

30 March 2009

Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Ms Amanda Bresnan

Ms Joy Burch

Mr Jeremy Hanson

Dear Committee,

Submission to the “Inquiry into school closures and reform of the ACT education system.”

I wish to put forward the following points for consideration of the Committee.

1. By way of background, my family and I are relative newcomers to the Village of Hall. We purchased in July 2006 – the same year that the school was closed. We have 5 children, the eldest 8 and the youngest 3 months, all of which would be eligible students of the Hall school.
2. Our decision to live in Hall was taken very seriously and very definitively. The location of what we intend to be our family home is very important to us as parents. We consider it a major factor to the upbringing of our children. Hall is a unique facet of Canberra that offers our children and family a rare mix of rural and metropolitan lifestyle and a sense of community that I don't believe is found in suburban Canberra beyond the level of neighbours or perhaps the street if you're lucky.
3. I am near completion of a professional qualification and intend to open my own practice. Ideally, this will be in Hall as I originally intended as part of our family plan and moving to Hall. However, the vacancy rate of what commercial premises there are already in Hall presents a grave concern.
4. From discussions with the existing business people in the village it is painfully clear that there are two dimensions to the economy of the village – pre and post school closure.
5. I have no experience with the funding or commerciality of public schools, but I wonder if a proper study of the financial viability of the school was done. Given what must have been an extremely high attendance of NSW children, especially in comparison to other suburban schools, the Hall school must have called for a different assessment model. If the same model was used then surely the question must be asked as to why this square peg was jammed into a round hole.
6. I note the continued existence (including financial viability) of the Hall P&F, and the level of support maintained by the Progress Association (which is older than the ACT). These are the sorts of unyielding community support that attracted us to Hall and that we wanted our family to be a part of. During our considerations, the school was in existence and very much part of the thriving community. Encouragingly, the community has proved stronger than just the

school, however there is no doubt that the community and economy of the village is different. You simply cant have a limb lopped off and pretend nothing has detrimentally changed.

7. I note the definitive stance the House takes on recognition of the Ngunnawal people and original land ownership. Given that the Village of Hall, and its school, existed prior to the establishment of the ACT, the closure of the school and subsequent erosion of the Hall community is in the same vein as the erosion of the Ngunnawal people that we are sorrowful for. If there truly is recognition of communities prior to the existence of the ACT, then here is a rare opportunity to put the “we’re sorry we annihilated you” rhetoric into practice.
8. I am a strong supporter for government accountability and responsible use of public funds for the provision of public services. My general knowledge of the ACT school closure program was that it was in the main a viable exercise. Where suburban schools simply did not have the occupancy to maintain the facilities and resources. However I believe that the Hall school was an ill-considered inclusion in the program and a true victim of the catch all policy at the time.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice these issues through the submission process.

Yours sincerely,

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