

To the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee of the Environment and Public Affairs Committee

I submit the following information in relation to Petition 072, Reference A702987, Education cuts as head petitioner.

Firstly, I bring to the committees attention this is the 11th Petition in relation to the Education department cuts issued 13th Dec 2017, either as individual facilities or combined services, with an approximate 35,000 signatures to date, without an inquiry launched so far. These cuts were all unconsulted and issued at the end of the school year, leaving teaching staff anxious and worried & many parent groups unable to challenge the decisions until 2018, when school resumed.

Community Kindergarten Enrolment Increase

The reason stated on the letter (Dept Reference D17/0531849, passed on to myself as the 2018 Bullsbrook Community Kindergarten Committee President, from the previous committee at the end of Feb 2018, stated "The current per child cost of provision at a community kindergarten with only 10 enrollees is more than double the cost of provision at public schools". This has resulted in the department directive of an enrolment increase from 10 – 16 students by July 20 to secure department staff and operational funding – without this, the kindergarten closes.

This figure for CK students is made up of Staff allocation, 0.1 FTE admin fee from linked school and census based operational grant for 10 students totalling \$134,237 = \$13,423.70 per student @ 10 students. I point out that in the last four year, there has only been 2 kindergarten classes with 10 students.

Using publicly available figures from Hansard, 11th April pp 1764-1765 1, 14th June pp 3444-3445 and Standing committee on Estimates and financial operations page 296, the following information has been presented to the Department and Minister for Education, Hon Sue Ellery, by the Community Kindergarten assoc. as follows; on an actual average in 2018 the funding per CK child is approximately \$7064, compared to the department target figure of \$8,430 (average actual cost per CK child in a class of 16). This is already a 16% saving and 2015, 2016 & 2017 average cost per student, yielded similar results. Clearly there is no actual savings issue.

Had the department consulted with the Community Kindergartens regarding the increase in enrolment numbers and serious threat of removal of funding and closure, they should already know, but would have found that for example, Shire of Serpentine and Jarrahdale have spent \$22000 of rate payers' money on fire safety upgrades at the Departments requirement, on the Byford Community kindergarten building. Here at Bullsbrook since 2016, the City of Swan have invested tens of thousands, in the Kindergarten facilities, 2 lots of new lawn, new kitchen and whitegoods, a new ceiling and lighting and asbestos removal and connection of a fire management system to name just a few. Simply just increasing the enrolment threshold without consultation with the Parent Management Committees and Local Governments has led to this backlash and challenge of this decision

However, the survival and under - utilisation of Community kindergartens is at further risk. I spoke with the point of contact for community kindergartens at the education department on Friday August 24th. As we had a wait list for 9 students and had secured group 1 and teacher allocation for 2019, we were potentially 3 students away from group 2. Had we been granted an extension, we could have assisted in providing kindergarten places for schools in Ellenbrook, Upper Swan etc, but rather than obtaining a teacher for 1 DOT day from the pool, it was deemed more appropriate, by the department, for the schools to split classes to accommodate children who start kindy at 3 & ½ years old. A Community kindergarten at capacity of 40 using the table in Hansard 14th June pp 3444-3445, is \$6026.65 per student. It is here I draw your attention to the base figure for kindergarten students in public schools being a combined figure of \$5694. This figure, however does not include extra school funding available per student such as social disadvantage, Indigenous heritage, small school bonuses etc. I feel we are not comparing apples with apples or recognising that structure of a Community kindergarten provides a best practise introduction to non -compulsory, but necessary education. I don't believe that a fair comparison has been made by the department in relation to the costs and the incredible child centred education Community kindergartens offer.

Landsdale Farm School

The blood, sweat and tears and personal time and effort put into establishing the farm school, originally Koondoola Special Farm School, over 30 years ago resulted in showcase facility of offsite Public education for students with disabilities, and also mainstream students. Until 2009 it was accessible only to schools, myself attending as a year 1 student in 1990 to be immersed in hands on paddock to plate education. I point out here that on the department's recommendations, the school was to be available to other learning facilities and disability groups. This very policy is now being used to rid the department of a facility that it should be further developing and extremely proud to have under its banner. An unfinished review of the facility, likely abandoned by the change-over in Government, would expose some fantastic and forward thinking education for our most vulnerable students, no doubt. The Education Department benefited greatly from this new policy, with the farm school being able to generate funds to add to the high calibre of teaching staff ranging from a teacher to farm managers giving disabled students real education credentials to take out into the workforce once leaving school. In 2017 the farm generated almost 47% of the total finances necessary to operate, including roll over to 2018 and money in various reserves. The Landsdale Farm school finance report 21/3/2018 states the full time equivalent of staff was 9.96 staff, out of which the Landsdale Farm School pays for the 3.32 FTE by opening the facility to the public on weekdays and weekends. The \$537,579 paid in salaries by the department for permanent staff, which realistically cannot be counted as a saving with redeployment required, leaves the \$104,855 cash component from the department as the real savings figure. So a stand out public education facility has been defunded for a grand saving of about \$105,000! There is nothing else like it in WA and removing the department staff, leaves us with a "cuddly" animal farm set up. The tender process itself states that the current educational programming must remain. As a level 2 social trainer by qualification, I can assure you that only the qualified Department of Education staff can provide and liaise affectively with the large number of schools to provide curriculum based education. We have seen a tender process, which literally reads, it is not broken but we will fix it for minimal savings anyway. On speaking to a member of the School Board, I was also disturbed to discover that they had not been informed in writing of the defunding of the farm school by the department as the parent committees and school boards of other facilities being defunded had been.

Put yourself in the shoes of the parents of the year 11 and 12 Special Education students using the farm school to obtain qualifications to use out in the community once they finish school. The concerns they have for their children, who will struggle throughout life to find meaningful employment, cutting the legitimate education staffing will seem so unfair to them and the futures of their children. Countless letters have been written and thousands of people have signed petitions against defunding the programs that have been offered for these students in a legitimate and supportive public education facility. Surely the farm school could have been annexed to Dianella Special Education, or as part of the \$50 million redevelopment at Balcatta SHS and its special education department.

The recent revelation from Mark McGowan that a non for profit organisation will be announced in coming weeks to take over Landsdale farm school leaves one thinking that such an organisation will need to put prices up substantially to make the lease viable and also it would apply for grants from the Government, via another department so would the process actually lead to any real savings?

I also find the cutting of teachers to Agricultural awareness programs at Kiara College and Kelmscott High school disturbing. The department and Minister seem to be pushing the importance of STEM, but science and Agriculture are so closely linked and Agriculture at these schools and Landsdale farm school are another avenue of STEM. It seems to make no sense to remove Agriculture programming and education opportunity from the public school system and promote STEM at the same time.

Camp schools

6 out of the 7 Education Department funded camp schools who employ teachers and qualified staff to specialise with curriculum based physical and outdoor activity education programs, have been put to private tender to rid the department of operation deficit costs. Broome the 7th camp school has not been put to tender and will remain with the department. This in itself completely undermines the budgetary savings reasoning. Broome has the highest deficit cost of \$1, 026,161! If this was truly about savings, the department has lost out on an additional almost \$3.1 million dollars on top of the extra \$7.2 million it projects 3 year savings to be. From what I have been able to obtain, Broome has been kept as it "services a large percentage of remote students". I believe this would be the case for all 7 camps, and if this argument was valid, it would make more sense to say, for example, keep Geraldton under the Department, as it services remote Schools, SOTA's, many Aboriginal communities and provides respite for Disability groups. It is also coastal and a more central geographical location of the 7 camps schools. Broome is logistically much further north and travel costs would be far greater, and the Operational deficit cost is almost half that of Broome at approximately \$582,000 a year. The tender brochure lists many "recommendations" to literally keep running the camps as they have been for the last 4-5 decades, in regard to pricing, staff and engagement in the local community. The only way this can be guaranteed by the Minister and Department is to leave them as they are. Once a private operator, who doesn't even have to be a Western Australian company or service provider, can do as they like in regard to staff, pricing and educational programming. This is unfair to the local communities and long serving employees, and completely contradicts the "local jobs" policy of the state Government. On visiting Pemberton in July, and speaking to the members of the community, they felt this was another blow to the town, which is still transitioning from Timber to Tourist town after the closure and relocation of the Timber mill in November 2016, the ripple effects of which, the community feels, hasn't been truly felt fully as yet. The Privatisation of the camp school, could lead to local job losses.

Herdsmen Lake Wildlife Centre/WA Gould League

The WA Gould League, founded 79 years ago by the Director General of Education after seeing the success of Gould leagues in the Eastern states, has been funded 1 teacher and 1 administrator for at least the last 30 year. The resource centre, is funded by money raised by the Gould league, so is no cost to the Department and an incredible off campus educational facility.

Figures tabled in Hansard 10th April P1503-04 by the Hon Sue Ellery MLC, show defunding the 2 staff members as a saving of \$413,000 over 3 years, \$137,666.67 per annum, which is actually \$28, 000 less than the commonly quoted figure of \$165,000 per annum. Over 6000 students visit the resource centre and ecosystem each year, at a cost to the Education department of \$23 per student! Surely in this time of Budgetary crisis, this is incredible value for money education, where students can directly engage in the environment as opposed to a text book or computer.

Again, it makes very little sense that another low cost, but integral part of STEM, which is being pushed and promoted constantly by the Department, is being defunded. There has been recommendations for the Gould League to meet with certain entities, but these places can only offer volunteers, of which the Gould league already has its own. What it needs is monetary funding to continue the long standing, educational programming and Ancient Science it offers thousands of students ever year. The traditional Nyoongar cultural education that is provided certainly is important. Not only to young Indigenous students, but to all students, to promote and nurture cultural respect and understanding. I would think that it is very short sighted to remove the funding, especially in a time where reconciliation and understanding of Indigenous culture and history is of utmost importance in WA, and Australia wide.

Moora Residential College- a home away from home

The announcement that the residential facilities will be repurposed by Federal Government funding, and that the Education department will have to continue to cover the operational costs, listed as a projected \$945,000 saving over 3 years (Hansard 10th April P1503-04), Mr McGowan stated to the media, that as the students had to be relocated that this funding would have continued to be provided by the department of Education, albeit to a different residential college. So this figure, \$945,000, then in fact is a false saving listed and will the department now be required to find another \$1,000,000 by defunding another program or facility?

There are other facilities, like Tuart and Canning College educating people wanting to finish year 11 and 12, and other alternative forms of education being cut. Surely as these colleges are the only ones of their kind, keeping one open would have made more sense. Limiting public education in varying forms to Western Australians, with the population increasing, is nonsensical.

At a time where public education clearly needs a more holistic approach and more inclusivity (Landsdale Farm school) and the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom, (Herdsmen Lake, Camp schools and MRC) undoubtedly make better prepared and engaged children and who become our future leaders, these public education cuts just make no sense. The facilities that have been defunded, or put in a position that inevitably could close facilities (Community Kindies) without any form of consultation, have been venomously opposed and all avenues explored to have them reversed as they are so extremely important to the children, families and communities that they serve. They attract staff of all descriptions who have a passion for children and who enjoy being involved in nurturing their development outside of a regular classroom, in many cases. I believe that it needs to be investigated or enquired into why the Department of Education would deem it suitable to present these facilities for defunding or privatisation, in a time where learning difficulties, disabilities and behavioural issues are on the increase. As a disability support worker and as a parent, I am deeply concerned by these cuts. So much so I have dedicated the last 8 months to contesting them. Development of such facilities should be nurtured, grown and promoted by the Department. In relation to the cuts being in the name of budget repair, the Minister and other members of the Government then follow up with the millions of dollars being spent in other areas of education, building science classrooms, etc. Surely those expenditures, could be adjusted accordingly to preserve these long term, successful facilities being disregarded.

Yours Sincerely

Joanne Matthewson