



Hon Peter Collier MLC
Minister for Education; Aboriginal Affairs; Electoral Affairs
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Your Ref: 009
Our Ref: 34-27547

Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr O'Brien

Thank you for your letter dated 13 August 2013 regarding *Petition No 9 – Reverse the Decision to Send Year Seven Children to High School*.

The following information is relevant to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs' preliminary inquires into the matters raised in the Petition.

The State Government announced in 2011 that Year 7 public school students will move to secondary settings in 2015, giving these students access to specialist subject teaching and facilities needed for the new Australian Curriculum. The new curriculum has more in-depth content in each subject area, and places higher expectations upon students than the current Western Australian curriculum.

The concept of moving Year 7 students to secondary settings is not new. Prior to the State Government's announcement in 2011, the former Minister for Education visited many country schools and discussed the initiative with many parents.

The move of Year 7 students into secondary settings will bring Western Australia's public schools in line with the majority of other Australian States and Territories and most private schools in this State. More than 90% of all Year 7 students will be located in secondary schools across Australia from 2015. Queensland has a similar geographical profile to Western Australia, and is transitioning Year 7 students into secondary schools in both its public and private school systems in 2015. Western Australia currently has nine public secondary schools enrolling Year 7 students (Atwell College, Ballajura Community College, Dalyellup College, Eaton Community College, Ellenbrook Secondary College, Gilmore College, Kinross College, Mount Barker Community College and Roleystone Community College) and 55 district high schools. In addition, the majority of Catholic and independent schools have Year 7 students in secondary settings.

Implementation from 2015 means that families can plan for their children's futures and schools can plan for the provision of appropriate structures that will support the transition of these students. Public schools are already working with their students, parents and the local community to prepare for the move. Principals have a range of support packages relating to the new curriculum, student services and student transition. Schools are talking with parents to ensure their children move smoothly into secondary school. Many primary students are being provided with an opportunity to visit their local secondary schools as part of the transition process.

Attachment 1 of the Petition is an extract from page 10 of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's 'Curriculum Design Paper', Version 3.1, Section 4.3, Structural Matters and proposes that the Year 7 curriculum could be taught in a range of settings. After careful consideration, the State Government decided to place Year 7 students in secondary school settings noting that some of the content in the current Western Australian Syllabus for Year 8 will be taught in Year 7 in the Australian Curriculum from 2015. Western Australian public school students should have access to the specialist teachers and facilities available in secondary settings to increase all students' educational opportunities.

Attachment 2 of the Petition refers to a limited study undertaken in 2007 entitled *The Future Placement of Year 7 students in Western Australian Public Schools: A Study*. This study is dated and, since it was undertaken, a number of changes have occurred, including:

- the introduction of a new Australian Curriculum;
- the Catholic Education Office and many independent schools placing Year 7 students in secondary settings;
- a need for greater consistency of approach across the public education system;
- the placement of Year 7 students in secondary settings in other jurisdictions; and
- the age of Year 7 students. In 2015, the youngest child will be 11½ years of age and the oldest child will be 12½ years of age when they commence secondary school as a Year 7 student. Approximately half of these students will celebrate their 13th birthday during this year of secondary school.

The State Government recognises some families in small country areas may experience greater challenges in preparing for their children to transition into secondary school for Year 7. In recognition of the challenge for these families, the Government has extended the period for transition to 2017 for parents to plan for their child's educational future.

On a case-by-case basis, principals at some small country schools can offer families special consideration to help them to be able to plan the most suitable timing and arrangements for the education of their children. This special consideration is for children to remain in primary school for Year 7, and is available to families until the end of 2017.

Each decision about a student to remain in primary school is to be made based on the individual family's circumstances. Whole-of-school exemptions cannot be made. Parents with children enrolled in schools in or near regional towns and centres that have access to secondary schools will not have the option for this special consideration.

There are eight residential colleges located in country Western Australia – Albany, Broome, Esperance, Geraldton, Merredin, Moora, Narrogin and Northam. These colleges offer many country children the option of staying close to home and accessing a high-quality education at the local secondary school.

The 2013 boarding fee is \$11,550 per student a year and families, depending on individual circumstances, may be eligible for Commonwealth and State Government allowances. The Country High School Hostels Authority continues to monitor accommodation requirements across all residential colleges to ensure accommodation for Year 7 students in 2015.

The State Government is addressing the expected shortage of secondary teachers through an allocation of \$24.42 million over three years for the retraining of approximately 525 teachers. Teachers in both rural and metropolitan primary schools have been invited to participate in this retraining program. Over 20,000 letters were mailed to current permanent and fixed-term teachers across all sectors, inviting them to consider expressing an interest.

The 'Switch' retraining program supports primary teachers to move into secondary teaching, and secondary teachers to expand the range of subjects they are qualified to teach. The funding covers course costs and teacher relief for study commitments. Training providers cater for the needs of regional teachers through online resources, and funds associated with travel and accommodation if required for practicums. As at 15 August 2013, the Department had received 401 expressions of interest.

I hope this information is of assistance.

Kind regards



Hon Peter Collier MLC
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

09 SEP 2013