

M J & D M Harden
24 Wilson's Lane,
EXETER, NSW, 2579

24th April 2002

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing this letter to be included amongst the submissions for the Senate Inquiry into support funding for students with disabilities enrolled in non-government schools.

We have three children, 12 year old twin daughters, Shelley and Elysse, and a 5 year old boy, Angus. My daughter, Shelley has cerebral palsy and is reliant on a wheelchair for her mobility. At present Elysse is enrolled in year 7 at Southern Highlands Christian School. Shelley is in year 6 at Exeter Public School and Angus is in Kindergarten at Exeter Public School.

Shelley is due to commence High School in 2003. She has been accepted for enrolment at Moss Vale High School and a conditional acceptance at Southern Highlands Christian School (SHCS). Our preference would be for her to attend SHCS where her twin sister is being educated.

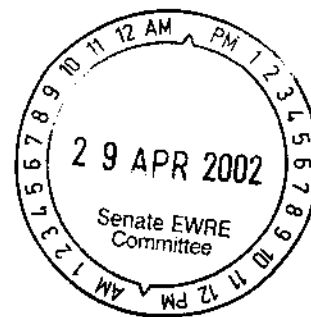
We are committed Christians who are enthusiastic about our faith and values being taught, reinforced and encouraged through the school system.

Moss Vale High School (MVHS) was built in the 1960's on the side of a steep hill. The buildings are predominantly multi storey (or demountable classrooms) and the playground is also on a number of levels. There are numerous flights of stairs to negotiate in accessing classrooms, library, canteen, hall, sports areas and playground. There has been a wheelchair accessible toilet installed in the school at some stage in the past but it will need to be rebuilt as it is very poorly designed.

Mrs Christine Drinkwater (Integration officer for the Department of Education and Training in this area) has been able to locate a "Stair climbing machine" to use on a temporary basis to allow access to two levels of the main school building until a lift has been installed. With the use of either of these devices (lift or stair climber) we are also concerned about the school providing safe fire exit in case of emergency.

Shelley has been enrolled in regular classes at Exeter Public School since 1995. We have opted for Shelley to be enrolled in the IO support class at MVHS. We are, however, still very keen for Shelley to be included in a large number of 'regular' classes throughout the weekly timetable. With the present staffing ratios and the fact that Shelley would need assistance in manoeuvring her way around the school we feel that she is bound to miss out on maximum inclusion time because it will be "too difficult" and too time consuming for Shelley to access other buildings and classrooms.

SHCS is a fairly new school (18 years old). Building work is still being planned and is expected to be ongoing for the next few years. The next stage is due to commence in a few months time. The school is situated on a large level block of land. The classrooms are all single storey and can be accessed easily by the use of a portable ramp. There is one small step up to some of the classrooms. Access to all classrooms and all playground areas is very quick and easy. There is already a wheelchair accessible toilet in the main administration block with plans being drawn for a new wheelchair accessible toilet/shower



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as part of a new toilet block to be built in the stage after next. There is no need to provide any extra or special emergency exits for a wheelchair as all doors open out onto the playground areas and are all single storey. SHCS has a special needs support unit and are prepared for Shelley to be included in a large number of regular classes during the timetable.

We are unable to provide you with exact figures but have been told (via Christine Drinkwater) that the estimated cost for the necessary renovations to MVHS will be in the vicinity of \$1 million and that building work is to be staged over the time that Shelley is enrolled in High School.

We are concerned about the costs and timing of these renovations. We know from previous experience that when building work is staged that access and facilities can be limiting and frustrating. At Exeter Public School the ramping of classrooms was staged as was the building of a well designed and easily accessible bathroom. The bathroom was, in fact, only built last year (Shelley's 7th year at the school!).

We feel that even with the provision of \$1million renovations at MVHS that the outcome will still not be the most positive High School experience that could be provided for Shelley. SHCS needs only very minor building assistance and the funding for a full time Teacher's Aide (Special) to provide what we believe would be an exceptionally positive and rewarding High School Educational experience as Shelley can move independently around the school and can easily attend regular classes and can interact with students in all areas of the school.

We are aware that Teacher's Aide funding and Properties/Building funding are two separate sources of money, however, they are all taxpayers money and should be used to support the educational choices that families make on behalf of and in consultation with their children. If Teacher's Aide funding (to a full time level) is not forthcoming for the SHCS for Shelley for 2003 we feel that our right to an educational choice for Shelley has been denied. What we are asking for involves rethinking the process of allocating educational funding for students with special needs but it does (in this instance) involve significant financial savings to the Taxpayer.

In very simple terms - why spend \$1million to provide something that a family does not want, when you can spend 1/10 of that amount and provide for them what they do want? We want to be able to choose where our children go to school. Unfortunately with the funding system operating at present we are being denied any choice in High School education for our daughter with a disability.

Please find attached copies of letter written to/from our local member Peta Seaton and John Watkins as well as Mr. Will Gardner (principal SHCS) and the NSW Dept. Education and Training. I have also been speaking with our local federal member, Joanna Gash and with Ms Robyn Yates at the Association of Independent Schools who has been most helpful and would be more than happy to provide you with any more information/figures that you may need during the course of this senate enquiry. Robyn Yates' phone number is (02) 92992845 and her secure fax number is (02) 92792206

Yours sincerely,


Demi and Matthew Harden

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PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**PETA SEATON, M.P.**

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENTASSISTANT TO THE LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION ON WOMEN

13 February 2002

Mrs Denise Harden
25 Wilsons Lane
EXETER NSW 2579

Dear Mrs Harden

Following our discussion at the electorate office late last year, I have now made representations on your behalf to the Minister for Education and Training concerning Shelly's high school education.

A copy of my letter is attached for your information, and I shall contact you again as soon as the Minister's response is received.

Yours sincerely

PETA SEATON, MP

Member for Southern Highlands

Shadow Minister for Competition and Consumer Protection

Shadow Minister for Small Business

Shadow Minister for Insurance Regulation

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PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

PETA SEATON, M.P.

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT

ASSISTANT TO THE LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION ON WOMEN



13 February 2002

The Hon J A Watkins, MP
Minister for Education and Training
Level 34 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of Ms Denise Harden (25 Wilsons Lane, Exeter 2579) regarding the high school education plans for her daughter Shelly, aged 12, who expects to commence Year 7 in February 2003.

Shelly suffers from cerebral palsy and will complete her primary school education at Exeter Public School. In 2003 Shelly would like to commence high school, ideally with her twin sister Elysse who is enrolled at the Southern Highlands Christian School, chosen by her parents as it accommodates their Christian faith.

However, Mrs Harden has had preliminary discussions with Moss Vale High School and has visited the school, to discuss whether or not Shelly's needs can be met there. Moss Vale High School is built on a severe slope and has indicated that major capital works, including the installation of a lift and numerous ramps, would have to be funded to accommodate Shelly. This work is understood to be staged, so if Shelly was to attend Moss Vale High School her needs might not be fully met from the commencement of her studies, something which is of great concern to her family.

On the other hand, the Southern Highlands Christian School is built on very flat terrain, all single storey buildings, and has no need for any additional capital works to accommodate a wheel-chair bound student, except for some minimal adjustments.

However, the Southern Highland Christian School would only be eligible for funding for around one third of Shelly's educational and support needs, if she were to attend.

It is clear that the cost of supplementing the educational funding at SHCS would be a fraction of the capital works requirements for Moss Vale High School. I also understand that a number of families of other children with disabilities in our area have expressed interest in attending SHCS, but have been made aware of the shortfall in teaching supplementation.

I therefore seek your consideration of the proposal to supplement the educational costs at SHCS, which might well also assist other prospective students, in a physical environment which is well suited to wheelchair bound students.

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The Hon J A Watkins, MP

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I look forward to your urgent consideration, as it is important that this question is resolved during early 2002, in order for Shelly to be well prepared for her entry to high school.

Attached is a copy of information provided by the Principal of the Southern Highlands Christian School, Mr William Gardner, for your information.

Yours sincerely



PETA SEATON, MP
Member for Southern Highlands
Shadow Minister for Competition and Consumer Protection
Shadow Minister for Small Business
Shadow Minister for Insurance Regulation
PLS:LAN



Southern Highlands Christian School

Cnr Kangaloon & Boardman Roads,
PO Box 639, BOWRAL NSW 2576
ABN 15 719 722 342

Ph: (02) 4861 1781
Fax: (02) 4861 1696
e-mail: office@shcs.nsw.edu.au

14th February 2002

ATTN: The Hon. J A Watkins MP,
Minister For Education and Training
Level 34 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

I am writing on behalf of a family that has enrolled in our School for the education of their children (Mr & Mrs Harden and children, Elysse and Shelley). We are able to accommodate only one of their children. Elysse, as their second child, Shelley, has high special needs and we are unable to obtain sufficient funding.

I understand funding which may be available for the category of High Special Needs only applies to students enrolled in the State Schools. For Shelley this amount would be close to \$40,000.00 / annum for a Full-time Aide. The amount we may be able to obtain through integration funding and support is approximately \$2,500.00 - \$3,000.00. The family have met all conditions of enrolment in our School and our Special Education Policy ratio means we can accommodate their desire to have Shelley enrolled at Southern Highlands Christian School, subject to funding.

Would the Department of Education and Training consider full funding for this child to be enrolled within our School?

I appreciate your consideration of the above matter and would be happy to discuss any issues with you.

Yours faithfully


William Gardner
PRINCIPAL

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PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

PETA SEATON, M.P.

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENTASSISTANT TO THE LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION ON WOMEN

11 April, 2002

Ms Denise Harden
25 Wilsons Lane
Exeter NSW 2579

Dear Ms Harden,

I have received a reply from the Minister in response to representations made on your behalf concerning special assistance for your daughter Shelly, to attend Southern Highlands Christian School at Bowral.

I have attached a copy of the letter for your reference.

I trust the Minister's advice is of assistance.

Thank you for contacting me about this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of assistance in the future.

Yours sincerely,

PETA SEATON, MP
Member for Southern Highlands
Parliamentary Secretary to Shadow Cabinet
Chair, Policy and Reform Committee
P.L.S:KA

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Minister for Education and Training

Ms P L Seaton, MP
Member for Southern Highlands
24 Wingecarribee Street
BOWRAL NSW 2576

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Dear Ms Seaton,

I refer to your representations received by me on 19 February 2002, on behalf of Ms Denise Harden of 25 Wilsons Lane, Exeter 2579, concerning special assistance for her daughter, Shelly, to attend Southern Highlands Christian School at Bowral.

I am advised that since 1993, students with special needs attending regular non-government schools have been funded at the highest level under the Government's per capita funding policy. There are no State Government funding programs outside the Government's per capita grants, textbook allowance, back to school allowance, and interest subsidy schemes available to assist non-government schools.

While it is recognised that the cost to the non-government sector of integrating students with special needs into regular schools is a significant expense, the non-government schools sector receives a financial flow-on from equivalent integration initiatives in the government school sector. The non-government schools sector also receives Commonwealth integration support funding.

The NSW Department of Education and Training provides services and resources to support the educational programs of students with special education needs enrolled in government schools. When a student with a disability presents for enrolment at a government school, an appraisal of the student's educational needs is conducted in consultation with parents. The Department of Education and Training then develops a comprehensive plan to provide the necessary physical support to enable the student to take part in regular school activities.

I appreciate the matters you raise concerning the special education needs of Shelly. I have sent your letter to Mr Alan Thomas, Superintendent, Shellharbour District Office for his urgent attention. I am confident that Shelly's needs would be well met by the Department of Education and Training.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Watkins'.

John Watkins MP

Minister for Education and Training

Level 34, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney NSW 2000 Telephone: (02) 9220 4866 Facsimile: (02) 9228 4855

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SHELLHARBOUR DISTRICT OFFICE

27 March 2002

Mr M & Mrs D Harden
24 Wilson's Lane
EXETER NSW 2579

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



Early Childhood and Primary Education
Secondary Education
Technical and Further Education
Vocational Education and Training
Higher Education
Adult and Community Education

Dear Mr & Mrs Harden,

Your daughter Shelley O'Bryan is eligible for a high school placement in the IO Support Class for students with a moderate intellectual disability at Moss Vale High School in 2003.

I would like to offer you this position and advise you to contact the Principal of Moss Vale High School, Mr McAlpine, to determine a suitable commencement date. The Principal will arrange a time for you to participate in the development of a learning support plan for Shelley if at all possible.

The placement of children in Support Classes is regularly reviewed at the school with parents being encouraged to participate in this process. If there are matters concerning Shelley's placement or progress, do not hesitate to raise them with the Principal.

If you **no longer** require support class placement for Shelley, please complete the attached advice slip and return to me within 7 days.

Thank you for your participation in the development of this application.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandra'.

SANDRA ACEVEDO-RUGG
Special Education Consultant

cc Principal - Moss Vale High School
Principal - Exeter Public School
(Please attach to School Counsellor Records)