

# Schools fear budget cuts after 'Razor Gang' proposals leaked

From front page

The proposed cuts would see over 220 jobs cut and raise more than \$13.6m for the government over two years from 2012.

Member for Mount Gambier Don Pegler said the recommendations should be taken seriously.

"We have several small schools in the district like Mil Lel and Kongorong, so it would affect us greatly," he said.

"It has the potential to place a lot of hardship on families and students in the area if it were to be included in state budget cuts."

However, Mr Pegler said it was important that people kept in mind where the recommendations were coming from.

"We must bear in mind that these are recommendations which have been suggested by an independent body, not the State Government," he said.

"The minister for education has repeatedly said no schools would close under a government decision, except if an internal decision was made by the school - we certainly wouldn't support if this guarantee was not upheld."

Glencoe Primary School principal Paul Harmer said it was still unclear how the budget would affect small schools.

Mr Harmer said he could see why small schools would be an easy target for cost cutting for the government, but the invaluable role schools played in the community was being overlooked.

"I can see why in monetary terms the government would target small schools as an easy cut - after you add up the building maintenance and teachers' pay and the general costs of any site, there is a level where those in

government do not see a small school as being sustainable," he said.

"However, what a small school means for a small community runs deeper - if you close a school it is like ripping the heart out of the community."

Mr Harmer said it was an issue which should be handled pragmatically.

"It should be dealt with case by case - not everything should be set in monetary value," he said.

"What should also be looked at is what a school means to the community."

Another recommendation by the SBC suggested rural students be charged to use school buses, but Mr Harmer said this may deter some parents from sending their children to school.

"If you begin to charge kids for this service then you may see many parents opting to home-school their children," he said.

Department of Education and Children's Services Limestone Coast assistant regional director Caroline Green said any comment ahead of today's budget release would be speculative.

"The Sustainable Budget Commission has made a number of recommendations about ways of reducing expenditure across government departments - until the budget has been handed down tomorrow, we will not have a clear picture about how education might be affected," she said.

"What I can say is that there will be briefings in Adelaide for regional leaders and senior DECS officers tomorrow afternoon and that both Garry Costello and I will be attending."



**HOPING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE:** ADASE facilitator Kylie Hann (left) and Disability SA senior developmental programmer Rita Zaccardo recently joined together to offer a successful pilot program to five children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. The children each received a workbook to take home for future support.

Picture: ANELIA BLACKIE.

## Pilot program combats anxiety



FIVE Mount Gambier children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome have been given the foundation for a more confident adult life through their participation in a social skills and emotional resilience program.

Aptly named Friends for Life, the program was launched by Anxiety Disorders Association South East (ADASE) in July last year, but recently ADASE and Mount Gambier Disability SA offered the service as a collaborative 11-week pilot program.

ADASE facilitator Kylie Hann and Disability SA senior developmental programmer Rita Zaccardo

tapped into each other's knowledge to present the program to five children between the ages of nine and 14.

"There was enough validation that was effective and feedback from parents was very positive," Ms Zaccardo said.

Developed by clinical psychologist Dr Paula Barrett, Friends for Life assists young people to accept their feelings as legitimate and teaches them techniques of positive thinking and problem solving.

The program builds their emotional resilience and assists in the development of children's social skills.

Ms Zaccardo said it was common for people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders to suffer feelings of anxiety.

"If left untreated, childhood anxiety may develop over the years into

a chronic adult anxiety disorder, and in some cases, clinical depression," she said.

"I often get to deal with adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders whose feelings of anxiety have reached breaking point - it is therefore crucial that anxiety prevention begins early and that is what this program offered."

Participants in the program were given workbooks to take home and can tap into future support from Ms Zaccardo as Disability SA clients.

Both Ms Zaccardo and Ms Hann said they were keen to present the program in Mount Gambier again as 200 children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders in the region justified an area of need.

For more information on the Friends for Life program, phone ADASE on 8723 9400 or Ms Zaccardo on 8735 1794.

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