



Small Schools Newsletter

April 2012

Devolution

The announcement by the Premier and Minister for Education on March 11 of the next step in the roll out of the devolution model Local Schools, Local Decisions needs to be carefully examined.

Analysis of the Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training looks at some possible ramifications for small schools in the roll out of the devolution agenda.

Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training

The previous Government commissioned an Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training (DET). This review was conducted by the Boston Consulting Group and presented to Cabinet. It was subsequently leaked to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The report is a blueprint for a government to shed its responsibility to provide a world class and adequately resourced public education system in NSW.

In this time of Local Schools, Local Decisions and the devolution of responsibility to schools, the following extracts from this report are some of those that relate to the future provision of public education with particular reference to small schools.

“Page 9 – Government schools constitute the largest category of spend. Several large opportunities are apparent

“• Reducing the asset footprint through joining small and nearby schools could be worth \$40–50 million in recurrent costs (\$18–25 million from school-based staff, remainder from non-staff costs such as cleaning and

maintenance and State and Regional Office staff); an additional \$375–450 million available through asset sales, although some funds would need to be reinvested

“• Opportunities exist to further reduce asset footprint through selling land in excess of standard provision for schools (\$350–400 million one off)

“• Range of other opportunities exist, largest being the School Student Transport Scheme (~\$100 million – not investigated in detail)

“Page 59 – **Opportunities exist to reduce asset footprint through joining small and nearby schools**

“• Reducing the number of schools will reduce recurrent costs such as school staff, maintenance and cleaning, and some central costs. In addition, sale of underutilised assets will provide a one-off benefit, though some funds will need to be reinvested in nearby schools to accommodate additional students

“• Opportunity to close 80 primary schools (25 metropolitan within 1.6km and 55 provincial schools within 5km of another primary or central school) which is worth \$15–20 million pa (\$3–\$5 million in school-based staff costs,¹ remainder from global funding, cleaning, maintenance, State and Regional office staff costs) and \$175–200 million in asset sales)

“• Opportunity to close 20 secondary schools (15 metropolitan within 2km and 5 provincial with 10km of another secondary or central school) \$25–30 million pa (\$15–20 million in school-based staff costs,¹ the remainder from global funding, cleaning, maintenance, State and Regional office staff costs) and \$200–250

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million asset sales

- “• Very small additional opportunities lie in combining small primary schools with nearby secondary schools in provincial and remote areas
- “• Performance as measured by NAPLAN for primary schools and year 10 School Certificate English for secondary schools varies widely in small schools
- “• Possible to position these initiatives as part of a broader school regeneration or building schools for the future program

“(1) Separate review undertaking detailed analysis of school-based staff costs. Note: Based on desktop analysis only, more detailed work to confirm students can be accommodated in nearby school.”

The full report can be found on the Federation's website www.nswtf.org.au — Click on *Campaigns — Salaries, Staffing and Security* and scroll down to *Campaign Resources*.

Meeting with John Kaye

The Committee met with the Greens Education spokesperson, John Kaye, to discuss small schools issues, particularly those relating to the closure of P6 schools. Dr Kaye indicated that he would put some questions on notice in Parliament to the Minister on a number of small schools issues including procedures for closing small schools, the number of students in small schools, the number of P6 schools 'on review' and the average recurrent cost of operating a P6 school.

The responses to these and other questions asked will be reported in the Small Schools Newsletter.

Meeting with General Manager of the THA

The Small Schools Committee recently met with the General Manager of the Teacher Housing Authority, Philip Shelley, to acquaint the members with the role of the THA and to discuss a range of issues that had been raised by teachers working in small schools, particularly those in rural and isolated areas.

Philip gave an overview of the THA and the services provided to teachers. The THA is a statutory authority and a public entity and as such has to be accountable for the spending of public money.

Members of the Committee raised concerns at the lack of THA dwellings in some 6 and particularly 8 point locations serviced by P5 and P6 schools. Philip indicated that there is a trial being organised, currently in the early stages, to put mobile granny-flat style dwellings in areas where such a problem exists. Some locations mentioned as possible trials include Clare, Yetman, Wanaaring and Boomi.

The committee suggested that such dwellings would need to have a minimum of two bedrooms to enable the families of teachers to spend time with them. Many of the schools which attract 6 and 8 transfer points are in isolated and disadvantaged areas and are often hard enough to staff without the added problem of not being able to offer suitable housing.

We also commented on the problem of attracting casual relief and the contributing factor of having nowhere suitable to house them if they are working for several days at a time. Some of our schools are great distances from other towns and many casuals will not drive back and forth for extended periods.

Many teachers working in small schools throughout the state are currently residing in teacher housing. At times these properties undergo renovations and maintenance which, depending on the scope, can be a lengthy process. It is important that communication is both timely and open throughout renovations and maintenance. Generally the Project Manager will be the first port of call if you are experiencing concerns.

Concerns were raised regarding problems some teacher tenants had encountered with contractors. Such issues included: tenants going without blinds for 6 weeks, houses left unlocked, personal property being used by contractors and personal items missing. Missing items should be reported to the police.

Philip mentioned that residents can apply for compensation and should make these issues known to the Project Manager and THA. If com-

pensation is sought it is essential that it is clear about how long you were affected and what percentage of your home was inaccessible.

The Federation has a representative on the Board of the Teacher Housing Authority. At present this is Deb Martin and she can assist in representations to the THA.

Philip Shelley explained that one of Teacher Housing's key stakeholders is a network of Local Housing Representatives who represent Teacher Housing in their local communities. Every two years Teacher Housing hosts a conference for these representatives where Teacher Housing updates them on their activities, future plans and thanks them for their contribution during the previous two years.

Given Local Housing Representatives are generally from communities where there are several Teacher Housing residences small schools are not represented at the conference. As such Philip Shelley invited the Small Schools Committee to attend future conferences – a practical solution given there are more than 280 communities where Teacher Housing residences number four properties or less.

Philip subsequently provided the following report to the Small Schools Committee:

The Teacher Housing residence at Yetman is being supplied with a new sleep-out to accommodate rural area – relief teachers who need somewhere to stay when helping out at the school. Yetman is a P6 school in the New England region that attracts 6 transfer points.

This self-contained sleep-out is a stand-alone furnished unit that is fitted with its own bathroom, kitchen, laundry, bedroom and separate lounge.

Traditionally Teacher Housing leases properties to teachers. So for visiting teachers who only need accommodation for a few nights the current options are to stay with the school principal, at the local hotel or travel to and from the school every day – none of them really ideal options.

Teachers are unlikely to lease a Teacher Housing residence when they only need somewhere for a few nights a month, so this self-contained sleep-out solution which is being rolled out to many of the state's small schools that attract 6 or 8 transfer points is ideal. The

units will be provided to the teacher who leases the present Teacher Housing residence as part of their existing property.

Clare Public School, a P6 school in the Riverina region between Balranald and Ivanhoe, will be the next school to receive one of the new self-contained sleep-out units.

Teacher Housing is a statutory corporation; it is a separate body to the DEC. Its principal objective is to provide and maintain suitable accommodation for teachers in regional NSW. Teachers pay a market rent to Teacher Housing for their accommodation. The DEC provides a rental subsidy to teachers who teach in schools that attract 6 and 8 transfer points.

Procurement

On November 11, 2011 the Small Schools Committee met with representatives from DEC Procurement, Jo Bailey the Commercial Director and Greg Short, a former principal now working with Procurement. Jo explained how the procurement system works and the fact that as a Government entity they are bound by legislation and thus have only a small margin of flexibility.

The Committee pointed out that a big issue with small schools is not being able to support their local stores due to restrictive procurement contracts. Mick Collins had compiled a series of questions from small school principals relating to the use of local suppliers. Jo said that she understood the desire to support local businesses that support their local schools and that there is room for negotiation in certain circumstances.

She explained the fairly new 'Household Electrical Panel'. Local suppliers are able to fill out a form applying to go on the panel procurement list. When they are approved, schools are able to buy certain items from them locally. She expressed surprise that not many businesses have taken up the offer and asks principals to let their local businesses know about the scheme. Details and application forms are available on the DEC intranet and further information can be obtained by emailing DETbuy.

The "Back to School" scheme at the beginning of the year which supplies bulk stationery items to students is another opportunity for schools to support local businesses as long as

the business is accredited. (Forms for this can also be obtained online.)

Computers will still need to be bought through Procurement and they are looking at a scheme whereby small schools may be able to pay off items such as Interactive White Boards over time. When asked about Apple iPads, Jo said that they would not be on Procurement any time soon as Apple is not prepared to negotiate.

Jo finally explained that a lot of the 'red tape' is actually there to protect schools and principals from poor products and services. She is happy to receive any feedback or ideas.

It was also mentioned that local printers can be accredited as part of the Print Management Solution and that there had been positive feedback from schools on the 'pay as you print' option.

RFF entitlements

All full-time primary teachers should receive 2 hours per week release from face-to-face teaching (RFF).

- This applies to preschool teachers, intensive English teachers, teachers hired full-time to provide RFF to colleagues, members of

the school executive who teach full-time, resource, ESL and community language teachers and teacher-librarians.

- Casuals who fill a position for one week or longer should receive RFF.
- The 2 hours may be broken up but each period must be at least 30 minutes long.
- Where necessary, the release may be provided in a fortnightly pattern.
- Release time is not to be rescheduled when it coincides with a public holiday, a variation of the school routine or the absence of the teacher. Consideration must be given to the effect on RFF when variations are considered.
- When a teacher is absent on a day when their release was scheduled, the casual replacing the full-time teacher does not receive the release time.
- When a full-time teacher-librarian is the provider of release time, the teacher-librarian must still have 20–30 per cent of their time for administrative duties as well as their own 2 hours of RFF.
- As a professional, you alone have the responsibility to determine how you will use your release time.