

**WOMEN IN IT
CAMPBELL PRIMARY SCHOOL, CANNING VALE**

Statement

HON LOUISE PRATT (East Metropolitan) [5.32 pm]: This week I had the pleasure of participating in an event organised by Women Are IT. It was called the "Go Girl, Go For IT".

Hon Peter Foss: What is the organisation?

Hon LOUISE PRATT: Women Are IT is an organisation for women working in information technology. Women working in IT are growing increasingly concerned that young girls are not embracing IT careers. They organised a careers showcase at Murdoch University with role models selected from corporate and government organisations throughout Western Australia.

I had the great pleasure of speaking to about 400 schoolgirls over a period of a couple of days about how I use IT in my career as a parliamentarian. One of the main reasons girls are not embracing IT careers is their lack of knowledge of the relevance of IT careers and skills in the modern workplace. It is clear that the number of IT jobs is continuing to grow in our community. There is a gender pay gap of about 23 per cent in Western Australia, so it is really important that we encourage young women into these kinds of careers. Currently WA women receive 77 per cent of men's average weekly earnings, which is the biggest gender gap in pay between men and women in the country.

About 1 900 girls came through this year's careers showcase. I am hoping that that will go some way to encouraging those girls to think about their future options. The survey conducted at the end of last year's showcase indicated that more girls would consider IT careers. Currently less than 10 per cent of women are in the IT professions, and only one in five high school girls chooses IT as a study option. This careers showcase demonstrated that careers span far more than merely information systems and computing, which is what many young girls perceive as the boring side of IT. The girls who attended could see that it encompasses management and is creative, and that it is not just about technology but how IT impacts on every facet of our society, including the environment and our economy.

Young women today still rely on many gender stereotypes when piecing together in their minds what their future might hold for them. It was really clear from my participation in the workshops yesterday that the girls who participated well and truly had those stereotypes blown out of the water for them. The showcase is meeting the needs of not only young women but also industry, because we need women to be engaged in industry to meet the future demands of a skilled work force in our community. We do not want to miss out on the diverse talents and potential of more than half our population.

I had the great pleasure of visiting Campbell Primary School in Canning Vale this morning to be a guest judge for what was called the virtues rap. The school ran a competition in which the kids performed rap about the virtues that the school promotes, which are respect, responsibility and friendliness. I thought that the school culture I observed - the values, morals and ethics - were second to none that I have seen in any other school and are exemplary virtues to be found in government schools today. I wanted to raise this issue because I have been dismayed at the way in which the Prime Minister John Howard has accused government schools of being value neutral.

We all know that to have an effective school culture and for schools to be positive places in which children can learn, they must put a lot of effort into the values of the school and teaching children about values. They must cover things like respect, responsibility and friendliness. They must have a dialogue about those things in the fabric of the school, where they talk about them and display these mottoes and children are encouraged to talk about what these things mean. Campbell Primary School has a cartoon competition. The young kids put together fantastic musical dance raps that are a modern way of engaging young people in the values and virtues of today's society. It is not about old-fashioned values; it is a modern sense of values that young kids of primary school age are able to engage in and understand. The fabric of the school community at Campbell Primary School is excellent. It is a new school that has only been in existence for two years. The growing suburban community there has been created in the past couple of years. A lot of the teachers' energy has gone into creating that school community, which has a robust sense of self. For example, plenty of parents attended the school assembly and there were lots of attentive, friendly children. The experience was second to none, yet it is similar to many other government schools I have visited.

I wanted to raise this issue because I was really dismayed at some of the debate that has been taking place federally, and at John Howard's arguments that public schools are too value neutral or too politically correct being used to partly justify injecting billions of dollars into private schools as opposed to strengthening the public school system. It is a shame, because all our children are of equal worth and they all deserve our commitment.

