



Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

RE: Inquiry into the Removal of Year 11 and 12 Courses at District High Schools

I wish to submit a response to the above advertisement in the West Australian newspaper on Saturday 8th May 2010.

I am the Principal of Bruce Rock District High School and have been since 2002. In that time we, as a staff, have made every effort to ensure students transition to further education or training past Year 10 at our school. This was made even more significant with the raising of the school leaving age several years ago. As a result we have quite deliberately made no attempt to, nor have we, retained any Year 11 or 12 students. For those students who pursue further education we focus on transitioning them to Merredin SHS or Cunderdin Agricultural College. There are no TAFE facilities for students to access locally and the Merredin campus of CY O'Connor offers such a limited range of courses.

Whilst we are only 49 km from Merredin, this translates to a bus trip of almost an hour and a half and all Year 11 and 12 students qualify for Living Away from Home Allowance.

One concern is a small but increasing number of low socioeconomic families, some of whom live at Shackleton or in outlying farm houses, who cannot access the daily bus service to Merredin which leaves Bruce Rock at 7.22 am. While many do board at the Merredin Residential College, there are still some who find the cost of having students in boarding prohibitive. Whilst the Living Away from Home Allowance covers the actual boarding fees, it does not cover funds for weekend activities, the cost to clothe a student in boarding or the travel costs to pick up and drop them off. Some of these families:

- don't even own a car to get them to/from the residential facility (or to catch the bus from Bruce Rock each day) and there is no public transport
- can't even provide 5 clean sets of casual clothes for our school to take the child on a 5 day school camp in Year 10 let alone enough casual clothes for boarding
- can't even pay for the student in yr 10 at our school to participate in a \$4.00 incursion which is minimal compared to the cost of some weekend boarding activities

Financially, some of these families cannot send Year 11 and 12 students away to boarding and these are the ones that a number of communities are currently retaining in their District High Schools. This is not just an Indigenous issue, the families living out of town in Bruce Rock are not Indigenous.

I still do not wish to accept Year 11 and 12 students, with one exception. My exception is Education Support students. I currently have a Year 10 student who has autism (severe) and who is non verbal. We have already ascertained that he will not be able to board at the Merredin Residential Hostel and his family lives half an hour South West of our school. The distance he lives from town prohibits him from catching the bus to/from Merredin SHS each day. I am keen to retain such a student, and others similar, in my school for Year 11 and 12. However, he does not have the intellectual capacity to undertake studies via the School of Isolated and Distance Education hence our school needs to provide teaching and learning

activities for him. This will be made more difficult if we do not receive a Senior Schooling Allocation for him. He does have an Education Assistant however this is not full time and he does not have the intellectual capacity to work independently, he needs 1 on 1 support. Our focus is on transition from school at the end of Year 12 and many of his activities will be off site, this requires significant time and preparation.

Having worked in both Senior and District High Schools where students study via SIDE, these students still need to be supervised on a full time basis. Some display poor behaviour as they do not wish to be at school where others struggle academically and need support to complete work packages to achieve passing grades as they lack independence and sometimes motivation. If District High Schools are not given sufficient funding for fulltime supervision of those students who wish to remain in their local schools (if given this option) who is responsible for providing supervision? This is particularly a problem with small numbers of Year 11/12 students where there is not enough staffing provision to provide fulltime supervision. They certainly cannot be left unsupervised and we should not be 'taking' staffing entitlements from other year groups in the school to provide supervision, this is unfair on other students.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Yeats', with a stylized, cursive script.

Fiona Yeats