

Education department admits dodging protocols for Murwillumbah merger and confirms staff cuts

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The planning for a mega-merger of four schools in Murwillumbah had side-stepped the NSW Government's own protocols for consultation for such a project, documents reveal.

Correspondence from the Education Department also revealed staff numbers will be cut at the new mega-school despite promises by the NSW Government.

In the letter to the NSW Teachers Federation, the Department claimed specific issues at the four sites created a 'different circumstance' that allowed it to circumvent 'the usual ... local consultation' protocols for such a merger.

Federation Deputy President Henry Rajendra said the letter confirmed the Department had been dishonest about consultation for the mega-school, to be built on the Murwillumbah High site.

"The Department admits for the first time, over 9 months after the announcement, it deviated from the accepted process for such a merger," Mr Rajendra said.

"Our members and the community have said that the nature of any discussions the Government had with stakeholders came after the announcement with no recourse for discussion of any issues that arose from the proposal."

"There was no room for negotiation or reconsideration, it was 'Here's what we're doing, consider yourselves consulted'."

While the Department affirmed the 2020 staffing entitlement across the four schools would be maintained until 2026, the correspondence went on to reveal that "around eight staff" placed as part of the staffing allocation for small secondary schools at Murwillumbah and Wollumbin, fell outside of that commitment.

Mr Rajendra said it was disingenuous for the Department to claim there would be no staff cuts when clearly eight positions would, in its words, 'not be relevant on consolidation of the two current schools into one'.

Further calculations reveal the eight positions to be cut are just the beginning.

"An examination of staffing levels under the merger using current enrolments reveals that primary school provision will, as a minimum, lose a classroom teacher, up to two assistant principal positions, a principal position, and a reduction in teacher-librarian staffing," Mr Rajendra said.



"The situation is far worse for high school staffing. On current enrolments, it is predicted that at least 16 positions -- 20 per cent of the teacher staffing entitlement -- will be cut including classroom, head teacher, teacher-librarian, careers adviser and principal positions."

"Ultimately, this will narrow the curriculum, leave students with fewer subjects to consider, increase class sizes and the workload of teachers."

Mr Rajendra said Education Minister Sarah Mitchell had touted the Murwillumbah mega-school model as the Government's blueprint for the future of education in the state.

Ms Mitchell told Parliament in November last year the Murwillumbah project is 'the first of its kind in regional NSW.'

Mr Rajendra said such a model did not augur well for public education in regional NSW.

"While schools around the state are taking action over staff shortages, this model will entrench staff cuts by stealth," he said.

"Fewer teachers in a merged setting also means the diminution of the breadth of the curriculum that can be taught, and the prospect of increased class sizes.

"This is a kick in the guts for kids in rural settings."