



Community Engagement Outcomes Report – North West Support School

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2021, the Tasmanian Government committed a \$20 million Support School Package which included \$15.5 million for the redevelopment of North West Support School (NWSS) Devonport campus. This was to be on a new site in Devonport, while the broader Package included a new hydrotherapy pool and upgrades for the NWSS Burnie campus.

The Government received advice that it could consider another option to deliver this commitment: consolidating the two campuses into a new single support school on the former Penguin Primary School site.

The Minister for Education, Children and Youth agreed to undertake broad consultation to test the school community's interest in further investigating this new option.

Consultation process

The consultation process for North West Support School ran from 27 February to 20 April 2023. This included:

- Online feedback form
- Community meetings held on:
 - 28 March 2023 at the Burnie campus
 - 29 March 2023 at the Devonport campus.

The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) ran an advertising and communication campaign to ensure as many community members as possible had a chance to have their say, including:

- Parents and carers
- Staff
- Community members
- Service providers.

Consultation submissions: a summary

Based on all submissions received, a greater number of respondents opposed the Penguin option (47 per cent) compared to 39 per cent of submissions received being in favour of the Penguin option.

The Department received **136 unique submissions** throughout the consultation process and there were seven submissions received through the Minister's Office, including one formal Question without Notice request from a Member of the Legislative Council.

There were 11 attendees for Burnie meeting and 16 attendees for the Devonport meeting.

What we heard: Key messages

Almost all the feedback received opposed to the Penguin option cited the additional distance and travel times to get to and from the school and the perceived impacts this would have on students and their families.

Of the total submissions received, four said they required more information about the tailored transport solutions offered by the Department.

Of the submissions received in favour of the Penguin option, the increase in scale for resourcing and co-location with the Penguin District School were cited as the primary reasons.

Community engagement objectives

- Community engagement activities for NWSS were tailored to meet three key objectives. These were:
- Facilitate effective consultation for NWSS to raise awareness with the whole school community and other stakeholders about the Penguin option and encourage participation in the consultation process.
- Generate community and stakeholder feedback on the Penguin option to help inform decision-making by the Minister and DECYP.
- Demonstrate the Government’s commitment to genuine, inclusive, and transparent community consultation.

The following activities were initiated specifically to achieve these objectives.

Table I - Community engagement objectives

Objective	Activity
Facilitate effective engagement for NWSS to raise awareness with the whole school community and other stakeholders about the Penguin option and encourage participation in the consultation process.	Extensively promote the consultation process via school communication channels, radio, print and social media advertising to maximise awareness of the opportunity to provide feedback.
Generate community and stakeholder feedback on the Penguin option to help inform decision-making by the Minister and DECYP.	Provide the mechanisms to receive submissions from all stakeholders to be considered and included in the consultation outcomes report, including online, hard copy, and face-to-face options.
Demonstrate the Government’s commitment to genuine, inclusive, and transparent community engagement.	Extend the consultation period from six weeks to eight weeks to provide additional time for stakeholders to submit their feedback. Make the consultation outcomes report publicly available.

Campaign outputs

The campaign for NWSS was launched on 27 February 2023. The campaign ran for eight weeks and concluded on 20 April 2023. Campaign outputs were:

- Multiple articles in the NWSS newsletter
- Ministerial media release (and subsequent article in The Advocate newspaper)
- Direct postcard mail outs to all currently enrolled students’ families, school staff and service providers
- Direct emails to all currently enrolled students’ families, school staff and service providers
- Letter from the DECYP Secretary provided to all currently enrolled students’ families, school staff and service providers

- Direct outreach to the Premier’s Disability Advisory Council
- Direct emails to relevant Local Government general managers
- Direct emails to relevant State and Federal elected representatives
- Campaign postcards made available in the NWSS administration areas
- NWSS page on the DECYP website
- Multiple posts on the NWSS Devonport and Burnie Facebook Pages
- Online feedback form
- Dedicated email box to receive submissions
- Two community meetings (Burnie and Devonport campuses)
- 30 radio advertising slots on 7BU, 7AD and SEAFM radio stations
- Three print advertisements in The Advocate newspaper (including two Saturday editions)
- Three print advertisements in community press publications including the Circular Head Chronicle, Central Coast Voice, and the Kentish Voice
- Five weeks of Facebook and Instagram advertising geo-targeting audiences on the North West Coast likely to be parents of school-aged children aged 3-17 years.

Interpreting the feedback

All feedback received through the consultation process has been reviewed and best efforts have been made to interpret it to ensure accuracy and integrity of the consultation process and support informed decision-making by the Tasmanian Government.

In interpreting the feedback, DECYP took the following approach:

- Invalid submissions are considered those that have been left blank or are duplicates.
- Duplicate submissions are considered to be either those that are the same submissions received multiple times via the same or different medium, or multiple submissions from the same respondent expressing the same viewpoint. In such cases, to help determine sentiment in relation to the Penguin option, duplicate submissions have been counted only once regardless of medium.
- Submissions were considered neutral if:
 - It was unclear whether they were in favour or opposed to the Penguin option.
 - They did not express a preference and instead provided feedback on the types of services and infrastructure support schools should include.
 - The submissions listed both ‘pros’ and ‘cons’; or
 - The submissions were requesting more information (such as transport arrangements for students).
- Submissions made via the community meetings have not been counted as unique submissions, and accordingly not included in the final tally in favour or opposed to the Penguin option. This is because no limit was placed on how much feedback one respondent could provide to the two questions, meaning that one respondent was able to provide multiple ‘submissions.’ Due to the nature of the questions, much of the feedback was also more general in nature, such as the type of infrastructure a support school should include.

- The majority of submissions received expressing opposition or support for the Penguin option cited multiple reasons. For the purposes of summarising feedback, the most common reasons for opposition or support for the Penguin option have been aggregated.

Table 2 – Total response breakdown

Channels	Total submissions received	Invalid – left blank	Invalid – duplicate submission	Valid submissions	Opposed to Penguin option	In favour of Penguin option	Neutral	Total Submissions
Feedback forms	115	2	10	103	53	41	9	103
Emails	36	N/A	7	29	8	12	9	29
Correspondence	7	N/A	4	3	2	0	1	3
Community meetings*	143	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Social Media Comments	1	N/A	0	1	1	0	0	1
Total	159	2	21	136	64	53	19	136

*Not counted in the total tally as much of this feedback was more general in nature, with multiple responses provided by other attendees

Summary of responses

Feedback breakdown

- Of the 136 total submissions received:
 - 64 (47%) were opposed to a consolidated NWSS at Penguin.
 - 53 (39%) were in favour.
 - 19 (14) were considered neutral.

Audience breakdown

- Of the 136 total submissions received:
 - 80 responses (59%) were from Parents/Carers/Community.
 - 52 responses (38%) were from DECYP Staff of the total responses.
 - 4 responses (3%) were from Service Providers.

Online feedback forms

The online feedback form was web-based using the Microsoft Teams platform, which respondents accessed via the NWSS *Get Involved* page on the DECYP website.

Response summary

- Of the 103 unique online feedback forms received:
 - 53 were opposed to a consolidated NWSS at Penguin.
 - 41 were in favour.
 - 9 were considered neutral.
- Of the total number of online feedback forms received:
 - 4 said they required more information about the tailored transport solutions offered by DECYP.
 - 8 raised the cost of fuel to travel to and from Penguin as one of the reasons for opposing the Penguin option.
- Of the 53 opposed to the Penguin option, the following concerns and themes were raised:
 - Concern about the physical and psychological impacts for students with severe disabilities of additional travel time on buses each day.
 - Concern about travel distance and the time it would take for parents and carers to drive to the school in the event they needed to collect their child for health, behavioural or other reasons.
 - Concern about the cost of fuel or loss of income for parents/carers having to take time off work to drive to and from the Penguin site.
 - Some families have specifically moved to the areas nearby to the existing campuses to be closer to their child's school.
 - Concern about the availability of residential properties for rent or purchase in the Penguin area and availability of nearby ambulance or health care facilities.
 - Concern about their child's learning and behaviour resulting from attending a larger school at Penguin.
 - Concern about the impact to parents/carers' employment or wellbeing resulting from additional logistical requirements for their child to attend school.
 - Concern about the impact relocation of NWSS to Penguin would have on families' disability support arrangements through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
 - Some respondents view the Penguin option as a loss of local community services for families in the North West region.
 - Some respondents view the Penguin option as primarily focused on resolving administrative and logistical challenges for DECYP in operating a school with geographically disparate campuses.
 - Some respondents said their preferred model was for NWSS to become two separate schools with separate principals.
- Of the 41 in favour of the Penguin option, the following benefits or issues were raised:

- Greater student access to allied health and services which currently split time between three campuses.
- The existing campus sites are constrained and do not allow for significant growth in enrolments.
- Opportunities associated with co-location with Penguin District School (e.g. could allow for dual enrolments where possible).
- Opportunity for NWSS students to come together and be more involved with each other, such as whole-of-school assemblies, group learning, etc.
- Reduced impacts to school services from the principal and staff not having to travel between three campuses.
- Improved learner outcomes resulting from co-location of staff at Penguin through greater staff interaction, professional development opportunities, and better staff morale.
- Operating multiple campuses places greater strain on resourcing.
- More space at the Penguin site allows for provision of more dedicated therapeutic and support areas for students.
- More in-class support and senior staff onsite
- Learnings from other support schools that underwent site consolidations (Northern and Southern Support Schools) identified student and staff benefits.
- Benefits of having a fulltime nurse onsite
- Equity of access for all NWSS students to contemporary learning facilities.
- Of the nine responses considered neutral, the following themes or issues were raised:
 - Concerns in relation to additional student, parents/carers and staff travel to the Penguin site (five of the nine neutral responses raised this concern).
 - Questions in relation to the student bus arrangements for travel to the Penguin site.
 - Questions about the availability of accommodation for professional support staff at Penguin.
 - Suggestions for the types of facilities and spaces the redevelopment of NWSS should provide.
 - Comments on the benefits that would come from consolidating the school on one site.

Online feedback forms response breakdown

- Of the 103 unique online feedback forms received:
 - 53 responses (51%) were opposed to a consolidated NWSS at Penguin.
 - 41 responses (40%) were in favour.
 - 9 responses (9%) were considered neutral.
- Of the 103 unique online feedback forms received:
 - 67 responses (65%) were from Parents/Carers/Community
 - 32 responses (31%) were from DECYP Staff
 - 4 responses (4%) were from Service Providers

Community Meetings

Community meetings were held at NWSS Burnie campus on 28 March 2023 and at the Devonport Annex campus on 29 March 2023. The meetings were promoted via the school newsletter, Facebook pages, DECYP website, social media advertising, and direct emails. Registration to attend the workshop was via the NWSS *Get Involved* page on the DECYP website. A total of 27 individuals registered to attend the meetings (16 for Devonport and 11 for Burnie).

Attendees were seated in small groups and the format included a Questions and Answers session and a workshop component in which attendees were asked to respond to two questions. Across both community meetings, a total of 143 individual feedback submissions were provided to the two questions.

Response summary

Question 1 - What are the most important considerations for redevelopment of NWSS – Infrastructure/facilities?

Respondents said they felt the most important considerations were:

- Fully fenced facilities
- Provision of therapy/sensory rooms and regulation spaces
- More bathrooms (inside and outside)
- Availability of onsite medical personnel
- Outdoor learning spaces
- Adequate space to allow for future expansion
- Adequate storage
- Level playground
- Shelter for drop-offs
- Decent sized library, music room, office spaces for staff, specialists, and visiting therapists
- ECIS integration
- Adequate car parking
- Design to be informed through consultation with staff
- Travel arrangements to Penguin.

Question 2 - What do you believe are the biggest opportunities or challenges with the Penguin option?

Opportunities

Respondents said they felt the biggest opportunities with the Penguin option were:

- Greater allocation of support staff on site more regularly
- Access to other new education and sporting facilities
- Better options for grouping students with similar needs
- More opportunities for students to interact with Penguin District School
- No doubling of resources

- Access to high school subjects such as woodwork, art, music, etc.
- Greater capacity to accommodate more students
- Onsite hydrotherapy pool
- More areas for therapy
- Bigger library
- Improved outdoor areas
- Input from all involved to get the best outcome
- Community access of site
- Accessible play equipment.

Challenges

Respondents said they felt the biggest challenges with the Penguin option were:

- Travel time/distance for families living further away
- Medical concerns
- Families being unable to collect their child if required
- Cost of transport (fuel)
- Risk of non-attendance/home schooling
- Sensory overload for some students with larger gatherings/noise
- Impacts to therapy appointments and NDIS funding
- Lack of affordable housing in Penguin
- Risk of nearby highway/noise, etc.
- Parents not having drivers licences but needing to collect their child from Penguin
- How tailored can the student transport be? (flexible, door-to-door drop-off/pick up?)
- Impact of additional travel time on students with continence issues
- Distance from hospitals
- Impacts to student learning due to fatigue from additional travel.

Emails

Email submissions were encouraged via the DECYP email box.

Response summary

The email responses received in favour of the Penguin option highlighted a range of perceived benefits, including:

- Penguin having good outdoor areas for inquiry-based learning
- Support staff all being co-located on one site
- More space for physio programs

- Having the opportunity to accept more students
- Good for resourcing/equipment and shared facilities
- Penguin potentially being available sooner than a greenfield site build
- Onsite hydrotherapy pool
- Penguin District School and sporting facilities nearby
- Opportunity for increased class combinations
- Improved staff health and wellbeing
- Better professional learning opportunities.

The email responses received opposed to the Penguin option highlighted a range of concerns or issues, including:

- The increased travel time/distance for families living further away
- Medical concerns
- Families being unable to collect their child if required, additional bus travel increasing dysregulation of students
- Additional strain on parents and carers already “doing it tough” caring for children with severe disabilities
- Penguin being a “village” rather than a city and lacking facilities and infrastructure
- Lack of support from a majority of families for the Penguin option
- Lack of health care and accommodation in Penguin
- Increased financial costs for families
- Some NWSS staff having to find other employment due to distance to and from work
- Impacts to NDS arrangements for families.

The email responses received considered neutral highlighted a range of perceived positives and negatives with the Penguin option. Five of the nine neutral submissions raised perceived impacts to students and families from increased distance/travel time to and from the Penguin site.

Email submission breakdown

- Of the 29 unique emails received:
 - 12 emails (41%) were in favour of a consolidated NWSS at Penguin.
 - 9 emails (31%) were neutral.
 - 8 emails (28%) were opposed.
- Of the 29 unique emails received:
 - 19 responses (66%) were from DECYP Staff
 - 7 responses (24%) were from Parents/Carers/Community
 - 3 responses (10%) were from Service Providers

Social media

One social media comment was received by DECYP during the consultation process, noting that due to moderation policy requirements, the capacity to provide comments on Facebook pages managed by DECYP (including schools) is limited.

Response summary

The one Facebook comment cited the capital investment in the Burnie campus in 2017, and that the Penguin option would be a waste of this investment.

Next Steps

This outcomes report has been provided to the Minister for Education, Children and Youth, DECYP Executive Group and DECYP Learning Services Division. The report was considered by the Minister as part of the decision-making process to not continue with the Penguin site option and to proceed with the election commitment which included a new school site in Devonport and upgrades to the Burnie campus. The feedback and submissions received will provide a valuable input into progress those works.