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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Free school bus service not always free**

Department of Education bureaucracy is making it harder for an outlying rural student starting school in 2009 to access the free school bus service, says David Koch, Member for Western Victoria.

Raising the matter in Parliament this week, he said that the policy set by the Department of Education states that to be eligible to use the free school bus service, a student must attend the nearest government primary or secondary school, or if attending a non-government school, may be permitted to travel on an existing school bus service, provided there is space available on the bus.

“On 1 August 2008, I wrote to the Minister for Education, Bronwyn Pike, on behalf of an isolated rural family who have two young children, the eldest commencing primary school next year, but due to the Minister’s tardiness, I am yet to receive her response.

“The closest government school to this family is at Dunkeld, 30 kilometres from their home with the nearest school bus service to Dunkeld, 10 kilometres from their property.

“After making inquiries about extending the school bus route to collect their child, the family was told that due to Department of Education policy, the bus route could not be extended unless at least five children were to be collected.

“The family has access to a closer school bus service to Hamilton. But if they choose this more convenient option, they have been told that as their child will not be attending their nearest government school, they will have to pay \$217 per term per child or if they did not want to pay this fee, they could enrol their child at a private school in Hamilton.

“Over the nine years their two children will be attending primary school, and after taking into account the travelling costs, it works out cheaper for the family to send their children to a private school in Hamilton rather than sending them to a government school in either in Dunkeld or Hamilton.

“The family wants to support their local school at Dunkeld, which has an enrolment of only 60 students, but feels the system is forcing them to send their children to a private school in Hamilton.

“Parents should always have the choice of where they want their children educated, and in this case, the opportunity to send their eldest child to Dunkeld next year should not be denied simply because the rule says there must be five children collected before the bus route can be extended to their property.

“Yet again, I have asked the Minister to address the issues raised in my letter to her and find a suitable resolution for this family so they can send their child to their local government school at Dunkeld in 2009. Surely this matter shouldn’t require more than three months to resolve”, David Koch said.

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