

SCHOOL LOCKDOWN — CLAIM BY MEMBER FOR MIDLAND

242. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Minister for Education:

Can the minister confirm a claim made in this house on Tuesday 17 March by the member for Midland that a regional school is held in permanent lockdown?

Dr E. CONSTABLE replied:

On Tuesday, the member for Midland made a claim about a school that was in permanent lockdown. According to the member, teachers at the school were communicating with each other using walkie-talkies and wearing safety glasses for protection. I was, of course, extremely concerned about such claims so I spoke to the Director General of the Department of Education and Training and asked her to check these claims. Her report to me was that there is no school in permanent lockdown, whatever that means—no-one seems to know what the term “permanent lockdown” means. If the school was in permanent lockdown, no-one would be able to get in or out, and there is no school in Western Australia that people cannot enter or leave.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Why don't you talk to the teachers' union? They used to be your friends, remember?

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Midland.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: According to the report I received, there is no school at which teachers are communicating with each other using walkie-talkies. Apparently at a school in the Pilbara, teachers are using walkie-talkies when on playground duty so that they can communicate, if they need, with the administration, but they are certainly not communicating with each other on walkie-talkies on an ongoing basis. No school could be found where teachers are wearing protective glasses.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: There are some schools, particularly in the Pilbara—I recently attended one in Port Hedland—where teachers wear fluorescent vests in the playground so that both children and adults can quickly identify them if necessary. That is the closest I got, in the report I received, to the member for Midland's claims.

Twice in two weeks the member for Midland has come to Parliament and made wild claims about matters in public schools. It is of great concern to me. Last week she was talking about an attempted abduction at a school south of the river; this week it is a school in permanent lockdown. Neither of these claims was substantiated. The police investigated the first and the director general has investigated the second. I do not know where the member gets this from, but there is no substantiation for these claims.

What is really important is that I am concerned—as, I hope, are all members—about the security and safety of children and teachers in schools; it should be uppermost in our minds. However, if the member for Midland is going to denigrate government schools in the way that she has, she has a real problem that she needs to deal with.