

Parents Group
Claremont College
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BERRIEDALE TAS 7011

27th August 2007

Mr David Bartlett MHA
Minister for Education
Tasmania *Tomorrow* Project
Department of Education
Level 2, 99 Bathurst Street
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Mr Bartlett,

Tasmania Tomorrow Response – Claremont College

Following the Claremont College Community Forum last month a group of interested parents have formed a working group to communicate their concerns and monitor future developments in this important issue. Each parent on the group has a student who is potentially affected by the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative.

Introduction

Claremont College is an award winning College providing a variety of educational opportunities to year 11 and 12 students. Our observations are that staff are dedicated to seeing students succeed in a supportive environment. The College is well resourced and both students and staff seem proud to be part of the College. The College has deservedly earned an excellent reputation.

Claremont College is greater Hobart's northern-most secondary college, principally serving the educational needs of residents of the City of Glenorchy, the Derwent Valley including New Norfolk, the Bridgewater/Brighton area, and the Southern Midlands as far as Oatlands.

A pathway is provided from local High Schools to Claremont College. The College boasts having a University of Tasmania Annexe to facilitate students who wish to

undertake University post year 12. The College is seen as an integral part of education in the Northern Suburbs.

Choice of Educational Pathways

Claremont College currently provides a choice of pre-tertiary subjects for University entrance, VET subjects for entry to the workforce or further TAFE education, or students are able to choose a mixture of both. Unfortunately many students attend Claremont College without a clear intention about what they will be doing after year 12. By attending Claremont College they are able to choose from a wide range of subjects while deciding on their future. In fact, many of their subject choices influence their future careers.

It is also evident that a significant number of students change their initial choice of future career while attending Claremont College. This arises through a combination of career counselling provided by the College as well as success or failure in subjects chosen. It is very easy for students to do this at Claremont College which ultimately assists them achieve both a qualification at the end of year 12 and a pathway to the workforce or future study.

Our concern is that if Claremont College becomes an academy or a polytechnic students will be pushed either into a pre-tertiary or vocational pathway to the exclusion of the other, thus effectively limiting their choice of future career. It is also much more likely that two years of education could be wasted if the wrong choice is made; for example, a student decides after 2 years that they *should* have attended the academy down the road because Claremont College only offered polytechnic subjects that did not facilitate the student's ultimate career choice.

Claremont College does not want either the stigma of just being a polytechnic in the Northern Suburbs or the elitist's position of being just an academy for the brightest students. Opportunities for both educational pathways should be available in the City of Glenorchy. Claremont College is ideally situated and suited to provide both an academy and a polytechnic role.

Retention Rates

The Parents Group recognises that there is a need to lift school retention rates post year 10. There is need for Tasmanians to be better qualified into the future and be more in line with mainland Australia educational levels.

We believe that the way to lift retention rates is to offer choice, flexibility, convenience and a supportive environment to students. Choice is important in a student's local area; they need flexible delivery, convenience to attend classes and the support of caring and dedicated staff.

We believe that classifying Claremont College into either a polytechnic or an academy will see retention rates fall rather than increase. If students will not travel to Claremont College now they are unlikely to travel to Hobart for an offering where

they have to travel extra distance, experience parking and traffic problems and importantly incur additional cost.

Colleges are in the market for students. Colleges need to have an attractive offering that will entice students to enrol. Any student of Marketing will espouse the four 'P's of marketing: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Students expect a wide choice of product (the subjects on offer), a reasonable price (all costs of education including transport), an attractive and convenient place (the more local the better) and promotion (including open days, information sessions, award nights, etc).

Future generations will be very demanding in the market place. They will have high expectations of variety, low price, services in their local area and expect to be told about it. The reality is that less choice, more cost, no local offering and no promotion will lead to less students attending years 11 and 12, not more.

Instead of spending vast amounts of money changing and categorising Colleges we believe it would be better to spend money on research with the Tasmanian community. Why are students dropping out or not gaining a qualification? It may be that there needs to be more marketing and support towards the parents of students who do not see the value in post year 10 qualifications. Alternatively, perhaps students do not understand their career options well enough and what they need to do to move into a career of choice. Attitudes towards post year 10 education can be changed. This starts in Primary School and is reinforced in High School. High Schools should support their local College and facilitate students' entry to College.

Students' Concerns

More research and consultation needs to be done with Tasmanian Primary and High school students to find out what they want. The focus so far seems to be on anyone except the ultimate end users of the product. Current students would provide some interesting insight about what they like and dislike about the current offerings, and their expectations for the future.

Some mention was made at the forum about potential students in New Norfolk and why they do not attend Claremont College. These people could offer some feedback on why they do not attend and whether the proposals will change their opinion.

Research and experience in other countries is interesting but not necessarily relevant in the local context.

Past Experiences

There are no guarantees that the proposals will work and past experience with change in the Education Department is not a good guide. Parents still remember the introduction of the EL's that was not a welcomed outcome. Clearly the end users were not consulted or listened to. Parents and employers wanted and needed graded report

cards however this was not in the first offering. Eventually this was provided to a limited degree. Parents and teachers still find the EL's confusing and there is a lack of understanding about what the students' reports are really saying.

We do not want similar mistakes with the introduction of the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative. A well thought out and consultative process should ensure the desired outcomes are achieved. The desired outcomes are higher retention rates and a better educated Tasmanian community, not categorising Colleges into a polytechnic or an academy. The focus must remain on the desired outcome.

Attending Two Colleges

It has been suggested that students who currently successfully do a mixture of pre-tertiary and VET subjects at Claremont College may have to cross-enrol at another College to achieve the same outcome. Our questions are, firstly, who will keep track of students who are enrolled on two or more Colleges, and secondly, is it envisaged that the Education Department will provide transport between Colleges, for example, between Claremont and Hobart city colleges.

A mixture of enrolments (including on-line/external) does not provide a caring and supportive environment for students. Again we believe that this will result in lower retention rates and increased drop out rates from students.

Transition

The transitional period to the proposed polytechnic and academy model could potentially leave some students stranded at a critical time in their lives. This will again lead to lower retention as students will drop out if not looked after. The current offerings must remain at Claremont College and increase in both range and relevance.

Conclusion

The Parent Group believes it is ideally placed to understand our children's needs and our local issues.

This response has been prepared independent of the staff at Claremont College to address our children's needs. This group has children ranging from early high school to currently completing year 12 at Claremont College.

We do not want to see the excellent standard of education provided by Claremont College eroded in any way. Future offerings should be increased, not decreased.

We agree that student retention rates need to be increased. We do not believe that Claremont College operating exclusively as either an academy or a polytechnic will achieve the desired outcome.

We intend to monitor future news releases and undertake to attend future consultations if required.

We would appreciate it if you could take into consideration the above points we have raised in this response.

Yours faithfully,

On behalf of the Parents Group
Claremont College.

Ian Wheeler

Kate Wheeler

Wayne Burdon

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