

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**INQUIRY INTO THE REMOVAL OF SENIOR SCHOOL
ALLOCATION FUNDING FOR YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES
AT DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT JURIEN BAY
FRIDAY, 11 JUNE 2010**

SESSION THREE

Members

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)
Hon Liz Behjat
Hon Ken Travers
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

Hearing commenced at 11.57 am

BITTENHUIS, MRS BELINDA

**President, P&C Association, Jurien Bay District High School,
sworn and examined:**

HOOTON, MISS LAURA

**School Council Chairperson, Jurien Bay District High School,
sworn and examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you both to the meeting. Before we begin, I must ask you to take either an oath or an affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

The CHAIR: You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood this document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: The proceedings today are being recorded by Hansard reporters. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist Hansard, please be aware of the microphones and speak directly into them. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any media or public in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please also note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. This prohibition does not, however, prevent you from discussing your public evidence once you have given evidence at today’s hearing.

Again, thank you for coming to this hearing. As you are aware, the committee is inquiring into the government’s decision to cease to provide senior school allocation funding for years 11 and 12 courses at 21 district high schools across WA, including the Jurien Bay District High School. If one or either of you would like to make an opening statement, please feel free to do so.

Miss Hooton: I would just like to say that whilst this is about years 11 and 12, it is very important for people to realise that this decision has not just affected years 11 and 12. Being a parent in this community and being on the school council, a number of people have already come to me and said, “Look, Laura, we just want to tell you that we have already started taking our children for interviews at private schools.” These children are in grade 6 and grade 7. They have younger siblings. A lot of people who cannot afford private boarding will be shifting. It is not just about years 11 and 12; this is having a flow-on effect to all school years. With regards to the fact that these children are already going to interviews, I have been told directly that these private schools are saying that they do not want these students in year 10; they want these students as of year 8. If you start taking the kids away from the community and from the school as of year 8, it has a flow-on effect to businesses, sporting groups and everything that happens in our communities. Families are the people that make a community. They are the ones that as a rule spend the most money over a wide range of businesses in a community. I think that is an important fact. It is not just years 11 and 12; this is affecting everybody.

The CHAIR: Would you like to add something or comment?

Mrs Buitenhuis: No, thank you.

The CHAIR: It might be hard to quantify but when you say that lots of people are talking about making a decision to leave Jurien, can you give us any indication of whether you are talking about a handful, a dozen or 20 or more?

Miss Hooton: Of the friends who have spoken to me—that is just grade 7 students—I would have to say that at least half a dozen have already gone for interviews at a private school. Another 10 to 15 people have come to my business and said that they have children in grade 4, the lower primary, wanting to know when the decision will be made final. If we do not get the senior schooling allocation, they have to start making plans to move now. If they are in a government department such as Horizon Power or something like that, they cannot just transfer at the click of a finger; they have to give at least 12 months' notice that they want a transfer. It is not a decision that can be made overnight.

With regards to numbers, the majority of the schooling community is talking about it. Of the people who have spoken to me directly, approximately 20 or so are definitely considering boarding and moving already.

The CHAIR: Do you have any indication of how many children are involved? I guess some of those families have more than one child.

Miss Hooton: All of those would have more than one child.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Following on from the Chair's question to you, of those roughly 20 families who have talked about their children heading out to private schools, how many of those children will be planning to do pure VET courses and how many children will be planning to go on to do university entrance courses? Are you aware of that?

Miss Hooton: I will speak on behalf of grade 7 because my son is in grade 7. It is a class of approximately 25. Before this notification was given, I know of two children who have definitely been booked into private schools. The majority of the rest of the students were staying here. I can say honestly that from probably about grade 5 upwards, at least 70 per cent of the children were planning to stay on. The school has always said—I know this because I am on the school council—that if a child wants to do TEE, we should take our children elsewhere. That is what it recommends. The majority of children do not do well doing everything by SIDE; they do not achieve as well. It just seems to be the trend now that children want to do TAFE courses and get into an apprenticeship straight away. From speaking to the kids, not many of them seem to want to go on to uni.

The CHAIR: Are the people that you are speaking with considering Moora as an option?

Miss Hooton: No, not at all. Most of them are considering Perth. The general consensus seems to be that if they have to send their kids away, they are going to send them where there are a wider range of sporting opportunities available. If they have to send them away—if they cannot afford to send these kids to boarding school—they want the option of moving the whole family. If the whole family moves, it will not be to Moora; it will be to either Perth or Geraldton.

The CHAIR: If they are not interested or cannot afford a private school, what public high school options are available?

[12.06 pm]

Miss Hooton: If you were sending them to board at a public school, it would be the Rotary Residential College in Kent Street. That seems to be the only one that I am aware of that people have been telling me about. When I made a phone call in February to inquire as to availability of spaces, Kent Street had around 20 spaces available, Geraldton had about the same and Moora had a little less.

The CHAIR: That is not a lot.

Miss Hooton: It is not a lot considering that this is happening to 21 schools. Out of all those children in those 21 schools, not every parent will be able to uproot the whole family and shift.

They will lose job security. People who can afford it or who want to have the option available are going to boarding schools now and enlisting their kids. You can always pull your kids out if a decision is made to leave the senior schooling allocation but you cannot get them in at the last minute.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: My question is about the perceptions of people that you described that has caused the behaviour that appears to be taking place. What is the perception of those people of the future of Jurien Bay District High School? What is their understanding of the future for years 11 and 12?

Miss Hooton: At present the overall perception is that people are hoping that years 11 and 12 will remain with full funding but they are not going to wait around for it. The department needs to realise that it needs to hurry up and make a decision about it and people need to be notified—it is already getting too late—probably at the beginning of term 3. If you want to move your family, you need to decide now. If you have to shift school, you have to start choosing. You have to start considering siblings as well. You need to be looking at it now. The perception is that they do not hold a lot of hope for it. They do not think that it will follow through. They are already starting to think that they are going to have to do this.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I go on a bit further. Trevlyn, our previous witness, talked about some of the compromises that will have to be made in delivery as a result of curtailing the senior school allocation. It is a good part of an FTE. You could look at that in the scheme of things from a different perspective and say that that is not much really and maybe the compromise of the delivery will not be that serious. People could reflect on it that way. Yet that is causing a significant change of behaviour with regard to the future of years 11 and 12 in the Jurien school. It intrigues me that people are at the tipping point and this is just a final thing, to send people away, which means communication is contributing to that or they have not done a full analysis or that allocation is such a critical element to providing the necessary resource and without that, they sign off on the Jurien schools. I really want to know what the real perception is that is driving this behavioural change as a result of this communication about years 11 and 12 and the situation in Jurien Bay.

Miss Hooton: Why should children in rural communities have less opportunities than children anywhere else? Why should they have to go to another school? Why should they have to leave their families? At the moment, for example, they have the ability to make a real gazebo. Take away the senior school funding and what are they going to make—a model gazebo? There is the difference. In this community at the moment there is a lot of general construction. Building is a major thing. Hospitality is becoming a major thing. Anywhere you go, business and IT is a major thing. Jurien is growing. You only have to look around the place to see that it is growing in leaps and bounds. With the opening of Indian Ocean Drive, it is only going to get bigger and bigger. It seems crazy to start taking these kids away when we should be furthering their opportunities to provide for what is going to happen here. Why should they have any less than anyone else? We are a big enough community, considering we take in Cervantes, Green Head and Leeman. We are a big enough area to have proper schooling facilities for these kids.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I will just try to paraphrase some of that. Because there is communication about taking money out of the education system at Jurien, that is enough for people to say that somehow the government's regard for Jurien is not very high, it does not think it is good enough and it is going to get out. Is it also saying that Jurien is growing and therefore it does not need to have stuff taken away from it; it needs to have more put in?

Miss Hooton: It is both. Jurien is growing. We need to have more put into it. We all want the best for our children. If our children are not going to get the best opportunity here for what we think our children are capable of and what we can afford, we are going to take them elsewhere. This life is hard enough; we want to be able to give them the best opportunity.

Hon PHILIP GARDINER: I have one final question on that. In terms of students staying back for years 11 and 12, do many parents have children with special needs or are there families with special circumstances that require a strong year 11 and year 12 presence at the school to cater for those needs?

Miss Hooton: As the community is growing, obviously there are more and children with special needs. You probably have to bear in mind the extent of these special needs. It is a bit hard to say this. I am not trying to be offensive to these children with special needs. Do they need to go on for further schooling? Do they have an ability where they can go somewhere else or if we do not get this senior schooling allocation and we just have basic years 11 and 12 schooling here, will that suffice for those special needs children? It depends what level they are at within themselves and what they are capable of. If children have the ability to get into the workforce and do the best they can, we want the best on offer for them.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Were you surprised at the closure of Swanleigh, and what does that mean for you?

Miss Hooton: Yes. I was not aware of the closure of Swanleigh until early this year. One of the parent members of our school council made us aware of it. That compounds this problem of the lack of boarding facilities. These children at Swanleigh are already going to be scrambling for places as well. The department is forcing us into a position to decide whether to go to boarding or shift the whole family. Where is it going to get all these extra positions from for boarding?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Are you telling me that you would not be confident that there are sufficient places for those students who have been affected by this decision with respect to the 21 district high schools and who perhaps could go to Perth to board?

[12.16 pm]

Miss Hooton: There would not be. There are not a lot of people who can afford to send their kids to private schools—not a lot of people at all. Private schools are already booked out a number of years ahead, so if you could afford to, you are going to have to be extremely lucky to get them in there. As far as I am aware, there is only the Kent Street Rotary college, which is a public one; they are only going to be able to take minimal spaces and it would be the same for Geraldton.

The CHAIR: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Miss Hooton: I would just like to say that I think it needs to be considered of real importance that this decision gets reversed and that above allocation is reinstated. It needs to be done immediately; people need to start knowing now. There is growing unrest and it has spread from Green Head through to Leeman; it is not just Jurien Bay. These surrounding communities are just as important to Jurien Bay as Jurien Bay is. They all support things here. We are all really one big community. A decision needs to be—either way it goes, we hope it is the right decision for this community, but this community needs to be told, and told as soon as possible.

The CHAIR: That leads to a question from me. We have heard that there has not been consultation, so in terms of taking your concerns and the concerns from other people in the community, had those concerns been directed to the Department of Education or to the minister? Have you had any response in that regard?

Miss Hooton: I have not. We have sent letters; the school council has sent letters, I know a number of people in the business community sent letters. I sent a letter—I am on the school council—representing all the children. I sent that on 23 April. I faxed it, I emailed it and I posted it: I have not had one reply.

The CHAIR: To the department or to the minister?

Miss Hooton: I have sent it to the department. I have sent it to Brendon Grylls. The only people who have replied to me have been the local business members and community organisations. I have

not had a reply from the department or from Brendon Grylls, which does not make it very good when people are saying, “We’re hearing no feedback; we’ve got no idea what’s going on.” You cannot tell them anything because you do not know yourself.

The CHAIR: It might be useful if possible, not now, if you could just indicate what correspondence has gone to whom and when and, obviously, if there is no answer if you could indicate that. It seems to me that there is not much happening either way here; they are not coming out to speak to you and you are not hearing back from them. If you could provide a summary, perhaps even just from your two organisations, of what correspondence you have sent and what, if any, response you have received.

Miss Hooton: To the department or —

The CHAIR: The department, ministers, members of Parliament—I guess where you have looked for assistance and what response you have had.

Miss Hooton: I did up a letter in regards to this issue and I sent it to probably 12 lots of groups. The only three groups I have not received a reply from are the shadow Minister for Education, but I have actually spoken to her office and the reply was that she was waiting on the budget to be able to get back to me with a proper response; the minister’s office, I phoned them approximately three weeks ago to say that I have had no replies as yet and they were posting me a letter that day, so I do not know where the letter has gone but I have not received it; and from Brendon Grylls’ office, which I have had no reply at all.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance. I appreciate your —

Miss Hooton: We thank you for the opportunity of being able to speak.

The CHAIR: No worries, it is nice to be in Jurien. We will close this hearing. The next witness will be at one o’clock. Thank you again. You will receive a copy of the transcript, so feel free if there is something you want to change or modify, just let us know.

Miss Hooton: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 12.22 pm