

I present this submission as past School Council, then School Board Chair & past teacher at Kondinin Primary School, but most importantly as a long term resident of the Kondinin community.

Over a number of years, the student population at our Kondinin Primary School has diminished and is just over 20. One factor in the decrease in our school, and in fact many Wheatbelt schools, can be attributed to the increased size and mechanisation of farming, continuous cropping rather than a combination of cropping and stock, and a reliance on seasonal (and often overseas with no families) staff rather than permanent employees. This, however, is not the main factor in our decline in numbers. We have lost large numbers of students to two neighbouring towns – Kulin and Narembeen. The main factor in this loss of numbers is clearly the school bus issue.

We used to be served by two buses bringing farm students to our school. This dropped to one for many years & ultimately ceased operation at the end of 2013. The bus contractor got a contract for a Narembeen bus run in 2014 with the same small bus she had used for Kondinin. Apart from the children near to Narembeen she picked up a primary school child from Bendering (14 kms from Kondinin, 36 kms from Narembeen) & high school students from farms midway between Kondinin & Narembeen. The [REDACTED] family now has 3 children on the bus. When asked for an explanation regarding the pickup of these students & them not going to their “nearest appropriate school” we were told it was a “grandfathered site”. The decision to allow this family access to the Narembeen bus for no obvious reason set in motion a chain of events that has directly resulted in a severe leakage of students. Local Kondinin town students, both primary & secondary, started to catch this bus to Narembeen as complimentary students. The contractor then got a much bigger bus, apparently due to projected numbers & even though she is our Kondinin School gardener is happy to take students out of our town. (Conflict of interest?) To me, this is definitely a “Narembeen bus” which should not be collecting students until a mid-point. For primary students this would be mid-way between Narembeen & Kondinin & for secondary students, mid-way between Kulin & Narembeen. As we lose students to both Narembeen & Kulin we would like to see the SBS policy on proximity to the school applied.

Apart from the fact that the loss of all of these students (and the parental involvement that would be generated) is detrimental to our excellent school, the impact on our town and community is enormous. Facilities provided by our Shire such as the swimming pool and other excellent sporting facilities are under-utilised, businesses within the town are not supported adequately as people shop out of town when there for school related events, and we now lack the “critical mass” for many functions. The presence of a flourishing school is seen as being vital to the survival of our town, and it is amazing to consider that Education Department and School Bus Services’ actions (or inactions) have been the catalyst in the evolution of this problem. Correspondence and meetings with SBS in relation to student leakage to these two towns have proven to lead nowhere as they are apparently working to Education Department protocols. A growth in our school population would create a much more positive atmosphere within our community. Our community appreciates and values education, and knows that our small school is still delivering this exceedingly well, and is

presenting many wonderful opportunities for the students. We would appreciate stronger leadership and action to help us do even better.

Quite specifically we need “bus kids” back into our school. Greater diversity in the student population & their supporting families is crucial to our school’s future. Our current parental/carer mix, with a few exceptions & without judgment or criticism, does not provide the involvement & support necessary for a school to thrive. Typically farming families (or other self-employed business families) are the ones who become involved in committees & volunteering at school. While our school encourages involvement, it is assumed that the lower socio-economic tier of our school does not feel comfortable in this role. The ramifications of not getting farming students back into our school is seen as a major impediment to again being the “school of choice” in the area.

The SBS & Operational Guidelines manual states “The Student Transport Assistance Policy will be applied in a manner that is reasonable, equitable & aims to meet the needs of individual communities.” Please look over the Darling Scarp & see the impact that your failure to see “the big picture” has in rural communities.