

SCHOOL BOARDING FACILITIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT AND REPEAL BILL 2015

First Reading

Bill read a first time, on motion by **Mr C.J. Barnett (Premier)**.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the Premier.

Second Reading

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [2.52 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to repeal the Country High School Hostels Authority Act 1960 and amend the School Education Act 1999 to provide for the functions of the Country High School Hostels Authority to be undertaken by the Department of Education. The catalyst for this legislative change was the Blaxell inquiry. As members would be aware, in November 2011 retired Supreme Court judge Hon Peter Blaxell was appointed to undertake a special inquiry into the response of government agencies and officials in regard to allegations of sexual abuse at St Andrew's Hostel in Katanning between 1975 and 1990. At the time, the hostel was one of a number in regional Western Australia that operated under the auspices of the authority established under the Country High School Hostels Authority Act.

The Blaxell inquiry report was submitted to the government on 3 August 2012 and subsequently tabled in the Legislative Assembly by me, as Premier, on 19 September 2012. At that time, the advice was that the government endorsed the five recommendations in chapter 20 of the report. These recommendations have been implemented, with the exception of recommendation 2, which was for a child-focused one-stop shop complaints system. On further examination, a one-stop shop approach was not seen as practical. The government does not want to disrupt the established lines of reporting, in particular to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and WA Police.

In addition to the recommendations of the report, the government decided that hostels must have a more contemporary public sector governance structure. To achieve this, the authority and local boards will be abolished and the management of hostels will come under the control of the Department of Education. The authority has been physically co-located with the Department of Education since 2003, and consequently has been provided with some support from the department since that time. The director general of the Department of Education had been acting as the chief executive officer of the authority from August 2006 and was substantively appointed in October 2011. Following the release of the report, the support of the department has been strengthened.

Chapter 5 of the Blaxell report provides an instructive history as to why the government is abolishing the authority and local boards in their current form. From the early 1900s, churches and the Country Women's Association established and managed individual hostels for country students to attend schools. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was an increasing demand for government funding of hostel infrastructure run by these organisations. The vehicle for the funding of hostel infrastructure was the Country High School Hostels Authority Act 1960. After the commencement of this act, there was an uneasy relationship between the authority and the bodies operating the existing hostels. In return for the funding of facilities, the authority gradually gained control until it was responsible for the operation of the hostels.

During the 1970s, the management of the hostels became subject to a letter of arrangement with the authority. The letter of arrangement provided that a local board would engage and dismiss staff, pay all accounts, and supervise the management and control of the hostel. This management arrangement was a significant contributor to what occurred at St Andrew's Hostel. Page 24 of appendix 1 of the Blaxell report states, "It is apparent from the records that McKenna maintained a close control over the Board. Chapter 19 of the Blaxell report considers what has changed at the hostels and considers the employment of staff, and the role and responsibilities of local boards of management.

Under the new legislation, local boards will no longer be responsible for employing staff and for the finances of hostels. The bill provides for the operations of the colleges and, most importantly, that the focus of the colleges will remain the provision of accommodation to allow students to complete educational programs in schools. The primary reason a parent chooses to have their child board at a college is to access the programs of a school. The incorporation of colleges into the Department of Education will reinforce the fact that the programs and the quality of the school are crucial to the attractiveness and viability of a college.

As student residential colleges will be administered under the School Education Act, the wording and ministerial powers used for the administration of the school system is relevant and, to a degree, relied on in the new part 6A to achieve internal consistency in the act. Notwithstanding this, there are also differences in part 6A that

specifically cater for the operations of student residential colleges. The new part 6A will give the minister the authority to establish such colleges as necessary to provide residential accommodation and related services for students while they attend a school. A “school” is defined in the act to mean a government school or a non-government school. As such, accommodation may be provided to government school and non-government school students. Access to available accommodation places will be determined through criteria that will be prescribed in regulation.

The bill will provide the minister with a number of corporate powers that may be exercised for the purposes of operating a student residential college. These corporate powers are similar, but not identical, to those provided to the minister for the administration of government schools.

The bill provides for regulations to be made about an accommodation agreement that will refer to the student code of conduct, and the costs and charges for accommodation. The relationship between the college, students and their parents will be formed by the accommodation agreement. Adherence to the code of conduct will be a requirement of the accommodation agreement. A breach of the code may result in a breach of the accommodation agreement and, in particular circumstances, lead to a student no longer being accommodated at the college. The code of conduct will be issued by the minister.

The minister will have the power to grant licences for the use of college facilities in which that use is for a joint arrangement as defined in the legislation—that is, an arrangement entered into by the minister for purposes that are complementary and beneficial to the functions of the college and that involve the use of property vested in the minister. This power is similar to the power that the minister has for government schools.

Joint arrangements will cater for the circumstance in which a Catholic or independent school wishes to build a college, contribute to the building of a college, or provide funding for the purposes of quarantining places for their students.

Each student residential college will have a local input networking and communication committee that will, firstly, provide advice regarding the operation and management of the college; secondly, promote the interests of the college and foster community interest in the college; thirdly, approve arrangements for advertising and sponsorship presented to it by the college manager; fourthly, provide feedback about the code of conduct; and, fifthly, undertake other functions that may be prescribed in the regulations. However, a LINC committee will not be involved in the day-to-day administration of the college and, as such, will not exercise direct authority over any person employed at the college or the finances of a college.

The bill provides that the land and finances of the authority come under the control of the minister and will be administered by the Department of Education on behalf of the minister. Staff of the authority will be employed by the Department of Education in accordance with their existing industrial awards and agreements.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman**.