

School with just 9 pupils

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A SCHOOL with only nine students may close just one year after letting a teacher go and building a \$100,000 kitchen.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is in talks with Olinda Primary School, which is costing thousands of dollars to run.

The 101-year-old Dandenong Ranges school has an acting principal, a teacher and a part-time administrative assistant to look after just one class.

Sassafras Primary School, Mt Dandenong Primary School and Sherbrooke Community School are all within 10km of the school.

Olinda lost almost 50 students this year after dumping the Steiner teaching method. It made headlines in March last year when parents considered taking out a \$60,000 bank loan to keep their Steiner teacher, after an enrolment drop led to funding cuts by the department.

Unable to bankroll the scheme, the teacher left and, with her, most of the school.

Over the past two years the school has received almost \$40,000 in state maintenance funding, and almost \$105,000 in federal grants, which went towards the new kitchen. Because school funding comes from many different avenues within both state and federal governments, and is tied to specific projects, schools are unable to pool it to fund areas where there is a shortfall of cash.

Fed-up parent Meg Yates was one of many to pull her two children out of Olinda last year.

"We couldn't even keep a teacher, then we get a \$100,000 kitchen," she said.

"I was ropeable. I called the department and told them we have been fighting for 18 months to keep our teacher and asked why we were still getting this kitchen, but they said there was nothing they could do."

The future of the school will be determined by its council.

The Education Department cannot order closures, but can strip funding based on enrolments. A department spokeswoman said there was no formal review of the school.