

Inquiry into the Student Transport Assistance Policy framework Submission

I believe the existing policies which apply to determining transport arrangements are outdated and need to be changed. The town of Pingelly is a small rural town approximately 150kms from Perth. We have a great Primary school, numbers are currently approximately 100 students from Kindergarten to year 6. There are transport issues which affect our Primary school aged children as well as issues affecting our High School aged children.

The current policy of providing bus service to the nearest appropriate Primary school is not a good policy. A family at Pingelly Primary school had access to bus service to Pingelly Primary school from their residence, they moved into a new house which was on the same property. However, the new house was 1 km closer to Wandering Primary School (a school of approximately 9 children) so it was deemed that the children were no longer eligible to receive bus service to Pingelly. The bus service already went past their new residence to pick up other students for Pingelly primary, and the Wandering bus would have had to travel a lot further on unsealed roads crossing over the route of the Pingelly bus – how ridiculous.

Another family have been considered complimentary on their service because they are closer to Yealering Primary School (again a small school of approximately 7 children). School bus services say this is closer and therefore the appropriate school – many letters have been written arguing the “appropriateness” of sending these children to a school and town of which they do not associate with at all. After school activities including sport should be taken into account – Yealering do not have any sporting teams, so for the children to participate they could potentially travel from Yealering to Pingelly after school which limits the time available to participate. These parents are running very busy farm businesses as well as being actively involved in the Pingelly community in volunteer roles and need to be supported in their choice of appropriate school. Historically, the school bus from Pingelly has picked up children from further than where this family live (again closer to Yealering). It seems to be budget cuts and ridiculous policy decided by a map that has bought about these changes.

This affects the entire community. If students are not attending our primary school, then we lose them and their families involvement in the community. It affects businesses in our town, sporting groups and community groups.

The High school aged students in Pingelly have been told that Brookton District High School is the closest and therefore most appropriate high school. Pingelly District High School closed in 2005, since then students have generally had access to a bus running from Pingelly to Narrogin High School. Brookton is a small high school which caters for years 7-10, which means that students then need to transfer to Narrogin High School for years 11-12. Most parents in Pingelly have chosen Narrogin as the most appropriate school as it continues to year 12 thereby eliminating the need to change schools at a critical time in their child's schooling, also reducing the need for two different uniforms. There have been students who have not had a seat on the bus running to Narrogin as the bus is full, leading to parents having to drive their child the 50km twice a day (200km total). The policy is detrimental to keeping students in school.

With current policy it is possible that a family with three school aged children may have their children at three different schools. The two high schools are also in opposite directions from Pingelly. How is this a good or appropriate option for any family?

The bus from Pingelly to Narrogin also caters for Primary school children whose parents have deemed St Matthews Catholic School in Narrogin as the most appropriate school for their child. Therefore, primary school aged children are granted a seat over high school students in years 7-10. The policy regarding this need to be changed as it appears that if you can afford to pay for private schooling then your child has a higher priority and the parent's choice of appropriate school is unquestioned.