



Adrian Pederick MP

Member for Hammond

House of Assembly

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COOMANDOOK AREA SCHOOL

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:02): I rise today to speak about a school close to my heart—Coomandook Area School—which I attended for most of my education. My two boys are there, and my wife does a few hours there every week as an SSO. Today I rise to speak about budget issues currently impacting the Coomandook Area School and no doubt many schools in the Hammond electorate and across the state.

The Coomandook Area School is situated 140 kilometres from Adelaide on the Dukes Highway and educates 160 students from around the area. The school is currently facing a budget crisis, in particular concerning the cost of water usage. The Coomandook Area School receives \$22,000 per annum to water school grounds, including the oval, used for school sport and physical education.

This \$22,000 budget has been the same for the past six to eight years, and no additional support has been provided by the government, yet the price of water has increased by 249 per cent in South Australia, thanks predominantly to the Labor government's desalination plant debacle. This year to date the school's water bill has been \$55,000. The school has been proactive and has reduced its water usage over recent years. However, the costs have tripled and continue to rise. Quite simply, the department's budget is inadequate to cover costs.

As a result, the school is forced to make drastic decisions, one of which is the decision to water only one quarter of the school oval from now on. Students will be expected to use only one quarter of the oval during recess and lunch and for team sports practice and physical education. I ask: how are the students supposed to keep fit and healthy when only one quarter of the oval is being watered? How is the school expected to run another government initiative—the Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden program—on this sort of budget? This flies in the face of the government's recently announced Healthy and Strong Children policy.

In addition to this, the school has decided that the school sports day will not be held at the school due to this issue. Instead, the 160 students will have to travel to the Meningie town oval some 45 minutes away—another hit to the school's budget, another hit to parents, at a time when the people of this state are already facing a high cost of living. While the school has invested in tanks and infrastructure to assist the issue, which incorporates the Coomandook community water recycling program, it is simply not enough. The school simply cannot afford to continue to water the oval and kids are missing out.

This brings me to a second issue facing the students of the Coomandook Area School. The school swimming pool is going to be out of action during summer due to maintenance issues and a lack of support from the department. The pool has been unavailable for the entire fourth term and unless some direction comes from the minister, it will be out of action for the first term of 2014. The pool requires attention and requests for repairs have been forwarded to the minister since February this year. This has been going on for 10 months, and I have been informed that the minister has not sent any department officials to date to examine the pool and approve repairs to be done. The students are now facing a long summer without access to the pool. Coomandook is in the heart of the Murray Mallee and is home to hot summers. Giving the students access to a pool must be a priority.

This school is facing the tough decision of holding the school swimming carnival at the next closest pool, the public pool in Coonalpyn, which is 30 kilometres away. This does not just impact the school carnival, but it also impacts team trials, physical education lessons and try outs for students to

represent the Murray Mallee SAPSASA team. Again, this will be a cost to the school and will hit the hip pocket of parents.

I am also aware that water costs are not the only bill shock the school is facing. There are similar issues with regard to electricity costs and telecommunication bills. There is a very real fear amongst teachers, the governing council, students, parents, and the community that the Coomandook Area School will be forced to close due to the high costs and lack of adequate budget funding. That is the real fear right across the school community and the public at large in the Coomandook region and greater area from which students come to attend the Coomandook Area School.

It is a real shame when we have a government coming in here banging on about how much they do for education, yet we face the real prospect of a school being forced to shut down. They are already at the onset of watering a quarter of the oval. How ridiculous is that? They do not have a pool for the kids to swim in. What are you going to do? Is the Premier going to send someone down with a cheque book? Something needs to happen. This would not be happening just in Coomandook either; this would be happening throughout the Hammond electorate and throughout this state. I do not need to be lectured from the other side of the house about Gonski. The only one that is 'gone-ski' is Weatherill and his Labor government.

Time expired.

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