

WA CIRCUS SCHOOL INC

Grievance

MR A.P. O'GORMAN (Joondalup) [9.13 am]: My grievance this morning is to the minister representing the Minister for Education in this place, the Minister for Planning. Minister, I will go through a little bit of history. More than 20 years ago we would have all known the name Reg Bolton and the Reg Bolton Circus School. Reg Bolton was involved in keeping young people engaged in the community by teaching them circus skills. That evolved into what was called Bizircus and is now WA Circus School Inc. WA Circus School has been operating out of the old Customs House building in Fremantle for the past 20 years. The old Customs House building in Fremantle is leased by a not-for-profit organisation called Artsource, which now requires for its own purposes as a gallery the space that WA Circus School is using. Artsource has informed the circus school that it will not renew its lease past December 2012, although in discussions I had this morning with my contact, I was told that that has now been extended by a month or two to allow the circus an opportunity to find a better place. The circus school has been actively seeking an alternative venue. It found one—or thought it had found one—at Claremont Showgrounds, but it turns out there is a fair amount of asbestos in that building and it cannot be used for its particular purpose.

The circus school is utilised throughout the state by many schools. It is used in an attempt to keep young people engaged in the school system. It helps build self-confidence and it teaches circus skills, generally to young kids who have very low self-esteem. It builds their self-esteem to know that they can get up on a unicycle or they can juggle, spin plates, swing on trapezes, walk tightropes and all those sorts of things. The circus school does a very good job in keeping young people engaged in our education system. We have found that it not only improves their self-confidence in performance and in their social skills, but also improves their performance academically. It is a fantastic organisation that has kept many young people engaged over many years. Now the circus school is facing eviction, not for anything that it has done wrong, but just because the other organisation needs the space.

Minister, I suggested in a letter to the former Minister for Education, Dr Elizabeth Constable, that the former Padbury Senior High School's gymnasium could possibly be used by WA Circus School. I wrote to the minister on 12 April this year and received a reply on 28 May. In that letter, the minister states —

On 26 May 2011, I announced that Department of Education's Statewide Services would relocate to the Padbury Senior High School site from 2012. Documentation of the proposed works on the Padbury site is currently being prepared. Building works will be in progress on the site from July 2012 until July 2013. Unfortunately, the gymnasium is located in the midst of the proposed building works.

I am hoping that means the gymnasium is still available after July 2013 and there may be an opportunity for the WA Circus School to occupy that space. I am not aware that that space is going to be used. In fact, when I visited the former Padbury Senior High School site, I was told the school was not aware of any plans for its future use. Failing that, the government of Western Australia and the education department have many buildings right across the state. As a second alternative, I am proposing the former site of the Australian Institute for University Studies, on McLarty and Shenton Avenues, Joondalup. That facility also has a gymnasium on its grounds that is not being used. Is there any possibility that that gymnasium can be used? The Department of Education has that. Is it possible for the WA Circus School to use that facility, or any facility for that matter, that the Department of Education, the Department of Training and Workforce Development, or the government in general, has across the metropolitan area?

The WA Circus School brings in circus performers from all over the world. It is a well-renowned school, not just in Western Australia. The fact that we get performers from Europe and America to come and give lessons in that school is a credit to its reputation. Joondalup Primary School has used WA Circus School extensively. Over the past number of years, I have attended many performances of the Joondalup Primary School, which I can only say were of an absolutely professional standard. I thought I was looking at professional actors on the stage; that is the level of self-confidence that the circus school has brought to that school. The drama teachers at that school told me that some of the people on the unicycles juggling all sorts of different things, from balls to skittles, or in some instances knives—albeit pretend knives, for safety reasons—have built their self-confidence to such an extent that they can get up in front of an audience of 200 or 300 people and do that performance. We all know how difficult public speaking is. These students can also actually do their own public speaking. In one of the performances that I saw, called *Seussical*—a collaboration of Dr Seuss books, put together and transformed into a stage play—a lot of the speeches were adlibbed. Young people were actually making the words up as they went along. I have to say that I have never been taken so much with a performance as I was on that night—and I have seen a lot of performances. The professionalism comes through because of the WA Circus School. It gives young people such confidence that they can stand up and not only perform a rehearsed piece, but also adlib.

Minister, I am asking whether anything can be done to help WA Circus School find new premises, preferably in the northern suburbs, where it will assist most schools.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Planning) [9.20 am]: I thank the member for Joondalup for giving notice of his grievance. I respond partly as minister representing the Minister for Education, but also as Minister for Culture and the Arts because the Department of Culture and the Arts has had some involvement with the WA Circus School about the issue that has been raised. I acknowledge that the circus school has made a significant contribution to young Western Australians and to the community of Western Australia. The member for Joondalup mentioned Reg Bolton. I certainly remember him; indeed, I saw him perform, and I am sure my children attended some of his performances. I agree that he was a very effective entertainer and communicator with children. Is he still performing?

Mr A.P. O’Gorman: No. He hasn’t been involved for quite some time.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The Department of Culture and the Arts has provided \$15 000 to the circus school to assist it to identify a possible new venue. I am advised that consultants have been appointed and that a report is due in October this year. The Department of Culture and the Arts has also confirmed with Lotterywest that, depending on the venue chosen, the circus school could apply for up to \$60 000 to assist with fit-out costs. As well as being able to apply, presumably that implies that the circus school’s application would be considered sympathetically.

The City of Fremantle has also informed the circus school that a building on the corner of Canning Highway and Queen Victoria Street may be suitable for conversion for its purposes depending on a structural assessment of the building, which is owned by the City of Fremantle. Artsource is the head leaseholder of the building in which the circus school is currently located—the old Customs House in Fremantle—and it has responsibility for the funding received from the Department of Culture and the Arts to provide support to Western Australian visual artists and, in particular, to provide affordable studio space as part of its core services. Artsource is a valuable and important organisation in the Western Australian visual arts arena. Artsource has provided the WA Circus School with significant notice—18 months—to relocate from its current premises, because it needs to use the space for its activities. The Department of Culture and the Arts has been in discussion with Artsource and the circus school to find a resolution to the circus school’s needs.

As the member for Joondalup said, Artsource notified the circus school that its current lease would not be renewed and that it would need to vacate the venue by the end of December this year. However, following further discussions with DCA, Artsource has now agreed to a six-month extension of the circus school’s current lease, which means that it can continue in the current location until June 2013. The conditions of the extended lease are currently being negotiated between the two parties. As far as the Department of Culture and the Arts is concerned, assistance is being provided to find a suitable location for the circus school’s continued operations.

I am informed that the Department of Education has not been formally approached by the circus school and that it is unaware of its particular requirements. It is acknowledged that the member for Joondalup wrote to the former Minister for Education requesting access to the gymnasium at Padbury Senior High School. I am advised that that site has been designated for the department’s statewide services and that the building works that are about to commence on the Padbury site will continue for 12 months. The department considers that the gymnasium, which is located in the middle of what will become a building site, is not suitable because it would not provide safe access for any activity during the construction period. I also understand that the former Minister for Education saw firsthand the work of the circus school and that she was complimentary of its activities. However, I reiterate that the Department of Education is not aware of any suitable school site for the circus school’s continued operations.

The important contribution that the WA Circus School makes to Western Australian children is acknowledged. Assistance is being provided financially and in other ways to assist the circus school to identify a new venue for its continued operations. It is important that the circus school continues to operate after the end of its extended lease period on the Artsource premises, which is June next year.