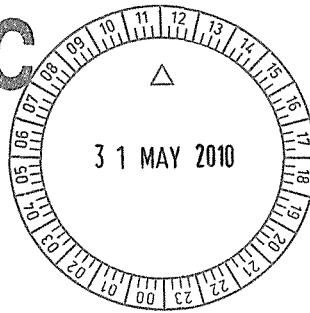


PUBLIC



Po Box 648
JURIEN BAY WA 6516

Submission 32

School Council Chairperson
Laura Hooton

Email: laurah@westnet.com.au

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATION

Inquiry into the removal of Senior School Allocation Funding for Year 11 and 12 Courses at District High Schools

Submission from:

Miss Laura Hooton
School Council Chairperson
Jurien Bay District High School
Hamersley Street, Jurien Bay WA 6516

Email: laurah@westnet.com.au

Amended Terms of Reference:

The Estimates and Financial Operations Committee has resolved to inquire into and report to the Legislative Council on the Government decision, announced in March 2010, to cease senior school allocation funding* for year 11 and 12 courses at 21 district high schools across Western Australia, with particular reference to:

- a) the decision-making process and rationale behind the decision;
- b) the effect of the decision on the state budget, the affected students and communities;
- c) the adequacy, cost effectiveness and social impact of the educational alternatives proposed;
and
- d) any other relevant matter.

*Terms of Reference amended 18/5/10.

Submission:

The announcement of the removal of year 11 and 12 courses from Jurien Bay District High School (JBDHS) was made in the last week of Term 4 in December 2009. The Principal, Mr Trevlyn Geiles, was notified, who then made the announcement to the School Council. As the school year was about to end it was not appropriate, or possible, due to lack of concrete information to inform the school community correctly as to the reasoning behind this decision. To say that we were flabbergasted would be an understatement.

There was no consultation whatsoever from the Department of Education (DoE) with either the school staff, school council, school community members, the Shire of Dandaragan, local business members or local community members. To my knowledge there has still been no consultation done.

As you are aware, the same time that this announcement was made in the last week of Term 4 in 2009, it was also stated that there was to no longer be any Senior School Allocation for the 2010 year 11 students and the Allocation for year 12 students was to cease at the end of the school year 2010.

Due to the fact that the then year 10 students had already enrolled in their accredited VET programs at the school it would have been highly irresponsible of JBDHS to say to these students and their parents at such late notification that they could no longer do these courses and would need to seek suited education elsewhere by the time school resumed in February 2010.

With due credit to JBDHS senior staff and admin. they worked tirelessly over the Christmas break to allocate funding (already budgeted elsewhere) to make sure that these senior students would not be disadvantaged by the DoE's incredibly ridiculous announcement and timing of it.

The public announcement done in March 2010 sent our school community into absolute turmoil. Some noted justification given for the decision was that;

a) *Certain senior schools were lacking in student numbers and the DoE needed to increase enrolment into these schools to support the programs offered and the qualified staff provided.*

One could safely assume that if the numbers in these particular senior schools was decreasing and that if people from these senior school areas were even sending their children elsewhere, it would be more directly related to actual location/ environment and social aspect of both students and the surrounding community and more importantly, the accredited courses offered.

b) *It is statistically proven that students achieve better in larger groups of students.*

Children are not statistics. They are unique individuals of a community and they need all the support they can get. How do you better the fact that students at JBDHS have on offer face to face, one on one teaching which would be of more benefit than any large impersonal classroom environment offered in senior schools. They also have on offer approved Cert 1 and Cert 2 courses which relate to the community in which they live.

There is no serviceable bus to the nearest Senior High School in Moora from Jurien Bay. It is also not within a bus able distance. Moora is a 250km round trip from Jurien Bay. Considering there are policies governing student travel time the one way trip to Moora of an hour and a half at the least would not be in the bounds of this policy.

Jurien Bay is the main feeder town for Cervantes, GreenHead and Leeman. A majority of the senior school students from these towns attend JBDHS. For them to travel by bus would mean more travel time. As bussing students to Moora is not an option because of the distance the DoE has left no choice for families of senior school students from these four communities but to either seek boarding school facilities or leave to further educate their children.

In particular relation to boarding facilities, it is obvious that the Government has not done its homework to the full extent as there are already minimal spaces available. With the closure of 21 District High School's and Swanleigh residential facility the problem has been compounded. The DoE have also not considered the fact that the closure of these senior years has a flow on effect. Families of students from approximately grade five and upwards are starting to consider

moving students on to schools which will offer the full years of schooling. So that a student does not have to go through any transition period at a stage where both schooling and life is a very challenging time for them parents are now discussing moving them as of year 8. This will add extra pressure to the boarding facility system.

Obviously consideration has been given to the increase in cost to Isolated Children's Allowance the DoE will now be faced with along with the increase in development they are going to need to plan for to accommodate the increase in children compared to actually keeping them in their own communities for schooling?

With the ICA there are still many families who cannot afford boarding options.

There are also many families who prefer to stay as a family unit. The family unit, involvement and acceptance in their home community are all very important to children and their successful development. The Government's stance on the importance of family values now seems very transparent.

Moving means losing the security of jobs and in such uncertain economical times people should not be forced to make this decision.

Has the DoE weighed up the extra cost in unemployment benefits which will be sought while families make the transition they have now been forced into?

Below are some further relevant points which I feel the panel need to take into consideration when reviewing the Departments decision:

- a) JBDHS has an extremely successful VET program that has been recognised through the VETiS Awards in 2009 and has also been invited by the DoE in 2006 to share our school programs as an example of best practice.
- b) There is a breadth of course choices available which are aligned with local needs and highly supported by the business community. The school has been successful in placing many students in local apprenticeships.
- c) There are increasing primary numbers and the school community has been committed to ensuring this growth rate is reflected into the secondary schooling.
- d) A government decision to raise the school leaving age forced schools to cater for senior school students. Why is this now convenient to 'transition out' due to an apparent difference in view between political parties?
- e) With the opening of the Indian Ocean Drive later this year the town population is expected to treble within the next ten years. There is no other District High School which has a major road going through its town. With planning data provided by the Shire of Dandaragan and Government agencies it shows that Jurien Bay will become a sub-regional centre. The location of the Shire office from Dandaragan to Jurien Bay also supports this growth.
- f) Parents in rural areas should have the right to choose their local school for the senior schooling of their child. People should not be forced to separate their families.
- g) The closure of the Senior School Program or even the dilution of the courses offered could inevitably cause the demise of the senior school. If this occurs it could potentially affect the lower secondary and primary population which has been the case for a number of wheat belt DHS.
- h) The availability of a comprehensive schooling program is a major decision maker when people wish to relocate to a rural area. Not being able to have a comprehensive and viable Senior Schooling Program to a parent who chooses the local school as their preferred option for their child will have an impact on regional growth. The town will be unlikely to attract permanent families which then creates a very transient population. A rural town does not survive like this. As a family predominantly spends more money on a day to day basis and over a wider range of businesses, it creates stability for towns. A family who is planning to stay long term becomes more involved within the town which then in return supports sporting groups, schools and infrastructure. Families are imperative to the survival of a town and a successful school.

As representative of the School Council, as a parent, as a community member I along with the other School Council members request that the Senior School Allocation be reinstated for Jurien Bay.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide a submission regarding this matter.

The School Council members would sincerely appreciate the opportunity to meet with the Committee to support our submission.

Yours sincerely

Laura Hooton
Council Chairperson
JBDHS School Council

Sunday, 30 May 2010