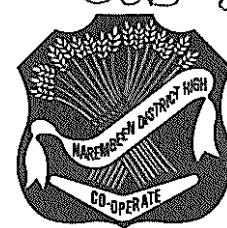


# NAREMBEEN DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

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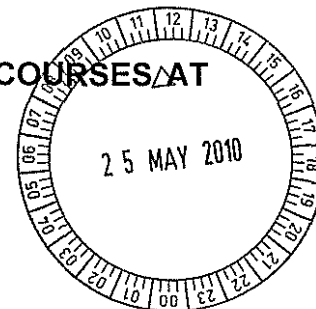


## PUBLIC

### SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

### RE: INQUIRY INTO THE REMOVAL OF YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES AT DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS

FROM:  
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#### TERMS OF REFERENCE:

##### a) the decision making process and rationale behind the decision

Narembeen DHS has had a small number of students remain at the school to study Year 11 & 12 through the School of Isolated and Distance Education for a number of years. The decision to enrol Year 11 & 12 students was based on the perceived need for an alternative choice for the completion of senior schooling. Although most students from within the shire continue their senior school education in senior high schools both in Perth and regional centres, this is not an alternative that suits all rural students. We may have been catering for a small number (no more than 5 students at a time) but the need was there, the students were engaged and we had almost 100% graduation. Students studying for university entrance have been particularly successful.

If we look at the rationale behind the decision, that 'research shows that education provision is strengthened for Year 11 & 12 students by attending senior high schools which are able to provide an increased range of curriculum programs and increased access to teachers with subject specific curriculum expertise; larger cohort sizes (linked to improved achievement); improved social interaction; improved facilities, particularly in the specialist areas; and access to hostel capacity.' It appears that if there are an 'educationally viable' number of year 11 & 12 students, then it doesn't matter that in actual fact, they are still studying through SIDE – as happens at our closest senior school, Merredin Senior High School. Nor does this rationale look at the individual families that cannot afford to use the hostel, and there is no doubt that it does cost, regardless of the government subsidies; travel time and fuel alone are limitations for some parents.



In 2010, Narembeen DHS lost its senior schooling allocation (an FTE for our SIDE students) due to the fact that we are considered close enough to a senior high school for bus travel. Unfortunately, the Department of Education has not considered the fact that although Narembeen township is 70km from Merredin, students can travel up to 65km to actually get to town first. There is no way these students could catch a bus to Merredin – if there was actually one that went to Merredin from Narembeen, which there ISN'T, and nor is it likely that there ever will be.

**b) the effect of the decision on the State budget, the affected students and communities.**

It is impossible for me to make a judgement on the effect on the State budget, but I can state that over the years before 2009, funding through ETPP was made available to many of the schools on the 'list' to set up senior school 'SIDE' facilities, complete with all the IT equipment needed for said courses. Given that we now have these facilities, the cost of our Year 11 & 12 students comes down to staffing FTE, in 2009 we received 0.34FTE and in 2010 we have no allocation for senior schooling. If these two students were attending another school, boarding would be the only option and therefore there is an immediate direct outlay from the government of approximately \$14,000 in Living Away from Home Allowance. At present, they are costing the government considerably less. We realise that as the numbers of students studying SIDE at district high schools increases, so does the FTE requirement. However, given the fact that the schools have their facilities for the courses, the future budget cost must be reduced as the initial outlay had to be the greatest requirement.

The decision to remove the opportunity for Year 11 & 12 students to complete their senior schooling in district high schools will further disadvantage those families that are in need of the service. Not all families can afford the alternative of living away from home in a boarding environment and not all 15 year olds are able to cope with the change in their lifestyle. Yes, there are government subsidies but do they take into consideration the loss of wages for time taken off work to pick up and drop off students at boarding facilities, fuel, new uniforms and various other costs. Research does show that larger cohorts result in improved achievement but it also shows that a seamless education with fewer transitions assists learning. The decision to remove the Year 11 & 12 courses simply adds another transition phase for some students who simply are not able to cope with it for a variety of reasons. Not all families wish to 'lose' their 15 year old child to a boarding school or hostel. Many prefer to have the opportunity to have them in the family environment to assist them in their continued development. In an ideal world, all families living in a rural environment would have the benefit of their city and regional counterparts and actually have their children live with them through their adolescent years. We have previously provided this alternative for the small number of families that require it.

**c) the adequacy, cost effectiveness and social impact of the educational alternatives proposed**

The alternatives for our students are:

- i) Private Boarding Schools in Perth
- ii) Public schools in Perth and boarding at a facility like the Rotary Residential College
- iii) Merredin, Northam or Narrogin SHS boarding at residential hostels
- iv) Cunderdin or Narrogin Agricultural Colleges boarding at residential hostels

Obviously, all of these will have a financial impact on the families. The residential colleges do not cost anywhere near what the private colleges in Perth cost. However, there is a hardship. There are families that do not have the means to send their children to other schools, some do not even have suitable transport to get their children to the closest school. We were informed that we were considered close enough to go by bus to our nearest senior campus. However, there is no bus and there is no way to get students from farms to town by 7:30am to catch the bus- should there ever be a bus service provided. We are a rural community and a large number of our students live to the south and east of the township. Merredin is to the north.

Socially many students are able to cope easily with leaving home and boarding. However, it does not work for all. The SIDE facility at Narembeen catered for these students. It ensured they were engaged in education and allowed them the opportunity to complete their education whilst remaining in the family home.

**d) any other relevant matter**

Over the past few years there has been a mini exodus from the metropolitan area to many rural communities. This has been due to the availability of cheaper housing for those that need it. This has often resulted in an increase in the number of students requiring SIDE as an alternative for Year 11 & 12. It was recognised as a way to keep students engaged when the school leavers age was increased to 17. A large amount of funding has been spent ensuring that it became a viable option for students, it now seems counter productive to take it away again. In the majority of cases, the option of attending a Senior High School with a larger cohort of students is exactly what our parents choose. However, it is beholden on us to ensure that we cater for those students who are not able to cope with the huge transition to a boarding facility with no family support or are not in a suitable financial position to move.