



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**Motion**

12 November 2020

**NEW LAMBTON PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:05:46):**

*That this House:*

- (1) Notes a recent change to the intake boundary of New Lambton Public School will see six streets very close to the school and four students excluded from attending the school.*
- (2) Notes 68 families attending the school live outside the catchment area.*
- (3) Calls on the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning to change the boundaries to include these six streets.*

There is no denying that New Lambton Public School is above capacity. Last year I met with Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW representatives and wrote to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning requesting action to reduce enrolment numbers. As a result of that action, the department changed enrolment boundaries. But in June this year the education department changed the boundaries without any proper community consultation. An online survey asked for feedback. The problem was that the Sydney-centric generated consultation was only shared with the current school community. No attempt was made to make parents who live in the streets that were proposed to change aware of the survey. Does that make sense? No.

My office was informed of the survey just 24 hours before it was due to close. The survey was extended after our intervention. Thankfully, my office and a group of

dedicated parents made contact with as many residents as possible, giving them an opportunity to have their say. The Sydney-generated maps of intake boundary changes made sense at a quick glance, with Lookout Road and Croudace Street creating the line between the intake of New Lambton and Wallsend South public schools. But when locals carefully read the maps, the six-street exclusion on the eastern side of Lookout Road made no sense at all. Homes on the eastern side of Croudace Street, Lookout Road, Ardlessa Way, Floralia Close, Bushlands Close and Ridgeway Road were all excluded.

Croudace Street and Lookout Road are major arterial roads with more than 30,000 car movements a day. They will ultimately be intersected by stage five of the Newcastle Inner City Bypass at completion of construction. More than 1,000 homes on the western side of Lookout Road were changed to the Wallsend South catchment area. From those 1,000 homes I received not a single call, email or complaint about being rezoned, and that was because it made sense to parents to be in the Wallsend South zone. But the children from the six excluded streets, who can currently safely walk to New Lambton Public School—it is only about 200 metres away—will now have to be driven to school. Their parents will have to drive more than 3.4 kilometres to the new school.

When I met with the Minister and Education staff in August, the Newcastle school director was adamant that the school needed to reduce its size by 60 students—fair enough. The department bureaucrats predicted that 40 students from the six streets would attend the school next year. When I asked how they predicted that, they advised it was a formula applied across the catchment area of students per household. That formula is very inaccurate. In conjunction with our office, parents visited every home in the six streets to get an accurate picture of how many students were eligible to attend New Lambton Public School in 2021. The parents doorknocked all 138 homes and had responses from 136. A grand total of two students will be excluded from New Lambton Public School as a result of the exclusion of the six streets.

In stark contrast is the number of out-of-zone students attending the school. I asked the education Minister: How many students are out of the catchment area? The result was that 68 students are currently enrolled at New Lambton Public School from suburbs outside the catchment area, with some living as far away as Blacksmiths. For non-locals, including the Sydney bureaucrats, Blacksmiths is in the Swansea electorate and 22 kilometres from New Lambton Public School. A quick search shows that there are 20 public schools closer to Blacksmiths than New Lambton. Why is the Newcastle director not investigating those anomalies? Why has the Minister decided to punish students who can currently walk to school by shifting them to a school requiring them to be driven across Newcastle's busiest road? Apparently the Department of Education's advertisements that tout walking to school habits exclude the Wallsend electorate—another matter for the department to investigate.

In my time in this place I have seen decisions that made me shake my head, but this one takes the cake. Our community is not asking for much. I am asking the Newcastle director to make sense. Look carefully at the 68 families from way out of the zone who have been allowed to enrol and exclude them. We never ask for much

in Wallsend. Residents agree with 99 per cent of the changes to the boundaries but excluding the six streets is just crazy. The streets must be included next year.

**Mr MICHAEL JOHNSEN (Upper Hunter) (12:12:37):**

I speak to the motion brought on by the member for Wallsend—the very lovely member for Wallsend. I have a lot of time and respect for the member for Wallsend. However, as I have in the past, I am compelled yet again to put some facts on the table and maybe enlighten her with some more detail. Under the Department of Education's Enrolment of Students in NSW Government Schools policy—herein called "the policy"—a student is entitled to enrol at the school within the designated intake area that the student is eligible to attend. Parents may apply to enrol their child in their school of choice. However, acceptance to a non-local school is subject to the child being eligible to attend and the school being able to accommodate the child.

The policy outlines designated intake areas or enrolment boundaries that are determined in consultation with the department's demographers, directors, educational leadership, school principals and local communities. The department continually monitors population and development trends, and periodically reviews boundaries to account for population changes. The data collected by the department guides the decision-making process when it comes to boundary adjustments. It includes consideration of not only current student numbers but also, importantly, future projections. The Department of Education collates information from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and local councils. Enrolment projections are based on the New South Wales Government's common planning assumptions.

It is vital that any changes to a school's enrolment boundary is done in consultation with the local community and in the interests of ensuring that all students living within the designated intake area of a school are able to be accommodated. As part of the school communities planning initiative, groups of schools work together when required to share enrolment growth. Boundaries are adjusted and schools with the ability to expand may be upgraded or new schools may be built. The Department of Education has undertaken consultation in line with its practices and procedures in regard to the adjusted enrolment boundaries for New Lambton Public School, Lambton Public School, Wallsend South Public School and New Lambton Heights Infants School. Consultation with the local community took place in the lead-up to the exhibition of the new enrolment boundaries in July 2020.

The member for Wallsend met with the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC, and representatives from the Department of Education, including School Infrastructure NSW and School Operations and Performance, in relation to this matter in late August 2020. The meeting canvassed information previously shared with the local community and the need to adjust the enrolment boundaries. Over recent years enrolment demand for New Lambton Public School has increased, requiring additional temporary teaching spaces to accommodate students. The adjustments to the enrolment boundaries are about ensuring that student demand is managed across the school community group and so the department is able to best utilise permanent teaching spaces.

It is why the adjustment to the New Lambton Public School intake area was not done in isolation. The school is part of a broader school community group and the enrolment demand is managed across a number of schools. The revised catchment boundaries include adjustments to Lambton Public School, Wallsend South Public School and New Lambton Heights Infants School intake areas. The decision to adjust the boundaries and to shift the three sections of the previous New Lambton Public School intake area was made based on available data and informed by engagement with the local community. The member claims that the decision impacts only four students. However, this is not reflected in the data held by the Department of Education. As was said earlier, the changes are not just about managing the current student demand. Changes are reflective of future demand, and under the previous boundaries New Lambton Public School would have experienced significant pressure and required the placement of additional temporary teaching facilities. That would adversely impact the amenity of the school site and remove vital green, open space.

I am advised that the New Lambton Public School site is constrained and not suitable for future expansion, and that is why the boundary adjustment was necessary. The adjustments to the boundaries are in anticipation of future enrolment demand, which would be more easily accommodated at Wallsend South Public School and Lambton Public School, both of which are on larger sites. The member refers to 68 families living outside the school's intake area. In 2019 the New South Wales Government clarified the enrolment policy as it relates to the processing of non-local enrolment applications. The clarification was aimed at supporting schools to manage non-local enrolment applications, encouraging greater consistency in decision-making, and making sure that enrolment choices are clear for parents. It also improves fairness and transparency in enrolment, promotes equity of resourcing school communities and strengthens each school as the centre of its local community.

The figures cited are a reflection of historic enrolments and not future enrolments. The revision of the policy will ensure greater consistency in the consideration of non-local enrolment applications. I trust that information is very useful to the member for Wallsend—now she may even withdraw the motion.

**Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) (12:19:10):**

I make a brief contribution to support the member for Wallsend's plea to the Government to fix this anomaly on behalf of the community of New Lambton. Her contribution regarding its impact on the local community was very sensible. It is something that would be easy for the Minister to fix, but having listened to the member for Upper Hunter it seems that the Government will be digging its heels in on this one. His contribution centred around—

**Mr Michael Johnsen:** You did not listen.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Upper Hunter has made his contribution.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I was listening to the member. I will reference a few things that he said. His contribution seemed to focus a lot on the fact that the Government asserts that it has consulted with the community on this change. But if you were living in that community you might have a different view, and that is why the member for Wallsend has moved this motion. But this is something that this Government does everywhere. Even with the most simple changes, such as the Department of Education redrawing a line somewhere that makes a difference to families in terms of where they send their children to school, the Government thinks that it knows better than mums and dads in New Lambton. I do not know why this should be surprising. The Government's consultation record when it comes to changes in education is absolutely abysmal.

I am glad that the member for Tweed Heads is in the Chamber, because I am going to paint a picture of something about which the Government said it has consulted the community on. In the community of Murwillumbah the Government committed to several upgrades. The Minister responsible has been repeatedly asked by the local member and other shadow Ministers in the Legislative Council when these upgrades will occur. She keeps saying that they are coming and to be patient while the Government consults with the community. But it turns out that, in lieu of the promised upgrades, four local schools will instead be merged into one American-style mega school, about which no-one in the community was consulted.

The Government has forced this decision on the community and told students and parents that the new school will be better and that it knows what will work in their suburb. The Minister goes into an electorate that is not his and says that the Government knows what upgrades are needed for local schools. How arrogant is that? I appreciate that the member for Upper Hunter gets handed a briefing note by the office of the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, but he should realise that when he is reading out a note that says the Government is consulting when it comes to schools, its record is abysmal. Those opposite close schools. They do not consult with the community. Even on the simplest changes they do not consult with the community.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Upper Hunter has had his chance.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** They close schools and flog off the land so they can build a mega school. Communities are going to lose their schools. In the case of New Lambton, they changed the boundaries, which to them is just the mark of a pen but it actually makes a big difference to local mums and dads. They think they know better than local communities. [Time expired.]

**Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Castle Hill) (12:23:33):**

Whilst I acknowledge the gesture from the member for Wallsend in trying to accommodate all the students of her local schools, I highlight that there are 2,200 public schools across the State serving over 800,000 students. It is the job of the department to ensure that it monitors and manages these schools civilly and

responsibly to ensure that the very best educational opportunities are provided. I represent an area that has seen enormous growth. I have seen new schools created and boundaries changed regularly in my time as a member, as well as prior to that when I was a councillor. In that time I have yet to see a situation that could not be resolved through consultation between a school's principal and regional directors.

When I read in the first point of this motion that there are four students who will no longer be able to attend school, I wondered whether the member for Wallsend has spoken to the principal or the regional directors. I have never had a request to accommodate four students refused. In fact, there have been many occasions where I have requested that students are moved across boundaries in order to be kept together with their siblings. I put on the record that I have yet to have a request like that refused when a principal and a school's regional directors have worked together, but I acknowledge that the member for Wallsend is well-intentioned and good-hearted in moving this motion. There is no better way to accommodate the educational needs of students across this State than clearing the maintenance backlog in all schools. With that said, I move:

***That the motion be amended by removing all words after "That this House" and inserting instead:***

***Congratulates the New South Wales Government on its record investment of \$6.7 billion in 190 new and upgraded schools across New South Wales.***

***Commends the New South Wales Government for reducing the massive maintenance backlog in schools left by the former Labor Government.***

There were severe cases of disrepair in New South Wales when I was elected to the Parliament in 2007. The Government at the time addressed the problem by selling no fewer than nine school sites between 2007 and 2011. I do not know who the beneficiary of that sell-off was. I do not imagine for one moment they were like coalmines with people like Eddie Obeid and Ian Macdonald interested in buying them, but I question why the then Government sold off the sites, leaving a massive backlog that required \$6.7 billion of investment to repair and upgrade 190 schools across the State.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown) (12:27:47):**

I congratulate the member for Wallsend on moving this important motion that represents the interests of her local constituency and the concerns of parents and students in both her local area and mine, because there are also concerned parents in my electorate who send their children to New Lambton Public School. Education is a silver bullet. Good early child education sets up a child to succeed at primary school, which in turn lays the foundation for success in high school, further education and the rest of their lives. This provides greater options for a young person's future, increasing the likelihood of lifelong success that undeniably provides social and economic good.

Every parent wants to give their child the best possible start in life, which is why few things generate as much anxiety as the education of their children. As a result, many families purchase their homes based on school catchment areas. Earlier this year when the catchment boundaries for New Lambton Public School were changed, a number of concerned parents reached out to me and the member for Wallsend. One local parent shared the feedback she provided to the department about the proposed boundary adjustment on the Google Docs survey that was circulated. Yes, there was consultation, but I certainly do not think it was taken into consideration in the decision. This parent wrote:

I am very disappointed in the proposal. Like many others, we bought a house in the New Lambton Public School catchment area for that exact reason.

We elected to send our daughter to [New Lambton Heights Infants] school for K-2 because we were wanting to begin her formal education in a smaller, family-oriented, close-knit school. The reputation of the school and knowledge of it flowing on to New Lambton Public School was a "no-brainer" for my husband and I. Furthermore, the OOSH is run by the same organisation as New Lambton Public School, which would enable a smooth transition with guaranteed days and familiar, trusted staff. I'm sure you can appreciate that for us as full-time professionals employed in the NSW public service the OOSH service is imperative.

This parent also pointed out that New Lambton Public School is reportedly in excess of 120 per cent enrolment. While she acknowledged that this level of overcrowding was problematic, she correctly identified a broader issue.

**TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans):** Order! I remind members that under Standing Order 54 they must remain seated while in the Chamber.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** How could department planners justify redistricting families to attend Wallsend South Public School, which is already over capacity? This is not an issue that can be solved by redrawing catchment areas. We are facing a crisis of overcrowding in New South Wales public schools. It is a problem across the Charlestown electorate. Twelve out of the 22 public primary and high schools in my electorate are already over-enrolled, and with projected population increases that overcrowding is set to become worse. Eight local schools in the Charlestown electorate are already facing enrolment above the 120 per cent benchmark identified by that parent at New Lambton Public School. Kahibah Public School was at 167 per cent enrolment at the beginning of 2020, according to information from the department obtained during budget estimates. Charlestown and Dudley public schools were at enrolment levels higher than 140 per cent. Eleebana, Redhead and New Lambton South public schools are looking at enrolment levels above 130 per cent. The same parent said:

You owe it to the local community to provide at least 12 months' notice. People plan for school placement.

I know she is not alone in her feelings. It is not a problem that can be fixed by tinkering around with catchment zones. It is unconscionable that this overcrowding crisis is allowed to continue. Our kids deserve better.

**Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) (12:31:57):**

I have always had a great deal of time and respect for the member for Wallsend. Public education is critical for our future. The member for Castle Hill has moved a very good amendment to the motion brought by the member for Wallsend. The member for Londonderry made a contribution but failed to deliver any facts. I have four schools in my area—Tweed River High School, Kingscliff High School, Kingscliff Public School and Tweed Heads South Public School—that are all going through upgrades worth \$140 million. The member for Londonderry referred to Murwillumbah. Although that is outside my electorate, I know significant consultation will be taking place there over the next few months. The Government has already allocated \$100 million to that expansion. The local Federal member announced that the Government would, to use her words, "sell it to their developer mates". That is totally false and misleading. That land was committed to remain in public hands.

The Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, is doing a fabulous job. Apart from the \$140 million committed to my electorate, in the last few years there has been a \$25 million brand-new primary school at Pottsville. Education is changing and we need to change the way we deliver it. A major part of the modern method of delivering education is with technology, open classrooms and connectivity in order to give our kids, who are our future, the best possible start. The Government is addressing the backlog of maintenance in the Tweed, and I am sure that is being done across the State. When I came into this place in 2007—together with the member for Wallsend and the member for Wyong, who took leave for four years but it is good to see him back—I was horrified at the backlog. Our schools were being treated as second class. It was very easy to slice the budget from time to time. From 2011 the Government committed to reduce the maintenance backlog and it has made great inroads.

Every school holidays when I drive around my local area I see tradesmen fixing and upgrading at all the schools. All my P&Cs are very impressed with the maintenance and the facilities their children are experiencing, and I see that trend continuing. I look forward to the budget next Tuesday when I believe there will be more money for education. It has been a tough year. Both sides of the House acknowledge it has been a tough year for year 12 students dealing with different rules and regulations due to the pandemic. The HSC has now been completed and some schools can hold formals. It has all been done with thought and planning. I regularly meet with my principals, who are the experts in delivering education. The principal at Murwillumbah has the support of four principals and my principals have the support of another four principals. They tell me that this is the best thing that has ever happened to education. I endorse the amendment by the member for Castle Hill.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) (12:36:15):**

By leave: I support the motion of the member for Wallsend. The amendment moved by the Government is very disingenuous. The member for Wallsend has raised a very important issue to her community. I am a former school principal of 23 years. I know the heartbreak that these sorts of decisions can cause. The member for Lakemba, who is in the Chamber, would also have dealt with these issues. I say to the Government that I have dealt with government education demographers for a long time. They deal with numbers and lines on maps, not necessarily human beings and the effects on families. One of the biggest issues around where boundaries are set is what is called "communities of interest". They have to understand when boundaries are changed life outcomes for students can be changed because if everyone in their surrounding area goes to a different school it can have a huge social impact on them.

In this case, I know from talking to the member for Wallsend that the students from those six streets will now have to cross a very busy road to reach their other school. So there are safety concerns as well. Sometimes we cannot just rely on numbers and lines on maps, we have to understand the impact on students and families. In this case, as the member for Charlestown said, parents have replied to the survey they were asked to respond to and they gave real and relevant reasons why this is not a good idea. We are not talking about 1,000 kids or 100 kids, we are not even talking about 20 kids. We are talking about four students in six streets. Surely the Government can be flexible enough to take into account the needs of those families and their community of interest. Their community of interest is in their current school. It is not moving them to a different school because it makes sense statistically. Students in high school can better cope with change. Here we are talking about very young people. The Government can move an amendment and say it is doing great things in education but education is not about buildings. Education is about kids and families and teachers and how we grow young people.

Sometimes in this place we get too caught up in numbers and how many dollars we are spending and we forget what schools and education are all about. They are about people. Surely, as the member for Wallsend asked, the zone boundary change could be reconsidered. It is not a huge ask; in fact, it is quite a small ask. There is no legitimate reason why the families in those six streets cannot stay in their community of interest at the school they are currently served by instead of having to cross a busy road and be away from the young people they mix with every day. There is no reason to have such a massive change and to cause so much disruption just because the Government wants to adjust a few numbers and lines on a map. The Government has moved an amendment to the motion which talks about how much it has spent. That is great but let us think about actual children. We are talking about the effects of this change on five-, six-, seven-, eight-, nine-, 10-, 11- and 12-year-olds. That is what we should be talking about here today.

**Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (12:40:40):**

In reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Upper Hunter, Londonderry, Castle Hill, Charlestown, Tweed and Wyong for their contributions to this

debate. The Government's amendment makes a mockery of an important local issue that has been brought by a local MP about a local school which the Department of Education is not addressing. All I am asking the department to do is to listen to the local community and include those six streets in the New Lambton Public School catchment. That is all I am asking. It is not a big ask. It is lovely for Government members to talk about the pots of gold and the schools that are being built in their electorates. The population in Wallsend, like many areas in the western suburbs, is growing by huge amounts. Where are the schools being built in the Wallsend electorate? Nowhere.

The member for Wyong mentioned demographers. The demographer talked to me on the day I met with the education Minister and the department. I would describe the job of demographers as shifting the deckchairs on the Titanic. What demographers do—and they get paid very highly for it—is say, "Look, we've got too many students at New Lambton so we're just going to shift them to another school." There is no accountability or care about whether students will have to cross a dangerous, busy road to get to a new school or that their parents had moved to the area, not 200 metres from the school, so their children could walk to a local school. This change does not make sense. I note my disappointment at the local Department of Education in Newcastle. It is not the first time I have had difficulty with department staff not listening to the local community. Yes, they return my calls, as do the principals. I am a former public school teacher, so I understand a little about what schools need—or I hope I do. But some staff of the education department seem to be more interested in certain lobby groups and what the department says and not in what the local parents have to say.

Finally, I say that the department needs to investigate enrolment zones all over the State. When a school like New Lambton Public School has 68 students out of area enrolled—some from large distances away—there is something wrong. Why is the principal and the education department in Newcastle allowing 68 parents to send their children to this school? That is 2½ classrooms. They should not be there. There is something incorrect about this process and it needs to be fixed. If the department is saying to me, "Sonia, we have to move some kids because the school is too big," it should look at those 68 students and investigate why they are coming to that school. It should send them to their local public school, where they will be best served and where, heaven knows, they may be able to walk to school. I will not stop at this. It needs to be fixed and those children and families need to be included in their local zone. Members should not support the Government's amendment. It does not address the problem and it does not listen to the local MP's simple request. I urge members to support the original motion and forget about the inconsequential amendment.

**TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans):**

The member for Wallsend has moved a motion, to which the member for Castle Hill has moved an amendment. The question is that the amendment be agreed to.

**The House divided.**

**Ayes44****Noes41****Majority3****AYES**

Anderson, K

Hancock, S

Sidgreaves, P

Ayres, S

Henskens, A

Sidoti, J

Barilaro, J

Johnsen, M

Singh, G

Berejiklian, G

Kean, M

Smith, N

Bromhead, S

Lee, G

Speakman, M

**NOES**

Aitchison, J

Doyle, T

Mehan, D (teller)

Atalla, E

Finn, J

Clancy, J

Lindsay, W

Stokes, R

Constance, A

Marshall, A

Taylor, M

Cooke, S (teller)

O'Dea, J

Toole, P

Crouch, A (teller)

Pavey, M

Tuckerman, W

Davies, T

Perrottet, D

Upton, G

Minns, C

Bali, S

Greenwich, A

O'Neill, M

Barr, C

Dominello, V

Petinos, E

Ward, G

Elliott, D

Preston, R

Williams, L

Gibbons, M

Provest, G

Williams, R

Griffin, J

Roberts, A

Wilson, F

Gulaptis, C

Saunders, D

Harris, D

Park, R

Butler, R

Harrison, J

Parker, J

Car, P	Cotsis, S	Dalton, H
Haylen, J	Kamper, S	McDermott, H
Piper, G	Smith, T	Washington, K
Catley, Y	Crakanthorp, T	Dib, J
Hoenig, R	Lalich, N	McGirr, J
Saffin, J	Tesch, L	Watson, A (teller)
Chanthivong, A	Daley, M	Donato, P
Hornery, S	Lynch, P	McKay, J
Scully, P	Voltz, L	

#### **PAIRS**

Conolly, K	Warren, G
Coure, M	Mihailuk, T
Hazzard, B	Zangari, G

**Amendment agreed to.**

#### **TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr David Elliott):**

The question is that the motion as amended be agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.