

School 'at risk of closure'

By **Peri Strathearn**

STATE Government "neglect" of Coomandook Area School has put it at risk of closure, according to Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick.

Like the town's sporting clubs, the school has struggled with water bills in recent times and has decided to keep watering only a quarter of its oval this year.

As a result, students will need to take a 45-minute bus ride to Meningie for their sports day.

An annual State Government payment of \$22,000 towards water bills failed to cover even half of last year's \$55,000 bill.

Mr Pederick said it was not good enough that the annual payment had not increased in six years, despite water prices having increased 227 per cent over the past 12 years.

"The school has introduced efficient measures and reduced its water usage over recent years," he said.

"However, the costs have tripled and, quite simply, the DECD (Department for Education and Child Development) budget is inadequate to cover costs.

"There is a very real fear among teachers, the governing council, students, parents and the community that the Coomandook Area School will be forced to close due to the high costs, lack of adequate budget funding and lack of support from the Weatherill Labor government."

The school's 160 students have not

even been able to find relief in its swimming pool, which has been closed all sum-

mer due to a maintenance problem but is due to re-open at the end of next month.

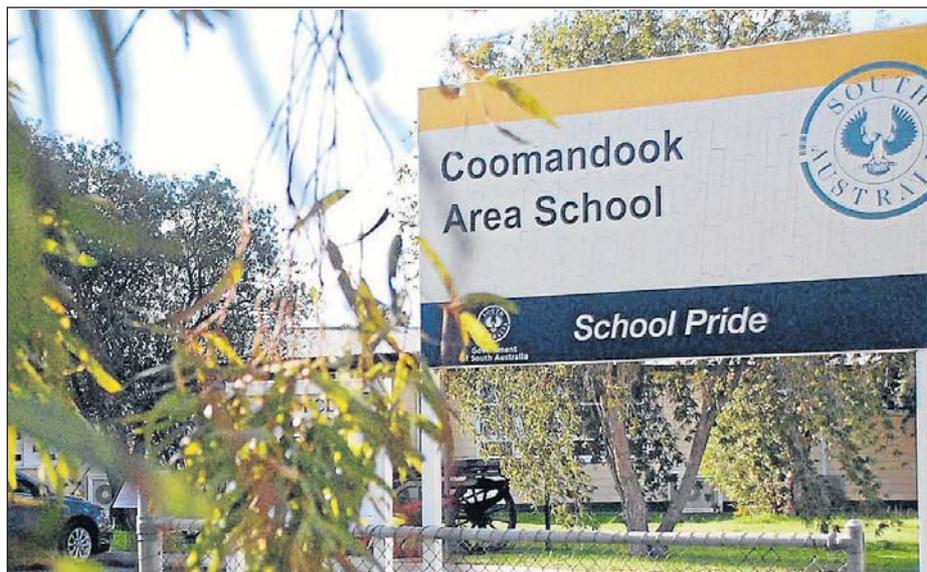
A spokeswoman for Education Minister Jennifer Rankine said the Minister was aware of the school's water consumption issues and had asked DECD to see how it could help.

"Discussions between the department, local council and the school include establishing a dam to assist with the school's water needs," she said.

"Underground rainwater tanks that were previously used as a drinking resource will also be directed for watering the oval."

But Ms Rankine shot back at suggestions the school could close, saying parents - not the department or her office - were the only people a Labor government would allow to make that decision.

Mr Pederick's two sons attend the school, as he did in his youth, and his wife works there as a school services officer.



Funding running dry: Coomandook Area School has struggled with water bills in recent years, and Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick has suggested insufficient funding could lead to the school's closure.