



PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS REPORT

Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Holder, March 2024

FAIRBRIDGE RUN CAMP SCHOOLS

At the 2023 State Conference two motions were presented regarding the state of disrepair and the lack of services offered at Fairbridge run camp schools. Of particular concern is the Goldfields Camp School in Kalgoorlie.

Following the 2023 State Conference letters were written to Minister for Education Hon. Dr Tony Buti, Director General Lisa Rodgers and Fairbridge CEO Mirina Muir outlining how vital the Goldfields Camp School is to the Kalgoorlie School of the Air (KaSOTA) students and their families.

Ms. Muir responded in what I feel was quite a flippant manner.

“Many thanks for your letter. The issues you have raised are inconsistent with the feedback from the Principal of SOTA. As for the pricing structure – the Department of Education consumed all costs when they ran the Goldfields facility.”

With COVID and the increased commentary on climate change schools do not attend the facility as learning about mining history or operations is not a focus of classroom programs. SOTA is the only school that uses the facility on a regular basis.

Fairbridge alone cannot keep the Goldfields facility operating at the same levels as the Department of Education did back in 2018 for the exclusive use of SOTA.

Fairbridge is very supportive of the equity issues that exist with students in SOTA. Fairbridge is actively working with the Department of Education regarding camp facility operations.”

The points Ms Muir raised in her response are definitely **not** inconsistent with that of the KaSOTA Principal who has gone above and beyond to try and make conditions workable when holding camps at the Goldfields Camp School; often visiting the site several times before a camp to ensure cleanliness and that bedrooms have beds and curtains.

Commenting that schools do not want to visit Kalgoorlie due to the impact of mining on climate change is not true. If schools are not coming to Kalgoorlie, maybe it is the poorly run facilities and exorbitant cost that is stopping them. Kalgoorlie has so much to offer and a camp in Kalgoorlie can cover a lot of curriculum areas and provide many engaging and enjoyable experiences for our children.

Pricing continues to be an issue at the Goldfields Camp School and we thank the Department of Education for subsidising camp costs to make them accessible.

We thank Minister Buti for engaging in conversation with us about the camp schools’ issue throughout the year; it appears at this stage there is no other provider able to operate these facilities. At some point, the Minister for Education and the Department of Education must realise that education comes at a cost, and for our School of the Air students, providing a well-run and resourced camp school is money well spent.

VACSWIM VENUE CANCELLATIONS

In early June 2023, it was announced by the Department of Education that three venues would not be hosting VacSwim in the upcoming season due to safety concerns. These venues were Cosy Corner, Cape Riche and



Starvation Bay. Reasons included the timing of an ambulance if there was an emergency, lack of sealed roads, poor phone service and vehicles on beaches. Locals reported these were not issues as they could be easily overcome.

It was disappointing that communities were not consulted before these cancellations were made. These cancellations would mean some families may have had to travel a 180km round trip to access VacSwim lessons.

We were very thankful for the intervention by the Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti and the calling for an independent review of the Department's decision. Late last year it was announced that it would be up to the local councils to address safety concerns and decide whether VacSwim should continue at the locations. We believe that all three locations went ahead with VacSwim.

VULNERABILITY OF SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

Late in Term 2, 2023, we became aware from ICPA Lakes District members of drastically reduced numbers at Gairdner Primary School. Gairdner Primary School was projected to have approximately 22 students in 2023. At the start of Semester 2, 2023, no students were attending the school.

Families had concerns about the school and this had led them to attend surrounding schools. Several people in the community had raised concerns with the Department of Education, but response and action had been unreasonably slow. We need to ensure there are practices in place for parents' concerns to be heard and addressed to ensure that this does not happen again.

This circumstance highlights the vulnerability of our small schools and how important it is to listen to the community.

ICPA (WA) reiterated the concerns of the community to the Director General and I am pleased to report that a new Principal was appointed with the task of rebuilding the school.

Encouragingly, at the commencement of the 2024 school year, there were 9 students enrolled at Gairdner Primary School.

TEACHER SHORTAGES

It goes without saying that a consistent teacher of high quality is what our children need in the classroom. So many stories have been shared of small schools being unable to staff their classrooms, leading to some classes having up to six different classroom teachers in one semester.

There is a teacher shortage across Australia. Rural and remote areas are missing out now as schools try and recruit teachers to the more isolated parts of Western Australia. It used to be that these teacher shortages were 'remote' areas, but we have seen in 2023 that there were many places in the Wheatbelt and Great Southern as well.

The Cook Government has allocated \$15.49 million to assist more schools in regional and remote areas in 2024 with the recruitment and retention of staff.

Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti said *"the successful temporary Regional Attraction and Retention Incentive package initially rolled out in 2023 will now be applied to more schools in 2024. An additional 18 schools would be included, taking the total to 66 schools to benefit from the initiative"*.

The incentive supports schools to attract, recruit and retain teachers and school administrators to schools delivering secondary education in regional areas, by providing additional financial incentives.

Eligible staff members will receive between \$5,000 and \$17,000 for teachers and school administrators working in rural and remote public schools for the 2024 school year.



The incentive will be paid in two instalments. The first will be paid at the start of the 2024 school year, or when staff commence at the school if it is later in the year. The remaining balance will be paid to staff remaining at the school at the end of the 2024 school year.

In 2023, the temporary Regional Attraction and Retention Incentive was allocated to 48 regional and remote schools. These schools saw a significant reduction in teacher resignations by up to 75 per cent.

On 18th January 2024, Minister Buti welcomed 103 experienced teachers from around the world to teach in Western Australia. The Department of Education recruits from overseas only when there is no teacher in Australia to fill the role, with the vast majority heading to the regions.

I believe motions are being presented at the State Conference relating to teacher attraction and retention and we look forward to pursuing this area in 2024.

GOVERNMENT REGIONAL OFFICER HOUSING PROGRAM (GROH)

The GROH program provides housing for teachers in regional and remote areas and is key in attracting and retaining staff.

Early in Term 3, 2023, we were contacted by members in the Munglinup area after the cancellation of a planned GROH build.

After four years of discussions and action from the local community, the Munglinup Community Group was notified by Sean Wilson, Principal Consultant, Housing and Transport, in July 2019 that the Department of Communities' GROH program would provide the town with an additional four-bedroom house, suitable for a family or shared accommodation.

I have a very detailed timeline of phone calls and written correspondence between the Munglinup Community Group and the Department of Communities over the ensuing four years detailing many delays that resulted in Andrew Sutton, GROH Project Manager, suddenly advising that *"GROH regularly reviews its construction projects to ensure they are aligned to best meet government service delivery needs in regional and remote WA. As a result of this review, a decision has been made to no longer progress the delivery of additional housing in Munglinup"*.

Without suitable (or any) housing for teaching staff and given the nationwide shortage of teachers, it will be almost impossible to attract and retain a teacher in this town.

In October 2023, we met with Minister Buti and a representative from the Minister for Housing John Carey's office to discuss the situation. The result was that although they understood, the money was allocated elsewhere due to higher need. This was very disappointing and we will continue the discussion in 2024.

I have heard several stories from other areas of teachers being appointed to schools and accommodation not being available. In one instance a teacher was put in motel accommodation in a neighbouring town for an extended period of time. In another, a teacher in Esperance was moved out of her GROH accommodation as a family had been allocated there and was put in a small holiday chalet which meant her pet dog had to be sent to her family in Perth. These are not the conditions that attract and retain staff.

MANJIMUP SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN-HOUSE GP

Manjimup Senior High School students will have access to a General Practitioner on-site during school hours as part of an innovative trial starting this year. Many students currently commute up to 90 minutes to attend school, which significantly impacts their ability to access youth-focused GP appointments before and after school. By increasing accessibility to healthcare with an on-site GP, the healthcare needs of students will be addressed and their time in the classroom will not be impacted.



DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS CURRICULUM SUPPORT

On Friday 15th September 2023, Minister Buti announced:

“That the District High School Curriculum Support initiative is to continue, with \$5 million in funding being allocated for the same schools on an annual basis.

This funding builds on the initial allocation of \$9.3 million in additional funding over the last two years that was negotiated through workplace bargaining to strengthen regional education in District High Schools with students enrolled in Years 7 to 12.

This funding will be distributed through a Targeted Initiative each year to eligible District High Schools. In 2024, these schools with:

- 30 or more students in secondary years will receive \$105,705
- 29 or fewer students enrolled in these year groups will receive \$63,423.

The annual amounts will be indexed in future years.

This funding will provide the freedom to hire additional staff and give existing staff opportunities to upskill through professional development or the chance to learn from expert teachers. It may also be used to develop curriculum materials, secure support through the School of Isolated and District Education and help provide the best education to students in multi-age classes.”

WA EDUCATION AWARDS

This was the first year ICPA (WA) has been invited to attend the Education Awards and I was very pleased to represent our organisation at the awards on 4th December 2023 (at 6.30am) in the Crown Ballroom. Ninety-seven nominations were received across the five categories. The four finalists in each category were presented at the awards ceremony with regional and remote WA being well represented including Wananami Remote Community School, Dawul Remote Community School, Narembeen District High School, Geraldton Primary School, Manea College and Western Australia College of Agriculture - Cunderdin.

It was wonderful to see the Bob Hawke College orchestra perform along with the Fremantle College band ‘Dive Knife’, but the highlight for me was our Rangeland Kids. Though they were not performing, the 2023 Rangeland NRM/School of the Air Photography Competition held a prime position as the only display in the foyer and it was of incredible quality.

CHANGES TO REGIONAL SCHOOL BUS ELIGIBILITY

On 16th November 2023, Minister for Transport, Hon. Rita Saffioti and Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti announced the following improvements in response to recommendations from the Bus Fair Report:

- Allowing students to attend either their nearest district or senior high school, rather than just their closest school;
- More flexibility for social and community factors to be considered in an application for transport assistance; and
- Allowing eligible students to receive transport assistance to travel to a regional town to attend their selected school.

SCHOOL FUNDING FOR STUDENTS TO FOSTER CREATIVE LEARNING SKILLS

A total of over \$600,000 in grants from the Creativity in Schools program have been handed out to over 16 projects. I look forward to seeing the outcome of the following project:

Carnarvon School of the Air - Creating Music Magic - \$54,319. A collaboration between Carnarvon School of the Air and Creativity artists to engage students in storytelling using media and music during the 2024 school



year. Students will write a song and create a video in a collaborative approach that will utilise creative pedagogy across curriculum areas.

SSTUWA FACING THE FACTS REPORT

In November 2023 the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) ***Facing the Facts: A Review of Public Education*** was released. The SSTUWA commissioned the review into public education in Western Australia. Dr Carmen Lawrence chaired the review panel which presented key findings and 46 recommendations, several of these are quite pertinent to rural and remote schools and their students.

ICPA (WA) met with Lindsay Hale from SSTUWA at our February face-to-face meeting to discuss how we can work together for greater improvements for our geographically isolated children.

A copy can of the report can be found at:

[DIGITAL - Final - Facing the Facts - Summary document - 25Oct23 8.30pm.pdf \(sstuwa.org.au\)](#)