



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

Our Ref: 34-32449

Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
18-32 Parliament Place
WEST PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr O'Brien

PETITION NO 21 – FUNDING AND STAFF CUTS TO STATE SCHOOLS

I refer to your letter dated 10 April 2014 with respect to the request for a response to matters raised following the tabling of the above petition in Parliament.

Background

Expenditure on public education has increased from \$2.8 billion in 2007-08 to an estimated \$4.6 billion in 2014-15. This is an increase in annual spending of almost \$1.8 billion or 61%. The 2014-15 Budget provides an additional \$812 million over four years to accommodate anticipated growth in student numbers. The State Government has also delivered on its commitment to make Western Australian teachers the highest paid in the nation. Teachers' salaries have increased by between 27.85% and 34.75% since 2008.

Over the next few years, increased demand for services and rising costs mean it is vital that every available resource is used to best effect. A review conducted by The University of Melbourne concluded that the current mechanism for distributing and allocating resources to schools is out-dated, unnecessarily complex and could not cope with any more adaptations

It is in this context that the Department of Education will be introducing a new student-centred model in 2015 that will allocate funding on a child by child basis according to individual student needs, rather than by school type or programs. As we transition to the new funding model, changes to school resourcing have been implemented in 2014.

It is acknowledged that the changes to school resourcing allocations in 2014 may have presented challenges for some schools. However, our schools are well resourced and will continue to be well resourced. Based on the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2014*, WA public schools have the highest per student funding of any State in Australia on average.

Impact on school programs and programs for students with special needs

There has been no change to the provision of Special Needs Education Assistants for students with a disability as a result of changes to education resourcing this year. The allocation of Special Needs Education Assistants through the *Schools Plus* program has continued for 2014 as it has in the past. All students with a genuine need for a Special Needs Education Assistant continue to have access to that support.

Some schools with students with disability are eligible for additional teacher full-time equivalent (FTE). Prior to 2014, this teacher FTE was determined by the year level of the student and their degree of educational need. From 2014, the allocation of this FTE has been determined by educational need. There is no reduction in teacher FTE provided for students with disability in 2014 compared to 2013. In fact, due to student enrolment growth, an additional 48 teacher FTE has been provided for schools with students with disability this year. This change was an important step in the transition to the student centred funding model in 2015.

With respect to funding for support programs, as you may be aware, the School Support Program Resource Allocation (SSPRA), is supplementary funding provided to schools and represents a small component of total school resourcing. The majority of SSPRA funding has still been provided to schools and it is the responsibility of the principal to determine how best to allocate the SSPRA funding within the local school context to deliver maximum benefit for students.

In 2015, the Student-Centred Funding Model will redistribute the same level of funding to schools that would have been available under existing allocative mechanisms. Funding previously allocated through SSPRA, for example, will be redistributed through the model.

Loss of teacher and education assistant resources

The Government made a commitment to maintain 2013 teacher FTE numbers (approximately 20,900 FTE on average) in 2014. There were an additional 7,464 students enrolled in public schools in Semester 1, 2014 compared to Semester 1 last year. This has resulted in a small increase in average class sizes across the system. Recent data collected for Term 1 2014 has demonstrated that the average class size across WA public schools is currently below those levels prescribed by the *School Education Act Employees (Teachers & Administrators) General Agreement 2011*. Public schools are, and will continue to be, resourced in a way which ensures prescribed class sizes are not exceeded.

The 2014-15 Budget provides for the number of full-time equivalent teachers to increase by an estimated 550 FTE in 2015. An additional \$10 million has also been provided to the Department to assist schools transition to the new student centred funding model in 2015.

In relation to Education Assistants, the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2014* indicates that both WA public primary schools and secondary schools have fewer students per non-teaching school staff than any State in Australia, and are well below the Australian average. This is due in large part to the number of Education Assistants (EAs) in WA public schools. While there will be a reduction of approximately 350 FTE EA positions over time, there will still be in excess of 7,000 FTE EAs in our schools in 2014.

The Department of Education has introduced a new funding model for the allocation of mainstream education assistants in Kindergarten to Year 2, with funding provided on a per student basis rather than based on class sizes and types. While there will be fewer overall education assistant positions, the change has addressed a previous anomaly whereby classes of 15 students received an education assistant, while classes of 14 did not.

The Department has also introduced a more effective system to support students with anaphylaxis. This is through the provision of specific funding for the purchase of emergency adrenaline auto-injector pens and online training materials to ensure all staff understand anaphylaxis and can respond in the event of an emergency. This approach is supported by the President, Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia.

The previous allocation of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AEIOs) was based on an out-dated formula that provided a different level of funding depending on the year level of the student. This has been changed to a fairer model so that Aboriginal students receive the same level of support regardless of their year level.

It is also important to note that all Remote Community Schools have continued to receive a minimum allocation of 1.0 AIEO FTE in 2014, as per the 2013 arrangements. Eligible schools have also continued to access other funding in 2014, including the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme, which provides supplementary tutorial assistance to Aboriginal Students to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Long Service Levy

As part of Government measures to ensure more effective control over public sector expenditure, all agencies are required to take steps to reduce levels of leave liability.

The vast majority of outstanding leave is attributable to school-based staff with accrued entitlements of long service leave. The Department has put in place a series of actions to reduce liability, including ensuring that leave is more closely managed in line with industrial instruments and requiring all staff with outstanding accrued entitlements to take their leave. In some cases, staff accessing leave will not be replaced. As schools cannot leave positions unfilled, the levy was introduced for 2014 to partially offset staff replacement costs.

The levy is calculated at \$600 per teaching staff member FTE and \$400 per school support staff member FTE allocated at the February census. For 2014, the levy will be debited against school salary pools in March (66%) and July (33%). The total levy for the 2014 school year is \$15 million. Schools may need to adjust programs and school expenditure to meet this levy.

Independent Public School Business Plans and Delivery and Performance Agreements

Independent Public Schools are resourced using the same resource allocation mechanism as all public schools. Independent Public School principals are aware of this and that their one line budget is subject to change annually. School business plans are therefore reviewed by schools annually as part of the budget process. I do not anticipate that any Independent Public School will be able unable to meet the obligations of their Business Plan or Performance Agreement as a result of the changes to school funding.

Displaced teachers transferred to special needs schools without adequate training/qualifications

Teachers who have been identified as surplus to requirements at an individual school are redeployed to other schools. Teachers are only redeployed to positions in which they are qualified. Teachers who do not have qualifications in special needs are not redeployed to special needs schools.

Increased funding spent on new schools rather than existing schools

A separate capital works allocation is provided in the budget for the building of new public schools to ensure all WA children have access to a local school. The State Government has invested heavily in building works, with 33 new schools and an estimated 799 classrooms built since 2008. The Government is investing \$1.2 billion over the next four years to deliver new and enhanced school infrastructure across the State, including the construction of new primary and secondary schools, additions and improvements to existing schools, the completion of 16 Child and Parent Centres and the completion of the air-cooling program.

The allocation of teaching and school support staff for new schools is provided on a per student basis. Students enrolled in new schools may have moved from existing schools and their allocation of teacher and school support staff FTE has moved with them. For example, students who attend Treendale Primary School in 2014 may have been enrolled at Australind Primary School in 2013. For 2014, their respective resource allocation is provided to Treendale Primary School instead of Australind Primary School, where they are no longer attending.

I am confident that the State Government, the Department of Education, our principals and our teachers will work together to build a more efficient and even stronger education system.

I hope this information is of assistance.

Kind regards



Hon Peter Collier MLC
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

- 8 MAY 2014