

Department for Education, Children and Young People

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Scott Hennessy
Secretary
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
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22 July 2026

Dear Mr Hennessy

Thank you for your letters containing additional questions from the Committee in relation to the major capital projects for the North West Support School's Burnie and Devonport campuses. Please see the responses to these questions provided below.

North West Support School Burnie Upgrade

QN 1: *Please provide a breakdown of Commonwealth funding received under the National School Funding Agreement that has been allocated to the North West Support School Burnie campus over the past four financial years, including base funding, disability loadings, school size loadings and any other Commonwealth-supported programs.*

ANS: The current Commonwealth school funding agreement is the 'Better and Fairer Schools Agreement: Full and Fair Funding', which replaced previous national school funding arrangements. Commonwealth recurrent funding for schools is calculated with reference to the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). The SRS comprises a base amount and up to six needs-based loadings: students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, socio-educational disadvantage, low English proficiency, school size and school location.

For government schools, Commonwealth recurrent funding is paid to the State as the approved authority for Tasmanian government schools. The State then distributes funding to government schools through DECYP's needs-based school resourcing arrangements, rather than as a simple pass-through of each individual Commonwealth SRS component to each school or campus.

The school-level public source for the Commonwealth and State funding split is available on ACARA's My School website, which publishes school-level financial information. ACARA notes that school finance datasets use different methodologies and should not be directly compared without caution, particularly in respect of financial-year government expenditure data and calendar-year school-based My School finance data.

The last four calendar years of net recurrent income reported on MySchool for the North-West Support School is as follows (noting that Devonport and Burnie are two campuses of the one school):

Net recurrent income	2024 \$	2023 \$	2022 \$	2021 \$
Australian government recurrent funding	2,805,207	2,696,468	2,564,820	2,230,417
State / territory government recurring funding	9,209,163	8,303,275	7,030,668	6,176,814
Fees, charges and parent contributions	9,819	37,091	18,375	19,368
Other private sources	44,546	10,447	102,383	30,320
Total net recurrent income	12,068,735	11,047,281	9,716,246	8,456,919

This funding is reported on a calendar year basis as this is representative of school year activity. The funding is not disaggregated between direct and indirect funding. That is, it is important to note that schools receive direct funding and there are also costs apportioned for payments directly on behalf of schools, programs across schools and corporate overheads that contribute to the running of schools.

QN2: *The Australian Government Schools Funding Report shows Tasmania received around \$250.7 million in Commonwealth funding for government schools in 2024, including \$26.3 million through the students with disability loading. Was any of that Commonwealth funding directed to the North West Support School and specifically to the Burnie campus, and has any of the recurrent funding been used to fund capital works at the Burnie campus?*

ANS: Please refer to the Question 1 response regarding context on recurrent funding for the North West Support School. The State Government distributes funding for students with a disability through its 'Educational Adjustments' funding methodology.

Schools are also provided with funding to support the operation and maintenance of school buildings and can seek approval to apply surplus recurrent funds to capital projects.

As outlined at the hearing, the North West Support School has contributed \$400,000 of its own funds to the Burnie capital project. This is a minor supplement to the overall capital budget which is funded entirely by the State Government through the Capital Investment Program.

QN3: *Please provide a breakdown of the consultation responses for and against consolidation of the North West Support School campuses at a single Penguin site, by cohort or type of respondent (i.e. staff, families etc).*

ANS: Through the consultation process undertaken in 2023 by the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) on the option to consolidate the two North West Support School (NWSS) campuses into a single site at Penguin, the primary mechanism for feedback was an online survey form. 103 unique survey responses were received during the consultation period.

- Of these, 53 were opposed to the Penguin option, 41 were in favour of the Penguin option, and nine were considered neutral.
- Of the 53 survey responses opposed to Penguin, 50 were from parents/carers or community members, and three were from NWSS/DECYP staff.

- Of the 41 survey responses in favour of Penguin, 23 were NWSS/DECYP staff, 14 were parents/carers or community members and four were service providers.
- Of the nine neutral survey responses, five were from NWSS staff, three were from community members and one was a service provider.

In addition to the online survey form, DECYP received 29 emails providing feedback on the Penguin option.

- Of the 29 emails, 19 were from NWSS/DECYP staff, seven were from parents/carers or community, and three were from service providers.
- Of the 29 emails, 12 were in favour of Penguin, nine were neutral and eight were opposed.

From the consultation process, it was clear a greater number of respondents were opposed to the consolidated Penguin option and that those opposed were overwhelmingly parents/carers and community members. Of those in favour of the Penguin option, the majority were NWSS/DECYP staff and service providers.

The primary reasons provided by those opposed to the Penguin option were the additional distances and travel times to get to and from the school and the perceived impacts this would have on students and their families. Of the submissions received in favour of the Penguin option, the bringing together of the school onto a single campus co-located with Penguin District School and the operational and learning benefits of this for students and staff were cited as the primary reasons.

QN 4: *Please provide the advice referred to on page 3 of the Community Engagement Outcomes Report North West Support School, provided by the Department to the Government that it could consider another option to deliver the 2021 election commitment (i.e. consolidating the two campuses into a new single support school on the former Penguin Primary School site).*

ANS: Initial advice was provided by DECYP to the previous Minister for Education in late 2021 which outlined a potential option to consolidate NWSS' separate campuses at Burnie and Devonport into a single consolidated site utilising the vacant former Penguin Primary School facilities. This advice identified:

- The Penguin site was larger than the existing NWSS campuses, and the existing infrastructure was in overall good condition and could be retrofitted for use as a support school.
- Consolidation of the NWSS campuses would reduce duplication of resources and infrastructure and provide potential student benefits as a result of co-location with Penguin District School.
- Savings resulting from reduced duplication of staff were costed at around \$80,000 per annum, as well as additional (uncosted) savings from reduced utility and maintenance costs associated with operating multiple sites (and two hydrotherapy pools).
- Travel distance modelling showed that more than 100 of the 137 current NWSS students would experience an increase in travel distance to attend NWSS at Penguin. More than 40 of these students would experience an increase of 20 kilometres or more.
- Approximately 75 per cent of NWSS students accessed the Devonport campus by bus.
- The Department was requested by the NWSS Association to provide information on the potential to provide more (direct) bus routes and services to overcome the increase in travel distances for students. No estimates were developed on the cost to provide these additional bus services, though it was noted this was likely to be a significant additional recurrent cost and would be a greater level

of service than was being provided for the other two support schools in the State. A possible funding source for these additional services were the potential capital and operational cost savings.

- Some School Association members had already expressed opposition to the Penguin option.
- There was potential for community division and opposition to the Penguin option.

A Minute was subsequently provided to the previous Minister for Education. This Minute contained:

- Advice that unanimous support had been received from the NWSS Association for the Penguin option (subject to significant additional bus services being provided to existing students through a transition period).
- Advice that there remained an inherent risk of opposition from the broader school community in Devonport and Burnie but that this would be tested through consultation.
- Advice that detailed building and infrastructure assessments and quantity surveyor cost estimates were required to determine the cost to deliver the Penguin option, and that these would be undertaken later in 2023, together with cost estimates for the additional student bus services. It was noted that due to high construction cost escalations, it was likely that further funding in addition to the funding already committed in the 2021 election commitment would be required.
- The proposed consultation process and related communication in 2023 to test the Penguin option with the school and broader community and seek feedback.

The previous Minister approved this Minute and DECYP commenced the consultation process with the school and broader community on the Penguin option as an alternative to the original election commitment.

QN 5: *Please provide any estimates that may have been done on the cost of consolidation at a single Penguin site, including capital and operational cost estimates.*

ANS: As per above, no capital or detailed operational cost estimates (including additional bus services) were developed for the Penguin option prior to the school and community consultation process undertaken in 2023. Based on the outcome of the consultation process, the previous Minister announced that the Penguin option would not be pursued and that the Government would honour its original 2021 election commitment. Following this decision, the Department did not progress any cost estimates for Penguin.

North West Support School Devonport

QN 1: *Please provide detail on the height of the covered bus drop off area, and whether this height is sufficient to cater for larger buses, not just minibuses.*

ANS:

The height of the covered bus drop off area is approximately 3.2 metres. This height is sufficient to accommodate the medium sized buses used by NWSS. In discussions with the school, it was determined not to raise the roof height of the bus drop off to accommodate larger buses. This was because the school does not use the larger (Metro) style buses and raising the roof height would result in reduced weather protection in the bus drop off area for the school's students and staff. Any larger style buses visiting the site will be able to drop off in a different location on the site.

I trust this information is of assistance and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require anything further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Williams', with a horizontal line underneath.

Todd Williams

Director Facility Services

Department for Education, Children and Young People