

To: The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Submission re: Petition 051 – Point Peron Camp School

The decision to close Point Peron Camp School and five of the other six has been made in haste and without adequate consultation. Closing them will not significantly improve the budget bottom line for either the Education Department, or the Government as a whole, but will significantly impact government schools ability to provide quality, affordable educational experiences for their students.



The Importance of affordable school camps for disadvantaged families

The value of taking students to camp and on excursions has been known for decades in educational circles. There have been visionaries over the years in the Education Department who knew this and were able to develop the network of camp schools around the state to what it is now, with many regional centres well catered for.

Point Peron has existed the longest and is the largest, its location and proximity to the metro area making it very popular. Their Annual Report acknowledges 4603 students being hosted at the Camp School in 2017, with 5132 being booked in for 2018. 86% of residents were from DET schools and 90% of day use were DET schools. 30 groups a year are turned away. Government Camp Schools were set up and managed by qualified teachers to meet the needs of government schools regardless of their ability to pay or their geographic location. As such a student attending Pemberton Camp School pays the same as one attending the Kimberley Camp School in Broome. The cost differential is in travel, hence part of the popularity of Point Peron. At \$72.50 per day for accommodation, catering and three programs the Education Department camps are the cheapest (the same program at a DSR camp is \$112 a day) but even then many schools implement payment plans for parents to enable them to send their children to camp. Other government providers and private operators would not be able to provide for the disadvantaged in the same way. The net cost to the government of Point Peron is approximately \$300,000 per year. To change this would be a paradigm shift from providing a quality government service to being a revenue generating facility and thus further disadvantaging poor families. The reason given for the exclusion of the Kimberley Camp School from closure consideration was that it provides for disadvantaged students – I contend, strongly, they all do.

Camp School Residential Facilities provide unique opportunities for growth and social development

Taking students on camp is one of the most demanding, exhausting and responsible things a teacher can choose to do and it comes with no extra time or pay. So why do so many do it? The answers are many but mostly it's about teachers knowing how valuable these experiences are for mental, emotional and social development of students while undertaking school curriculum related activities but in an experiential environment. In the 1970's and 80's experiential education, outdoor education and adventure playgrounds were catch cries of education. The wheel has turned again and the need for these types of educational experiences is once again to the fore – primarily due to the rise and attraction of technology and loss of opportunities for students to experience the outdoors. We have seven fantastic facilities well equipped to support government schools in their desire to enhance the education they are providing for their students. The quality of the experience provided at the Camp Schools is closely aligned to the experience and expertise of the educational leader who runs the facility. The Camp School Managers work closely with each incoming school, guiding the teacher through the pre camp program developmental phases, ensuring a tailor made quality program achieves the school's objectives.

It is unthinkable that when they are needed the most six of the seven government camp schools will close or be removed I from the Education Department.

There are no other comparative facilities or services to replace the camp school experience

The fact there are many residential camp facilities in WA reinforces the value of the benefits of a residential camp experience for young people. Many are owned and operated by church groups, enabling them to run, primarily, holiday camps for their clientele to reinforce their value systems. The camps are then available for booking by other groups during term time. Many government schools access them, mostly by necessity due to the unavailability of government camp schools. The Department of Sport and Recreation operate five themselves, but only one in the regions, at Quaranup in Albany. They cite their key objective is promoting participation in physical activities, with all the attached benefits of doing so.

No other camp schools exist specifically to work with schools on the student's educational journey and achievement, other than the exclusive private schools, a number of whom run and own their own facilities. The key difference with the government camp schools to all the others is that, until recently, all were run by qualified, competent teachers who were able to value add to the experience of students attending their facility, in the context of their individual schools. These leaders are now classified as public servants, thereby opening the position to others, including re-deployees from other government departments. The fact that this has been done in the case of Kalgoorlie only reinforces the need to keep the schools with the Education Department and run by qualified teachers – regardless of departmental classification.

The other key difference is cost. The camp schools, like all schools are subsidised by the government in order for equity of access by all students, regardless of economic status and location. Unlike mainstream schools the camps schools do generate an income and the net cost to the department is negligible for the number of students benefiting. With proper support many of the camp schools believe they could be more cost efficient while maintaining their current accessibility. Alternatives to closing or outsourcing have not been explored by the education department in terms of rationalising staff and costs, seeking corporate sponsorship, changing the way the camp schools are managed or where they sit within the Department for the better utilisation of their services.

Unfortunately the Education Department didn't give them this opportunity in its quick decision to firstly close and now putting out to tender the lease and management of six of the seven camp schools.

The negative economic impact on the local area

The six camp schools targeted for closure are based at Dampier, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Pemberton, Bridgetown and Rockingham. All employ local people to provide the support services at each location, e.g. cleaning, gardening and office management. All access local providers for catering. A number also employ local people for additional specialised instruction. Many access local tourism services for day excursions. The economic impact of closure would vary for each location but would be significant.

In the case of Point Peron, with such a large clientele and therefore the largest staff the impact would be the greatest. In an area that struggles economically the impact is further exacerbated.

Time is Running Out

It's very important and with some urgency an inquiry be undertaken to investigate the consequences of government policy on the operation of government camp schools before they are outsourced and the benefits, so highly valued by principals and teachers is lost. The tragedy will be low socio economic government students will be further disadvantaged by their inability to afford equitable education opportunities.

This complaint has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

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