

Two Aboriginal Schools are Closed

Two aboriginal schools on the South Coast will not reopen after the 1964-1965 summer holidays.

The two schools have been closed with the approval of the Department of Education and the Aborigines Welfare Board, and the children concerned transferred to public schools.

The schools closed are those at Roseby Park and at Wallaga Lake.

The children from the Roseby Park school will be enrolled at Nowra Public School, and those from Wallaga Lake will be transferred to Bermagui Central School.

About 20 children were enrolled last year at the Roseby Park school and about 25 at the Wallaga Lake school.

The Aborigines Welfare Board has agreed to bear the full cost of transporting the children from their homes to their new schools, over and above the subsidies to which their parents are entitled.

The cost to the Board will be about £870 in one year. The Board has agreed to meet the extra cost of transport to the parents concerned for the first three years following the transfer.

Wallaga Lake is nine miles from Bermagui, and Roseby Park is 16 miles from Nowra.

The Aborigines Welfare Board has also agreed to meet a similar charge on parents of children from the Aboriginal schools at Burnt Bridge and Green Hills, near Kempsey, who are now attending public and denominational schools in the town of Kempsey.

Students at fifth and sixth grades at the schools at Burnt Bridge and Green Hills have been travelling to Kempsey for the past year.

The Board last year closed the school at the Kinchela Boys' Home, and the children now attend school in Kempsey.

Since the early 1940's the education of Aboriginal children has been the responsibility of the Department of Education.

The Department's policy is to close Aboriginal schools wherever possible and to enrol the children in the nearest public school.

The Aborigines Welfare Board is in complete agreement with this policy and it assists if required in the matter of transport of the pupils from its stations and reserves to the public school.

In general, the only Aboriginal schools now functioning are isolated from the nearest public schools in towns.

Percy Bamblett, a 19 years old Aborigine from Gilgandra, who has been blind for seven years, can now "see" again.

Percy has not had his sight restored, but he has just returned to his home in Gilgandra with a seeing eye dog whose name is Ivy.

Percy "won" the dog and the right to be trained at the seeing eye dog school in Melbourne, on a television show.

He is believed to be the first Aborigine in Australia to use a seeing eye dog. Percy spent six months at the school in Melbourne.

There he learned upholstery and other crafts, and braille, the system by which blind people can read.

His stay at the home where the school is, was subsidised by Gilgandra Apex, with assistance from Mrs. Edna McDonald, a councillor of Gilgandra Shire.

At the moment, the Bamblett family—Percy's parents, and four brothers and sisters—are living in a home in Gilgandra built by members of the Christian Youth Council using materials supplied by the Aborigines Welfare Board.

A new and bigger home is at present being built for them by the Board in Gilgandra. It is being built by the Housing Commission and should be ready in a couple of months. The people of Gilgandra have rallied to Percy's plight.

In a leading article shortly before his return to Gilgandra with his seeing eye dog, the *Gilgandra Weekly* said: "As an Aborigine, he has to face the apathy and indifference of many of his white brothers, and indeed the shiftlessness of many of his own colour.

"These are problems enough when possessed of all faculties. Blind, they can multiply to large proportions.

"We suggest that the people of Gilgandra will lend a helping hand to Percy Bamblett on his road back and help him where possible with any problem."

First "Seeing Eye Dog" for Aborigine