

SCHOOL FEES

Statement by Member for Kingsley

MRS C.L. EDWARDES (Kingsley) [12.58 pm]: I rise to highlight the inconsistency and duplicity being shown by the Minister for Education towards schools in my electorate in relation to the non-compulsory school fees that parents are asked to pay. These fees amount to a small proportion only of the total school budget, but they do allow the individual schools the opportunity to offer an expanded range of courses to their students. When the minister made these fees non-compulsory, he boldly predicted that fee collection would fall by only 20 per cent and that the department would make up the shortfall so that schools would not be disadvantaged. The reality is that the fee collection has fallen by considerably more than the predicted 20 per cent, and the department has not made up the shortfall. One of the schools in my electorate has suffered a shortfall of \$43 000 and a neighbouring school \$70 000. I wrote to the minister, and in his response he was confident that the education assistance fund and the secondary assistance scheme would go “some way” towards addressing the shortfall. “Some way” is not far enough. The minister came into this House on 30 August 2001 and said “that schools be instructed not to use debt collectors in relation to any parent contributions”. Yet on 11 July 2002, in a letter to me, the minister said that “schools have available to them the use of debt collectors”. The attitude of the Minister for Education to the calls for help from these schools to meet their shortfalls is confusing and gives mixed messages. When will the minister send a cheque for \$43 000 to the Greenwood Senior High School?

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

The SPEAKER: Before I call on questions without notice, I acknowledge in the Speaker’s gallery members of the Public Accounts Committee of Kenya and the Kenyan High Commissioner to Australia.

[Applause.]