

**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 GINGIN
FRIDAY, 21 MAY 2010**

SESSION TWO

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 2.55 pm**MOIR, MS SUE****President,****Gingin District High School P&C,****sworn and examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to the meeting this afternoon. Before we begin, I am required to ask you to take either an oath or an affirmation. If you would like access to a bible, Renae has a copy if you would like to make use of that.

[Witness took the affirmation.]

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

Ms Moir: Yes, I have.

The CHAIR: Thank you. These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you may refer to during the course of the hearing. Please also be aware of the microphones and try to 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 public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please 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 generally once you leave this hearing.

Again, thank you for coming today. 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 at 21 district high schools across WA, including Gingin District High School. We welcome your input this afternoon. Would you like to make a statement or give us some indication of how you see this change impacting on the students in the school community?

Ms Moir: It came to our attention last December, which was very inconvenient, as it was the end of the school year, so the timing was not appreciated by the parents, because it caused a lot of upheaval about what do we do during the holidays. So we then went into the new term, and, as Kevin explained, we have actually got a year before it will take effect.

The CHAIR: You heard when in December?

Ms Moir: The last week of term. I think it was 18 December when we received the piece of paper.

The CHAIR: Right at the end of the term?

Ms Moir: Yes. Right at the end of the term was the first that we as the parents heard about it. It came to the school in a letter from Margery Evans. We were then officially given that in term 1. From the parents’ point of view, we did not really understand how it would affect what the actual situation was, because we were under the impression that it meant the abolishment of SIDE, which is where we all went, “Whoa! Hold on! This just is not fair”. So at no time was it actually explained to the parents or to the school that it did not mean the abolishment of SIDE. So, from that perspective, since I have written my letter, I have just received a copy of a letter from Elizabeth Constable explaining that SIDE can continue, but the senior school allocation, which from our

parents' point of view means our face-to-face contact with teachers, is unable to be assisted. So that is where the issue lies with us now. There was a lot of miscommunication and lack of information,

The CHAIR: So now that you understand that it is just related to that senior school allocation, are you still of the same view about the impact?

Ms Moir: Yes. We are still of the view that we want to support our children as much as possible, and taking away any little bit of money means that we are going to lose something that we already have in our school situation.

The CHAIR: Would you like to elaborate in terms of the impact on students and families in the area, because we are interested in that perspective.

Ms Moir: I cannot answer any technical questions, but from a parents' perspective, when we wrote the letter—do you all have a copy of that letter?

The CHAIR: Yes. Thank you for that.

Ms Moir: This is what the parents were coming and saying to me. They said that a lot of us moved from the city to here. I am sorry that I have only one copy, but I actually have a map of all the different areas that we have here. At the moment, we are travelling for miles for our kids to get an education. If we are able to have continuation of schooling, we want that. We do not want our children to be separated. This is coming purely from a mum's point of view. We want our kids to stay here. We moved out of the city because we wanted a "sea change". We want our kids to have an environment where they can run and play sport and not have to go to a park because of the area that they live in. So a lot of us made that choice. When we made that choice, we were advised that year 11 and 12 could be conducted at Gingin. Then to take that away all of a sudden just did not make sense. A lot of us believe SIDE is fantastic, because it prepares them for university. When they do years 11 and 12, they have to start studying on their own. They have to start resourcing their own materials. They get a great grounding. I do not know if you know, but our chaplain at the school now, which the P&C funds, is from Gingin. She did all her schooling at Gingin. She did SIDE. So she is the best advocate for SIDE, and I am hoping she will come here later to speak to you to promote it. Three of the teachers who have come back have done the SIDE program through Gingin. So it works, and it is really good and it has a great reputation for what it does do. So from the parents' point of view, we do not want our children to leave. We definitely do not want them to go to Clarkson. We have got nothing against Clarkson, but for country kids who come from a small environment to go to an area with 1 200 kids, it is just something that as a parent we would feel worried about, because some children would not cope with that situation.

From the perspective of going to Mindarie Senior College, a lot of us love that idea for the ones who do not want to go to university and do need that extra support. We would send them there. But we are being turned away and not allowed to enter. Parents are applying and they cannot get in; it is too full and it is too busy. So an alternative from our perspective is the Gravity Discovery Centre off Military Road. That is science-based. That would be an excellent senior school location. It would be an excellent facility, because there is no senior high school at Yanchep either, or Two Rocks. The children who go to Two Rocks do not have a position at Yanchep High School. They may be coming back to Gingin. This is what my map shows. We have six suburbs that are being split into four different schools.

The CHAIR: So you are saying that students are being turned away from Mindarie because it does not have the capacity?

Ms Moir: It does not have enough space for our children to go there. In relation to the school bus, there is a bus, which I actually arranged with the transport department to have, that goes to Sovereign Hill, which is the little estate where I am, just outside of Guilderton. That picks up the children and takes them to Mindarie Senior College. So there is a bus run from there to Mindarie. But that is not our feeder school. We are not given automatic entrance to that school. So the bus

now is used by private school children who go to Quinns Baptist, and because of the numbers it keeps the bus running.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Do you know how many students have applied to go to Mindarie and have been refused entry?

Ms Moir: Last year, there were 10, and I helped another two to get through; so three of the 10 got through.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Three of the 10 who applied got through?

Ms Moir: Yes, after they had been rejected on the first try. We get an outright no.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Did you take that up with the education department?

Ms Moir: Yes.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: What was their response?

Ms Moir: From Sue Curnow, we are not a feeder school to Mindarie. I addressed it with her when she was in that capacity role, and we are not a feeder school to Mindarie. That was the response that I was given.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So outright they were not prepared to take them?

Ms Moir: The only way we got these three in was that one had a brother who had gone there before, so he was allowed to go in under that rule. The other one got in under a music scholarship. The two others got in under another sibling ruling. But the department said it is not a feeder school; you have to go to Clarkson. But we do not have a bus that goes direct to Clarkson.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: You did make the comment that you are relieved that there would be no abolishment of SIDE.

Ms Moir: Yes.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Are you aware that there may be some consideration given to charging schools for SIDE enrolments?

Ms Moir: We were just made aware of that at our last P&C meeting, so I have not even had a chance to approach that with the parents. We have only just heard about it. How much we have not been told.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: What were you told about it?

Ms Moir: We were told that the government department may be looking at a \$90 000 charge to the school, and we all just went, "Wow!"

[3.05 pm]

The CHAIR: Where did you hear that from?

Ms Moir: It was just the P&C that it came from—one of the staff.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Would you have any concern that possibly, in order for the school to make that charge to the education department, you may in fact have to reduce support from other parts of your school—let us say from the primary section—to come up with that \$90 000?

Ms Moir: We would not be able to do it.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: You would not be able to do it?

Ms Moir: I will be honest. From my point of view, as president of the P&C, at the current stage, we have got 28-29 children in year 12, and we have another 300 or 400 children. That is money that we do not have. Do you know what I mean? It would have to be cost effective, and the parents of the SIDE children would have to probably do their extra fundraising. We fundraise so much now just so that we could get medallions to hand out to the kids today at the fun run. We fundraise just to keep

our chaplain. We fundraise to buy mirrors to put in the girls' toilets. We are just not given enough money for our school to survive. I welcome you to have a look around. The gutters are falling off; the roofs are full of mould. I am glad Grant is here! I sent though a report to Grant with pictures of the condition that the school is in. The maintenance schedule is so far behind it is just appalling. So, to justify that, I would have to say that we would have to fundraise.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am assuming that the principal may well have advised the P&C in relation to this possible charging of schools for SIDE enrolments. Is that the case, or did you hear it from somewhere else?

Ms Moir: No, it was from the principal.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Did the principal advise the P&C of what action he might take in respect to this information?

Ms Moir: Off the top of my head I think it was just discussed that that was a possibility, and once more information was known we would be made aware of it. But at that stage it was just hearsay—it was a possibility.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: So will the P&C be making any further inquiries in respect to whether this is something that is under active consideration by the department?

Ms Moir: Yes. We will be constantly reminding the principal at every one of our P&C meetings to keep us informed and communicate what is happening.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The bus from Sovereign Hill to Mindarie, which obviously takes the kids —

Ms Moir: To all the private schools on the way, yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Do you know how full that bus is? Does it have spare capacity to put additional students from the area on it, or is it already at capacity?

Ms Moir: It changes every day, because there is a problem with Mindarie closing later. So the children who go to Mindarie cannot use that bus, because they close an hour after the other schools, because they do not go on Wednesdays. Therefore, those Mindarie Senior High School children are not even using their school bus. It is used for the private school children, because they finish at the regular school hours. So it is full as in the capacity of what it could have, but on certain days it looks empty, because there are no senior high schools able to use that. The mums have to drive down on Tuesdays and Thursdays to bring their children back up here.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: And on the other days, every seat on the bus is taken?

Ms Moir: As far as I am aware, yes, but that can change.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Each year the enrolments will change, but if you were to put it in place based on the current figures, you would need to provide a larger bus if you wanted to take the students even from just your area?

Ms Moir: From Gingin, yes, all to Mindarie.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Or basically extend it further north to Lancelin.

Ms Moir: That is right. The Lancelin children have no way of getting down to Mindarie. They would have to drive for 40 minutes to get down to Sovereign Hill to get onto the bus to go to Mindarie. But then you would have to look at the private school children and what bus run they would be on and what would happen to them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: And that only goes to Mindarie? It does not go to Clarkson?

Ms Moir: That is correct, yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It is interesting that you mention Yanchep District High School. You may not be able to answer this, but I know that a number of years ago there was talk about taking away years 8 to 10 from Yanchep District High School. One of the results of that was that parents took the decision to immediately take their kids out and send them to Wanneroo High on the basis that they wanted them to be at the one school for the whole of their schooling. Within the parent community, have there been those sorts of discussions—that parents do not want their kids to be at Gingin for years 8 to 10 and then have to go somewhere else; if they have to go somewhere else, they would prefer them to go at year 8?

Ms Moir: Yes, we do. We lose a lot in Gingin from year 8, for that exact reason—that the parents want them to go then. For our area, splitting the children is just so hard. You have got to travel 45 minutes to get to school anyway. Then if you have one child in Gingin and one at another school, it really makes it very hard. So the parents from our area do want to keep their children together and have them at the same school, and they want to start them there and go all the way through. I have all the literature that gets sent out to the P&C from the department, encouraging families to educate their children and encouraging them to learn at home. We cannot do that if they are not home. If they are spending all their time on the bus and do not get home until nearly five o'clock, it is a bit hard to do that for the kids.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You were saying earlier that your initial interpretation of the letter was that SIDE was going to be taken away from the school.

Ms Moir: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Now that you are aware that that is not the case, are you able to give us your views about how you would interpret that letter as a parent? That is the letter that was sent out in December of last year. I think you have sent us a copy as part of your submission. I am intrigued to get a sense of it from a parent's point of view. Even though you have now had the issue about SIDE clarified, what is your sense about what that letter is trying to tell you as a parent?

Ms Moir: Not to panic, because it is going to be okay. But they are still not answering enough questions as to what it really means for us, because, okay, we can have SIDE, but does that mean that we can still have our teacher assistant and that we can still have the kids supervised? That to me in the letter that I got back was not really addressing that full issue. It is all not being communicated well enough to us from my point of view. We do not know enough. My children are not in SIDE yet, I will be honest—they are not even in high school yet—but I am preparing for the future. I have got SIDE students stopping me at the local shops and saying, "What is happening? Can I go to school tomorrow or not?" They are all worried, and they are at such a vulnerable age and they need to have stable parts in their lives, and one of those is their education. So I do not think the letters were worded well enough to fully explain what it really does mean to us.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: In fact, it was interesting, because after you had made your comments I went back and re-read the letter. I can understand why you would have interpreted it in this way, and that is why I am asking you. One interpretation that you have put on the letter is that it is suggesting that Gingin District High is not going to be capable of offering senior school education.

Ms Moir: Are you talking about the first letter and those comments where she says that they need socialisation? That is why in the letter we addressed we went back and said we do not think that is right; we do not think these children need to go to another school to learn. They can learn on their own. When they go to university, they will have to learn on their own. That is what the SIDE program allows them to do. It nurtures them and gets them ready for that. That is why we did not want to see SIDE abolished.

The CHAIR: Just for accuracy, can you give us the date of that letter?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is the Margery Evans letter dated 11 December last year.

Ms Moir: Yes, that is the one, and then she responded to me, telling me to wait until I got a letter from Liz Constable.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: We do not have that letter.

Ms Moir: That is this letter here. Sorry. I only just got that one.

The CHAIR: That is okay. What is the date on that one?

Ms Moir: It is 12 April. I will leave a copy with you.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Just to round this off, and I might have missed it, but what consultation occurred between the department and yourselves in relation to the cancellation of the senior school allocation?

Ms Moir: Absolutely nothing. All we were given was that letter that you have got there, that was passed on from the principal. At no time was there any consultation with the P&C. We are also a member of WACSSO, I think it is, and I went to their conference, and there was no mention of it there either, so it just caught us all by surprise. So I actually contacted them as well, and that is how I think everybody started to say, "Is this happening to you; is this happening to you?" None of us knew, and we do have a peak body that it could have been explained to at the beginning. So it was very disappointing from the perspective of the lack of consultation.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Was there some sort of coordinated response to that lack of consultation through WACSSO, to the best of your knowledge?

Ms Moir: We had to put submissions in, and, I will be honest, I was too busy working on my own to liaise, but they said they would look into it once all the high schools were advised; so we were advised to write as our own individual schools, wait until we got a reply, and then respond to it.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Had you had an opportunity for input, do you think that would have made any material difference to the final outcome?

Ms Moir: I think it would have cleared up the lack of communication as to what it actually meant we would lose at the school if we had been allowed to liaise with the department. If the department had come out and explained to us that this is what we are going to do, it may have cleared it up, rather than just getting that letter.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: And what if you had received the correspondence earlier than 18 December?

Ms Moir: We could have gotten in touch with the parents and asked the department to come out to us, maybe during the school holidays, before the children went back, so that we could alleviate any fears that the students have.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Do you feel you have been left powerless by this?

Ms Moir: Definitely, yes, and helpless. The only way we were able to get this is we phoned Grant Woodhams and he advised us to write a letter, and that is when we wrote the letter and got that response back to clarify.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The letter that you got back, does that satisfy your concerns now?

Ms Moir: It satisfies us that we will not lose SIDE, but it still does not address the issue that we need to still look after what we have got and keep it at the standard that we are providing now. I do not think that has been addressed, to be honest.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Sorry. Can you just elaborate? What are you not happy about now?

Ms Moir: Well, we are still going to lose that senior school allocation, so we are still going to lose some funds. What that means we will not know until we know how many enrolments we have next

year. They do a face-to-face English class at the moment, which is fantastic. It keeps all the students together. We may lose that. We do not know, and we will not know until we know how much funding we will get.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: The department is saying that as many students as want to continue into years 11 and 12 will be catered for. That is not going to stop. Do you understand that that is what the department has been saying?

Ms Moir: Yes.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Therefore, it is really dependent on the number of students who stay at the school as to what will happen. So if the student numbers are not going to drop, then your SIDE allocation is not going to change.

Ms Moir: The SIDE will not, but the senior school allocation portion will, which does allow us to give that face to face. We will not be able to do face to face if we do not have that senior school allocation, because we will only be funded to supervise the children, not provide a teacher to do a lesson.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: But you cannot be certain of that, though?

Ms Moir: No, but going on what we have got now, we are going to lose something.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So you say you need someone to come here and tell you. If someone from the Department of Education were to come here and have a meeting with you and allay all these fears, then the parents and the students and everyone would be a lot happier than they are now? Is that a fair thing to say?

Ms Moir: Exactly, and we would be prepared to listen as well. We want to be able to ask questions and say this is what we want. We want what we have got to continue. It works well. That is all we are asking. We are not asking to change it. We like what we have got.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The impression I get is that part of the difficulty is that parents do not know whether they want to send their child to Gingin District High if they do not know what is going to be offered; and they do not know what they are going to be offered until you work out how many parents are going to send their children there. There was a book written by someone called *Catch-22* that pretty much sums up that situation for us!

Ms Moir: I know that situation very well!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I do not know if that is still a required text for the students to read or not!

Ms Moir: This is what is happening. I know that three families now are already looking at enrolling their children in Yanchep so that they can get into Mindarie, because they are not sure about what is going to happen. There are so many issues. When I met Liz Constable she did advise that they would also look at a junior school on the coast where we are. But nothing more has been heard from that perspective. So now we are just concentrating on the senior school. But there are a lot of other issues that we need them to look at in our whole area.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I also understand that Clarkson is going to become a TAFE college as well, so that might change.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: West Coast TAFE is having an annexe built alongside the community college.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Do you think that might change the attitude of some people and they might want to go to Clarkson?

Ms Moir: For those students who want to do apprenticeships it may, but for those who just want to study subjects, I would say no, because they would rather study with the peer groups that they have already established. They have some wonderful support groups around here. It is a very small and

closely-knit community. Yes, we have our problems, but we do not have any more than you have down town; we probably have less. All the parents know each other, which is what we like. We like that.

The CHAIR: Do you have any further comments? We have heard that part of the cohort that will probably be most affected by any changes will be those students who are more difficult to engage. What will be the potential impact on that cohort? It seems to me that they are a higher risk subset of the student community already.

Ms Moir: Yes. I do not know what happens to children when they turn 12 or 13. Everyone says it is adolescence and their hormones are running wild, but whatever it is that happens to them, some will go off the track, and others will not. From the parents' point of view, we want to keep them on a track where we know where that track will run and that it has so many stops on the way and that we are able to do that. When we have got a great support at the school, we can ring the teacher, and we know the teacher we are talking to. I have been to year 12 graduations. The kindergarten and the preprimary teachers even turn up to see these children, because they have known and watched them through their whole time here.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: On average, how many parents and other people are active participants in the Gingin District High School P&C Association?

Ms Moir: We have 19 parents that are involved, and thankfully we have email, so you do not have to go to all the meetings; we keep in constant communication via email. You have to understand that a lot of us have partners—well, I do not—who work away season on, season off. Night meetings when you are a single mum are a nightmare. But we do have 19 who are registered on our board. We had the British car day here on Sunday, and we had at least 10 mums working out there in the canteen. It was just awesome support.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: It is always the mums in the canteen!

Ms Moir: You know what it is like—wrapping the hamburgers! We have a great support network. If we have a funding project, they will all put their hands up and they will assist. There are so many businesses around here. The lettuce was donated, the carrots were donated; we only paid for the meat and the bread. So it is a fantastic support network.

The CHAIR: If members do not have any further questions, we might let you off the hook! Thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon.

Hearing concluded at 3.21 pm