Most of the field work is complete.

Since my appointment to the task I have had a conversation with John Danuitis (Western Metro Region: 24/2), and several lengthy discussions with the principal Mary Bluer.

On 1-2/3 I had telephone conversations with principals (mostly) and/or other relevant representatives of Brunswick SC, University HS, Princes Hill SC, Buckley Park SC, Strathmore SC.

On 25/2 I visited Malvern Central School and had a lengthy conversation with Kerry Clayton, its principal, who also provided some useful documentation and data about student movement.

On 9/3 a meeting was convened of parents of Years 4-6 students; 39 came and lively discussion ensued. Those present filled in a survey form which inquired about their attitudes to the school, intentions for their children’s Years 7 and 8 schooling and the major factors in the choice they had made.

Last week I spent several days in the school talking to most of the teachers (all of the classroom teachers and a number of the specialists). I have had a follow-up meeting with the student coordinator and plan one with the curriculum coordinator.

Earlier this week I spent some time talking to two Years 5/6 groups and plan to see the others later in the week.

I have also received and read relevant documentation about enrolments, previous discussions, school prospectuses, brochures and parent notices, contemporary student performance data and the report of the recent school review.

A spokesperson for the Northern Metro Region indicated that he felt this was an issue which rightly belonged to the Western Region.

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The focal point I advanced in my proposal has not changed. The current enrolment numbers are insufficient to sustain Years 7 & 8 provision at MPCS in an environment where there is a great deal of alternative choice. Regardless of the quality of the school, its program or its teachers, unless enrolment in 7 & 8 increases quickly and dramatically maintenance of a secondary program is unsustainable.

For that reason I want to focus on plans and reasons for those plans, the future and not the past. Hence while I am happy to speak to past students their views are not germane to this study. The same goes really for kindergarten staff, although the impact of the work of Nicole and Matt in 2010 has been noted.

Some of the questions in the brief will be difficult to answer, eg ‘What does MPCS stand for?’ and ‘What is MPCS’ value proposition?’ but they might be dealt with in terms of the general discussion of what the school is now and what it might become.

I am digesting the information I have at the moment and would prefer not to put a view that may be qualified or redirected as I have a chance to examine the evidence and opinion more closely. I would say:

- the answer is not clear cut — you know that, you would not have solicited this study otherwise
- there are, as always, influential extraneous factors
• parent opinion is strongly held but very varied as are the reasons for their positions
• the Years 5 & 6 students I have spoken to know where they are going in Years 7 & 8. There is very little uncertainty
• the issue is impacting on the school negatively and resolution is required.

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I mentioned that I was going to be overseas for five weeks in this semester and that this would have to factored in for the production of my report. I am no longer going so things can happen more quickly. We have another meeting planned for May 3. I anticipate that a draft of my report will be available then.

David McRae
23 march 2011