project above \$5 million can start.

**Ms TONELLI** - I am curious why it is being done. Why have we had the vegetation destroyed. Okay, maybe the buildings were old. My children also go to scouts. They have left the scout house there, which is something. I have many memories of camps and things like that out there, but that is beside the point. I just cannot understand why it has all been flattened when the decision has not been signed off.

**CHAIR** - That process is quite different to the process of building a new school. The approval of this committee is required. A landowner can do on the land what they choose with the relevant approvals - like the demolitions of buildings or the preparation of a site for something.

**Ms TONELLI** - I have been disappointed in the fact that decisions have been made to build this school but we have virtually seen no-one from higher up coming out to the school and actually watching it work and seeing what it has to offer - going on little excursions down to Andrews Creek and the little farm and things like that. There has not been that support. To me, it looks as if decisions have been made from behind a desk without actually going and seeing what the schools have to offer. That disappoints me.

**CHAIR** - If indeed after today's hearings this committee deliberates and decides to reject the proposal, then that is the end of the story. The only way around that is for the Government to introduce legislation and if that legislation passes both Houses of Parliament then they could still build the school. Recently this committee rejected the proposal for a new Devonport police station. Subsequently there was another proposal put to the committee; it addressed the issues which the committee was concerned about and that was subsequently approved. The work out there cannot start. The department can go through the process of seeking expressions of interest, putting the documentation out to tender, but people who are considering tendering know that they do so with some risk.

**Ms TONELLI** - So it is not an absolute given if it is put out?

**CHAIR** - Not at all.

**Mr BOOTH** - Given that it will not happen unless this committee approves it.

**Ms TONELLI** - Fair enough.

**Mr BROOKS** - I just wanted to see what you meant and then also allow clarification.

**Ms TONELLI** - I am really pleased we have had this opportunity because I have not felt I have had any input. Emma said that they had pamphlets dropped in their letterbox. I live near Ghost Rock Vineyard and we have had nothing. Because we are so far out I have had no consultation at all.

**Mr BROOKS** - That is what today is about. It is for us to hear evidence from everyone and then go and consider our options, and that may be an extension to call for further evidence.

In your submission you spoke about families and truancy and loitering and you mentioned it today. Is the fact that we can't control our kids a good enough reason to not build a school?

**Ms TONELLI** - It is kids after school a lot of the time, the older ones who are bored and have nothing to do. At Wesley Vale we have a zero dollar budget for vandalism; how many schools can say that? If you are going out there then it is going to happen, so that will have to be taken into account. One of the teachers said to me how lovely it is to go to school and not have to check for foreign objects such as condoms, needles, coke cans or whatever that could affect children. We are so lucky that we have that and that is a concern I have out there. Would that be part of the groundsman's job to check that every day, combined with maintaining the school? A lot of vandalism will happen after hours and school holidays when kids are bored.

**Mr BROOKS** - Heidi, you mentioned that the kids come out and visit the farm. You guys run a fantastic operation with local produce. How often do they come out and have they been out this year? What age groups come out?

**Ms RADCLIFF** - They were out a couple of weeks ago. It's generally a grade 3-4 class, Mrs Dennison and Mrs Armitstead's class. It is open to any other classes if they would like to come out. We invited the principal last year just to show her what is available because she's not from the area. The children have a fantastic day. The parents love the fact that there's no money involved. It takes the kids about 15 minutes to walk to the farm and we spend the whole day with them and then they walk back again. They do some activities probably that they wouldn't otherwise do. It is a working farm and we have to work around what is happening on the day. Then they walk down to our shop. It's another little excursion, it costs nothing and they don't need to get on a bus. It adds a bit of variety to their day. Once the school is out there then all that sort of thing will go by the wayside.

**Ms TONELLI** - It is a country school and it doesn't have to be like every other school.

**Ms RADCLIFF** - Most of the children are 'city' children - they are not from farms - so it's something really different. It's not completely structured; it depends what happens on the day so some really exciting things can happen for them.

**Mr BROOKS** - There are arguments in submissions for the school that there are other opportunities for excursions that also won't cost money - the beach or other areas. I think it is a wonderful opportunity that you provide.

**CHAIR** - Given that Wesley Vale addresses your needs at the moment for your families, in the event that a Port Sorell school became the central focus and Wesley Vale was closed, what then for your families?

**Ms TONELLI** - In a perfect world it wouldn't happen. If Wesley Vale was to close I suppose they would come out here, but it's not something I would do willingly. We used to live up in Sheffield and when we moved down here I looked at taking my children to anything from Moriarty to Latrobe, and then decided on Wesley Vale. I liked the atmosphere and the whole feel. If it did close then I suppose it would be out here but it would not be something that I would choose to do. It would be something that would be more likely forced upon me to make that decision.

**Ms RADCLIFF** - I would prefer not to have to send the children out here, and I probably wouldn't. I would even consider the option of sending them to Devonport, possibly to the Catholic school there, rather than driving out to Port Sorell. That would be my preferred option because I really just do not see that there is a need for the school and I do not really feel like supporting it if it does go ahead. If I have no other options, I suppose I will have to but I just don't really think I will be sending my children to the new school.

**Mr HALL** - Would Moriarty not be an option for you where you are?

**Ms RADCLIFF** - I am thinking if you close Wesley Vale surely you are going to close Moriarty first. I suppose Moriarty would be an option if it was still there. I would probably prefer a slightly larger school. I think that is a little bit too small.

**CHAIR** - Thanks. I appreciate your time, both of you.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

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

**CHAIR** (Mr Harriss) - Welcome.

**Mr HIDDING** - Mr Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. Could I just say that in the 15 years of my political life I have been aware of and working with this issue. There was a period that Port Sorell was not in Lyons but I was still interested in the issue because it was a live one when I was first elected and it is still live now.

In that 15-year period there has probably been three generations of parents that have moved through, so listening to parents today we need to understand that in three to four years' time as their children graduate, we have the next cohort come through so they are not arguing for something that they need in 20 years' time. We have a changing cohort there.

I want to first talk about democracy because after all that is what we are about as elected members. A parliamentary inquiry, a joint House standing committee inquiry which included all parties, including the Tasmanian Greens and independents, held an inquiry into this area - the Community Development Committee. There was a huge number of submissions for the school from not just the school community - from the community itself, the broader community, the business community and residents and others who lived in the area. Since then we have had an election and all three parties that were standing in that election supported the construction of the school.

The next iteration of democracy was that the Budget, reasonably passed by both Houses of Parliament, included funding for the Port Sorell school. It was not clear whether the capital funds would have been drawn from reserves or otherwise because in Treasury terms that is immaterial. It has a cost regardless. The process has been passed by both Houses of Parliament; the funding for it has been passed by both Houses of Parliament.

Just as important is the local government which has a very strong view about this and in fact developed a view to getting support from the Parliament for it and in fact did a report on this area which they saw as their key development area of their municipality and identified as one of the key drivers for development of Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley the establishment of a school.

I was about when the last decision was made about the Port Sorell school, which was in 1999. I was elected in 1996. During that period that we were in government Sue Napier who was then the Minister for Education involved myself and other members of Lyons in the decision. She did not make the decision by the time the election came around but it was made shortly after with the agreement of the then State Opposition because it was a developed agreement that marginally, on balance, we would spend the money on the Wesley Vale school instead and keep it open, but I remember as clearly as though it were yesterday that it was absolutely marginal and we discussed, watching very carefully, developments over the next 10 years in Port Sorell.

Here we are now some 13 years later and Port Sorell from back then has gone ahead substantially in population, probably not as much as it would have done if we had had a



school at Port Sorell, and that evidence has been provided by real estate agents in the past who have demonstrated that they have had inquiries from families to move here but the lack of a school within 10 or 11 kilometres was seen as a disbenefit.

I will trot through this quickly because you are on a short rope. The BER expenditure is what it is. I noticed at the time that nobody locally was prepared to say anything about it one way or the other because it was controversial. It is difficult in a small community like this when these things become controversial, and we've heard that today. It is hard for everybody, but for all that it is fair that people stand up for their own communities and they have done so strongly on this school. The BER expenditure was always going to be a problem and it's here today being held up as a reason that we would not build this school in Port Sorell. I knew precisely that that is what would happen. I think it is wrong. I thought it was wrong then and I think it is wrong now of the Government, particularly the Minister for Education at the time, who was then the Premier and has since retired, Mr Bartlett, to sign off on that money being spent there without there having been this decision that we are having now. That should have occurred back then, but because it was controversial they just banged it through and did it in any event. Firstly, that decision should not be levied upon the children of Port Sorell; the children of Port Sorell should not have to wear a poor executive government decision made back then by the Government. Secondly, I don't think that the level of expenditure of BER and the outcome of itself has set that school up as being prime to go for the next 20 years. I believe that if you were to reject this project now, you would be sitting here in three to four years and the Government would be looking at substantial expenditure at Wesley Vale because it is the only school in the area.

Professor Natalie Jackson has said that with or without a school this place will continue to rise; with a school it would be more so. She also pointed out, as many others have, that it is very wrong for those who have influence in these matters to try to develop a community without all elements of a community. One of the issues of not having a public primary school in a town of 4 000 is that you create a vacuum. At the time, in support of my strong feelings about this matter, I e-mailed many of my colleagues in State parliaments around Australia asking them if they knew in their areas any town of 4 000 people that didn't have its own public primary school, and not one of them could find one. The vacuum created starts looks attractive to other markets, such as private schools. There is interest and there has been interest in this place, evidence is on the record, in Port Sorell from a private school organisation that was looking at a step-down private school and this would be a perfect place to step in and build it. Whilst some people might be attracted to that, and I am a strong supporter of private school education, I am a stronger supporter of choice. The choice then will be to send your child to the nice private school down the road that is going to cost you a few bob or stick your child on a bus to Wesley Vale. I think that is a cruel, unnecessary and wrong choice to put before people of a community in Tasmania. I think any community of this size should have the opportunity to send their child to a public primary school.

On the issue of clearing of the land, I wasn't aware it had been cleared. I had a look today. As it was council land, it may well be that the council has cleared it as part of its handover. I'm not sure and I wouldn't be jumping to any conclusions about that. The key point I want to make here is the democratic processes of the State Government, an election process, an inquiry that allowed anybody to come in - it was well publicised and went on for quite some time; it was a very long session - has given most people an

opportunity to have their voice heard. There will always be those who say they didn't get a chance or they would have wished a bigger chance and there will always be that whenever you build a new school. It has to be that the local community that you are affecting is going to be concerned about that. People feel very attached to their schools, and so they should. It is one of the beauties of our public primary school sector, that people feel so attached to it, they work hard in it and they're terrific schools and communities. But for all that there is no reason why all those good things we heard about with Wesley Vale couldn't and won't happen in this area here. In fact I feel very strongly that that's precisely what will happen, that there will be schoolchildren on tracks and trails and clearly marked things so they can ride their push-bike to school on. This is a lovely flat area around here. They would become part of this community, a community that is growing with imbalance. There are far more people over the age of 40 than there are under the age of 40 or 45; that's most peculiar and most unusual, and Professor Natalie Jackson pointed that out. We did address the matter but we made the conscious decision back in 1999 to go that way, to keep the area under review. It has been under review and here we are now ready to build a new school. I would, with that, ask you to find that this school should be built.

**Mr HALL** - Rene, being the devil's advocate for a moment, I might give you the analogy of Port Sorell and Wesley Vale, also Hadspen and Hagley. We've had a bucket of money spent at Hagley. We have no school at Hadspen - the same situation.

**Mr HIDDING** - It is but it's certainly not 4 000. I have three kids that live in Hadspen and it is most peculiar. For that reason the Meander Council just this year - probably a few years late - did a Hadspen town study to identify what are we going to do about the school here if we're going to grow. Now they didn't and they haven't and that's a town of 1 500. The same peculiarity has arrived where out in a paddock there is the Hagley Farm School and it contributes to quite some consternation in the area. As you know the Westbury School was slated for closure and yet 20 or 30 of the Westbury kids drive straight past their own school, in fact in public-provided buses, and go this other school. So these are difficult matters for the public sector to sort out.

**Mr HALL** - The capex has been spent, the public money has been spent at Hagley, a village the same size as Wesley Vale, I suppose.

**Mr HIDDING** - Yes, indeed, but that doesn't mean that Hadspen doesn't have a problem. It now has a growth issue and it's 1 500, mind you, not 4 000; that very much is the difference. Back in 1999 when the decision was made there were about 2 500 to 3 000 here then, so that was completely marginal. Hadspen is not there yet. One of course was a special school, a farm school. It's a great school, as we know, but it's certainly peculiar.

**Mr BROOKS** - Rene, you're the local member for the school side of the street in Wesley Vale and this way.

**Mr HIDDING** - Yes.

**Mr BROOKS** - We've heard some evidence today that some feel the minority are leading the charge for the school. I know how much feedback we all get politically; is that what you're getting as well?

**Mr HIDDING** - No; that's so far from reality that it doesn't bear thinking about. I have been on this now for quite some time. For the last four or five years I have been dealing with a very large group of local individuals, and that's not just people in the school community. That's real estate agents and retired people who live in the area who know that this is a community that is imbalanced. There are not enough kids here and the kids who are here get bussed out every day in two shifts. We don't have enough buses to run them out all at once, so you have an early bus and a late bus, and then the reverse on the way home.

**Mr BROOKS** - I'm aware of that.

**Mr HIDDING** - If you were to equate numbers with passion or people who are prepared to say things right now in this awkward environment that people find themselves in, then it's always awkward. It's awkward for a member of parliament. There are plenty of members of parliament out there who will not take a position on this because they are scared. I take a position on this knowing that I have people at Wesley Vale throwing rocks at me because this is absolutely right for the Port Sorell community. This is about Port Sorell. This actually isn't about Wesley Vale.

**Mr BROOKS** - But the impact will be significant.

**Mr HIDDING** - There is a significant impact on Wesley Vale, which does not get overridden by the strong need for Port Sorell for the last 10 years to have had its own school. To say that there will be an impact there and an impact here, of course you can cook that impact up to be something that is unimaginable and really painful, but the point is, as we heard from the experts this morning, these things get managed through a process. I have already pointed out to you that generations wash through the schools. A child is in a primary school for seven-odd years and then moves through. Then you have a different cohort of people. We are talking about building a school, a facility, that will serve this community for the next 20 or 30 years. It is not for the current cohort. The decisions Public Works committees make are about 20- to 30-year-plus forward thinking. It is not only for the immediate things.

**Mr BROOKS** - In the public hearing we have heard that Wesley Vale is getting their budget cut. In your opinion is it affordable and should the Government be putting money towards this given the current state of the Budget?

**Mr HIDDING** - What we are talking about here is capital expenditure. This is not related to the school budget.

**Mr BROOKS** - But there will be recurrent expenditure.

**Mr HIDDING** - There will be recurrent expenditure as part of this and that has been budgeted for. There are out years in the Budget. Now, has that driven a reduction in cost? I hope not, but who would know. It is not for us. We have been through the Estimates process. Even if we asked that question my guess is that you would not get an answer, but you would hope that is not why. I guess it could be. The out years for this school and the capital budget recognise that this community needs a school. A series of

democratic processes have decided that it should get a school and this is the last process of democracy here today.

**Mr BOOTH** - Rene, you gave evidence that you had done a survey of a whole lot of different communities around Australia, asking whether they knew of any other area with 4 000 people that did not have a school.

**Mr HIDDING** - Hardly a scientific survey.

**Mr BOOTH** - Also it depends on the questions you ask. Five minutes away from here there are a number of schools that kids travel to by bus.

**Mr HIDDING** - Five minutes?

**Mr BOOTH** - Five or seven minutes on a bus.

**Mr HIDDING** - Someone is breaking the speed limit.

**Mr BOOTH** - Well how long?

**Mr HIDDING** - It is 11 kilometres for many of the kids around here.

**Mr BOOTH** - So 10 minutes on a bus. Did you declare that on the survey?

**Mr HIDDING** - It is longer than 10 minutes on a bus. I even timed it myself and I have genuinely forgotten what it is, but it is much more than 10 minutes.

**Mr BOOTH** - I am not sure it is much more than 10 minutes, but did you include on your survey the fact that there are a number of schools in very short bus distance from this community of nearly 4 000?

**Mr HIDDING** - The question was: are you aware of any town or community of about 4 000 people in your area that does not have a school and buses its kids 10 kilometres away? The answer was, no, cannot think of one.

**Mr BOOTH** - The other point is that you talked about the community being 4 000-odd people but 25 per cent of the infrastructure here is shacks, according to the report we have in this submission from the department. So it is not really quite the same. It is a completely different demographic.

**Mr HIDDING** - Yes, it is a different demographic. I have not brought the latest demographics with me, but they are available to you. I would also point out that with southern beaches, the reason that we have had to do what we do with sewer and water now was all shacks. They never stay shacks.

**Mr BOOTH** - These have sewerage and water, the point being -

**Mr HIDDING** - My point is they never stay shacks because they become very desirable community properties to buy because people get driven out of the cities.

**Mr BOOTH** - You said you have had a lot of representation from real estate agents and people involved in property and so forth.

**Mr HIDDING** - As part of the group, yes.

**Mr BOOTH** - Has it more to do with a desire by people like that to pump up the property values and so forth or is it really about educational opportunities?

**Mr HIDDING** - No, two things - genuine educational opportunities obviously, but nobody has been saying that the Wesley Vale school lacks educational opportunities. That is not true. What we are talking about is educational opportunities within an area reasonably close to the house. What we have here is three areas reasonably close together - flat; a perfect area to have a school in the middle and kids ride to it on their little pushbikes or walk or still be brought by mum or dad or whatever but the fact is -

**Mr BOOTH** - How many of the 320-odd kids who go to Wesley Vale would then be riding bikes to Port Sorell school or walking? Quite a few would be on a bus going back the other way, wouldn't they?

**Mr HIDDING** - There are not that many. I know there are people who are about to give evidence who would have those answers. On the question you asked, if it was only about education, no it was not. There are two things - one, the fact that this town deserves its own primary school for the same reasons that every other town deserves one; and there is also a regional development push by the council, which is very fair and it is a good thing for that council to do, to make sure that the community grows up balanced. This is an imbalanced community; there is a void. As I say, there was evidence given that the school was on the ground looking for somewhere to build one of these private schools. That will skew this town to a position that no other town in Tasmania has, which I think is a very unjust and wrong choice to put before the residents of a Tasmanian town.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Rene.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

**Mr NATHAN RICHARDSON, Mr MATTHEW RYAN AND Ms LIZA PETHERICK**  
WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Harriss) - Regarding Matthew's submission, that was submitted to committee in confidence.

**Mr RYAN** - No, mine wasn't.

**CHAIR** - We do not have it in front of us today because we were not aware that you were giving evidence to us.

**Mr RYAN** - Okay. I am happy to read it out, if you like.

**CHAIR** - If you want to table that for us as well but there is no need particularly to read it out. You can speak to it, if you like, and paraphrase it but you could table that so that it comes on the table today. We did not come prepared with yours in front of us, whereas with the others we have, knowing that people's were on the agenda to present today. We will get you to lead off and speak to your submission and then we will get the other two to speak to theirs as well and take questions to the three of you.

**Mr RYAN** - Thanks very much to the committee for giving us the opportunity to speak. Very briefly, I am a parent of the school community at Moriarty Primary School and a farmer from the Thirlstane area. Our children are very privileged to have the caring, safe and fulfilled education of school environment at the Moriarty school right now. This school, along with both Wesley Vale and Sassafra, is an extremely important part of the fabric of the communities in this area.

It would have to be acknowledged, as it has been today with other speakers, that with the opening of a school at Port Sorell, these three well-functioning schools' viability will be questionable and, as it has been said, they are only a short bus trip away.

Some points of relevance to us are that there has been very significant money spent on upgrading those schools. Truancy levels are virtually zero in country schools, as is vandalism, and it is obscene to us, or absurd, with the State Government in an extremely weak financial position, to see taxpayers' money spent in large amounts, when cutbacks are needed, on a new school facility when the status quo is functioning very well.

In addition, to use the argument that the justification is that children from Port Sorell should not have to travel on a bus is ludicrous. The distance is very short for both Wesley Vale and Moriarty, and in any event, if one of those schools is compromised, there will have to be children bussed into the Port Sorell area, so I do not see what the difference is. In addition to that, the reality of life is that travelling on a school bus is an experience which prepares children for the reality of life in the real world. It assists with interaction and organisational skills.

We believe that the decision to build the school at the expense of other small schools in the community is only as a result of lobbying and pandering to a very small vocal group which doesn't represent the view of the wider community. I will leave it at that.

**Ms PETHERICK** - I have two young children who attend Wesley Vale Primary School. It is a wonderful school; the teachers are fantastic. My children have bonded very well with other children there. I believe primary school is where they make lifelong friends. I asked my son the other day, 'What would happen if Port Sorell school opened up and your friends went to Port Sorell?' and he said, 'I would want to move back to Queensland'. I do not want to see Wesley Vale close. We are from the mainland. When we first came here and moved to Shearwater five years ago, I did a lot of research on schools in the area. I didn't like Latrobe, I didn't like the three primary schools in Devonport and then somebody said, 'What about Wesley Vale?' and I said, 'Where's that?' So they gave me the directions and I fell in love with it. The kids love it. It takes 13 minutes by bus; seven minutes for me to drive there if anything happens. They leave at a decent time in the morning and they are back by a quarter past three in the afternoon.

We were at a shared assembly last Friday, all the kids were in the hall and one of the mums said to me, 'It's going to be so sad to divide these kids' and I said, 'What do you mean?' and she said, 'When Port Sorell opens Wesley Vale will close'. She said that a lot of the parents wouldn't be sending them to Port Sorell - maybe through spite, I don't know - she said, 'I don't know where we're going to send our kids', and I am exactly the same way. There are a lot of people who want the Port Sorell school because it is going to be shiny and new. It's close and they don't have to walk their kids to the bus stop or drive them into school. It is convenient for them and they can walk to school and do whatever. My kids will not let me drive them to school, they want to catch the bus because their friends catch the bus. If you want to spend money on a school, think about a high school. Apparently there are 4 000 people here, I don't know how many children are in the area. The kids in this area who attend high school their buses leave between 7.30 a.m. and 7.45 a.m. in the morning and they don't get home until 4 o'clock or 4.15 in the afternoon. They do a lot of sports at night, they're tired and can't get out of bed in the morning to catch a bus so their parents have to drive them into either Latrobe High School or Devonport High School because the buses leave early. It would make more sense to have a high school, then close or split up and have 150 in each school. Wesley Vale Primary School is a very close-knit community. You should spend a day there, the teachers know every child's name.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - I am a bit unsure where to start. You have read my submission. I agree with the previous two speakers and would like to add something from a small business owner. Being a farmer in the area, if I was wanting to spend some capital money on a project, it would want to have unanimous support, I would have thought. I am not against a school in Port Sorell, I am against this proposed school because I don't feel that it meets what I want my kids to move from. Depending on the zoning, as other people have said, I am not sure where we sit, whether we would be allowed to send our kids to Port Sorell, which means I would then have a huge 10-kilometre drive to Port Sorell. I think the planners have completely missed the boat. They have seen the Camp Boomerang site as being available and they have made a school fit into that area, and I think it should be done the other way around. Let us replan a school, whether it is a high school or a primary school, and then find a greenfield site that is not in between a holiday camping ground and the caravan park, is not in between the tennis club and a golf course and not bordering right onto residential areas. The school is really hamstrung as soon as it is built; it can't move out, go north or south, it's stuck there. If it can be stopped, find a site where you can build to your heart's content. Wesley Vale and

Moriarty schools have stood the test of time. They have been there for 70 or 80 years and are a perfect size. Whereas, the day this school opens, it's not big enough. Who is going to sign the bottom of the cheque knowing it is not big enough? It is not big enough for the students of Wesley Vale and Moriarty put together and it wouldn't be big enough for the students who currently travel to other schools in the area. If you're going to build something and the first day it opens it's not big enough, where can you move from there? At least with Moriarty and Wesley Vale they have been there for 70 or 80 years and have been able to grow and adapt. Currently Wesley Vale is ticking along quite nicely with good numbers. It's not at capacity and has room to move. I reckon this site is a ridiculous place to put a school; it is absolutely absurd.

I've had experience with Camp Boomerang. The first thing is there will be noise complaints from holidaymakers and then there'll be something else to do with the tennis club - kids scratching and whatever else at the tennis courts, vandalism on the golf course after hours. So put a school where kids have to go and then they leave. That is the environment they need to learn in. If they've got all day to get to school, they'll forget their books and, 'I'll just have to go home and get something', miss a class, wander off at lunch time down to the beach. It sounds terrific to build a school right next to a beach but it's a bit like if you live right next to the beach, the novelty soon wears off, doesn't it? So it might be great for the first term then after that, that's it.

So if you're going to build a school, make sure it's big enough to start with, gets the support of the people, rather than doing what this plan's doing. It's turning people off the area, I think, already and I reckon it looks bad for the people designing it and the political representatives that are supporting it, both from government and, to a greater extent, the Latrobe Council.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Nathan. Liza, you were going to add something.

**Ms PETHERICK** - Yes, to me there only seems to be a handful of people that actually want this school. I don't know why but real estate agents were brought up several times. Obviously this area is not full. Okay, we might have 4 000 people but 3 000 of those might be retirees that don't have any children here. I live down in Haven Drive in Shearwater. Every second house is up for sale, half of those are empty, so they're not occupied anyway.

If they're wanting to bring in population to this area, don't build another school, put out a Woolworths - that's been promised here for four years, that I know of - 'There's going to be a Woolworths built, a Centro centre with 12 specialty shops'. The land is still sitting there, nothing else has been heard. I just really think another primary school would be a waste of money. Build a police youth club centre. A friend of mine runs one in Hervey Bay in Queensland. He has more than 1 000 kids there throughout the school holidays, he looks after them after school, he runs sporting programs, he takes them camping on weekends - something like that.

I have to put my kids into vacation care. It's costing \$50 a day, each child - that's \$100 a day - because there's nothing for them to do. I don't have family here, they're in Queensland. I have no close friends. You can't just ring up and say, 'Listen, I've got to work, can you have my kids for the day?'. You have to put them into care.



If there was a facility where you know they could spend three or four hours which might cost \$10, they're getting exercise, they're having fun, they're being with their friends - they're being looked after. That, to me, is more viable than another school when you have the most beautiful school in this area.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Greg?

**Mr HALL** - Thanks. Nathan, I got the distinct impression you don't like the site. If I could put to you there is 5.5 hectares there and the department claim that they have this pod system, if you like, that there is suitable room for expansion for quite a lot more students if need be. Were you aware of the design features there?

**Mr RICHARDSON** - I did look at the website and it did have the words 'Future Proofing' in the website submission but the point still remains, Mr Hall, that the day the school opens it's not big enough. So if you're going to build something -

**Mr HALL** - What, for the projected of the number of students?

**Mr RICHARDSON** - For the students currently attending Wesley Vale and Moriarty and there's only 350-odd, I believe, that's earmarked with the size of the school.

**Mr BROOKS** - There is no intention, currently as part of this plan, to close Wesley Vale and Moriarty the day it opens.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - Yes, you don't have to be blind Freddy though, Mr Brooks, to realise that if this school opens it is going to undermine Moriarty and Wesley Vale.

**Mr BROOKS** - There is no argument that it won't have an impact, and I fully understand the impact it will have, but I also completely disagree that the day Port Sorell opens, if it goes ahead on the advice of this committee, will be the day they close Moriarty and Wesley Vale. Certainly I have not heard any of that and I certainly think it is not on any agenda. I do not think it would be possible anyway.

**Mr RYAN** - The viability of them would have to be questioned, though. There is no doubt about that.

**Mr BROOKS** - Given the current history of the Government on school closures, I reckon they would be looking at it. However, they are not going to be able to do so on that day anyway. I take your point, though, that there needs to be consideration for that. One thing that I came in concerned about was the size of the potential development. It is capable of going to double the size and still meeting the standard of space available - so they told us.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - One of my last points - number eight - is that I have run my own business and if I was designing a school it would be big enough to cater for all the current surrounding students and had 50 to 70 years of future growth capability and had the facilities and complexes that attract huge interest and public support. It would be a school to be proud of in design and results. In the way this school is being planned, the opposite has happened. It has created a lot of torment and worry for people. With the recent round of closures announced and then reversed, there is obviously an agenda there

to shut schools. We need to go back to the drawing board and put up a model that I would rather be sitting here fighting for, rather than against. That is a better way to go about it.

To answer your question, Mr Hall, I was not aware that the site went to 5.5 hectares, but it is still in between the tennis club, a holiday park, a golf course and residential.

**Mr HALL** - I accept what you say there.

Liza, you talked about the very good student and teacher relationship at Wesley Vale. I am very much aware of that. If a new school was built at Port Sorell, would that not translate down to Port Sorell as well?

**Ms PETHERICK** - Not really because if you have new teachers and new students then it is going to take a lot of time to get that bonding together with new friends and the students. My son is nine and my daughter has just turned seven; she has had all his teachers. She is known by the teachers because Cooper has been there. They are just treated with such respect. The principal goes out to the yard and talks to all the children. The old principal used to get out and play basketball with the children. You see the kids walk around and address the teachers like, 'Hi, Miss Hughes' or 'Hi, Mrs Dennison'. It is just wonderful. There is such respect there and if it is divided you will not have that. You will not have that country feel. What actually happens if you do build this \$13 million school and you have three teachers that might want to go and work at the new school, and 50 students? Are you going to make everyone transfer over to Port Sorell? Has anyone thought about who actually wants to go to Port Sorell?

**Mr HALL** - Those questions were explored this morning. We are here as a committee charged with looking at the project.

**Ms PETHERICK** - You have to look at the real reason why people want it too. Is it because they do not want to walk their kids to the bus stop? Is it because they do not want to drive them to school? Just kick them out the door at 8.30 and say go to school and whatever. Is it convenient for the parents for the children to walk to school? My kids love catching the bus. Has anyone gone into the real depth of why people want a school here? Obviously the real estate agents want to suck people into the area because more houses are going to be sold and property is going to go up. If I was a real estate agent then I would want it but real reasons have to be put behind why a new school wants to be here.

**Mr HALL** - Matt, I accept what you are saying about transport in and out either way but if a school was built at Port Sorell would it not be the case that you would have fewer kids on buses in the end because more of the population live in Port Sorell. Therefore they may walk or ride a bike so it would be the kids from the country, if you like, on buses.

**Mr RYAN** - I can't understand why this is such a big deal. The surrounding primary schools are very close. If there were children going to attend the Port Sorell primary school from the northern end of Hawley where there is quite a bit of development, then that is almost too far for them to cycle or walk or whatever so they are going to have to be bussed or transported by parents, which may not be convenient now. To me this whole issue has come about as a result of pork-barrelling at election time, despite what Rene said about it

being a public issue for a long time. This committee has the opportunity here to demonstrate something to people in the community who have become very disillusioned with politics and our decision-makers when they talk about the financial situation that this State is in. A project like this is clearly a waste of money when you consider the services that are already provided by the State in these small local schools which are only a very short distance away. The idea of having a secondary school at Port Sorell has far more merit than a primary school for the simple reason that Latrobe, Devonport High and Reece High are all fairly full. There is quite a distance for children from this area to go to any of those high schools, so once they get to high school they will have a significant shock to their system in getting to and from school. Children from the outlying areas that are being serviced by Wesley Vale, Moriarty and Sassafras at this point in time could actually utilise that facility if it were the case. I know we are not here to discuss it but let us talk about the waste. This is clearly a waste of government resources, especially at this time.

There is a handful of children that actually travel to Moriarty School from the Bakers Beach area, which is a much larger hike to Port Sorell, so if Moriarty Primary School were closed, where would those children go? How far would they have to travel on a bus to get to a school as a result of the change?

**Mr BOOTH** - Building the Education Revolution money was spent on upgrading those facilities -

**Mr RYAN** - Absolutely.

**Mr BOOTH** - which we looked at today and I must say are very good. Do you think that has now changed any reason why you would want a new school? Was part of it because those schools were dilapidated? Has that now been removed as a result?

**Mr RYAN** - I think that comment has quite a bit of merit because you only have to go to these schools now - Moriarty and Wesley Vale; I have not been to Sassafras of late - and they are wonderful facilities. They have modern new classrooms. Our children enjoy a wonderful educational experience and school life at those facilities. It's the waste of government resources in this process that is completely unpalatable to the community, I believe.

**Mr BOOTH** - Is there any educational benefit or detriment that you can think of with regard to closing those schools and opening up a new one at Port Sorell or potentially threatening the viability of other schools?

**Mr RYAN** - Obviously it's going to disrupt the school life of the children who are there at the moment. That's going to happen at any point in history when that has to occur. Our children enjoy an environment which is probably slightly different to Wesley Vale where it's a very small school community and very closely knit. I guess they would go to a larger school environment, if that were the case. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing in the long run, I am not an expert and I wouldn't know the answer to that, but certainly their needs are very well met at this point in time.

**Mr BOOTH** - So there is no educational reason that you would want to shift your kids?

**Mr RYAN** - I wouldn't believe so, no.

**Ms PETHERICK** - Something else that is wonderful about Wesley Vale is they go to Heidi's whey and they have Wes Farm at Wesley Vale Primary School where there are animals and they can collect eggs and feed the chooks and they look after injured animals. When they have their cross country they walk 300 metres up to Mrs Dick's farm where she lets them gather and have their cross country for the day and their sports day. It is a lovely environment and I think you're going to lose the attraction of that when it moves into town. It has a lovely country feel and is wide open spaces and beautiful views. There are probably six or seven houses at Wesley Vale which are close to the school but you never hear any complaints from them. It has such a nice feel and I think you're going to lose all that. It would be a shame to see that go because there are not many schools left like it. I have nieces and nephews who attend schools in Queensland with 1 500 students. The teachers wouldn't know who they are; because they are so busy they have to have certain classes from 7.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. and then they get a different group in from 1.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. because there are so many students. They don't know each other but they do at Wesley Vale. They are very close. The mums know the mums, everyone says hi, and it would be a shame to lose that, and I think you will.

**Mr BOOTH** - Matthew, you touched on the benefit perhaps of building a high school there rather than a primary school. Is that something that's been considered by the community?

**Ms PETHERICK** - No.

**Mr RYAN** - It's only come up very recently with the talk of the waste of resources with a school shutting as a result of Port Sorell coming on line. It seems ridiculous to us that we couldn't have that debate about whether that would be a better option for the community because I certainly believe it would be.

**Ms PETHERICK** - It would be wonderful.

**Mr RYAN** - On some of the discussions that have gone on with the previous speaker, I don't see that the argument that children have to go a few minutes on a bus is such a big deal; it is a part of life. Correct me if I'm wrong, but is there or is there not a primary school in a small town like Legana that shouldn't go through to Riverside Primary and Exeter Primary from there?

**Mr HALL** - There is a school at Exeter but not at Legana.

**Mr RYAN** - There's another example of a community which would probably be 4 000 to 6 000 people. If we wanted for every single thing in the world, we would have an underground railway system in Port Sorell. The status quo works really well. I think we need to have a step back and look at what the priorities are for government expenditure.

**Mr BOOTH** - There would still be a fair percentage of children who would go on the bus anyway.

**Mr RYAN** - Of course, and when the Port Sorell school is built there would be a number of children who will still have to be bussed in one way or another. With children who live at Sunhaven Drive, Parkers Ford Road, or wherever you set your school boundaries, it is bound to happen.

The other point is that I thought it was a rather ridiculous comment that there are two shifts of a bus. If you are running a bus service, I think that is the most efficient way of doing it. What is the Government going to fork out to have another set of buses and create another inefficiency by having two buses running one after the other just so that kids don't have to wait for an extra 10 minutes or they don't have to schedule themselves an extra 10 minutes later? It is a ridiculous argument.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - The final point I would like to make to the committee is that if this current proposal gets knocked down and goes back to the drawing board, then I hope the powers that be don't use budgetary constraints as a handbrake to developing and planning a bigger and better school. The Government found plenty of money to pay for an Aurora hydro billing system that went \$40-odd million over budget and the Health department has just announced it went \$100 million over budget in 12 months. Well, where's the powers that be that put the red flags up for that to say that we're going over? And we can soon find \$90 million a year for Basslink. So when it comes back to education, I don't see budgetary constraints as being a feasible argument.

There are only 500 000 of us living on this island and to have something 10 minutes away, whether it is a school or a hospital or a good shopping centre, that is about the limit. We have to live within our means. Out of that 500 000, there are probably only a couple of hundred thousand of us paying a bit of tax, so we have to realise that we are in Tassie. You can soon squash the argument of travelling 10 minutes on a bus to Wesley Vale or Moriarty.

My final point would be to recommend to you guys to go back to the plans to find a better greenfield site that is not in the middle of recreational, holidaying and residential areas and one that is going to stand the test of time as the current three surrounding schools have.

**Mr BOOTH** - To clarify that, there is a bit of an inconsistency in what you said. I understood that you were saying we didn't need a school but now you are saying we need a bigger and better one on a greenfield site, or are you just saying that hypothetically?

**Mr RICHARDSON** - You will notice that my first line is that I am not in favour of the proposed school.

**Mr BOOTH** - Right.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - As I have stated before, I would rather be sitting here and standing up for a better school that is going to provide great things, whether it is a high school or a primary school.

**Mr BOOTH** - But if that primary school site as proposed was bigger and better, then would you support the -

**Mr RICHARDSON** - Well, that's hypothetical, isn't it; I would have to see it. If a new school provided opportunities for my children, better facilities, would stand the test of time, was good for the community and in point 8, 'Not create torment and worry within the community', I think that is the best way to plan something, not the way this one has been done.

**Mr BOOTH** - But to be clear at the moment then, you have said that there is no educational or other reason that you would want to move your kids anyway.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - That's right.

**Mr BOOTH** - But if it was going to be just a proposal, you would want it to be able to not create those problems you articulated.

**Mr RICHARDSON** - Yes.

**Mr HALL** - Somebody raised a matter before that there wasn't enough community consultation. Do you feel that that has been the case given that there have been, as the department said, community forums and indeed the joint House Community Development Committee which ran a couple of days of hearings - I think it was last year - here? Did any of you avail yourselves of those opportunities to make any inputs of your thoughts, as you have expressed them?

**Mr RICHARDSON** - From my point of view, our school has school representatives that have sat on the steering committees and whatnot around the area, and my wife is on the parents and friends organisation in the school. Personally, I do not feel that I have been left out of where the school sits, who supports it and where it is going to be built and submissions.

**Mr HALL** - So you feel that you have had an opportunity to have your two bob's worth through school associations and that sort of thing?

**Mr RICHARDSON** - Yes, I feel the representatives from Moriarty Primary School have voiced the concerns of most of the parents in an appropriate way. I am happy with that.

**Ms PETHERICK** - Getting back to the community-type thing such as a centre or something like that, basically the only thing to do around here is sometimes they have cricket down at Port Sorell. Mr Gee from the school runs the local tennis club which my kids are attending now, but everything has to be done in Devonport. There is really nothing here apart from cricket and tennis so it would be nice to maybe get more sports out here. Get a big hall or a nice playing field where they can do softball or something like that.

**Mr RYAN** - The only response I would have would be in line with what Nathan said. My wife is also on the Moriarty School committee but I think you will find it is fair to say what happens in these processes is you have the view that the process is going to have some element of commonsense and then busy people tend to sit back and watch the process and then when they get to a point where they believe commonsense has gone out the window they have their two bob's worth and I certainly feel that is the case at this point in time.

**Mr BROOKS** - I just want to talk to Liza briefly. Again you have spoken about a lack of infrastructure and some of the argument and some of the submissions have said that younger families are turned off by there not being a school in the vicinity of town at Port Sorell. Would you consider if they built a school here that would increase the population and therefore increase the ability to fund and develop further infrastructure for more activities.

**Ms PETHERICK** - A lot of things have been brought up about real estate. They want another school here to bring the people in. I do not agree with that. I think a high school is needed more than another primary school. Because of the weather here in Tasmania they need a hall or something where children can go. I know there is basketball at Latrobe and whatever but that is at Latrobe, it is not here. It is not keeping the families in this area. We are all going to Devonport and other surrounding areas. If we are talking about bringing people in, bring things to attract people with families. Not so much another school.

**Mr BROOKS** - You do not think a primary school will do that?

**Ms PETHERICK** - No, I don't think so. I know two people who have moved out of this area because their children attend high school so it is convenient for them because their kids are in Devonport so they have sold up and moved to Devonport. I think a high school would certainly keep people here. It would take a lot of pressure off children. They would not have to catch the bus at 7.30 in the morning. At the moment they are not getting home until 4.15 in the afternoon. It would be a better lifestyle. You bring people in, you can build a big community hall where they can play netball and basketball - indoor activities. I love the weather here but if it is wet you cannot play a lot of outdoor activities because they have been cancelled. Have indoor cricket or something. Build centres like that that get people involved and the kids off the street.

**Mr RYAN** - I would like to add to that. There is very clear evidence and we know of quite a number of families who have moved out of this area when their children get to secondary school because of the distance they have to travel backwards and forwards with sport, et cetera. They are travelling into Latrobe or Devonport for school and then they have to travel backwards and forwards after hours for sport and quite often those families do end up relocating into Spreyton or Devonport or Latrobe or somewhere like that to cater for that. I think that is where you are going to get the biggest bang for your buck in terms of retaining people or bringing people into this community.

**Mr BROOKS** - I just have a final question and I thank everyone for going on and on and on. Nathan, just on your point 6. Did you want to quickly explain what you meant by that. You had a dig at politicians which is fair game.

**Ms PETHERICK** - I hope you have not got my letter then!

**Mr BROOKS** - I think part of what you're saying is we are looking more at the short-term election cycle rather than the long-term requirement. I would put it to you that wouldn't building a school here for the long-term benefit of the community outweigh that short-term election cycle?

**Mr RICHARDSON** - At no time in my submission did I say that a school is bad for the area. There might be another agenda out there and to be fair to everyone who spoke today and to people who want the school and don't want the school and to all other stakeholders there needs to be a better agenda put in place for the schools and the area. We're trying to hit a moving target with regard to building a school or not building a school when we don't know what is going to happen to the other schools, real estate, transport and the people living in the Squeaking Point-Mill Dam Road area. What's next? Is there going to be a two-lane bridge built across Muddy Creek? Is there going to be a better public transport network?

I direct this to the council - this area has been a lost opportunity through the council development. I grew up in this area and I've seen the native tea-tree and the bush decimated, clear-felled, to have houses put side by side where you can jump from one to the next. As a farmer, I know I can't clear-fell my land and not leave any green corridors, but it seems that the council has been able to do it in the area above the golf course and the area adjacent to the service station up the road where land was clear-felled, no green corridors. I will go back to my point: find a better site for the school and incorporate it into the natural environment where we have natural bushland, like Wesley Vale. They could have an agricultural avenue for the students. I think it has been overlooked greatly in the past.

**CHAIR** - Thank you all very much.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**



**Ms TRACEY BELL, Mr MICHAEL RADCLIFF, Ms NAOMI LANCASTER, Ms WENDY ROBERTS, Mr COLIN CHAPLIN AND Mrs ELIZABETH CHAPLIN** WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**Mrs CHAPLIN** - Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views. We would like to oppose the building of a new school in this area at this time. A facility is already available to the children at Wesley Vale and Moriarty. These have recently been upgraded with a substantial amount of BER money and are well equipped to service the needs of the community, including any growth, for years into the future. If the new school goes ahead, all three facilities become less viable and their future becomes uncertain. This seems an incredible waste at a time when the Government needs to be getting maximum value for every dollar spent. We believe it would be appropriate to put the plans for the new school on hold in this time of government cut-backs. Public education should be about programs and teachers in classrooms, not where buildings are located.

**Ms ROBERTS** - First of all there are approximately nine primary schools within half an hour of Port Sorell/Hawley/Shearwater. There is Moriarty, Sassafra, Wesley Vale, Latrobe, East Devonport and I think there are four in Devonport. We have heard a lot of talk about a school for Port Sorell, but Port Sorell already has a school less than 10 minutes away from us. It is called the Wesley Vale Primary School and if there is money available to spend, and if we are to talk about the growth of the area, why can't we build at Wesley Vale? We have heard some talk about growth in the area. Hawley/Port Sorell/Shearwater are bounded in quite large part by water, so we cannot grow in that direction. Squeaking Point has large allotments with houses on them, so any medium density in that area is probably out of the question. It should really have been out of the question for this area as well. So the only growth that can occur is towards the Wesley Vale Primary School and, in fact, there is a new subdivision going in as we speak.

The one point that cannot be talked away is the colossal waste of money. Almost \$3 million of BER money was spent on Moriarty and Wesley Vale and there is proposed expenditure of \$13 million on a new school - which will almost certainly blow out. We are talking about new roads, bike tracks, new footpaths. We have already spent quite a lot on clearing the site, which was absolutely clear-felled, so no doubt we will spend quite a lot of money on replanting.

Who was surveyed? I certainly wasn't. Nobody I have spoken to was surveyed. We have a nursing home and a retirement village and provided you ask the right question or make the right statement when you hand out the survey you will get the required result. We have covered the fact that there are two separate buses running. I did not quite understand that. There is certainly only one bus for my child and I understood that the children could only get to school at a particular time. They are not allowed get there too long before the school commences. There is some requirement.

**Mr BROOKS** - There is a late and an early bus.

**Ms ROBERTS** - There certainly is not where I live. There is only one bus.

**Ms BELL** - I think it does the pick-up in the other direction on its second run. One bus does two runs in different areas.

**Mr BROOKS** - Absolutely. I am not sure of the route but there are definitely two runs.

**Ms ROBERTS** - If parents had been given an option, I would definitely continue sending my child to Wesley Vale. The working mothers I have spoken to want their children to remain at Wesley Vale because they drop their children at the bus stop at 8.15 in the morning and go on to work. If there is a school in Port Sorell then that throws up a different set of problems. How do you get your child to school in that time frame you have before school commences, which is only 10 minutes or so? They wouldn't be able to drop them there at 8.15 in the morning, unless they were prepared to pay, maybe.

Forget about bike paths and footpaths. My child will not be riding a bike, nor walking on, a footpath that has sand dunes on one side and bush on the other. I think that's a recipe for disaster. I walk daily and I have never seen children on bikes or walking alone in those areas - they are always accompanied by adults - never once in the 10 years I have lived here.

Vandalism is a problem in Port Sorell, and the golf club could give evidence of that. Their flags are regularly vandalised. That is probably small bickies but they move on to other things such as pulling plants out and breaking windows. I personally don't like the fact that there is a caravan park on the site. Most caravan park residents are law-abiding citizens but you have transients in caravan parks and they can attract undesirables.

The committee claimed this morning that they will work with the local community. I had no knowledge of the meetings. I had knowledge of one alone, and that was repeated to me by somebody by word of mouth. I don't get the newspapers for ethical reasons and they were not well publicised. There was \$1.6 million allocated to site works and landscaping. That amount couldn't be separated this morning but I would really like to know how much has been spent to date. I have read the reports and seen the work that has already gone into this school and which has led many of us to believe that we could not do a thing about it because it was a decision that had been made that nobody could do anything about. Perhaps that was a proposition that certain self-interest groups wanted us to believe. I have talked to a number of mothers. One was going to try to be here today. I spoke to her around 7.30 this morning and she said, 'We didn't put in a submission. The reason was that my husband saw the devastated site when we took our children to scouts. It really upset us and we lost heart. The decision's been made, Wendy. You can't do a thing about it. The exercise today is face-saving.'

Somebody on the committee this morning said that it was council land, and I would like that clarified. In the documents I looked at it said the land was owned by Port Sorell. So if Port Sorell received the money for the land, and I assume the Education department paid for it, then we can put in some of this infrastructure that people have spoken about today. We do have a hall in Port Sorell; there is a huge hall and facilities at Camp Banksia which are totally underutilised. Whoever did these reports has mentioned the development of those facilities for the school, so why can't some of the \$13 million, plus the blow-out, plus the BER, which has already been spent, be used to develop Camp Banksia and to make it more local-people friendly?

The reason we don't have organised sport in Port Sorell is that matches for sports like soccer and netball are normally held in population centres. You don't hold them out in the country because the city kids aren't going to be able to attend. So if we are going to have soccer and netball matches here, we're not going to get people coming from Devonport so the kids aren't going to get the competition they should be getting.

I would like to end - and we can go through the vandalism bit, and Port Sorell definitely has vandalism - by reiterating what I said at the beginning. It is an outrageous waste of public money, and we talk about it being government resources. It is our money, taxpayers' money, and we don't want it spent like that.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Naomi.

**Ms LANCASTER** - You have read my submission so I won't add much to what I have written, except that probably the crux of my submission is that I am against the duplication of already existing services, especially in a time when the State is in a financial crisis. I don't understand people saying, 'Port Sorell needs a school, Port Sorell needs a school'. I put my children into uniform every weekday morning and choof them off to what I think is our local school, so I don't know where they are spending their time but, as far as I am concerned, my children are spending their time at Port Sorell/Shearwater/Hawley/Wesley Vale - at our community's local school. I don't agree that our community does not have a local school already; we do. It is seven minutes from my house to my local school and my children can take the bus, they get home at a reasonable time; no problem.

I don't understand people saying we need a school. We have one; we have two in fact, and I think it is an irresponsible waste of taxpayer dollars to duplicate something we already have. We already have two excellent schools and the suggestion by Mr Hidding earlier that those schools can't take us into the future I think is incorrect. I am wondering when Mr Hidding last visited those schools and I am fairly certain he hasn't visited since the BER updates happened so he might like to go and have a look because those schools are well placed now to take our community's education needs into the future.

**Mr RADCLIFF** - Thank you for allowing me to have my say. I will not elaborate too much regarding my submission but I will give an outline. I came from the Kentish Municipality, the Barrington area, and I went to a primary school there - bussed for six or seven years, which took half an hour - and then went to Latrobe High - it was about 40 minutes to get there - and moved to this region 20 years ago. I am an agricultural producer, thus farmer, in the Wesley Vale region and I have seen this area expand, and I am referring to this Hawley/Shearwater/Port Sorell region and outer areas.

I am very privileged to live in this area; I think it is fantastic. I think this growth area that the Latrobe Municipality prides itself on is very fortunate that it is statistically the highest-growing municipality in the State. I have heard different ones - I will quote Rene Hidding - say that this area is the only area - I think he refers to it as an estate - that hasn't got a primary school in its close vicinity. I think it is crap to talk like that because we have one 10 minutes away called Wesley Vale Primary School. We go to places like Melbourne that will have a primary school in their suburb. It might be only 2 or 3 or 4 kilometres away but it can still take way in excess of 10 to 15 minutes to get to their local primary school.

I am not impartial to Wesley Vale coming to a standing stop at some stage. That is an admission. I can see that purely on the grounds of numbers maybe a school out here is warranted at some stage. I can remember going to a meeting at Wesley Vale about 18 months ago, around the same time as the BER money was allocated. Malcolm Wells at the time had the position that Bruce Cameron has at the moment, infrastructure spending controller for Education. I can remember quizzing Malcolm at the time as to whether our money would be spent at Wesley Vale considering that we are talking about a new school. It appeared that because it was designated to go to Wesley Vale Primary School that is where it was to be spent. I thought that was a bit ludicrous at the time, knowing that this one out here was to be built if it was to go ahead and be opened in 2013. Since then, obviously it has been spent. It has made both Wesley Vale Primary School and Moriarty into fantastic facilities. One of the things I wanted to nail Malcolm Wells on at the time was the real justification for a new school and he was simply on the projected numbers. We can't all be experts and I wanted him to listen to the figures and I realised that was a trend and that was what was happening. We have had a lot of industry closure and all sorts of things happening in the State, as we all know. You have to tighten your belt and it's no different whether it's a business, an individual family or the Government; a situation like this where the numbers haven't come to fact, the numbers at Wesley Vale are still sitting around 300 to 310. They have been around that number for the last five, six or seven years. I don't think until the numbers start showing a real trend of significant rise that we should be fair dinkum and honest about a full-blooded attempt on this school. I think it should be put on the backburner for a little while. Thus in excess of \$13 million at the moment because there is a question as to whether it can be held to budget. I think is a waste of taxpayers' money at this stage. It would be better spent through the rationalisation of budget restraints that all primary schools, or schools in general, in the State have. I think at some stage we need to accept the fact that we have to put up with what we have and allow some stability to be maintained within families and for us to focus and be happy with what we have.

**Ms BELL** - Thank you for the opportunity. I will take it that my submission has also been read. One thing about surveys that has come up in listening today, I know that I filled out a survey from someone sometime in the last few years and I said, 'I think that the area needs a school'. That was before my children were school age, so I probably have changed my view a little since then. If I was asked the same question today, I would probably still say that at some stage it needs a school, but we find ourselves in a very different economic climate now than we did a few years ago and I certainly wouldn't support it going ahead right now.

With the BER improvements, in 2009 at the joint standing committee Mrs Dennison said there were 293 students at Wesley Vale. As at today there are 307, so it has had an increase of only 14 students in the last two years. That equates to a growth of about seven enrolments and bringing in the BER money that has now been spent, there are three classrooms at Wesley Vale that are not currently utilised. If they were to be utilised that would take the numbers at Wesley Vale up to 350. So at the current rate of growth, if it is seven students per year, potentially Wesley Vale will not be at capacity until 2017. There seems to be this perception that, oh well, the Feds gave us the BER, so that does not matter. I think it would be economically responsible to make the absolute most of that money and at least try to wear the improvements out a bit before you move the students away.

Just to make sure I was using facts here I rang the school office to ask about the school population. In the last 10 years the population has actually hovered between 293 and 313, so in 10 years there has only been a 20 difference in the population. So I just do not think that the growth is there in numbers to substantiate that massive outlay of money right at the moment.

The other thing, and Michael has touched on it, is that since July 2009 when the last joint standing committee was held the pulp has closed, the carpet factory has closed and the forestry industry has had a massive downturn. I do not think a school like this is going to bring people to the area. It is jobs, and whether those jobs are out here or whether they are in the local area it is jobs that we need to stop families moving away. There was a child in prep last year and his family has gone to the Hunter Valley. They have gone away because that is where the jobs are.

Besides being a parent and working in agriculture, we run a business out here. We have a storage facility in the industrial estate; we also do property development out here, but I am saying - do not do the school.

**Mr BOOTH** - The evidence you have given is very similar to evidence we have already heard. I would like to drill down to what Wendy and Naomi have both mentioned - that you already have a school at Port Sorell. It has been a bit of a theme. People have said Port Sorell needs a school but would the six of you say that Port Sorell already has a school, and that would be Wesley Vale? Is that a fair comment?

**Ms LANCASTER** - Absolutely.

**Mr BOOTH** - So the notion that somehow Port Sorell is a community adrift, bereft of a school, is just simply not true.

**Ms ROBERTS** - Absolute nonsense.

**Mrs CHAPLIN** - I would like to dispute what Mr Hidding said that there was a vacuum out here; I do not agree with that. As a parent looking at where you are going to send your kids to school from here, we have just about the perfect choice. We have a small school in Moriarty, I chose to go to the larger school at Wesley Vale, and if you choose to go private there is a bus to Devonport. Parents already use that choice to use private education from here.

**Mr BOOTH** - Has the BER funding that has actually improved all these schools effectively now made redundant the need for another school, if there was one?

**Mr RADCLIFF** - It hasn't helped the plight of the new school, seeing that money substantially used to improve the infrastructure. It has made it harder I think for the concept of a new school, which is probably unfortunate for that scenario.

**Ms LANCASTER** - The already existing facilities at the two schools were fairly good quality anyway but the BER money has enabled the schools to continue on and provide into the future.

**Ms BELL** - I would be very keen to ensure that some good value was derived from that money before the new school came online. It might be that 2020 is a more realistic time frame, it might be 2017, but my main issue with this is the time frame rather than the need. It just seems very hurried.

**Ms LANCASTER** - So now that the BER money has improved the schools, a new school at Port Sorell it is not a necessity, it is a luxury. It is definitely not a necessity. In the economic situation at the moment in our State I don't think we should be spending money on luxuries; we should be sticking to necessities.

**Mr BOOTH** - The change in demographic that you mentioned, Tracey, with regard to the job situation, you say that the whole reason behind the need for a new school has now changed because of the BER, the changed demographic and the job situation.

**Ms BELL** - I think back in 2009 we had also come off a very large property boom. Things had grown like crazy out here and I think everyone was quite excited. It seemed to be the perception that the growth was going to continue on that plane, but it hasn't. I do not think the school is what's stopping families coming here, as Liza said. They moved from Queensland. They moved out here and their school is Wesley Vale. Not having a school didn't stop them moving here. I think jobs are the main thing we need.

**Ms ROBERTS** - It seems to me that the growth here, which is the equal highest, I think, with Sorell in the south, has been translated into numbers of children, quite inexplicably, and that isn't what has happened. Certainly we have had the growth, but as Tracey just said, we haven't had that translate into an increase in school enrolments.

**Mr BOOTH** - The statistics presented to us were that 25 per cent of the growth was holiday homes.

**Ms ROBERTS** - Exactly, and what percentage of the population is in the retirement village and the nursing home?

**Ms LANCASTER** - We moved down from Launceston 10 years ago. We lived over the road from East Launceston Primary School and had our children started school there we would have been walking across the road, which would have been nice. The fact that our local community school was seven to 10 minutes away didn't deter us from moving here. In that time we've lived in the same place for 10 years and we've had new neighbours on both sides and both lots of neighbours are retired couples. We haven't had children in close proximity to us; I can't think of any families with children who have moved in.

**Ms ROBERTS** - In our street they're all retirees, all older than us. We are great-grandparent age, raising a child. We live in a small street but there are no children in that street and the big problem for my child is other children to play with. We have to do play-date stuff because there are no children in the area. There used to be two little boys at the shop but they moved. I live in what is largely a retirement area. There has been huge growth in that area but I don't think it translates into huge numbers of children.

**Mr RADCLIFF** - If a school goes ahead out here, I think there needs to be a full-blooded revisit to the proposed site. It's ridiculous. There's no potential growth in residential

area in the Port Sorell vicinity. It should be in a site where the potential area for expansion with residents is more appropriate. It is very closed in down there.

**Mr BROOKS** - I believe the State government owned Camp Banksia and the council owned Camp Boomerang across the road and part of the land swap is that the State Government now owns Camp Boomerang and the council has taken over Camp Banksia.

**Ms ROBERTS** - I think maybe there is some misinformation on the government site regarding the findings of the people who have come in to do the preliminary investigations because on the *Sustainable Thinking* document at 12.1 - 'Title information' - it says:

'The site comprises the following six titles:

133708 Lot 1, Folio 1, owned by the town of Port Sorell'

It goes on to list six titles, all owned by the town of Port Sorell. That was why -

**Mr BROOKS** - The council would be the owner.

**Ms ROBERTS** - That is not what it says on the document but I assumed it meant Latrobe Council and that is why I made the comment that if Latrobe Council was paid for the land, which I assume it was, by the State Government, then what is the money being earmarked for and why can't it be put back into this community for some of the infrastructure that we desperately need, such as sporting grounds which, after rain, are under water - you know which one I'm referring to - and no guttering.

**Mr BROOKS** - Yes, I am a resident of the area, and most people know that.

**Ms ROBERTS** - We also have footpaths on only one side of the street.

**Mr RADCLIFF** - I think it's absolute short-sightedness to be building it down there -

**Ms ROBERTS** - Absolutely.

**Mr RADCLIFF** - I have made by point very clear that it needs to be put in a position where it has potential for sporting grounds, community facilities, green belts and nature reserves - all sorts of things.

**Mr BROOKS** - I heard your earlier comments, Michael, is there an area you would suggest of where you think it should go?

**Mr RADCLIFF** - Yes, I would. Up near the old-age home - not next door -

*Laughter.*

**Mr RADCLIFF** -When we use the word T-I-P suddenly everyone shudders, but in the vicinity where the tip has been - I am not referring to the fact of building a school on the tip site, it is more having forward planning so that eventually that tip area can become a green belt and a school could be built in that vicinity where there is plenty of room. I

think the whole Education department, with the site they have, must be very careful. It is not due to circumstantial circumstances of the ground they have available as to where the school has to be built; I think they have to look 80 to 100 years ahead and not regret five years down the track after it is open that, 'Oh, gee, we've made a silly, rash decision'.

**Mr BROOKS** - In your wife's submission - it was listed as yours as well -

**Mr RADCLIFF** - I will answer for her then.

*Laughter.*

**Mr BROOKS** - I will read it out, if I may:

'Why should the Government want to disrupt this harmony for the sake of a very small, very loud group of people who are not satisfied with the fantastic facilities that are currently available but just want something new for the sake of something new.'

**Mr RADCLIFF** - I think that's probably self explanatory.

**Mr BROOKS** - Do you believe that the majority of people don't want the school here?

**Mr RADCLIFF** - I can't get over the number of people who have come out openly lately that are so pro the facility at Wesley Vale, it has blown me away. Probably five to six months ago, we were all hush, hush, and keeping it to ourselves, it was one of those things where we didn't create a division. I think probably Heidi's comment is that in society these days people tend to say, 'I want this, I want that'. They want things new, and new bricks and mortar doesn't provide better education. That is what she probably means by that, so there was probably a minority that have been pushing for that in their close vicinity, and who are not necessarily happy with what is being offered down there simply because it is too far to go.

**Mr BROOKS** - Both major parties went to the election with it as an election policy and from my recollection there weren't huge objections back then on that issue.

**Mr BOOTH** - You got voted in.

**Mr BROOKS** - It's not my electorate, I'm the member for Braddon. I suppose it goes on from what Mr Hidding said as the local member. They didn't raise it, as far as I am aware from feedback from the electorate back then. I question on what basis is there that feeling.

**Ms ROBERTS** - People feel helpless and it's only that this advertisement appeared in the paper that we felt we had a chance to say something and be heard. I have spoken to politicians and phoned their offices and most of them don't ring you back. I blame the staff, not the politicians.

**Mr BROOKS** - It wasn't my office.



**Ms ROBERTS** - It definitely wasn't yours. From the minister's office I got total lack of interest and was told many months ago that it was 'too far down the track' and that as far as they were concerned it was fait accompli and I could do nothing. I said, 'I think it should be made public, people need to know. I'll write to the newspapers', and the woman made a very nasty remark, something about 'making threats'. I thought, 'Well, let them build the school where they like, my child won't be going there anyway'.

**Ms BELL** - Mr Brooks, I think your point is really valid. Both major parties, and I believe the Greens, all came out in support of the school. There wasn't an opportunity for anyone to make a stand at the last election because whichever party you voted for you were getting the school.

**Mr BROOKS** - It wasn't Greens' policy, as far as I'm aware.

**Ms BELL** - I think they might have supported it before the election. As far as the election making a statement about the school, you couldn't really make a statement. I was very much in support of the school and I put in my submission. I was under the impression that everyone wanted the school so I said, 'Who am I to argue, everybody wants it?' We were selling some things out here as a fundraiser for the school recently and I was very taken aback when these two ladies came along and I said we were fundraising for the school and they said, 'Which school are you fundraising for?' and I said it was Wesley Vale and they said, 'That's all right then, we'll support you because we don't want that new school out here'. I was quite shocked because I thought everybody wanted the school.

**Ms LANCASTER** - Probably a lot of people thought that. As we say, a lot of people thought it was a foregone conclusion and this forum is giving us the opportunity to put up our hands and say how we really feel.

**Ms ROBERTS** - There are so many more of us who feel intimidated by this sort of inquiry or a chance to have a say. I've had phone calls from a number of people who decided not to do a submission and I said, 'But you could have done it in confidence' and they said they didn't realise that. It's a very small community, too; you don't really want to come out on one side or the other. 'We've told you privately we don't want the school, we've given you the reasons, you put our views forward'.

**Mr BROOKS** - We want everyone's opinion and we are glad everyone's made a case.

**Mr CHAPLIN** - Tracey has mostly said what I was going to say but, when Mr Hidding was talking about democracy and making a choice at the election, we didn't really have a choice. I just assumed it was a fait accompli with the parties having that as an election promise, that they assumed that was what people wanted and they didn't give us anybody else to vote for. What are the committee's thoughts on a closure of a school if there is one built out here at Port Sorell? That would be my worst thought if there were three schools in the area and none of them had a big enough school population to have specialist services, music or special reading or any of those sorts of things, if all the schools missed out on having enough students to provide those services and then, if the Government wasn't brave enough to shut one of the schools and let one die slowly, I would rather a decision be made to close a school but I am not sure whether the Government would be brave enough to do that really. Then you have the upkeep and the

administration on three schools instead of one - gardeners, groundsmen and all those sorts of things - but I am not sure what the committee thinks about the future of the three schools in the area.

**CHAIR** - It might be worthwhile by way of explanation because there has been a number of questions raised and it is not necessarily our role to answer the questions, you would appreciate that, it is for us to get the information by asking the questions. The legislation under which we operate sets three members from the lower House onto the committee and two from the upper House and historically the two members from the upper House have been independents but even though the parties may have taken a policy position to the election, the Devonport police station was a matter that was in budgets from some time back but notwithstanding that, this committee unanimously rejected the Devonport police station. So it is not to say that any proposal which comes before this committee will go down party lines because the committee will, as it has in my 13 years on the committee, assess the proposal in accordance with both the submissions from the proponent, whichever department it is, and taking into consideration the evidence of witnesses. That is the process. Further to that, I probably should indicate to you all - and there have been suggestions as we have proceeded today that an amended proposal or whatever might be a proposition - this committee has no jurisdiction under the legislation that we operate within to recommend amendments to a proposal, a downsizing an upsizing; we can only either approve or reject. So that is the jurisdiction under which we operate and that is the make-up of the committee, and the lower House appoints the members it chooses by resolution, as does the upper House.

Any further questions?

**Mr BOOTH** - Chair, from my experience on this committee, and certainly it is my own position and I am sure it is that of the others, we absolutely take off any party hats; there is no commitment necessarily to a party policy or an election policy. Rather we just consider it on its merits - the case whether the money is well spent or not, whether it gives value for money and so forth - and that is the way that I will be considering this. I am sure the other members all feel exactly the same way so you can have absolute confidence as far as I am concerned that any evidence you give is taken in good faith and well considered before we make a decision.

**Mr BROOKS** - I would like everyone to know there has been no decision; we do not discuss it until we hear the evidence. We discuss it after.

**CHAIR** - Colin, you raised what the committee's views might be about keeping the other schools open or whatever. They are not matters for this committee. This committee simply considers this proposal, certainly against the backdrop of what we have seen as we visited Moriarty and Wesley Vale earlier in the day and they might be contributing factors as to our deliberation in terms of the capacity of those schools to grow a little or to take further enrolments in the construction that they currently have but, again, we do not have any capacity to recommend anything with regard to the other schools in the vicinity. We either reject this proposal or we approve it.

**Mr CHAPLIN** - Yes.

**Ms ROBERTS** - I know I have had a pretty big bite at the cherry but it just seems quite odd to me that tonight we will go home to a survey form. Some of us will be relatively well informed about the school and both sides of the equation which we have heard today but a large number of people won't be and that really concerns me, that the opposing point of view really has not been well circulated. We also have to fill in that survey not knowing what the plans are for the existing schools, Sassafras, Moriarty and Wesley Vale. My nine-year-old came home the other day, so upset. She said, 'My school is going to be bulldozed'. I said, 'Where did you hear that?'. She said, 'Everybody knows it's going to be bulldozed'. So that word went around the school, and I don't think it is something that children make up.

**Mr HALL** - Where is the survey coming from?

**Ms ROBERTS** - Who knows?

**Ms BELL** - I can answer that. The Future Directions Group are putting out the survey - the one that the Education department has put together. It was prepared in August last year and put to that group but they didn't want to circulate it at that time because they felt not enough information had gone to the families; they wanted to ensure that families were informed prior to that survey being circulated. It has now gone out in almost the identical form that it was drafted in but it has an Education department letterhead on it now. Unfortunately no zoning information has been released, which is particularly what they were hoping to do, and because of the review with trying to find more funds in the Education department, that zoning stuff has been put on hold indefinitely. So unfortunately the families haven't been provided with any further information, even over a 12-month period.

**Ms ROBERTS** - The survey is basically an initial survey where people can indicate their intention if there was a school at Port Sorell - 'How are you feeling at the moment about where you might send your children?' - as far as option is concerned. That's what the survey is.

**Mr BOOTH** - It sounds as though it was to inform zoning rather than to inform whether there was to be a school built because it would be fait accompli, wouldn't it?

**Ms ROBERTS** - Well, that's it.

**Ms BELL** - It's a shame that it's taken this long to come out.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, folks, for assisting the committee by coming to the table all together. You are certainly welcome to stay for the rest of the considerations today.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

**Ms DAYNA DENNISON, Mr GRAEME HAY AND Ms JOANNE COATES, PORT SORELL COMMUNITY SCHOOL COMMITTEE, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED. Mr MICHAEL RATAJ, PORT SORELL COMMUNITY SCHOOL COMMITTEE, WAS RECALLED AND RE-EXAMINED.**

**Ms DENNISON** - Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and speak with the parliamentary committee once again. As you would know, two years ago our Port Sorell Community School Committee addressed the then joint standing committee on the provisions of public primary schooling in the Port Sorell area. It is exciting that we now stand before you again today with our feedback about the plans that are now before us all for the long-awaited and much-needed state-of-the-art public primary school for Port Sorell. Although I wear many hats within my committee, today I am here as a representative of our Port Sorell Community School Committee. I am a parent of primary-school-aged children; I am a local resident and have been for 11 years and I am here because I'm a passionate community-minded person. We represent a much larger committee that we are speaking on behalf of today.

I will start off by saying how frustrated I have been during the day while I've been sitting here listening. I think I would need to be excused for not realising that we weren't at the public primary joint standing committee that took place two years ago. Most of the argument and conversation at this table has been conversation that took place two years ago, or perhaps should have taken place two years ago. I would like to refer you to the *Hansard* on the State Government website from evidence tabled at that committee whereby all our committee put through relevant and very important arguments against every single point that has been raised by those who have objected to the plan. Our presentations today are around the plans put before us, which is the project at hand, but in your deliberations I would like the committee to refer back also to that *Hansard* because much of our argument that counteracts any of those conversations that have taken place today is there in black and white and took place two years ago.

Let's clear up a few percentages before we go on. Community consultation: the acting general manager for the Latrobe Council, Mrs Jan Febey, today stated that 73.1 per cent of our community is in favour of a public primary school and that's because the survey that went out in April 2009 indicated that 73.1 per cent of our community is in favour of a Port Sorell primary school; 26.9 per cent did not support the building of a public primary school in Port Sorell.

The school newsletter publicised many of the meetings from Wesley Vale so the word was out that the opportunity for raising concerns was open for anybody. That public consultation, as far as we're concerned, has been thorough. Also, as to the concerns about the caravan park bordering onto a school, the staff car park, as you would note in the plans, is the part that borders directly onto the caravan park and, as far as we are concerned, they are irrelevant comments.

I am really glad that we have had the opportunity to sit and listen to most of the representations that have been made today. The \$13 million is in the Budget, ready to access. Although the BER funding has been injected into Wesley Vale and Moriarty primary schools, these funds have by no means future-proofed these schools to enable

them to meet the capacity that will be required for them in the long term - 20, 50, 80 years. Also, we are surveying the students today; I have just received a note that notices have gone home from Wesley Vale Primary School to all parents. I would like to remind the committee that this is a survey that is going to the current students. This school is going to be available for these current students' children and grandchildren. We need to remember that this is not just for the here and now; it is a long-term investment into the infrastructure of our community.

We, as the committee, totally respect the passionate views and arguments that have been put before us today by those who have spoken to you, and the current residents of Wesley Vale and Moriarty, as they have attempted to highlight why a school at Port Sorell should not go ahead. We acknowledge that it is completely natural that periods of transition and change can evoke strong emotions within people and in this case it highlights people's loyalty and passion for their school communities. That is exactly the kind of passion and loyalty that we look forward to seeing in the future as our Port Sorell primary school begins to build and foster a community of love and passion, a community with loyalty and drive. Stress related to change and progression is a short-term problem to a long-term solution. Let us separate the emotions and the sentiments and focus on the facts.

In our original submission two years ago, when I was referring to the *Hansard*, I would also like you to refer to the 77 submissions that were put to that committee two years ago. Not 20, not 50, not 60 but 77 documented submissions were placed to that committee two years ago. I don't remember how many spoke to it but it was certainly two full days of people who spoke to that committee back in 2009.

I would like to make the point that now is the time for the school to be built. In the year 2000 there was mention of \$2 million to \$3 million that was deemed necessary for a school at Port Sorell. Eleven years later and it is now \$13 million and this argument has in fact been going on for over 20 years about the possibility of building a school here in Port Sorell. If we defer this project, apart from adding more financial expenditure to the project we will be prolonging the stress and the anxiety of the Wesley Vale and Moriarty residents who are emotionally protective and passionate about their particular schools. These communities need progression. This project needs to begin and the communities, both local and surrounding, need to advance their journey through what I believe is a period of transition that cannot be avoided. So let us remember what we are all here for today.

We are now going to outline why we are really excited about the plans that were presented to you by Artas this morning. Our committee would like to fully congratulate Artas on the plans that have been put before us today. Wide community consultation and hardworking representative groups have engaged in long hours of research and deliberation that has led to these plans. This state-of-the-art public primary school for Port Sorell is about far more than just students on seats in classrooms learning. In fact it is far more than just about education, just in case that was not already enough for us to be excited about. However, what wonderfully designed classrooms and learning spaces they are, as you would fully appreciate after seeing those plans. This school is about building a hub for this local community. It is about developing a sense of pride and belonging within its students, a sense of community spirit. It is about providing multipurpose spaces for the wider community access and fantastic sporting fields to

complement those that are current available in walking distance such as the Port Sorell oval and the Camp Banksia stadium, also acknowledging that hopefully the project of the school will also have a flow-on effect that we will see some upgrades of these facilities when the school opened; that would be fantastic. It is about utilising the layout of the land to best maximise the natural features and the assets of our environment here in Port Sorell.

How about that multipurpose indoor-outdoor amphitheatre that will provide the entire community with a place to come together and experience cultural and community-based experiences. The entrance way is welcoming and entices the community in to become a part of the children's learning. In this school, children will have a ready access to a wide variety of community groups that can build partnerships with the school and its children. Children will learn about foreshore erosion and estuary management, and take the short walk to the aged care and retirement precincts to build quality relationships with the aged. How great will it be to see those bike racks full each day when children have the opportunity to ride or walk to school, which is something that just does not happen at the moment.

Everything that we have outlined in our submission two years ago and at the community forums that have been held this year - let us call it our wish list - have been carefully considered by the Artas group and well and truly catered for in these Artas designs. This is an exciting time for our community and this school will provide a state-of-the-art learning centre as well as becoming the lifeblood of our town. Joanne is going to tell us a little bit more about that.

**Ms COATES** - Thank you again for allowing me to speak on behalf of the group before us. My name is Joanne Coates. I am a parent of two great girls who have both enjoyed a great education at Wesley Vale Primary School. Ella is about to finish high school and Hannah is at the university in Hobart. I am a teacher who has taught at both Wesley Vale Primary School and Moriarty Primary School and absolutely adored the experience in both those schools. But it is about the kids and their parents, and I hope that the school at Port Sorell enables the teachers who work there - and I know it will because teachers are great people who love kids and build relationships regardless of where things are. I was a bit confused, as Dayna said, because I wanted to pull out my submission that I spoke to two years ago because I thought, 'I'm hearing all this stuff again'. I thought we were at a different meeting; I thought today's meeting was about checking in regarding the plans in the brief recommended by the joint standing committee and then accepted by the Parliament. I thought that was what we were here for today, just to check in that those things had been met and covered off on.

My submission was written in the context of what I thought today's meeting was about so with that in mind I am here today to celebrate. I am here to celebrate that the \$13 million that is in the bank that is being set aside for our new school that meets the brief is about to go ahead if this committee believes that the brief has been met - the school that each one of us spoke about when addressing the joint standing committee this time two years ago, the school that this community desperately needs, the school that will bring heart to our community and help us to be the best we can be. I am here to celebrate the outstanding job done by Artas and the project working groups and the steering committees. They have put together an amazing plan to provide state-of-the-art facilities for the children in this community, facilities that will be the blueprint for future schools.

When I viewed the plans at the local hall about two months ago and then on the department website it was time to celebrate because the architects and the steering groups had captured the spirit of community consultation perfectly.

Two years ago our vision for the school was that it should be seen as the heart and soul of the community, that it would embrace the community learning and shared experiences available and that the whole community could access the facilities and that in turn the children could access the whole community. We saw a school in our local community that was to be the envy of other communities, not just because the facilities would be modern and futureproof but because the school would maximise the assets of our beautiful local environment, our growing facilities and our community groups and its people. Learning in your local environment is an opportunity to learn and value it more.

There is \$13 million in the bank ready to build the school that meets the brief. Thank you to Artas, to the project working group and the steering committee. In my view, you have definitely fulfilled your brief. There will be many more moments of celebration for this community when the space is full of more than 300 engaged students learning about their local backyard environment, with community experts able to pop in - such as Rubicon Coastal Care, Landcare, Parks and Wildlife - learning about the local landmarks, both historic ones and natural ones, utilising the nature trails that are right on their doorstep. There will be celebrations when schoolchildren are engaging with the local surf club where I volunteer to learn more about the water activities, when they utilise the services of the tennis club, the cricket club, the golf and the bowls club, to help families have a better understanding of the services that they can all access in their free time. There will be celebration by adult learners in the community when they can sign up for Adult Education classes or similar and find that they're being held in modern, warm facilities, two minutes from their front door. There will be celebrations from parents when their child is involved in that extra music practice or even a presentation night when a quick trip to Wesley Vale school hall is replaced by an even quicker trip to the new multipurpose auditorium or amphitheatre and there will be celebrations from 300 children as they continue to enjoy great teaching from great teachers in amazing facilities. There will be celebrations from the community as they begin to feel connected, as they walk with their children to school, alongside their neighbours. There will be celebrations from teachers as they have greater opportunities to chat informally with more parents at that drop-off and pick-up time. That doesn't happen so easily when your children are on the bus. There will be celebrations from the school SEO and the teachers and the students when they don't have to use their class budget to pay for an excursion on a bus to their local community. There will be celebrations from those who don't have a car or find the cost of fuel an issue when they walk along the path to do parent help next week or pop in to see the newest display of grade 2 artwork or to hear the assembly items just because they can pop in down the road. There will be quieter celebrations, too, but just as important, celebrations by students as they share moments with the elderly at Rubicon Grove and celebrations by the residents when their sunny smiles filled the room that day.

The vision for the new school at Port Sorell was, and still is, about growing a community with heart. We have the embryo in this plan and, as a group and part of this growing community, we can't wait for the chance to nurture it.

**Mr HAY** - My name is Graeme Hay and I am co-owner and director of Sea Change Real Estate. Everyone is having a go at the real estate agents today but the only comment I can make is that when figures are thrown around as such, and as have been today, they are not facts on the record. If anyone is ever quoting facts regarding real estate in this area, they should get their facts correct. I am here today basically representing the local business community in stating and reinforcing reasons that it is paramount for the school to eventuate. Commenting as a local real estate agent, approximately 30 per cent of all our residential real estate inquiries come from young couples and/or families who ideally would like to live here. This area has the classic sea-change lifestyle and it attracts inquiries in the first instance, including about the environment with its clean air, temperate climate, beaches, waterways, natural bushland, the location of course, which is only 15 minutes from major facilities including the airport, *Spirit of Tasmania*, Mersey Community Hospital et cetera, and the lifestyle with the beaches, walking tracks, a playground for all water-based pursuits and activities, fishing, boating, cycling and more. It also offers security and a safe and healthy environment in which to raise children. The first questions raised are always the same: what facilities are here? Two of the highest-priority questions are, 'Is there a doctor's surgery? Is there is a school?' Sadly, not having a school here in the past has initially led to many not progressing further. On the other side of the ledger, we experience a certain number of families moving out of the area from time to time because of the distance required to travel daily not only for school but for school-based activity relating to sport and other projects outside our area which can't facilitate them. The time and cost of continued travel in many instances has become prohibitive.

Why is a school necessary now? I don't think the question needs to be asked. The fastest-growing residential hot spot pro rata in Tasmania with a base population close to 4 000 is a target for family migration for all the aforementioned reasons but has no school. We need a change of demographics in completing the major requirement, favouring young families, and the answer is a public primary school. It would also be a very effective way of providing a multipurpose venue for all ages from infant to adult education. A school would turn around social interaction between kids and the Port Sorell district business community. How? To start with, we do not know the kids. They are bussed out and in and their focal interactive point is the skate park. There is not a lot for them to do. We need to create interaction between kids and the community and in particular the business community. The business community would embrace, participate, interact, take interest in and provide monetary contribution by way of sponsorships and assisting in school fund-raising activities. We do not know the kids and they do not know us; how sad is that? It is our fault, the fault of the community, in letting this happen and the fault of the State Government as well if at this point it does not proceed.

A school offers growth, employment and skills and employment opportunities within the business community. It is paramount to the community process of moving forward and catering for all those therein in a vast growing, caring and public-spirited community which is what this community is.

Amongst various activities I am on the steering community to have a community bank here. In partnership with Bendigo we are progressing to a point where we, as a local committee, have secured over \$600 000 in pledges in record time, which are then transferred into shares to go towards creating this facility. The community then



effectively owns the bank. We need about another \$200 000 to take this to a feasibility stage. To make this a reality we intend to form a locally owned company to obtain a commercial franchise to run a Bendigo Bank branch, a fully operational bank with all the bells and whistles. While Bendigo Bank provides banking infrastructure and support, a local board manages the bank and returns profits to the community. Some 50 per cent of profits made are retained by the bank and 50 per cent are distributed within the community by determination from that local board. These amounts invariably are substantial and we are suggesting that a Port Sorell community school would benefit greatly from a Port Sorell district community bank in this instance. As many have said today, the area needs schools, grounds and sporting infrastructure. This is an absolute vehicle that has been discussed in depth concerning the Bendigo Bank and the committee, that I am part of, in forming this.

Provisions have also already been made in the commercial sector for building and property expansion. Real estate is still going okay here, and developers are progressing with development applications as I speak on the back of this school happening. Many of them rightfully or wrongfully are of the opinion that the school is progressing as a *fait accompli*. Many of the pledges for the bank for shareholders are from parents of local children who believe the school is happening and understand the benefits of a locally owned community bank and how that could assist with ongoing support. So the community owns the bank and the local board distributes 50 per cent of all profits and that can run into six-figure sums on an annual basis.

A school would become the heart of our community and the community would take ownership of our school. Currently as one of the fastest growing residential areas on a pro rata basis in Tasmania without a school, this would be a sad and unforgivable legacy if allowed to continue without one.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Graeme.

**Mr RATAJ** - Thank you, again, for allowing me to speak this afternoon. I am not here today to argue whether or not we should build a school in Port Sorell. That has been done more than successfully for the past 12 years or more that I know of and have been involved with. As I see it your role here today is to preside over whether the school, its design and the site meet the brief of, firstly, the Joint Standing Committee for Community Development. Yes, it does. Is it within the State Budget allocation? Yes, it is. Does it meet the Port Sorell community expectations? Yes, it does. Therefore, as I see it, your job is done. We envy and are quite jealous of the passionate presentations you have heard, not only here today but which echoed around the State earlier this year with the threat of school closures. That pride and passion cannot be manufactured. It is undeniably real but it is missing from the Port Sorell community. There is probably not a single issue that would generate such passion and pride in our community. We need this school to not only provide a fantastic learning and teaching environment but also to give this town its heart and soul, to give us that sense of pride in our community, to unite us and to let this town continue to grow and flourish as it so richly deserves. You cannot deny us that; you must not deny us that.

**Mr HALL** - Dayna, you wear many hats in the community, so in regard to your role as a Latrobe councillor and for the public record would you mind succinctly putting on *Hansard* the views of your council on the proposed school?

**Ms DENNISON** - I'd prefer not to speak on behalf of the council; that is not my role today. I am here as a passionate community person, but if you have asked me to reiterate or echo the thoughts of the Latrobe Council, from my knowledge as a councillor and my knowledge two years ago when I wasn't a councillor, they are in full support of a school being built here in Port Sorell. They see the community at the moment being quite disjointed because there are lots of younger families and then the middle-age to elderly. Then there is that section in the middle that we have heard about today that tend to move away as soon as children are involved in a great deal of sporting events et cetera as they get older and get into high school. That is mainly because extra curricula activities take the children outside of the community. As soon as we have a school here we have sporting facilities and all the infrastructure. We have sporting rostered programs that are connected with other schools and finally we can access daily services such as the possibility of adult education classes and things such as that that can happen within our own community. It is going to be the next step to maintaining our community as a fully self-sustainable community. We will no longer have to travel outside of our community for daily services.

**Mr HALL** - As part of the Latrobe Municipality's strategic plan, is a school at Port Sorell part of that strategic plan?

**Ms DENNISON** - Definitely. You can refer to the Latrobe Council website where for many years that has been one of the priorities, to secure a public primary school in the area.

**Mr HALL** - I just wanted to confirm that for the public record.

**Ms DENNISON** - Can I mention to Mr Hall that I was led to believe that the Latrobe Council had in fact forwarded a submission to you as part of this. They're not speaking to it but they certainly did forward a submission - through you, Mr Donnelly, I believe.

**CHAIR** - We haven't seen a submission from the council.

**Ms DENNISON** - Mayor Mike Gaffney reported to me yesterday that he had forwarded a submission from the council through Mr Donnelly to the committee.

**CHAIR** - Not that we've seen.

**Mr BROOKS** - Ms Dennison, given the current financial state, can we afford this project at the moment - 'we' the Tasmanian people, through the Government?

**Ms DENNISON** - I believe we can because it's in the State Budget; \$13 million has been allocated.

**Mr BROOKS** - Do you think it should be postponed?

**Ms DENNISON** - No, I certainly do not and, as I outlined in here, by postponing a school at this point you basically put the emotions that you have seen from what I believe is more than 10 people who spoke to you today in the negative. If they represent that small group of people who are anxious and stressed and emotional about this, there is always going to be that small group that is feeling aggrieved during times of transition and

change. If you put the project on hold and revisit it in another couple of years, you are prolonging all of this agony to the point where the transition process will end up blowing out to another five years, another eight years, however long it might be. The money is there, the time is right, the school needs to be built so that people can move through this transition phase and we can look to the future because this community is about to receive a school that is going to service its community for the next 70 years, 80 years, 100 years. It is not a short-term issue; it is a long-term solution to a short-term problem.

**Mr BROOKS** - I want to refer quickly to the survey you mentioned in your proposal.

**Ms DENNISON** - Yes.

**Mr BROOKS** - Who was that sent out to?

**Ms DENNISON** - That was sent out to every resident of the Latrobe Municipality who lived or resided within Port Sorell, Shearwater, Hawley, Squeaking Point, Wesley Vale, Moriarty, Sassafra and that is where the line was drawn. The line was drawn -

*Audience interjections.*

**CHAIR** - Order.

**Ms DENNISON** - Excuse me!

**CHAIR** - Dayna, order. We can handle that process, thanks.

**Ms DENNISON** - Sorry.

There were 1 958 surveys sent out in April 2009 and they were to every resident who lives in this particular area that is serviced by the schools -

**Mr BROOKS** - Every residence?

**Ms DENNISON** - Residence, yes, so to each household.

**Mr BROOKS** - I did have another question for Graeme. We have had a few comments and submissions regarding real estate and real estate in the area, and I certainly would not question anyone else who is more of an expert than you. In one of the submissions they have said that there are 105 properties for sale in Shearwater alone, not including Port Sorell, Hawley or Squeaking Point. Does that sound accurate or correct?

**Mr HAY** - Absolutely, yes, that would be possibly par for the course but does that include just residences or does it include land?

**Mr BROOKS** - I will read it again, and this is an exact quote:

'There are 105 properties for sale in Shearwater alone' -

not including Port Sorell, Hawley or Squeaking Point. Is that accurate? Is that fairly usual or is that more than normal or less than normal?

**Mr HAY** - In the environment we are in it is less than normal but to answer that correctly or exactly, when was that survey done?

**Mr BROOKS** - Again, I do not have that information and we can only go off the submissions we were given but someone has given it as evidence.

**Mr HAY** - Including land, yes, we have had more properties than that ourselves on the market but that is what I am saying: does it include land, does it include every property, including land? But that is light on.

**Mr BROOKS** - The point that was being made in that submission was that there appears to be a high rate of 'for sale' signs, and I will read it out:

'Looking about at the moment the number of "for sale" signs is astonishing.'

That is based on the demographics of growth in the area so what the feedback on that was, just to put it in context and if I can get your comments or evidence on that, the feeling on it was growth in the area and the submission was made that there will not be the growth that some think there will be therefore it does not justify a new school and part of that argument was around - and through the submission that we have had - the number of 'for sale' signs and given that there are 105 properties in the Shearwater area.

**Mr HAY** - Not every property has a 'for sale' sign on it. I cannot answer that but what I can say is it could be an average figure in this current market. The growth here is between 3.7 per cent and 3.8 per cent per annum; the average Tasmanian growth rate at the moment, I think, is about 3 per cent less than that, about 0.7 or 0.8 per cent per annum. That is maintaining the status quo of the growth rate here. If you look at Real Estate Institute figures et cetera and the development that is going on around the area, that is why we are number one or number two with Sorell. In answer to your question, that is not an abnormal figure. That figure of properties on the market does continually turn over.

**Mr BROOKS** - Subsequently, there was another submission or representation made by Liza that every second house in her residential street is for sale. I'm not meaning that if you counted them every second one is for sale. She says it seems to be a high number.

**Mr HAY** - She did mention Haven Drive. There are 109 lots in there and probably seven or eight that aren't built on at the moment. I own property there myself and that is an absolutely incorrect statement.

**Mr BROOKS** - I wanted to ask the Community School Committee about some of the comments about vandalism, truancy and those sorts of things. It has been raised by witnesses today and I would like to hear their thoughts on it. Has that been accounted for or has the planning included some measures for that to reduce it and/or control it?

**Ms COATES** - We can only make some best guesses about vandalism. What any community group would hope is that if you engage students and people in the wider community and in the value of a community facility such as a school, they will value that as their own property, and nobody likes their own property to be destroyed. There is

some evidence on the mainland where schools are considered to be community hubs and because businesses take on a much bigger role within the school community, people are much more vigilant about who is in the school after hours. When you have a community group using the school after hours, as we hope this school would encourage people to do - we would want this school to be open seven days a week; not 24 hours a day! - and available to lots and lots of different groups, having those people use that school is certainly going to discourage vandalism, but primarily if kids love their school they don't want to see it ruined. At the moment they don't have the opportunity to vandalise Wesley Vale because it is so far out of town, however I don't believe those kids would vandalise that school anyway because they love that school. Most high school kids will tell you that their best memories of school are when they were at primary school, so they don't aim to go back and destroy the things they love.

**Ms DENNISON** - Mr Hall was present a few weeks ago when we had our BER opening at Wesley Vale Primary School - a beautiful, brand-new building. I can refer to the Wesley Vale Primary School newsletter last week in which there was a report of vandalism on the bars outside the new temporary classrooms. Vandalism is something that happens even when you have a community where kids love their school. It is a matter of trying to manage it within house and the community. I strongly believe that by having a school here in Port Sorell, as I stated and it would be on *Hansard* back in 2009, by involving children not only in the school here but also the school community groups, such as the Lions Club, if you get the kids in on the ground level when they are in primary school and passionate and engaged, if you get them in with the Lions Club assisting them to build park benches and maintain some of the pathways through town, having a love for their own school, then they are far less likely, in my view, to go back as a teenager and destroy the park bench that they had helped to create or to go down to their local school and destroy something that they created when they were there as a primary-aged child. It is all about the heart of the community.

**Ms COATES** - Can I just throw in the surf club as a possible similar situation because that club has had a new building there for a couple of years now and it sticks out. It is a target for someone to come and paint the walls. Touch wood, we have had no vandalism there because we engage quite a large group of kids and youths in that organisation, so I would hope that the same sort of thing happens and, touch wood, that the respect for the surf club continues as I am so sure it would for the school.

**Mr BROOKS** - The idea of a high school option has been suggested today as well as an alternative site. Obviously the committee cannot recommend that you should go ahead but on a different site. That is not within our scope. The question we can put is whether where it is going is suitable and is the primary school the best option rather than a high school.

**Ms DENNISON** - The second question I will answer first. The children who are young and impressionable are the ones who we need to look after at a local community level. Once they get to high school they are that little bit more independent, a little bit more worldly and they are at that next level of maturity and development. So as far as providing the best care and the best education locally, definitely it would have to be primary children.

**Mr RATAJ** - The site was identified long ago by the Latrobe Council and various consultants have come and done studies in the town, and there has been community

consultation. So the site is well recognised as the preferred site from the council's point of view for the school.

**Mr HAY** - And it was the preferred site in the ecologically sustainable design plan that the Latrobe Council commissioned three years ago.

**Mr BOOTH** - Just before they bulldozed the site, was it?

**Ms DENNISON** - No, the clearing of the site was part of the demolition order that was put out to tender by the Education department. It was nothing to do with council.

**Mr BOOTH** - Yes, but before the site was bulldozed the assessment of its environmental -

**Mr HAY** - No, that was only recent. This ESD report was about three years ago, from memory. This is only very recent.

**Mr BOOTH** - Yes, that was the question I was asking.

**Mr BROOKS** - You mentioned, Graeme, in real estate that you have around 30 per cent inquiries from younger couples inquiring about the school. I presume that 30 per cent would be the industry standard. Can you elaborate a little on the people who ask about a school? Do they turn away and is that a higher proportion than industry standards or from general sales elsewhere?

**Mr HAY** - I cannot answer the latter part of the question on industry standards because to the best of my knowledge there has not been a standard set. It depends on the location, demographics and everything else relating to areas. However, it is young couples and families who look at coming to the area, because it is that classic sea-change lifestyle. They may work in Devonport or whatever so they do make cursory to substantial inquiries. It can be young couples looking at starting a family or primarily young families referred to there. I cannot give absolute figures but I do know that it is certainly a negative.

**Mr BROOKS** - Do you feel it is a higher proportion because of that issue?

**Mr HAY** - Absolutely, yes, because a school or doctor's surgery always seem to be the two prime criteria, followed by other facilities and amenities.

**Mr BOOTH** - Following up on that, Graeme, we had some evidence given that people are leaving the area because, when their children leave primary school, it is a long way to go to a high school.

**Mr HAY** - That is true, there is a percentage there, but there is also a percentage of the primary-school-age ones, too, going because of the cost-prohibitive factors. I suppose we can relate more to the current environment in taking primary-school-age kids to other activities and school-related activities if they are in Latrobe or Devonport. We do find that it's not just secondary age; it is also those in the primary-school-age group.

**Mr BOOTH** - But don't they have those school-based activities? Dayna talked about all these school-based activities. We had an inspection today of a few schools here that

seem to have excellent facilities, including sports fields and all sorts of things. Don't those things happen in this area at the moment?

**Ms DENNISON** - Not locally, no. Not at Port Sorell.

**Mr BOOTH** - But don't they happen at Wesley Vale?

**Ms DENNISON** - No, they train within the school but all the rosters take place in Devonport. None of my children play soccer but I am aware that most of the games are held in Devonport.

**Mr BOOTH** - Surely, as an estate agent your job is to sell real estate. Are you telling this committee that somebody rings up and says, 'Is there is a school in the area?', and you say 'No'? Don't you say, 'There's one less than a 10-minute bus ride down the road. There's a choice of three pretty decent schools very close to this area.'?

**Mr HAY** - We have packs of detailed information and we go through that. It's not so much the ones who ring up; it's the ones who come into the area and are at that point. However, we do say there is not a school in Port Sorell, absolutely, but there is one at Wesley Vale, Moriarty, Sassafra, Latrobe and Devonport.

**Mr BOOTH** - So there is a broad range of schools very close to Port Sorell, although not one specifically in Port Sorell, as there won't be one in Shearwater, for example. If it's built in Port Sorell, the same argument could apply to Shearwater.

**Mr HAY** - I suppose it could.

**Mr BOOTH** - The evidence we've had from the community has been very passionate in support for the schools and the excellence of the facilities since the BER.

**Ms DENNISON** - Mr Booth, we, too, are the community here. We disagree strongly with that view. As far as it being 10 minutes away, I am a parent and I represent on our committee a number of people who are parents of primary-school-age children. Although it is a 10-minute drive in your car, it is a 20-minute drive by bus. My seven year old gets to the bus stop at 8 o'clock in the morning, a full hour before school starts. They are collected and driven to school at Wesley Vale but once she is at school she plays in the playground for 40 minutes before school starts, while the bus goes back out to a different venue. There is first big, first little, then second big, second little, and a medium-sized bus. The bus goes back out and gets the Port Sorell kids and brings them back. In the afternoon my child is dropped home while the others are supervised by one staff member for about half an hour before those big buses come back again and pick up the second load. They get home at 3.45 p.m., which is 50 minutes after the school bell has gone. So, although it is only a 10-minute drive, for a parent and young children it adds more than an hour and a half to their school day just by transporting them. Although it is a 10-minute drive by car, by the time you get on the bus and do all the stops and got back off at school it is much more considerable.

**Mr BOOTH** - What's the demographic then if it went the reverse way, were this to proceed and Wesley Vale and Moriarty children had to travel in there? That would be exactly the

same thing. Isn't that the problem, that you have a reasonably large feeder area and whatever direction you're going, you are going to have children on buses?

**Ms DENNISON** - They still have their Moriarty and their Wesley Vale school. At no point has there been a statement about schools closing. Our committee has never been in support of the closure of a school. We believe that every community should have a right to their own school. The school is the heart of the community and that is what we are pushing for here.

**Mr BOOTH** - So your committee would not support something that would end up resulting in the closure of the other schools?

**Ms DENNISON** - We support wholly and solely a school at Port Sorell.

**Mr BOOTH** - So you're not worried about Wesley Vale or Moriarty schools closing as a result of the critical mass?

**Ms DENNISON** - Of course we would be worried about that. If that was a result, if our school is built and then there is a claim for one of those other two schools, we would be out there supporting them and helping them prepare their argument as to why their school too is justified and worthy of its sustainability. As I have heard from evidence today from the Education department, there are committees in place at the moment that are looking at different varieties of models for education to assist those two smaller schools to maintain their own sustainability and identity, as we want for our community. There is no closure on the table at the moment and we are here today talking about the Port Sorell school.

**Mr BOOTH** - We've also had evidence today that these schools are the Port Sorell school; people have clearly said that Port Sorell has a number of schools.

**Ms DENNISON** - By talking about our Wesley Vale school being part of the Port Sorell school, yes I wholly agree, because we don't have an option at the moment. They are our community school, however my children have not had an excursion that has been local within their community all year because for a class to have an excursion to their local community, which is Port Sorell where they live - and Shearwater, Hawley, Squeaking Point - it costs a teacher a minimum of \$100 for them to hire a bus from their class consumables budget to put the kids on the bus and bus them out to their own community so that they can have an enhanced local community education program, whether it be learning about Landcare, meeting the old people at the aged-care home or doing some sort of project with local businesses. To have a local excursion, it is going to cost them \$100 out of their class consumables budget and teachers can't afford that.

**Mr BOOTH** - But we can't afford \$13 million for a new school.

**Ms DENNISON** - It's in the Budget; there's \$13 million. Ten years ago it was estimated to be \$2 million to \$3 million. In 10 years' time we're still going to need the school and it is going to be blown out again.

**Mr BOOTH** - Does your committee have demographics based on today's economic circumstances that will justify the growth rates that you have based this school on?



**Ms DENNISON** - We had a submission that we put to the joint standing committee for public provision of public primary schooling in the area two years ago where we stated all of the necessary demographic statistics. We had research - we had 77, not a very small but a very loud number of people - we had 77 willing submissions that were all talking about research, statistics, and they laid it all on the line. That is what the parliamentary parties at the time chose to listen to that informed their decision. They made those decisions that were handed down in Parliament. Their recommendation was that a school be built at Port Sorell. Can you remember how many people were on that committee that we spoke to, Mike?

**Mr RATAJ** - There were eight politicians.

**Ms DENNISON** - There were eight politicians from every aspect of the parliamentary parties and they listened to all the evidence for two whole days, which included statistics.

**Mr BOOTH** - I am aware of that but I'm wondering if you have any current statistics or demographic information that would justify that today because things have changed quite a lot since then?

**Ms COATES** - We didn't believe that we needed it.

**Ms DENNISON** - We're here to talk about the project.

**Mr BOOTH** - In the meantime we also have had \$3 million-odd spend on the BER, fixing other schools up. Some members have given evidence that in fact now those schools are so good they do provide excellent educational outcomes.

**Ms DENNISON** - Mr Booth, you were at Wesley Vale today?

**Mr BOOTH** - Yes.

**Ms DENNISON** - And were you shown around as to what the money was spent on?

**Mr BOOTH** - Yes.

**Ms DENNISON** - I am presuming you were shown?

**Mr BOOTH** - Yes.

**Ms DENNISON** - So you would know that the old building was given a face lift - that was the 1920s building with the library and things in it that was given a face lift - some work was done on the roof, I think, to assist with the long-term maintenance of that building. Painting was done; there was remodelling of an office and an entrance. Two temporary, not permanent, classrooms have been established -

**Mr BOOTH** - Well, they are transportable actually.

**Ms DENNISON** - Yes, they are. And they have replaced the toilet block and the reason for that was that they had already demolished the toilet block before the BER project was

put on hold and revised, as the Education department outlined the process that took place earlier today. So they rebuilt the toilet block that had already been demolished and basically the hall has been given a face lift.

Under no circumstances has that future-proofed the school to deal with the population projections that our community is facing.

**Mr BOOTH** - That is the question that I have asked before with regard to the demographics; do you have evidence that you will in fact get a population increase?

**Ms DENNISON** - I can give you evidence. It is on record that the Shearwater, Hawley, Port Sorell, Latrobe area is the fourth-fastest growing area in the whole of Australia and that Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley is the largest community with a population of over 4 000 that does not have its own primary school.

**Mr BOOTH** - What do you anticipate then the need in terms of kids in the class will be for this school tomorrow, say, if it was built?

**Ms DENNISON** - Sorry, what was that?

**Mr BOOTH** - What do you anticipate the number of students would be who would attend this school if it was built tomorrow?

**Ms DENNISON** - I do not have that information, and this is just speaking from what I have heard; I am not speaking on behalf of any particular committee here other than our own. I believe the transition committee has been looking at zoning and the topic of zoning, and the Education department outlined why that has not been specified yet - due to the other committee that is looking at school closures. Obviously over the first few years of the new school being open there will need to be some leniency given to the zoning for the transition period because if a family, for example, has a child in grade 6 in 2013 and it is their last child in their family, they probably would not move that child to the new school for one year. There are people who might choose to remain at Wesley Vale due to friendship groups that their children have established and that is what I believe to be really important, that these families that are currently being educated at Wesley Vale and Moriarty have the choice to choose where they stay or move to as a result so that those children are eased through the transition phase and not disjointed and so their friendship groups are not fragmented.

Obviously it would be difficult to project into the future the enrolment numbers. I would suggest that at least for the first five years there would be some grey area around the enrolments because it would be a slow and steady trickle until the ones who are currently attached and educated within their own schools are fed through the system. In the long term, which is what this project is all about, why wouldn't it be at capacity like any other school in communities in Tasmania in a growing area?

**Mr BOOTH** - That is the question I was asking you, whether you think that it is in fact big enough given the growth rates around Tasmania.

**Ms DENNISON** - I absolutely believe that our community is big enough and that is why all of our committee is here.

**Mr BOOTH** - No, but is the school big enough? I was asking what numbers you anticipate to be there given the growth rates you anticipate?

**Ms DENNISON** - I am supportive of the research that the Education department and the project team have put into that which states that they are building a school for 350, which is the projected number at this point, and then there is more than substantial possibility to expand on those plans that are put before us at the moment for future growth.

**Ms COATES** - We would have to be led by the experts in that area and we are comfortable with what they have proposed. That is not out job to project into the future. We cannot do that.

**Mr BOOTH** - No, no, but it is just that the demographic and the economy has changed considerably in the last couple of years and we have heard some fairly compelling evidence, I suppose, that the real estate market here has changed and that houses are in fact not getting built around the place and so the growth predictions are quite different now than they were two years ago.

**Ms COATES** - In two years they may well be different again.

**Mr BOOTH** - Well, they may be worse too.

**Ms COATES** - And they may be better and should a school be built here, they may become even better.

**Mr HAY** - If I can make a comment on real estate, we are not doing the business we were doing two years ago but we are still performing better than most in the economic environment which I acknowledge and you are referring to but that is an ever-changing and an ever-evolving process in whatever environment we are in. So, there again, on a percentage, on a pro rata and on a performance basis we are doing as well as anywhere in Tasmania and that is all that I can say.

**Ms DENNISON** - Mr Booth, was that evidence referenced at all?

**Mr BOOTH** - No.

**Ms DENNISON** - Is that hearsay or was it referenced to a particular study?

**Mr BOOTH** - It is the same as the evidence you have given us; it is opinion and it is hearsay.

**Ms DENNISON** - Okay.

**Mr BOOTH** - Your evidence is the same. That is why I was asking if you had any supporting information.

**Ms DENNISON** - Okay.

**Mr BOOTH** - I am not making a point; I am simply seeking information.

**Ms DENNISON** - Yes, that is good.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much. It has been a most worthwhile process and we thank you for your evidence and for being around later in the day than we had anticipated and probably later than you had anticipated as well. We do appreciate your patience and thank all of you who have shown the interest to be here. Thank you for your participation.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**