



## ST MARY'S CLOSING CLASSES WOULD BE BAD FOR WELLINGTON

Last week I attended a concerning meeting at St Mary's Catholic School, Wellington, to discuss the future of the school and the possibility of class closures.

It became public a fortnight ago that there were plans to stop offering Years 7-10 beyond 2020 at St Mary's and go back to being a primary school.

Parents and community members began to hear these stories and the Bathurst Catholic Education Diocese organised the meeting on Thursday to make their position clear.

The Diocese has said it hasn't decided anything and everything is still up for discussion but it is clear that they are strongly considering cutting back.

For Wellington to grow it needs education choices. It has been a great thing for the town to be able to say it offers public and private schooling between kindergarten and Year 10. The longer Catholic school students can stay in their town and at their school, the better.

Parents are already faced with the situation of being forced to decide between sending their child to a public school, or needing to go to Dubbo for the final two years of schooling. We don't want that decision needing to be made for their entire secondary education.

I think the Catholic Diocese would have received that message from the parents and residents who attended the meeting and we can hope that they are being honest when they say no decision has been made yet.

What I fear is that a decision has been made and they are going through the process before announcing a closure. That is why I urge the community to mobilise and present a case that would motivate the Diocese to keep the school operating as kindergarten to Year 10.

Council staff also attended Thursday's meeting, with representatives from the Community and Recreation and Economic Development divisions on hand to see how they can assist the school in keeping their services going.

From my perspective a reduction in the services offered by St Mary's would be a disaster for the town. I want to see the town grow and prosper, not contract and lose services. If we can grow the population, schools and child places will be needed.

From an economic development point of view, it would be a major blow to lose jobs. We saw it with the closure of Bellhaven Aged Care. Those employees are then more likely to consider leaving town to find a job in their chosen profession.

At a time when Council is doing everything it can to convince people to stay and others to consider moving there, this is unacceptable.

I believe there are enough people in Wellington to support this school and keep it running for Kindergarten to Year 10. The community and the school need to work together to make this happen.

It is in everybody's interest to keep this school open and functioning at a higher capacity.

I am a firm believer that Wellington can become a prosperous town again but it needs everybody to work towards that goal.

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