

SCHOOLS — BUNTINE PRIMARY SCHOOL CLOSURE

5313. Mr R.S. Love to the minister representing the Minister for Education:

I refer to correspondence from the Minister for Education, dated 25 January 2016 in relation to the closure of Buntine Primary School which stated that small schools are challenged to provide an optimum learning environment, and I ask:

- (a) can the Minister furnish me with NAPLAN results from the small regional schools in my Electorate of Moore – that are not otherwise published – to substantiate the assertion; and
- (b) in justification of this statement, can the Minister provide objective evidence to back this claim?

**Mrs L.M. Harvey replied:**

- (a) No. As my letter of 16 February 2016 indicated, NAPLAN data for cohorts of fewer than six students sitting a particular test are not published. This is to protect the privacy of individual students who might otherwise be identified. It is the same standard applied by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) with respect to the publication of NAPLAN data on the My School website.
- (b) As the Member will appreciate, the relationship between school size and its effect on education standards is a complex matter. While schools with very small enrolments may have advantages in terms of a sense of belonging, they may be disadvantaged by factors such as a lack of staffing flexibility, a limited range of programs, and limited opportunities for students to interact with peers.

Research on small schools supports the findings of the review undertaken by Professor Teese of The University of Melbourne for the Department of Education in 2012. A key finding was that “schools with small enrolments are limited in the way they can use their resources.” Professor Teese found that effective schools need sufficient flexibility to provide extra support for small groups of students with identified needs, to adjust student-teacher ratios to target the early years and to use more experienced teachers in areas of need.

Prior to closing in 2015, Buntine Primary School had an enrolment of 13 students. Despite receiving additional resourcing, the school only had sufficient funding to employ one teacher and a principal. In contrast, nearby Dalwallinu District High School had sufficient resourcing to employ 21 teaching staff, including specialist staff. This allowed the larger school to provide a more differentiated curriculum that addressed individual needs in more optimal learning environments.

There is no assertion that only schools with a larger enrolment provide students with a good education. However, those schools do have greater flexibility to use resources in ways that have been shown to contribute positively to student outcomes.