

To: The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Submission re: Petition 049 Pemberton Camp School

The Department of Education made a strategic educational decision in 1978 to establish the Camp School Network for West Australian school students.

This was based on sound educational outcomes that are able to be achieved in a residential dormitory setting. The selection of the sites was to enable a wide cross section of WA students to have access to unique camp school locations and the specialist curriculum offerings available. This outcome continues today with a range of opportunities for school children to extend their experiential learning, focusing on values.

The imminent closure of the Camp School Network removes the opportunity for public school students to access:

- **Affordable camps.** The current cost structure provides the opportunity for a range of socio economic groups to access camps across WA.
The cost of camps, with meals and programs offered, provide value for money and access for all WA school students. The closure of the camp schools will substantially impact WA schools in being able to access affordable educational experiences for their students.
- **Camp Curriculum.** The camp curriculum provides learning opportunities and experiences in a real world context that are not possible in a conventional school setting.
- **Experiential Education.** Experiential educational programs are designed and implemented to complement the school curriculum and provide extension.
- **Qualified educational staff.** Managers, instructors and teaching staff understand the local area, and are skilled at designing educational programs that are rich, diverse and provide valuable knowledge and skills to school students across various year groups and ability. The camp schools are run by experienced qualified staff.
The Managers develop individualised camp programmes in consultation with the Teacher in Charge and run the camp school based programs for the different year groups.
- **Department of Education facility.** The advantage of camp schools being part of the Department of Education is they utilise and implement policy and guidelines that all schools use. This provides a facility that is cognisant of the processes and standardisation of paperwork compliant with the Excursions policy and assists schools to arrange and operate a residential learning experience for school students that enable Principals to sign off on students going on camp.
Teachers continue to take students on camp as they appreciate and understand the social, emotional and mental outcomes that occur in a residential learning environment.
- **Values education.** The consequence of a communal living environment, away from the student's home and school is ideal for developing:
 - ✓ Self-management skills. Pursuit of knowledge and commitment to achievement of potential.
 - ✓ Interpersonal skills. Respect and concern for others and their rights. Social and civic responsibility.
 - ✓ Self-esteem. Self-acceptance and respect of self.
 - ✓ Environmental responsibility.

School camps have a long history in WA. With the original National Fitness camps established post WWII to ensure access for young people; there have been a wide range of camps providing educational opportunities for school kids.

W.H. Kilpatrick, the philosopher of education who worked with Dewey on a number of progressive education issues, said in an article he published in *Camping Magazine* in 1942: "We learn what we live, only what we live, and everything we live . . . the camp can thus spread a more adequate ideal of education" (Lance Ozier, 2010).

Students have various learning styles. Camp Schools have exemplified the concept of differentiated instruction that changes the pace, level, the type of activity provided in response to an individual's needs, learning style or interests. Understanding that students learn best through various methods including visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinaesthetic types of learning styles, camp schools qualified staff deliver a range of educational programs engaging these approaches as per School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) .

Professional experts – doctors, mental health experts, educationalists, sociologists – are beginning to suggest that when kids stop going out into the natural world to play, it can affect not just their development as individuals, but society as a whole. The "power" of organized programs in the outdoors, and particularly, the contributions of one-week residential camp programs to the growth and development of young persons is a highlight of camp school programs.

As camp schools are located in regional areas the local impact is high. Staff are local, suppliers are local, activity providers are local. The loss of reliable, interesting jobs working with school children is a difficult one to replace. Suppliers of goods and services who benefit under the buy local policy will be affected. The Camp Schools provide a regular demand for goods and services that makes it economically viable to run a local business.

The flow on effect of camps from a tourism perspective is dramatic. Students, staff and parents return to the town / region, one to explore and two to spend more time enjoying what is on offer.

Removing residential camp school opportunities from the WA curriculum will result in fewer children experiencing the natural world and their relationship with nature.

The major impact of less time outdoors is a less health community. Camp programs enable students to improve their problem solving skills, resulting in better cognitive function, better creativity, focus and self-discipline. Socially it improves cooperation, self-awareness; and emotionally it reduces aggression and increases happiness.

Camp School experiences provide a sense of place for school students, as the impact of the educational outcomes achieved are affected by those places and how the two interact and change each other. The loss of camp schools in the regions will result in the loss of this opportunity.

The Camp School experience preserves for students the chance to slow down, to notice, to attend, to engage and interact with their world. ALL students regardless of their socio economic status deserve to know the joy of being able to see things not as they are, but as they could be. The camp school curriculum, unlike most school curricula, awakens kids with challenging activities that encourage innovation and exploration, the same kind of innovation that creates jobs, and the kind of exploration through which discoveries are made. The work of Camp School programs CHANGES people's lives indelibly and infinitely for the better.

Students remember the camp school experience for a very, very long time.

Please note: This issue has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

Mark Hudson