

SECONDARY EDUCATION — YEAR 7 STUDENTS — TRANSITION

Statement by Minister for Education and Training

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [2.04 pm]: I rise to advise members of the conclusion of the special transitional arrangements that allowed some families in rural and remote areas more time to prepare for the transition of year 7 students to secondary schools. Families were able to apply for special consideration for their year 7 students to remain in primary school. The special transitional arrangements were granted for a period of three years, to conclude in 2017.

Following representations from some community members, and in line with my commitment to the house to review the previous government's decision to end the transitional arrangements in 2017, I asked the Department of Education to provide me with advice on the proposal to extend the offer for special consideration. I have now received that advice. The enrolment data confirms that the overwhelming majority of families in regional areas has adjusted to the change, with a decline in year 7 students in primary settings from 85 in 2015 to only 22 in 2017, 10 of whom are enrolled in School of the Air, so there are only 12 year 7 students attending a local primary school across Western Australia. The 10 students enrolled in School of the Air may access the School of Isolated and Distance Education for their secondary schooling. The decision to relocate year 7 students to secondary school was made so that all public school students would have the same learning opportunities as students in other states and territories, as well as those of students in non-government schools in Western Australia.

Secondary settings provide year 7 students with access to specialist subject teaching and facilities across all learning areas and provide the most appropriate learning environment for students. The lack of direct access to the specialist staff and facilities available in secondary schools can limit the capacity of primary schools to deliver a high-quality year 7 curriculum across all learning areas. Year 7 students who remain in primary school may have limited or no interaction with their age peers due to the vast majority being educated in secondary settings. Some concern has been expressed that the year 7 move to secondary school would affect the viability of some primary schools. School closures in recent years have been the result of very limited or no enrolments across all years and have not been related to the loss of one particular year group. Small rural communities rely on government infrastructure to sustain a viable community and the reduction of any service, including education, can have economic and social ramifications. However, the educational needs of students should not be jeopardised and should be at the forefront of any decision-making. I have decided therefore that the offer for special consideration for year 7 students to remain at primary school will cease at the end of 2017 as originally planned. This decision is made in the best interests of students' academic and social development.