



THE HON VERITY FIRTH MP

Minister for Education and Training

Mr Stephen Thomas
President
Gosford Public School
Parents and Citizens Association
PO Box 216
GOSFORD NSW 2250

Dear Mr Thomas

I am writing to let you know that, after careful and lengthy consideration, I have approved the relocation of Gosford Public School to the Henry Kendall High School site.

I know this is not the preferred outcome of the Gosford Public School Parents and Citizens Association, so I am writing to explain the reasons for my decision, and to respond to a number of issues that you and your predecessor, Mr Gary Jackson, have raised on behalf of the Association over the past six months with me.

The key issue is the size of the existing school site on Mann St. The existing site is very small at 1.59 hectares. As you know, in the near future the school will lose access to the adjacent playing area of Ray Maher Field, as Gosford City Council intends to develop the fields into a recreation area.

Curriculum programs in physical education and sport and space for children to play in before school, at recess and at lunch are dependent on access to these fields. Council's plans mean that the school, as it currently exists, would have no grassed area.

Council also intends to extend an existing road so that it runs adjacent to the school, in between the school and the current playing fields. According to Council, this road will connect the city centre to the water and will be developed into a boulevard encouraging entertainment and retail development, pedestrians, cyclists, buses and cars. This activity will further impact on the school, and its ability to access adequate play areas.

Upon your suggestion, I asked the Department of Education and Training to examine the legal rights of the school in regards to Ray Maher Field, given the long-standing association and use of the Field by the school. I am advised that in the absence of any formal lease or agreement in favour of the school, the school's use of the Field is subject to the *Local Government Act 1993* and to the Management Plan for the Field dated February 1995. These documents confer the right of the school to seek a formal lease agreement for use of the Field from Council. However, in the current environment, it is clearly understood that such a lease agreement would be refused. I am further advised the school is not entitled to make a claim for adverse possession of the Field and any such claim would be unsuccessful.

When we met in my office on 28 September, you asked that I request a detailed costing of the Association's preferred option, the demolition and rebuilding of Gosford Public School on its existing site in a different configuration. This costing came in \$18.179 million, plus demolition costs, estimated to be in excess of \$1 million.

Utilising the existing site substantially reduces the amount of funds that will be available for rebuilding, since revenue from the sale of the land will not be realised.

As you will know, the Government has set aside in excess of \$13 million for capital works for Gosford Public School. In addition, \$3 million in Building the Education Revolution funds are being held for the school. If we were to build on the existing site, the total value of facilities that could be built would be approximately \$16 million. If the school moves to the proposed site, utilising the proceeds of the sale of land, facilities of substantially higher value can be constructed for the future students of the school.

Of course, this is not merely a financial decision.

I am mindful that the proposal to relocate will deliver more play space to future students of Gosford Public School than the proposal to reconfigure and rebuild on the existing site. It will also deliver a range of other benefits including:

- The opportunity for Gosford Public School students to share in the resources of the high school, including its hall and science facilities.
- The ability for students in Gosford Public School's Opportunity Class to participate in accelerated classes utilising secondary teacher expertise.
- The opportunity to better integrate transition programs, which assist children with the challenges of moving from primary to secondary education.

You have advised me of community concern regarding the proximity of an electrical substation to the proposed site for a relocated Gosford Public School. I asked my Department to engage an independent, expert firm to conduct testing of the level of electromagnetic field at the site. EMC Services was engaged for this purpose.

This testing showed the maximum magnetic field strength in the proposed construction area for a relocated Gosford Public School on the Henry Kendall site to be a very small fraction (0.26%) of the recommended limit for the community. Testing occurred when the loading of the electrical network was at its peak.

I have included a copy of the testing report for your information.

You have also advised me of community concern that the proposed relocation will overly restrict the space available for growth at Henry Kendall High School. I asked my Department to thoroughly review the demographic projections for the high school.

As you will be aware, the opening of Kariong Mountains High School has substantially reduced the catchment area of Henry Kendall High School. Where Henry Kendall previously drew students from nine primary schools, it will now draw from only three (Gosford, Gosford East and Point Clare Public Schools). While the establishment of Kariong Mountains High School was a positive for the region, it does entail the necessary consequence that enrolments at Henry Kendall High School are projected to decline from 1,239 in 2009 to around 650 by 2015. This will leave land and facilities at Henry Kendall High School surplus.

The advice from demographic and asset planning experts in the Department of Education and Training is that the Henry Kendall site can accommodate the projected future enrolments of both schools.

I acknowledge that the Association will be disappointed with this outcome, but I hope you can appreciate the reasons that have brought me to this decision.

There will be a wide range of details to be worked through as we move forward. I do hope that the Association will continue to be actively involved in planning work to ensure that the outcome for students is the best that can be delivered.

I thank you and other members of the Association for your keen interest and thoughtful contributions on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Verity Firth
Minister for Education and Training

17 DEC 2010