



School of the Air wants new home

Call to relocate

IAN CUTLER

PARENTS of children who use the Meekatharra School of the Air have written to the new Education minister, Liz Constable, suggesting an alternative location to the school's temporary base at Beachlands.

President of the school's Parents and Citizens Association, Tanya Brown, said the group had suggested the old St Patrick's building behind the Target store in Geraldton, which is currently vacant.

"We've spoken with the principal and a board member of the Nagle Catholic College about using the building for the

School of the Air, and they didn't see any problems with that," Mrs Brown said.

"However, the lease arrangements need the approval of the State Government, and so we've written this week to the new government's Education minister with the suggestion."

The School of the Air has been located at Beachlands Primary School since its building at Meekatharra was burnt down.

The P and C had asked for relocation to Geraldton, primarily to address difficulties in retaining staff in

Meekatharra.

However, Mrs Brown said the P and C felt the Beachlands accommodation was inadequate, and the St Patrick's building would be more suitable for the needs of the School of the Air.

"The St Patrick's building has two floors and eight rooms, so we could run the school from there as well as provide accommodation for the families and children living in remote areas when they visit Geraldton," she said.

The Upper House member for the Agricultural Region, Brian Ellis, has contacted

the Education minister's office seeking a clarification of the new government's intentions regarding the school, and a briefing note is being prepared for Ms Constable.

Mr Ellis has offered to meet the School of the Air Parents and Citizens Association to discuss its preferred options, and to liaise with the minister on the association's behalf.

"As a bush student who spent years at boarding school, I am well aware of the School of the Air's important role of providing education without young people having to leave

home," Mr Ellis said.

The Meekatharra School of the Air has 62 students from places as far away as Newman, Wiluna and Murchison, even from an island off the coast of Queensland and parts of the Northern Territory.

The parents' group has established a program called "Care to Dream", to raise funds towards a purpose-built base for the school in the long term, while it continues to press for relocation from Beachlands.

A recent fun run raised \$1500 towards the campaign.