



PUBLIC

THE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC.)

28 May 2010

NON-PARTY POLITICAL NON-SECTARIAN

The Hon Giz Watson MLC
Legislative Council
Parliament House
WEST PERTH 6005

E-MAILED
28.5.2010

Dear Ms Watson

Re: Closure Years 11 and 12 classes in 21 District High Schools in Western Australia

The Country Women's Association Western Australia views with great concern the decision to remove the allocation of funding for the senior school programme at 21 District High Schools in WA. The options open for students who must remain in school until they are 17 are:

- Studying years 11 and 12 through School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) either home schooled or unsupervised if allowed to use on-site school facilities.
- Travelling to the nearest Senior High School
- Attending a school with boarding facilities
- Moving families in search of the appropriate education opportunity

Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE): Is it still an option for years 11 and 12 students to study through SIDE at the local District High School? It is noted that the cost of providing SIDE courses for these students is charged to the school. It would require supervision, computer facilities and ongoing technological expertise and support to ensure the best outcomes for such students.

To facilitate SIDE students there has been significant expenditure in the listed schools to provide facilities such as study areas and computer access. These facilities have resulted in successful outcomes for students, especially where programmes in vocational training have been strongly supported and are pertinent to local industries in their home community.

If the above will not continue to be provided at schools then students using SIDE would require home schooling with parental/SIDE supervision or assistance.

TRAVEL: The Association has information from various communities affected by the closure. Many students travelling to their District High School already travel more than allowable travel time i.e. 90 minutes one way to get to their education centre. To travel by bus to Central Midlands Senior High School from Jurien Bay is another 125 kilometres. This raises significant safety concerns, the longer the distance the more safety issues involved, both environmentally and socially. Students who have significant travel times are limited in participation in after-school activities such as sports training, excursions, library, study time etc.

There is no bus route between Gingin and Moora. At Gingin the students come from a 150 km radius and then would be required to travel to Moora. There is also no school bus service between Jurien Bay and Moora. Jurien Bay District High School also receives Years 11 and 12 students from Leeman, Greenhead and Cervantes so these communities will also be directly affected. Their bus travel time will be impossible for students to sustain on a daily basis. If parents are required to drive students to connect with a bus route which has been designed to fit into the allowed travel time, claims on the conveyance allowance will be made.

This will result in extra expense to Government as well as to the families involved. The current conveyance allowance does not fully cover the travel cost nor the cost of the time involved.

BOARDING: The added expense for most parents would be approximately \$8,000 (after AIC and state boarding allowances) if the student stays at a Country High School Hostels Authority Residential College, plus the cost of new school uniforms and personal linen requirements. Families who prefer their child to live at home and be educated in the local community have already chosen that option.

Is there sufficient capacity for students in boarding facilities which serve the limited number of country Senior High Schools to which students would be directed? Members have advised that sufficient places may not be available in Geraldton. Schools in areas closer to Geraldton and Merredin which have been listed have students from families impacted by drought conditions in recent years. These businesses are still recovering financially. It should be noted also that city boarding facilities which serve Government Senior High Schools are very limited.

FAMILY RELOCATION: Families who do not wish their children to travel longer distances on school buses, or live away from home during years 11 and 12, will move away from their current community in search of better education opportunities. Similarly, families may no longer consider moving to localities where there is no education provision for their student child.

This will impact on regional development, reduce services including health care professionals and could result in a labour shortage for local industries and businesses.

Centres such as Jurien Bay and Gingin have been identified by the WA Planning Commission as growth areas. There are currently 22 students in Years 11 and 12 at Jurien, with a trend to increase over next two years. Central Midlands Senior High School already has 53 students in the upper school. Are facilities at this school capable of handling extra students from Dalwallinu, Jurien, Gingin and Wongan Hills? It should be noted that there are growing new housing developments west of Gingin with young families who in a few years will be looking to towards Gingin District High School for their education.

LOW INCOME FAMILIES: Because CWA of WA provides welfare assistance to families attending the schools listed we know that the Government decision will affect students from vulnerable low income families. Many of these students do not wish to attend school and their families often do not place great importance on completing years 11 and 12 despite the requirement under the Act to do so. Suitable programmes can, and are being provided in the District High Schools, such as Wongan Hills District High School, in conjunction with local businesses resulting in positive outcomes. These students will not travel long distances or board away from home unless there is strong financial and other support for them and their families. It is believed there must always be a local option for vulnerable students.

Would it not be more cost effective and less disruptive to families and schools to provide the required range of education experiences through periodic excursions or longer term camps to central locations?

Yours sincerely



Anne Gething (Mrs)
General Secretary