



17 May 2018

Hon Tjorn Sibma MLC
Member for North Metropolitan Region

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005

Dear Hon Matthew Swinbourn

Petition No. 061 – Landsdale Farm School

Thank you for your letter of 10 May 2018 inviting a written submission regarding the issues raised in Petition No. 061.

Please find attached a submission in support Petition No. 061 – Landsdale Farm School.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tjorn Sibma'.

Hon. Tjorn Sibma MLC
Member for the North Metropolitan Region
Shadow Minister for Government Accountability; Community Services; Youth;
Seniors & Ageing; Volunteers; Veterans Issues

SUBMISSION: PETITION 061 – Landsdale Farm School

This submission is in support of Petition 061 – Landsdale Farm School which was tabled in the Legislative Council by myself on 9 May 2018. I confirm I have not referred this matter to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

In December of 2017 while children, parents and teachers were preparing for the upcoming summer holiday, the Hon Sue Ellery, Minister for Education announced a raft of cuts to the education budget that left many uncertain about the future, and with a considerable degree of anxiety that would have soured Christmas and New Year celebrations.

Following these announcements there was an unprecedented backlash in the community. Many in the metropolitan area found something inherently distasteful about axing iconic programs such as Schools of the Air or cutting the talent and gifted program in our schools. The Government made these decisions in haste, along with others in the education portfolio, but thankfully reversed them in response to the strong concerns voiced by the community. There remain however, buried amongst these cuts other hasty and discriminatory decisions that have not been so well publicised.

There has of course been a march on Parliament by the Country Women's Association to protest the closure of Moora Residential College and the transfer of school camps to private organisations. This is the first time in its 94 year history that the Country Women's Association has been compelled to take such drastic action, which in itself says something about the wisdom of the decisions being made by the McGowan Government. And while I agree that the decision on Moora, just like Schools of the Air was hasty and ill advised, there is an issue closer to home that has received little attention.

Lost among the media and community scrutiny of the education cuts announced by the Minister for Education, was the withdrawal of funding to the Landsdale Farm School. A school which is a cherished asset in the local community and one that is used by, amongst others, children with disabilities. The needs of those using this unique school are ignored for the sake of saving what amounts to a pittance in the overall education budget.

The argument offered by the Government is that the vast majority of people who visit the school are adults and that it is mainly on weekends. This is a poor justification for what the Minister for Education rightly acknowledged in her comments in Parliament on 10 May 2018 was 'a valued community asset'.

This justification is hollow when one examines the Landsdale Farm School Annual Report for 2017 which confirms that the school does run weekend and after hour's activities, but this is largely to raise funds to assist with the overall operations of the school. However, focusing on the number of adults and children using the school, as the Minister would like to do, is also very interesting.

Of the 25,941 users of the school during school hours, 5,640 or 22% were students with more than half of these students with a disability. That leaves 20,301 other visitors – a large number indeed – but what the Minister has not revealed is that 5,594 of these were teachers, support staff, Education Assistants, TAFE students, and disability groups that use the school for professional development, accompany students to the school and or engage with the animals at the school for the therapeutic and rewarding experiences they offer. That leaves 14,707 other visitors, of which 26 are identified as being Aged, and it is impossible to determine what ages the remaining visitors are. They may be adults, but more than likely there will be a large number of children amongst this remaining total.

If you look at the weekend visitations of 32,668 visitors per annum, the task of working out ages and purpose of visits is a little more difficult because there is no age breakdown of the numbers. However, it is a reasonable assumption that the 14,560 visitors for out of school clubs, birthday parties and school holiday visitors are predominantly children. It would also be safe to assume that a significant number of the remaining 17,784 visitors (once the 324 visits by the Aged are removed) are also children.

As the analysis above shows the argument put forward by the Minister and the Department of Education that it is inappropriate to fund the school because the majority of the users are adults is very weak. The real reason this school is not being funded is because it does not neatly fit the Minister or the Department's idea of what a school should be. Despite the fact that the Landsdale Farm School is making a meaningful difference to the lives of children with a disability, children more broadly, and those who support them, is lost in the blind ideology being followed by the Government.

The Government funding needed to keep this school functioning in the same way for the 60,000 West Australians who currently use it is less than the funding given to three or four of the hundreds of projects funded under the McGowan Government's Local Projects Local Jobs grants program. While \$150,000 has been found to reline a swimming pool, \$250,000 has been given to a couple of tennis club to upgrade their facilities, \$100,000 has been given to a Australian Arab Association for a coffee van, and \$250,000 has been used to upgrade lighting for a soccer club – a few hundred thousand dollars cannot be found to keep Landsdale Farm School operating under a government structure. Staff will need to be redeployed, a cost in itself, but most importantly those who use the school will be disadvantaged.

The McGowan Government has disregarded the needs of children with disabilities and others who use this school, and instead put the equipment needs of tennis, football and soccer clubs first.

On 30 April I attended Landsdale Farm School to receive a petition of over 5,995 signatures protesting this unfair budget cut by the McGowan Government. While the cuts made to schools of the air, talented and gifted programs and Moora College have gained much public attention and support (forcing the Government to back down on some of its ill-considered cuts), the decision to cease funding of Landsdale Farm School has been less prominent. This important and iconic facility serves the community beyond Landsdale and is used by a great many children with disability, and adults who support these children. The decision of the McGowan Government to cut its support for this school is simply wrong and seeks to punish these and other people.

The Landsdale Farm School should be allowed to continue to operate in its current form to best serve the needs of those who use this facility, children with a disability, teachers, families and the local community. The decision to cease Government funding has been made in haste, does not meet the needs of the community and is ill conceived in an environment where taxpayer's money is being squandered on a raft of other projects that do not stack up against the needs of this school.



Hon Tjorn Sibma MLC
Member for North Metropolitan Region