



Minister for Education, ~~Tourism~~

28-23136-D10/0719160

Hon Liz Behjat MLC
Member for North Metropolitan Region
PO Box 874
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Dear Ms Behjat 

I refer to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations report tabled on 1 July 2010 following the inquiry into *The Removal of Senior School Allocation Funding for Year 11 and 12 Courses at 21 District High Schools* and the minority report you submitted.

Let me say at the outset that I greatly appreciate the care with which you considered the evidence, and your determination to reach conclusions based squarely on that evidence. In this spirit, I acknowledge the recommendations in your Minority Report, which called for a review of Year 11 and 12 programs at all district high schools, with a focus maintained on the best possible educational and social outcomes for the students and community located in each district.

I have, for some time now, been listening to the views expressed by a range of stakeholders regarding educational provision at district high schools, including school principals, school chairs, local government and community members. They expressed concerns related to the hardship already being faced in their communities due to current economic and social conditions, including hardship experienced as a result of the drought. In light of these concerns, I have recognised that it is in the interest of some students to remain at their district high school.

It is, however, important that schools provide realistic opportunities for students to engage in meaningful pathways that will facilitate transition to further education, training or employment. During my visits to district high schools, I have seen many innovative developments and partnerships with industry, particularly for vocational education and training (VET), that support senior students' transition to employment or further training. I asked the Department to investigate ways of supporting initiatives such as these.

Following the Department's investigation and in recognition of the very real difficulties, such as the drought, faced by our regional and remote communities, I announced in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday 9 November the Department's new funding arrangements for selected district high schools. From 2011, these 19 district high schools will be provided with additional resources to design and deliver senior secondary programs that optimise opportunities for students to prepare for life beyond school.

The schools will be supported by the Department to develop more sustainable, robust and rigorous Year 10, 11 and 12 programs, particularly VET programs, in partnership with local community and industry groups. School principals were informed of this support via a teleconference with the Director General on 5 November 2010, and I am informed that the news of these additional resources was well received. The increased availability of VET programs in Year 10 seems, in particular, to have answered a widely-felt need.

As you stated in the debate in the Legislative Council on 18 November 2010, these new funding arrangements have been well received also by school communities and local industry, as demonstrated by correspondence I have received from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and the Albany and Great Southern branch of the Master Builders' Association.

The Department will review this funding, as it does with all its programs, to ensure that limited resources are directed to where they are gaining the maximum educational benefit, and to where they are needed most. I am confident that this additional funding provided to these schools will ensure that students, parents and their communities benefit from strengthened senior school programs.

I am grateful for your accurate perception that the Committee's Conclusion 4.6, which stated that the removal of the Senior School Allocation was part of the three per cent efficiency dividend, was inaccurate. You recognised that the prime concern in the removal of the allocation was always to do what was, and is, best for our students in terms of educational outcomes. To maximise opportunities in senior schooling, it is preferable that all students should attend their nearest senior high school.

It is, however, acknowledged that, in certain circumstances, students may need to remain at their local district high school to complete their Year 11 and 12 education. While the Senior School Allocation will not be reinstated at 19 district high schools, it will continue at Lake Grace and Roebourne District High Schools, the former due to the distance to the nearest senior high school, and the latter for specific cultural reasons.

I commend your recognition that, in the 21st century, one size does not fit all. It is important that schools are provided with as much flexibility and autonomy as possible, within the limits allowed by the enabling legislation. This is why I encourage schools to seek local solutions to problems that occur in their local contexts, and why I am hopeful that schools will be active in seeking the widest possible community support for those solutions. The funding for VET programs mentioned above is one example of how this Government is supporting schools to design programs tailored to their own students, in partnership with their local communities and businesses.

Thank you for your contribution to the Inquiry, and for your Minority Report. If you require further information regarding this matter please contact my office on 9222 9699.

Yours sincerely



Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION