

NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard Full Day Transcript

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TAMWORTH SCHOOL ZONE ROAD SAFETY

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [5.42 p.m.]: I draw attention to a road safety issue at a school in my electorate of Tamworth. This issue has relevance at schools across the State but it reached a critical point at Westdale Public School recently when an eight-year-old student fell victim to very unfortunate circumstances and had his life changed forever. Accompanied by his mother, Tim Moffat was at the end of the school day when he crossed the road on 18 August and collided with the rear of a car. Dozens of students and parents watched helplessly as Tim was dragged along the bitumen for a short distance with his foot wedged under the wheel. Due to the extent of the damage, Tim's foot and lower portion of his leg were amputated. He is now undergoing intensive treatment in the New Children's Hospital at Westmead. The accident is under investigation.

Despite the trauma, Tim is reportedly coping with the challenges very well. Due to the resilience in character and support from parents, Max and Maria, and his five siblings, he is expected to bounce back. Late last week, as this brave young man was undergoing skin graft surgery, the school's principal, Ruythe Dufty, and I hosted a second meeting of concerned authorities and community members to discuss how this dreadful accident occurred and what steps are needed to ensure these circumstances do not occur again. It disturbed me deeply to learn that the school's parents and citizens association and the school council have been lobbying the local school community and the Tamworth Regional Council's traffic committee for some five years to have public safety and parking hazards addressed in Marathon Street, which is the roadway where Tim was injured. Of no comfort to the Moffat family is the fact the school repeatedly warned that a serious accident was likely to take place.

Westdale Public School has had some wins in the implementation of measures to improve road safety on the adjacent and very busy thoroughfare of Gunnedah Road. This road carries highway traffic between Gunnedah and Tamworth and has speed restrictions in place near the school. A cement path has been created to control student passage and a crossing guard has been introduced. Flashing lights have also been installed as part of a statewide trial to draw motorists' attention to 40 kilometre an hour school zones. Marathon Street, which meets Gunnedah Road and provides an alternative point of access to the school, has been largely ignored. The street is extremely busy during student drop-off and collection times, as both cars and pedestrians mix, with buses turning into a bus stop driveway, students crossing the road and parents endeavouring to find parking space.

The motorist whose car struck Tim was a parent who had just collected her children in

Gunnedah Road and was turning into Marathon Street. On that day, traffic was significantly heavier than usual, due to AgQuip being held in Gunnedah. The meeting convened at the school last week was attended by the Department of Education and Training, the school parents and citizens association, the school council and occupation health and safety committee, Moffat family members and the Tamworth Regional Council's local traffic committee, which includes representatives of the Roads and Traffic Authority and the highway patrol. It was also attended by former Parry mayor Phil Betts and former Barraba mayor Shirley Close. Several issues were identified at the meeting, including short-term and long-term measures that will be needed to address the circumstances that arose on the day of the accident and, indeed, on each and every other day at the school. It was broadly acknowledged at the meeting that Westdale Public School is not the only school to hold grave and significant concerns over road safety for students.

I recently received correspondence from the Tamworth Public School detailing similar issues, which I believe, in common with Westdale Public School, should have been addressed years ago. The school council of the Tamworth Public School has raised concerns about high traffic flows, the dangers of pedestrian crossing locations and inadequate drop-off and collection areas. Only some of these issues have been addressed. Like Westdale Public School, Tamworth Public School requires the separation of traffic and students during drop-off and collection. Unlike Westdale Public School, it is yet to experience an accident. and I hope it does not take a tragedy like Tim Moffat's to prompt a response. I have written to all schools in my electorate requesting details of road safety issues from each individual school.

I hope that this information will prompt a more targeted response from the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] to take action on issues that have been identified as potential threats to students' safety. The RTA's framework for saving 2,000 lives by the year 2010 in New South Wales is outlined in the document "Road Safety 2010". This document details the Government's commitment to an ongoing program to build pedestrian overbridges, particularly in the vicinity of schools, to separate pedestrian traffic. It is also committed to continuing a road safety education program in schools, which I applaud. However, it concerns me that programs which address road safety at schools such as Westdale Public School are not being implemented when requested, nor do such programs keep pace with the rapid development of schools. The challenge for schools is to adapt their activities as student numbers grow. The challenge for Government is to have greater flexibility, a quicker response to issues and to be prepared to adapt facilities at growing schools such as Westdale Public School so that the safety of students is never compromised, as it was in the case of Tim Moffat.