

MT MAGNET DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL, WITHDRAWAL OF SECONDARY DEPUTY PRINCIPAL  
POSITION

**652. Mr SWEETMAN to the Minister for Education:**

I refer the minister to the Australian Labor Party policy statement “Investing in our Children”, which states that schools with a demonstrated need will be funded to employ additional support staff to assist in managing discipline and behavioural issues.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that, despite being an isolated and difficult to staff school with limited support from the Department for Community Development, the position of secondary deputy principal at Mt Magnet District High School will be withdrawn?
- (2) Can the minister also confirm that the secondary deputy principal at Mt Magnet District High School specialises in behaviour management, discipline problems, cultural issues and staff support, particularly for Aboriginal and itinerant students?
- (3) Why is this important position being withdrawn from an isolated and needy school with such complex student issues?

**Mr CARPENTER replied:**

- (1)-(3) I thank the member for some notice of this question. To be fair to me, it might have been better if the member for Ningaloo had given me some notice of this specific staffing issue. I do not have the detail, but I will find out for the member. It is not the practice, as far as I understand my position, for me to be directly involved in whether this or that person in a school must stay or go, but I will obtain the information for the member.

More generally the member mentioned the behaviour management and discipline program in schools. It was launched at Girrawheen Senior High School two or more months ago to look at the issues that confront schools in dealing with the behaviour management and discipline problems specifically of years 8 and 9 students. These are difficult transition years, when many students, for one reason or another, exhibit difficulties with behaviour management or discipline. The program provides schools with the resources to help them deal with those issues. I steered clear of laying down a template for all schools for dealing with those issues, because it is my belief, and from what the member for Ningaloo has said, he would share this belief, that schools have individual resourcing ability with staff. They know the individual problems with student and groups of students and how best to deal with the issues and children in their schools.

I fulfilled an election commitment that we would tackle this difficult issue. Many Governments do not like to confront behaviour management and discipline issues in government schools, but we did. Over the four-year budget cycle I applied \$28 million to this problem. Public schools are able to access that money to deal with the issues in their schools.

It can be done in different ways. Direct staffing allocations were made to a range of schools, and many schools benefited from the provision of extra full-time equivalent positions. In addition, financial resources were provided for schools to buy in the resources they needed. If a school wanted the services of a child psychologist, a chaplain or a variety of other resources available in the community, it could purchase them.

I believe - I have not heard anyone say otherwise - that this is a good policy initiative. From what the member has said, he appears to agree. It is -

Mr Barnett: It dates from last year's wage negotiations.

Mr CARPENTER: It does not.

Mr Barnett: It does; it was raised by teachers.

Mr CARPENTER: The former Minister for Education set aside an amount to reduce class sizes in years 8 and 9. That demonstrated how little he understood about education. He understood nothing about his portfolio. He demonstrates his ignorance on a daily basis, and he has just done it again. He was an ignorant minister who simply signed the documents put in front of him. He ran budget deficits year after year; he had no idea about how to manage a budget. He ran tens of millions of dollars over budget and left this Government with a \$60 million education budget problem. He would be wise to remain silent and try to learn something about the portfolio area that he did his best to know nothing about during his term as the minister responsible. He was a failure, and I do not intend to repeat that failure.

Several members interjected.

Mr CARPENTER: Schools did not necessarily want the resources directed to class size reduction. If a teacher has a class of 16 or 17 students and eight are disruptive, and if funds are allocated to reduce that class size to 15 students, what will be achieved? That teacher will still have a class of disruptive students. What schools wanted, and what they are getting from this Government, is central support for local flexibility to deal with local issues and problems. This Government has listened to the staff, students, teachers and parents in school communities. As a result, it has developed policies that address their concerns. Members opposite did not; they failed. The former Government spent \$80 million on the government schools information technology program. That program is now a huge problem and it is costing hundreds of millions of dollars to rectify. The Auditor General reviewed the program and said it was a mess. The former minister created a mess. I am the minister responsible for cleaning it up, and I am doing that.

I will investigate the specifics of the member's inquiry and provide a detailed response.