



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

9 February 2021

WALLSEND ELECTORATE SCHOOL BOUNDARIES

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (17:43):

Walking is an active, healthy, practical and efficient way to get to school, according to the Department of Education. Its website states:

Benefits of safely walking to and from school helps:

reduce traffic

reduce our carbon footprint

promote physical activity

provide an opportunity for supervising adults to talk with their child about road safety.

Will the NSW Department of Education send that information to its Newcastle office? Some parents in Newcastle have heeded the department's words, and the students who live in the New Lambton and New Lambton Heights area have enjoyed the freedom of being able to walk safely to and from school through quiet, leafy suburban streets. New Lambton Public School is one of the oldest schools in my electorate and has educated local kids for around 150 years.

Like so many western suburbs that are located in cities, the suburbs in my electorate are growing, the community is getting larger and there are more children, but the Government has failed to provide adequate school infrastructure to the area. Recently the Department of Education failed to crack down on out-of-area enrolments, which meant that New Lambton Public School exceeded its capacity; it is a popular school in an area close to the city. The school enrolment cap last year was set at 555 and the enrolment was 680; a large proportion of those students were out-of-area enrolments. I met with the school and the P&C to look at ways to reduce enrolments and at what additional infrastructure was needed.

After writing to the Minister, the department reviewed the intake boundaries—an idea that had my full support. Lookout Road and Croudace Street made a perfect boundary line and allowed students to safely travel to either New Lambton, Lambton or Wallsend South public schools. The department also decided to reduce student numbers at New Lambton in the future to meet the capacity of the school. But Sydney-based bureaucrats excluded six streets on the eastern side of Lookout Road, and students who could have walked to school were instead faced with a 3.2 kilometre trip to school across a number of busy major roads and with no direct school bus. The education Minister must explain why she allowed such an impractical and poor decision to be made. More than 1,000 homes on the western side of Lookout Road were changed to the Wallsend South catchment area. I did not receive a single call, email or complaint from those 1,000 homes about being rezoned. Why? It is because it made sense to the parents; they lived close to the school and they could walk.

Late last year a survey of 138 homes in the excluded streets was conducted to see how many students would not be allowed to go to the school. The result was just one: Erin and Will Kenneally's daughter Maggie, who was to be enrolled at New Lambton Public School this year. They moved to the area to go to the school and Erin is a long-time supporter of public education and works as a teacher. They made the difficult decision to put their daughter into a non-government school. Erin told me that the decision to send Maggie to the local Catholic school was a difficult one. She said,

"Distance and the fact that we wanted Maggie to go to school with her neighbours and her friends made the big difference."

The whole premise of the boundary change was to reduce enrolments at New Lambton Public School but, at the end of the day, the exclusion of six streets has resulted in the reduction of just one student—remember, 55 students were out of zone at the school. It is a silly decision made by the Department of Education and it is not in the best interests of the local parents.