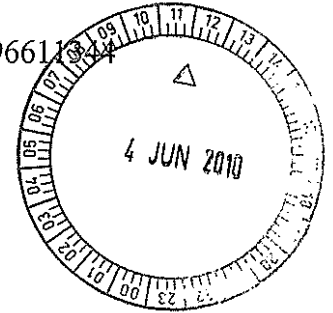


## Dalwallinu District High School

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May 24, 2010

Ms Renae Jewell  
Committee Clerk  
Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
PERTH  
WA 6002

Members of the Committee

I write with regard to the request for information regarding the removal of year 11 and 12 courses from District High Schools. My experience as an administrator spans 22 years in district high schools throughout the state, but my comments here are in the context of Dalwallinu only.

a) I am not in a position to comment on the decision making process or the rationale that lead to this decision. There had been considerable speculation that this would be the decision but the actual written confirmation arrived at the school during the last week of the 2009 school year.

Clearly, this did not provide many people with the capacity to make a timely decision with regard to their children's education as most schools have their enrolments and timetables set for year 11 students by this time. I had capacity within my staffing allocation to continue some support for students enrolled through SIDE for 2010.

b) The immediate effect was a response of disbelief from the community as many parents had their children educated in this manner and we had experienced many successes. Examples include the only Indigenous student in the Midlands District to graduate with WACE in 2008 who gained entrance to UWA physiotherapy and a student with significant intellectual disability who successfully completed certificates in metal fabrication and welding during 2009 and is now fully employed. Opportunities such as these for students who have been traditionally alienated in senior years of schooling will be severely limited.

We do have the circumstance of one particular family who relocated to the district for business reasons believing that their children would have ongoing access to education

without the need to send them away. The removal of year 11 and 12 courses will require some reconsideration of the method of accessing further education.

The comment has been made at a number of senior department and political levels that parents have choice, but the range of choices is limited by the capacity of parents to pay for their children's education.

During 2010, possible enrolments at SIDE through the school could have included a 16 year old single mother and an Indigenous girl who does not speak. These young adults now do not attend any form of schooling at all.

A comment that has been made to me by parents in this and other communities is that the availability of metropolitan government boarding facilities is extremely limited and I believe that the options are Rotary House adjacent to Kent St Senior High School or City Boarding. The latter is only available to students who have been accepted into Talented and Gifted programmes.

With the closure of Swanleigh at the end of this year, the 90 vacancies at Rotary House will be heavily contested. Private school boarding is also an option but is an expensive avenue of education. An interesting consideration for the committee would be to compare the numbers of students at the District High schools named in the closures with the available boarding facilities at both government and private institutions.

c) Alternatives other than SIDE include enrolment at a senior high school in the country with residential access. The nearest such school is Central Midlands located at Moora; a town that is 94 km south of Dalwallinu. Other residential facilities are at major towns such as Geraldton, Northam and Merredin. The Agricultural Colleges are also a possibility. These options do involve expenses for boarding and tuition. All parents are able to access Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and some could qualify for other means tested options. It is estimated that out of pocket expenses with these options is in the vicinity of \$3 000.

Private schooling is also possible provided a family has the financial capacity to access these schools and the schools have the capacity to accept the number of students at short notice. This last element is vital as most families with intentions of private schooling have enrolled their children almost from birth to secure a place at these schools.

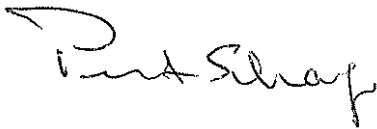
d) On a number of occasions, our community has been advised that the school can enrol students in SIDE and that the students who are enrolled will be counted for staffing allocation but not a senior school allocation. This creates a concern in that we have been told that this is a case of "double dipping" and schools that engage in this process will be invoiced for the additional costs at approximately \$1 000 per student.

This comes about because the students are enrolled at this school to enable them to legally access the school's facilities and resources but must also be enrolled at SIDE to access the materials provided by that school.

Having witnessed the invoices that have been sent to some senior high schools, district high school communities are reluctant to pursue this avenue of education as these costs could not be borne within the existing financial resources allocated to smaller schools. This is an area that requires specific clarification for administrators and communities, possibly involving a staffing allocation capped at a suitable FTE (not exceeding 1.0) to manage the students as required by SIDE management.

I look forward to an outcome that maintains equity in educational opportunities for our rural and remote students.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Scharf". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Peter Scharf  
Principal