

Mr Ross Field
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Department of Premier and Cabinet
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Dear Ross

STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Please find attached some commentary prepared by my Department in response to your Department's discussion paper on the development of the State sustainability strategy.

As you will see, this commentary relates to the three main areas where the Department of Education feels it is making a contribution.

The first is through the curriculum that is delivered to children and young people in our schools. Clearly, from your point of view this is a long-term strategy in so far as it will be quite a while before today's young people take their place in adult society and begin to influence "sustainable" decision-making using the knowledge, know-how and values that they have acquired at school. Importantly for the here and now, however, is the establishment of partnerships with groups outside the Department that can assist teachers to develop and deliver high quality teaching and learning programs. While the Department already has quite a number of such partnerships, we would be looking to the sustainability strategy to facilitate more. The value of such partnerships is that they enable teachers to develop programs that are fresher, more relevant and contemporary than is otherwise possible.

The second area relates to what may be termed "social sustainability" or social cohesiveness. Here the challenge for the Department – and the sustainability strategy – is to ensure that the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is not allowed to widen. The main banner under which we are organising our thinking and policy initiatives to meet this challenge is "inclusive schooling". Again, we would be looking for recognition and support for our efforts in this direction through the State sustainability strategy.

The third area relates to what we can do through the way we construct and manage school buildings and facilities. The attached papers outline what we have already done in a range of areas as well as what we are planning to do in one new school, at South Atwell, by way of world's best practice. The State sustainability strategy could do much to help us to build on these initiatives.

I apologise for not getting this material to you sooner. I trust nevertheless that it will prove useful and hope that you would feel free to contact me for further information or commentary as may be required.

I wish you and your staff well in their work in this most important area of State policy development.

Yours sincerely

PAUL ALBERT
DIRECTOR GENERAL

Att.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION COMMENTARY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Preamble

A well-educated population is essential to sustainable economic and social development. The Objects of the *School Education Act 1999* recognise that each child has a basic right to education and that a government schooling system must meet the educational needs of all children. Inclusive schooling and differential resourcing of the disadvantaged are essential in addressing this goal.

Laying the foundations for sustainability through the school curriculum

The State's curriculum framework (which mandates knowledge, know-how and values outcomes for all students in government and non-government schools) includes attitudes and values about sustainability, together with knowledge and skills to improve students' capacity to understand the factors that influence sustainability, the balances required, the reasons for change, and the potential consequences of human action or inaction.

While schools are not expected to have completed the implementation of this framework until 2005, all schools are currently actively engaged. For example, John Forrest Senior High School and Middle Swan Primary School have won a range of State and National awards for their work in environmental education.

The framework recognises that values can have a life-long influence on behaviour. The values most pertinent to a State sustainability strategy are environmental responsibility, resulting in a respect and concern for the natural and cultural environments, and a commitment to regenerative and sustainable resource use.

The framework's overarching outcomes set the parameters for schools' development of teaching programs that enable students to reason about their world, appreciate it and make decisions to support sustainable practices.

One of these overarching outcomes (outcome 7) is that students will 'understand and appreciate the physical, biological and technological world and have the knowledge and skills to make decisions in relation to it'.

Outcome 5 requires that 'students describe and reason about patterns, structures and relationships in order to understand, interpret, justify and make predictions'.

As students work in ways that allow them to achieve these outcomes, they will become more critical, with a healthy scepticism, of issues that influence their lives.

An understanding of sustainability is developed through outcomes in each the eight learning areas of the framework, but particularly in society and environment (through the outcomes of "active citizenship" and "place in space"; science (through "acting responsibly"); and technology and enterprise (through "technology in society").

Curriculum Implementation

The ways in which the curriculum framework is being implemented in the government school system actively engage students with the here-and-now issues as well as those on the horizon.

Teachers are on the constant look out for materials and projects that engage students' interest in local and global issues.

Students' understanding and appreciation of the "triple bottom line" is being fostered through their engagement in such issues as: the disposal of radioactive waste; salinity; and genetically modified crops.

While the Department continues to the best of its ability to support schools in their development of teaching programs that engage students' passionate interest in sustainable solutions for environmental problems, it is constantly on the lookout for partnerships that can extend this ability.

Partnerships

The establishment of the attitudes and values that can result in changed societal behaviour require long-term strategies that involve agencies outside of the Department of Education.

The Department's formation of partnerships with other government agencies and non-government organisations is geared to enhancing teachers' ability to enrich their programs and teaching practices with "real-life" research and multi-faceted applications of the concept of sustainability.

Partnerships enable schools to gain access to specific expertise, materials, organisational structures and networks that support students' development of the necessary understandings, skills and values.

They provide "real" contexts for learning that engage young minds through their relevance to children's experience.

Examples include the partnerships with the Water and Rivers Commission on the Ribbons of Blue program; the Gould League at the Herdsman Wildlife Centre; Landcare through the Tammin Landcare Centre; and the Scitech Discovery Centre, which connects science and technology to society.

Other very valuable associations include the Department of Environmental Protection (the Waste Wise Schools Program); the Water Authority (Waterwise Schools Program); the Keep Australia Beautiful Council (Earth Schools); the Chamber of Minerals and Energy (Envirosmart), the WA Museum (Sustainability exhibit), the Perth Zoo (Education Program) and Western Power (World of Energy).

The Department actively participates in strategic programs that are established to stimulate action. As a signatory of the WA Cleaner Production Statement, a commitment has been made to the Action Plan that includes maintenance and enhancement of the Utilities Management Program and an efficiency plan in Central and District Offices to achieve a 10 per cent reduction in energy utilisation and waste over the next 3 years.

Sustaining the social fabric

The Department's *Making the Difference* strategy formulates affirmative action for students at educational risk and reflects current thinking on the identification and provision of services for the full range of students who have difficulty learning.

Stage 1 of the Department's *Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools* has recently been completed. The interim findings will be progressed through State 2 of the review.

Inclusive schools will be supported by the development of leadership and teaching methodologies that recognise diversity and ensure full acceptance and participation of all students, which means in effect that:

- School communities value diversity
- Educators have the awareness and confidence to support students with special educational needs
- Educational leaders take a proactive role in advocating and ensuring equity for all students
- Schools develop and adopt inclusive pedagogical and cultural practices.

A new funding model will be developed based on students' learning needs. Schools will be encouraged to use their resources flexibly, which will mean in effect:

- A consistent and coordinated system-wide procedure for the identification of students with special educational needs is in place
- All stakeholders contribute to the identification and assessment of students' learning needs
- Schools are supported to be flexible in planning and implementing appropriate programs for students with special needs
- Schools demonstrate accountability in the use of allocated resources.

Dwindling populations in country areas have meant that basic and advanced infrastructure, to cater for the full spectrum of students' educational needs, is increasingly difficult to sustain. Difficulties in placing experienced staff in country locations, to teach in specialised areas of the curriculum, has presented a continuing problem for the Department. A number of initiatives are being taken to ensure more flexible and equitable services to all students, but most especially country students.

The Department has embarked on a long-term strategy (called “e2c – education to community”) to establish on-line services that will go well beyond the current provision of digital resources. These include:

- The development of strategies, structures and processes for the implementation of electronic learning, the delivery of online services and the development of community partnerships
- In partnership with universities, determining best-practice pedagogy to support the achievement of improved learning opportunities for students
- Establishment of community partnerships to ensure long-term gains are maximised and that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Public demonstrations of commitment to sustainability

Sustainability objectives form a fundamental part of the planning associated with the development of our new schools and the maintenance of the Department’s asset base. The generic briefs for all new facilities have high standards with respect to utilities management and environmental conditions.

Recent initiatives include:

- A review of air conditioning standards which will have recommendations regarding best practice passive environmental standards.
- The utilities management trial in which schools share in savings made in utilities costs
- The auto-irrigation program which results in significant savings to water usage
- The local area education planning (LAEP) and excisions program which reduces under-utilised, but serviced land holdings

Future initiatives:

It is proposed to take one of the Department’s new primary schools and develop world’s best practice in respect to sustainability.

An examination of the proposed schools suggests that South Atwell as the most appropriate school to choose for this purpose. As South Atwell is not due to open in 2004, there is sufficient time to undertake the necessary research and development.

The South Atwell development, which is managed by LandCorp, has a strong sustainability theme. Architects have been selected with expertise in this area and a scoping document is currently being prepared.

All aspects of sustainability will be considered in the development of the new school, the total energy consumption of construction, the total recurrent energy consumption, passive environmental design and effective landscape design. Meetings are being held with LandCorp and with Professor Peter Newman to assist in the development of the brief.

A proposal will be prepared for the consideration of the Department’s corporate executive and the Minister in May.