



New structure for rural schools

By Helena Bogle

REGIONAL schools throughout the state will benefit from a new network designed to provide more flexibility and power.

Under the new structure, there will be six non-metropolitan network regions including the Mid West, Wheatbelt, Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields and South West.

Each network will have up to 20 schools across the six new rural education regions. Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis, who is also the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) chairman, chaired the first council meeting last month and said the new structure would benefit rural and remote schools.

Mr Ellis said it was the second stage of the Liberal-National government's election commitment to hand greater control to the schools and communities.

He said there would be regional education offices in each region and smaller, local education offices would continue where district offices currently operated.

"This will maximise the opportunity to co-locate services and foster

inter-agency collaboration and will give country parents the opportunity to meet with senior departmental personnel at the local level," Mr Ellis said.

Rural and remote schools will benefit particularly because each region will have a network principal who will continue to administer their own school but will also assist other schools.

"I am particularly pleased that professionals such as school psychologists and specialist teachers working with students with disability will be placed in schools rather than in district offices," Mr Ellis said.

"This means they can work direct with country students and their families on a daily basis."

Mr Ellis said the new network gave principals more control over the support services for their schools.

"It will potentially enhance the services to the country schools and will benefit the students more because the actual principal will be in direct daily contact with those support services," he said.

"Because of the restructure, it has an added benefit for those rural and remote areas because the regions will be led by a regional executive director who will become a member of the

department of education's corporate executive arrangements.

"This will strengthen the representation of country areas at the most senior decision making level of the department.

"The voice of the regions and the country will definitely be getting heard at the senior level."

Mr Ellis said regional families could also look forward to a greater curriculum choice for their children and a smoother transition between primary and secondary school.

Mt Barker Community College principal Jonathon Hoskin said the movement of staff from district offices to schools would allow each school to better manage all the resources available to support children's learning, giving them greater flexibility and freedom.

"It will be up to the schools to make the decisions on the best way to operate," Mr Hoskin said.

"We already have groups of schools working together and we've found them very valuable.

"We think the proposed new networks of schools will develop to be even more beneficial to regional schools."

Mr Hoskin said by having more professionals, such as psychologists and

specialist teachers based in schools meant children would get the best opportunities possible.

"This school will have more power over these resources and to work more closely with the children," he said.

"Parents are much more likely to keep their children in the schools knowing they have resources better targeted to each community's needs and readily available."

Mr Hoskin said Mt Barker was a distinctive school that worked with children from kindergarten to year 12 as well as having a farm on the campus. "By better managing the resources on site, it allows us to be more distinctive and better for students and families," he said. RREAC was created from a ministerial review in 1994 and its first chair was MLC Derrick Tomlinson, who conducted the inquiry.

Mr Ellis will be joined on the committee by MLC Mia Davies, who also represents the Agricultural Region.

Recruiting for regional executive directors, who will become a member of the Department of Education's corporate executive, will start immediately.