

5 December 2012

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The Hon Martin Dixon M.P.
Minister for Education
2 Treasury Place
Melbourne Victoria 3002

Dear Minister,

We write to seek your commitment to the actions outlined in this letter.

Our group, Richmond High School Choices, has been campaigning since 2006 on the provision of secondary education in inner Melbourne. Our activities are known to you and successive governments have supported our efforts at different stages during that time.

You will recall that in May 2011 we received welcome assurance from you that the Victorian Government is committed to providing families in Richmond with access to a suitable government secondary school for their child. An initial measure of that commitment was the continuation for two years of the local arrangement that has applied since 2007 to provide more secondary schooling options to families living in Richmond. You further advised of your intention to request a review of the provision of government school education in the City of Yarra, including a review of demographic data, enrolment numbers and trends, demand, capacity and the configuration of existing schools.

The community, whilst it still awaits news of that review, has noted the current government's interest in secondary school provision in neighbouring Prahran and action in other areas such as Coburg.

The community interest in this issue remains strong and we see it growing.

We now need to see action on the rights of entry for local families for 2014 (with decisions to be made in the coming months) and the review, together with medium-to-long-term planning.

Accordingly we seek your commitment to the following:

Immediate steps

An immediate, short term step is the continuation of a local arrangement, as a variation to the Department's neighbourhood school policy, to reflect the situation facing local families and to address the failure over the last 10 to 15 years of the regional education public servants to adequately plan and manage inner city secondary education provision.

We seek a "3X3" principle-based local, City of Yarra arrangement.

That is: a child who (1) lives in the City of Yarra and (2) attends a government primary school in the City of Yarra can (3) enter in Year 7 at any government secondary school in the City of Yarra.

This measure is not proposed as a solution to the long term issue. Indeed, 2011 correspondence from you notes that only a small number of families have used the previous special arrangement. Many families instead choose to send their children to a range of other schools. As such, the proposed measure would be a non-disruptive, interim measure. Nonetheless, it would send a very supportive message to the community and demonstrate a commitment of Government and Council to inner Melbourne amenity. It would provide greater choice, relieve some pressure and maintain goodwill. That said, the arrangement needs to be ongoing and not undermined or emasculated by the public servants upon whom the necessity for the local arrangement reflects poorly.

Medium term

Commission an independent review of the provision of government school education in the City of Yarra. The aims should be those set out in the Minister's letter to Richmond High School Choices in May 2011 but the study should be conducted by an independent consultant, not the Department.

An option is for the City of Yarra to partially fund or provide in-kind support to this study. On 27 November, the City of Yarra council unanimously voted to provide in-principle support to the community aspirations of more secondary school opportunities.

At the same time, the Victorian department of education needs to continue to review and then make decisions about the future and configuration of existing schools, particularly those schools that are not attracting students. Collingwood College remains in this category. Hawthorn Secondary College, in the Premier's electorate, has fallen into this category and is the subject of its own review commissioned by its School Council. The State Government really needs to grasp the opportunity that is currently available.

Long term

Implement the findings of the independent study. This may be to build a new school in Richmond or an adjacent area, if the demographics of our inner-city suburbs support this.

We seek your commitment to these steps and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Justin Naylor
Richmond High School Choices

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