

We want more input, say ignored parents

SHERADYN HOLDERHEAD
EDUCATION EDITOR

PARENTS have demanded more say in public schools because the State Government is not listening to them.

A South Australian Association of State School Organisations survey of more than 130 governing councils showed three in four parents believed the Government did not listen to their concerns.

Association president Gino Amato said the poll showed parents were fed up.

"Every year, SAASSO takes thousands of calls from frustrated parents and governing council members fed up with being ignored and the problem is getting worse every year," he said.

"Parents and the local community should decide how their school is run, as happens in other states. But in SA there's this culture that the department are the experts and parents aren't competent to make important decisions."

Mr Amato cited forced school closures, continued

implementation of the compulsory Year 12 research project and sex abuse cases as issues where parent opinion was dismissed.

"You can't just put out discussion papers that nobody sees and say 'we've consulted,'" he said.

The association began expressing parent concerns on the slipping standards of children's literacy and numeracy skills five years ago.

"We were told we were wrong," Mr Amato said. "Now we have seen con-

tinued decline in both NAPLAN and international tests.

"This State Government needs to start approaching the problems... with an open mind - really considering all ideas, rather than just dismissing suggestions."

Education Minister Jennifer Rankine said recent consultations for the numeracy and literacy strategy was an example of how the Government had sought feedback from parents.

"Feedback was sought

through face-to-face meetings and an online discussion to help frame the strategy's... outcomes," she said.

SA Primary Principals Association president Steve Portlock said it was important governing councils had a strong presence on school boards, oversight of finances and championed student safety and welfare.

Australian Education Union SA vice-president David Smith said recent government consultation was "patchy".

\$3.5m to move kindy away from old trees

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An arborist report prepared for the council cleared the trees, saying they were showing no signs of weakness or disease, but a subsequent Education Department report deemed the trees presented an "unacceptable risk".

Rather than apply to the council to remove the trees, it decided to relocate the entire kindergarten.

Under state law, regulated and significant trees, which have a circumference of 2m or 3m respectively, cannot be removed, killed, destroyed or even have branches, limbs or stems tampered with without approval from the local council.

Children at the Lockleys preschool have since been placed in other nearby kindergartens following a crisis meeting about the issue in January.

An Education Department spokeswoman said no application was put to the council's Development Assessment Panel to remove the trees.

"Removal of the trees was not a viable option. The trees were deemed significant... and the land is owned by the local council," she said.

South Australian Federation of Residents and Ratepayers Association president Kevin Kaeding said that spending \$3.5 million on a new school

was "a drastic measure". "I understand the importance of keeping trees that have been there a significant amount of time but we also have to think of the inconvenience of the children who have had to change schools (since the closure was announced)," Mr Kaeding said.

"If it's the matter of getting someone in to prune the trees back and manage it, so be it. They would spend a lot less money on something like that."

Work on the kindergarten's replacement is expected to start in April and it was likely to open early next year.

Sascha Walker, 37, of Findon, whose son Hunter, 4, attends the preschool, said it was a shame that the trees were deemed unsafe as it was a major selling point of the school.

"It is disappointing because it was such a beautiful kindergarten and the trees were so appealing, however if it's judged a risk, it's important to keep the kids safe," she said.

"I'm really excited that this is going ahead because we've got one child at the school already and one in kindy who will start there and we have another who is two and a four-week-old who will also go there."

West Torrens Mayor John Trainer said no plans had been made for the former pre-school site.

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ON THE MOVE: Matt McLean with his daughter Tatum at the former Lockleys preschool site yesterday. Tatum's brother Hunter attends the preschool.

Picture: DYLAN COKER

Typhoid alert for hotel's diners

JORDANNA SCHRIEVER
HEALTH REPORTER

DINERS who ate at Glenelg's Stamford Grand Hotel over the past two months should be alert for signs of potentially deadly typhoid, SA Health has warned.

A part-time food handler at the hotel who travelled to India, and a family member, have been diagnosed with the food- and water-borne illness.

SA Health chief medical officer Professor Paddy Phillips said the risk of infection was extremely low but that anyone who ate at the hotel should watch for symptoms over the next 60 days.

"SA Health is asking doctors to be aware of the possibility in people who ate at the hotel between December 14, 2012, and February 15, 2013," he said.

He said the illness was spread by eating food or drinking water contaminated by the faeces or urine of those affected.

"The symptoms... include a high fever, headaches, diarrhoea or constipation, stomach pains, weakness and loss of appetite.

"In some cases a flat, rose-coloured rash may appear on the torso."

The illness can appear gradually and could kill if left untreated. Anyone concerned should contact their GP, he said.

Prof Phillips said there was no current risk from food handling practices at the hotel.

General manager Justin Higgins said the health and safety of patrons and staff was the hotel's most important priority. "We have strict procedures in place for food handling and hygiene," he said.

"We are working in consultation with the SA Health Department on this matter and have been assured by them that it is classified as low risk."

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