

Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr David Scaife; Dr David Honey;  
Ms Sabine Winton; Ms Alison Kent; Ms Elizabeth Kelsbie; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Terry Healy

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**EDUCATION — GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE**

*Motion*

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Western Australian Labor government's continued neglect of the state's education system and acknowledges its failure to prioritise the needs of students throughout the entire state.

This is a very important motion. I know that the relatively new Minister for Education will be looking forward to the opportunity to respond to my motion. I say to the minister that my speech will not be all negative. I tend to agree with some of his philosophies, even though I do not always like to admit it. Certain elements that he has spoken about in the last nine months or so since he has been the education minister have struck a chord with me. I will outline a few of those. I do not agree with everything that is happening in the education system; I have quite a few concerns. I want to point out a couple of things at the start of my contribution.

It is unfortunate that this relatively new minister has been tainted by the actions of some of his predecessors, including what occurred with Moora Residential College. The member for Cottesloe was around at that time. The people of Moora, and the people of WA, had to go out and rally and make sure their voices were heard. Eventually, a combination of funding, including \$10 million from the federal Liberal–National coalition government, saved the day.

There was also the issue relating to the Schools of the Air, which the member for North West Central would be very familiar with, given her background in the pastoral region. When I look back on the nearly seven years that I have been in Parliament, the Schools of the Air fiasco is something for which this government will be remembered, along with Perth Modern School. We remember the likes of former students Hon Kim Beazley, Hon Malcolm McCusker and many others working in the background or rallying on the front steps of Parliament House when the former minister was very keen to build a high-rise building in the centre of Perth for Perth Modern School, when it has a beautiful campus not far away from us.

Unfortunately, for the current minister, they are some of the things that have tainted this government's education background. I like to call it command and control. That was the *modus operandi* for the minister's predecessor. I like the current minister's slightly more relaxed and consultative attitude. The minister demonstrated that a few weeks ago at the opening of the Western Australian Primary Principals' Association conference. His opening address struck a chord with the audience. That was so important for the 600-odd principals and deputy principals in the room. They felt that the minister was listening and that he knew about some of the issues they are facing. I recognise that.

I have quite a shopping list of concerns that I would like to raise today, including reference to a couple of grievances that I will make over the next few weeks, one of them being school bus services and the relationship between the Department of Transport and school bus services. As the minister knows, I was on the committee that inquired into that issue last year. I will be making a grievance to the Minister for Transport tomorrow morning because the silence is deafening. I am looking forward to learning whether there has been any interaction between the Minister for Education and the Department of Transport and the Minister for Transport. I also wish to raise the situation of the Darkan community in the Shire of West Arthur. Many families in that community are trying to get their children to Collie Senior High School. Once again, they have been left high and dry as far as I can tell. They have certainly written to the Minister for Education and the Minister for Transport. I am looking forward to hearing whether they have received a response.

Another issue that probably relates to the minister's portfolio is the teacher housing situation in Munglinup. Basically, the Shire of Ravensthorpe and the community of Munglinup negotiated with the Department of Education. The department purchased a block. I have more detail on it. It said that it would build a house in Munglinup, starting in 2021, I think. Sure enough, late last year or early this year, the Department of Housing decided to build one in Kalgoorlie and not worry about the Munglinup community. They are the sorts of things that really upset our regional families when they are just trying to get a decent teacher and a decent principal in their community. I thought I would mention those issues early on. I will provide more detail as we go.

One of my big concerns is the resignations and teacher shortages that we have seen. There is certainly no outward sign of it, if the minister is looking for some sort of signal from the department that it is struggling for teachers. However, I can assure the minister that I see how some of our regional schools, in particular, are struggling to get teachers, with regional directors having to slot people in, swap principals to other schools and do all sorts of things, including merging classrooms. This is a real issue. As the minister commented the other week, our teaching graduates are down 41 per cent over five years. I was very interested to hear those comments from the minister. No doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has had some effect on this, as it has on many other occupations, but it has probably been amplified in schools. Many principals were almost health department operatives during the COVID pandemic. They

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had to do all sorts of things, whether it was cleaning, checking people's medical records and the like. There was a certain burnout factor. That has no doubt started to come into play in the education sector.

An article by Holly Thompson dated 20 March 2023 states —

West Australian teachers are struggling to keep up with growing workloads, as teacher shortages and threats of violence continue to increase, a new survey has revealed.

The results of the survey showed that in WA, school leaders and their staff were struggling with burnout, stress and anxiety over a range of factors. They also showed that 55 per cent of teachers reported that they had been subjected to threats, including cyberbullying or physical acts of violence—the highest number ever since the survey started 12 years ago. Almost 52 per cent of teachers in WA also received a red flag alert email, up from 28 per cent in 2021, in the survey sent to participants. The email said that they may be at risk of serious mental health concerns in the coming years. That is an increase from 28 per cent to 52 per cent. There is no doubt that that is one of the biggest things in the principal/teacher landscape that we are seeing. Western Australian Primary Principals' Association president Niel Smith has been quoted as saying that school leaders continue to work, on average, the longest hours in the country. That certainly struck home with me. An article in today's *The West Australian* reported that the New South Wales government is looking to reimburse its teachers and principals on a much better basis. I wonder whether the WA Minister for Education will follow suit. From my perspective, everywhere I go, burnout of our teachers is a real issue. Every time I talk to principals, they are worried about not only themselves but also their deputies and the teachers on their staff. Those surveys highlight quite a few concerns.

The other part of that is teachers with limited authority to teach. Around this time last year, in the order of 673 teachers were in that category. They were certainly filling a pretty large gap. I will be interested to hear whether the minister has any up-to-date figures on the number of teachers with limited authority to teach in the mix. That is something that has developed. I have met a few, out in the regions especially. Generally, they are pretty well prepared, but I suggest that classroom management could be a challenge for a lot of teachers who are in their last years of training. Then, of course, they potentially have to return to a prac situation to gain their degree after having taught for a year or part of a year. That is an issue. I will be developing a few of those topics in my time today.

Another thing I forgot to do at the start of my contribution was to congratulate Bob Hawke College on the opening of stage 2. The Minister for Education, the Premier and the member for Nedlands were there the other day; obviously, my invitation was lost in the mail.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Member, if that is the case, it's not acceptable.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** No; I must admit I was disappointed when I saw the press release and the photos. I visited Bob Hawke College about six months ago and was very impressed with how things are going there. The school seems to be well-run, but as I said, I am disappointed that my invitation obviously got lost in the mail.

Regardless of that, I will move on to various other subjects, all of them important. I asked the minister a question about NAPLAN the other week, I think with regard to the year 9 results. As the minister pointed out at the time, participation is pretty good, but there are some concerns in the lower age groups. I think NAPLAN is important and something that we need to press on with. I actually agree with the minister that we still need to put some pressure on our students to get a measure of how they are going.

One of the first things the current Minister for Education did was to bring up the matter of early university offers. I asked the minister a question about that recently also, and I will be curious to hear how his recent meeting with the universities went. I know that the early offers were not as early as usual this year; they did not go out in April, which was the timing in the past. The first round of offers this year from various universities went out on 17 July. It is my understanding that they would go out on a monthly basis from there. I tend to agree with the minister's perception that if early offers go out too early, there is a tendency for students to take their foot off the pedal. I am curious to hear how the minister's meeting went with those universities, what his long-term strategy is for that and how he sees it fitting in with the eastern states. As we know, some of those universities are looking for some of our top WA students, so I am curious to know how that is going to play out. We do not want eastern states universities taking all our best talent out of WA.

I will now move on to what I suppose I could call the union review. It must be close to being released. We know former Premier Carmen Lawrence was leading the union review, and some of the issues it looked at included housing; the lack of support from the Department of Education for teachers and principals; increased violence in schools; behavioural issues in schools; the revolving door of principals and teachers, with little notice to the schools that they are leaving; and the use of teachers and principals from nearby schools to fill gaps for short periods. The list goes on. We have not been able to get the review from the union at this stage; I understand it is close to being released.

I refer to an opinion piece that appeared in *The West Australian* of Monday, 30 January by the new president of the State School Teachers' Union of WA, Matt Jarman. It states —

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As almost 317,000 public school students head back to schools around the State, there are concerns about whether they'll have the right teacher in front of their class.

While it's expected all classes will have a teacher, the teacher shortage in WA will mean that not every teacher is the right fit for the class they're in front of.

Some of the teachers will not yet be fully qualified to teach in secondary schools —

As I mentioned a minute ago, that is because of their limited authority to teach. The article continues —

This situation is not fair to teachers, and it's certainly not fair to students. The teacher shortage in WA, which the State School Teachers' Union of WA flagged several years ago, is now causing major headaches for the State Government and the Education Department.

WA's border closure prevented the department from recruiting teachers from overseas or interstate, while at the same time many were leaving the profession due to high workloads, violence in schools and stagnant wages ...

I have already mentioned the stagnant wages, pursuant to the article in relation to the New South Wales government improving the wages of its teachers and principals. I have already mentioned the stress and extra workload in schools during COVID. It is often teachers in classrooms who bear the brunt of behavioural and emotional outbursts, from not only students but also parents. This is one thing I agree with the minister on. In general, many parents need to have a hard look at themselves; they go onto school premises and make trouble. Principals are faced with this issue, sometimes daily and sometimes weekly. It is a real challenge and it adds to the stress they face as they deal with other things.

In the car this morning I listened to a well-known educator from the eastern states talk about helicopter parenting and some of the flow-on effects when parents do not let their children make their own way and learn from their mistakes. I found that interesting. I am sure part of that flows on when those parents go onto school premises and think they need to put in their two bobs' worth about how their child is not necessarily being dealt with properly. I am sure there are instances when that might be the case, but there are also challenges with some of the same parents cropping up all the time. I can only imagine some of the issues our principals deal with. I point out the part of the article that talks about the COVID scenario and the former Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, creating those shortages with his COVID closures and the flow-on effect it had for universities.

**Mr D.R. Michael:** Outrageous! Do you support what he did?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am talking about the 8 February closure, when university students were stranded around the world after the former Premier decided arbitrarily—I understand against the advice of other members of the committee he was on—to extend the border shutdown for a few more weeks. Members cannot believe the amount of grief that caused for the university sector and for students who were stranded around the world, in Hong Kong, India, the USA—wherever you like. A lot of them had no money and they were stranded for an extra six to eight weeks. That has now contributed to this state having the lowest number of international students in mainland Australia—5.8 per cent. Members can say what they like, but that last arbitrary shutdown by the former Premier caused a lot of grief. I wanted to point that out. As far as I am concerned, the long-term effects of that will be felt for many years. Our universities are doing their best to recover from that, but from my perspective, it will take some time.

I will move on to some of the other issues I am concerned about and outline them further as I go along. I have this discussion every so often with the director general of Education about our regions and some of the challenges for regional directors covering the territory. I could probably compare it with the recent electoral distribution changes. By stretching out further and further the electorates of regional members of Parliament, there are more and more schools to be dealt with and more and more kilometres to be covered. The electorates of the member for Central Wheatbelt and I partly cover the district of the wheatbelt district director, who looks after in the order of a couple of hundred schools. It is challenging to cover that many. I still believe there is a place for district offices, like the ones in Narrogin and Northam, to support that district director. Those offices could have some mentor-type principals and people who could spread out to some of the smaller schools to support principals who are out there at the coalface and might be in only their first, second or third year, as well as support the regional director. I believe there is under-resourcing in this sector. I am not a fan of the current structure; there are too many schools for a regional director to cover. As far as I am concerned, that is a real challenge. All the other sub issues—school buses, teachers leaving, principals moving, district high schools—are challenging for one person to deal with. That is an issue from my perspective.

Another matter involves relief teachers. In remote areas, relief teachers are not included on the list for remote incentives, such as the country teaching program, the locality allowance and the attraction and retention initiative. That is something the minister could look at. I know the member for North West Central will comment on that later.

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Relief teachers, especially in those far-flung areas of the state, need to be compensated properly because, quite frankly, a lot of schools rely on them for 70 to 90 per cent of the working week. It is very important that they are looked after.

I have spoken to the minister previously about education assistants. They are a very important part of the schooling system and they need to be compensated better. The government lodged a \$6 billion surplus the year before last and \$4 billion last year and yet education assistants, who do a fantastic job, are not paid anywhere near what they are worth. That is another issue for the minister to take on board.

In consultation with the Principals' Federation of Western Australia and other representative bodies, the Department of Education has said that everything is back to normal after COVID. I do not think it is back to normal. Programs are being collapsed so that teachers can be put in front of classes. We have seen programs merged to ensure that teachers are in front of classes. An important element was when the State School Teachers' Union of WA said that it wanted to cut class sizes because of the challenges faced in many classes. The Minister for Education raised in his speech to the Western Australian Primary Principals' Association that the number of students with undiagnosed severe behaviour disorders creates a real challenge for staff and principals. It is very challenging. We know how far behind this government is in getting students diagnosed—it is up to 18 months at times. As the minister well knows, and as he pointed out on that day, sometimes even when kids are diagnosed, some students do not fit into that category. They do not fit into that diagnosis or anything that can be pinpointed, but they do have severe behavioural disorders. I look forward to the minister's proposal and hearing his thoughts. This is starting to create a real challenge in a lot of our schools. There is also a shortage of psychologists. Once again, Hon Donna Faragher has asked many questions in the other place about delays in diagnosis and access to psychologists, and the many shortages. Families are in limbo and cannot identify what their child may be diagnosed with. They do not know whether they or the school can get funding to help out or whether education assistants can be put in place.

I move on to some of the challenges in the regions. Government Regional Officers' Housing for our teachers is a real issue. In *Hansard* of 17 May 2023, Minister Carey gave a statement about extra funding for GROH. He ended the statement by saying —

... we are actively increasing the housing supply to meet the needs of our dedicated government workers who deliver critical services across regional Western Australia.

I can assure members that many teachers out there are not housed very well at the moment. Another challenge is what some of our teachers and principals pay in rent for GROH. Although the minister has said that all rents for GROH tenants will be frozen for the upcoming financial year, that will not help to attract teachers and principals to regional areas. Compared with police officers and so forth, teachers get the short straw. The Principals' Federation of Western Australia says there needs to be, preferably, rent-free accommodation, but at least higher rent subsidies, to attract principals to the regions. Why would a principal-elect go to a regional school where they have to clean the school, as there is no cleaner; teach classes when there are gaps in available teachers; and pay over \$20 000 from their salary to rent a mediocre house? That is a challenge. As I said when I spoke about Munglinup earlier, it was quite frustrating that the community of Munglinup and the Shire of Ravensthorpe negotiated with the Department of Education for a block and an amount of \$19 800 in December 2020. The block was there and ready to go. What happened? In April this year, just before bringing down the 2023 budget, the state government advised the community that it would not be getting the house for their teacher. To rub salt into the wound, the government set aside an extra \$61.6 million for GROH in the 2023–24 budget. One teacher travels a 160-kilometre round trip daily from Cascades to Munglinup Primary School. The other staff members drive from Esperance, which is 108 kilometres in the morning and 108 kilometres in the afternoon. That is 216 kilometres a day or 1 080 kilometres a week. The Minister for Housing and the government say, "Look at this: we are putting an extra \$61 million into GROH", yet teachers go to Munglinup from Esperance and Cascades, driving over 1 000 kilometres a week. A block has already been bought from the Shire of Ravensthorpe, but some bureaucrat somewhere decided that the house is no longer needed and to put one in Kalgoorlie because they think it is more important there. We can understand how some of our regional communities become very frustrated.

I highlighted the school bus situation. I was seconded onto the Public Accounts Committee by the Minister for Transport. We conscientiously went on a trip. The member for Bicton was the chair of our committee. Five or six members of the committee went to Dumbleyung, Darkan and Narrogin. We went to all of those schools.

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The member for Cottesloe, of course, is very familiar with what goes on at country schools, having come from Cranbrook back in his heyday. Here we are, a year after lodging our report, and the silence has been deafening on our two most important recommendations—the one about the nearest appropriate school and the one about district high schools. I will make a grievance to the Minister for Transport tomorrow morning.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Just for clarification, what was the second recommendation about district high schools?

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**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That was about the challenge faced by the community of Darkan, in which, depending on which part of Darkan a student lives within a 500-metre radius, they can be sent to four different district high schools rather than being able to attend the likes of Collie Senior High School. I do not want children from my electorate going to Collie Senior High School!

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Absolutely. That is a difficult one because if you allowed that, in some places a parent would probably want their kids to go to the senior high school so they do not make a double transition, but that might dilute the district high school that might be the major focus of that little town. It is a difficult one.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is challenging. One family in Darkan has a child at Darkan Primary School, another student in year seven or eight has been sent to Boddington District High School and another student in year 11 goes to Collie Senior High School, so they have three children spread-eagled around three different towns and they are trying to work out school buses and everything else.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It is very difficult, but the problem is that if they all go to their school, then —

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That is right. As I said, I know the Shire of West Arthur wrote the Ministers for Education and Transport a letter. The silence has been deafening and we would like a response. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I would like one. I am sure the member for Cottesloe, as a hardworking member of the committee, would also like a response. The concept of the nearest appropriate school has created a lot of grief out there. There is an invisible line in the sand; if someone just happens to live one kilometre to the wrong side of that line but their community is on the other side, sorry, but the Department of Transport dictates where they can send their kids to school. As far as I am concerned, that is not good enough. That was the number one recommendation of the report, and there is still no sign of life from the government. That is quite frustrating.

I turn to a few other things before I wrap up in a few minutes' time. I will now talk infrastructure. Highgate Primary School, as the Minister for Education and I both know, having visited it, faces some challenges. It is very restricted. The school has around 890 students, with projected growth each year. I believe the minister is looking at a site between the WACA cricket ground and Gloucester Park. I am concerned about how long that will take and whether it will happen. I look forward to hearing anything on that. As I said, with that number of students and the number of staff, car parking is challenging. Currently, the school is at a restricted site, and some really quick action needs to happen.

I turn to no doubt my favourite subject—that is, Esperance Senior High School. I could not have let this speech go without saying something about it. I know the minister is in discussion with the P&C, the shire president and the school board. I know the minister has a strong interest in it. The Esperance community well and truly has a strong interest because when I run into grandparents, they say that their son went to Esperance high school and nothing has changed from when they were there. I run into them again and they say their grandson now goes to the school and still nothing has changed. It is not good enough. I know we spent \$14 million on the Esperance Residential College out of royalties for regions funding. That is a fantastic facility. Now, we need the upgrade. Hopefully, the state audit is completed or close to completion. I am sure the Minister for Education will enlighten us about Esperance Senior High School.

There are a couple of things I will go on with. I know the member for Vasse has been out to speak to the community about Como high school, and the minister visited there as well.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** What did you just say? I got distracted.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I think the Minister for Education visited Como Secondary College on 7 September, if I recall yesterday's question in the upper house.

From my perspective, they are some of the issues, but I have a couple of other little ones that I found quite interesting, and quite disturbing in some ways. I spoke about the challenges with overseas recruitment. The article from Bethany Hyatt on 29 July stated —

Just 33 overseas teachers netted so far in the education department recruiting campaign.

I am not too sure whether there has been an improvement on that, but as I said, Hon Mark McGowan extending the COVID-19 lockdown at one stage would not have helped. One issue that confuses me is the country teacher allowance, which is worth \$8 020. It is a big allowance for some of those challenging schools that teachers are asked to go to. It is quite confusing, because East Narrogin Primary School and Narrogin Primary School get a country teacher allowance, but Narrogin Senior High School—300 metres up the road—does not. Newdegate Primary School gets the allowance but Lake Grace District High School does not. It does not quite add up for me. I have an example. Condingup Primary School, about 100 kilometres east of Esperance, does not get the allowance, but Scaddan Primary School, which is probably 40-odd kilometres from Esperance, does. Apparently, Condingup does not get the allowance because it is closer to the coast. It does not matter if a school is a bit closer to the coast when it is almost the furthest east primary school in Western Australia. It does not make sense.

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I am curious for the department to take a look at that, because it is trying to attract teachers to the regions, and get some numbers out there. These are the sorts of incentives that it could have a good, hard look at. Before Minister Buti became the Minister for Education, his predecessor announced the remote and regional program. It was in place, but I am curious about the results, how the government went with that, and what numbers came on board when that funding package was improved. Today on the jobs.wa.gov.au website, there are still 346 vacant positions in the Department of Education, including 23 jobs advertised for the goldfields area, 16 in the great southern, 231 in the metropolitan area, eight in the midwest, 13 in the Geraldton region, 11 in the south west, 17 in the Pilbara, and seven in the Kimberley region. Those are the numbers. There are still quite a few shortages even though the education department does not want to admit it. There is still a teacher shortage. That is a real issue from my perspective.

As I said, and as the Minister for Education said in a statement in here recently, violence in schools is totally unacceptable. I think there has certainly been an improvement of the department's attitude towards violence in schools. It is totally unacceptable. Parental involvement, such as parents coming to the school site with violent intentions, is totally unacceptable as well.

I look forward to hopefully receiving an invitation to the opening of stage 2 of Bob Hawke College—even though it has come and gone! I know the member for Nedlands was there because I saw a photo of her there.

**Mr R.S. Love:** It got lost in the mail!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Obviously, it was lost in the mail, member for Moore. Anyway, so be it.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** As I promised you, I will chase it up. I will let you know. I don't actually get involved with the protocol. I thought you would have been invited because I have seen you on the list for other invitations. I'm not sure what happened there, but I'll follow it up.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** No worries; I thank the minister. I appreciate that. In closing, I agree with some of the programs the minister is putting in place, but I want the minister to be aware of some of the challenges, in not just our metro schools, but also our regional schools, in trying to address the housing and teacher shortages and supporting principals, schools and, especially, teachers.

The last issue is the School of Isolated and Distance Education. The member for Central Wheatbelt is also very familiar with this. It is almost now the largest school in the state. In some of our district high schools, years 9 and 10 have only three or four students, and the easy solution is to put those kids in SIDE. They spend a lot of their school life now just sitting in front of a computer. That is a challenge. The number of students going to SIDE is increasing by the day. The last figure was up around the 4 000 mark. It is probably now the largest school in the state, but it is not a pattern we want to see developing in the regions. We want those kids to have the opportunity to have face-to-face learning. It is a challenge for the department, but it is an old story: we all want to give our children an opportunity to have an equitable education no matter where we live. I will leave it at that.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [4.47 pm]: I stand to support the motion moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and make a brief contribution about our agricultural colleges, in particular at Cunderdin, the Western Australian College of Agriculture. The minister would be familiar with this as I have raised my concerns around some of the infrastructure and lack of funding to address the shortcomings at the college, despite the fact that there is a desire from that school community to see those upgrades. It is an absolutely fabulous education facility, and I was there last Friday for its open day. All of the agricultural colleges are hosting open days, and students past and present go with their families to look at what is on offer. We should be really proud of our agricultural colleges in Western Australia. I think other states look across the border at WA's model with some envy.

I can personally attest to the fact that the calibre of the graduates from those colleges is exceptional. The colleges provide an alternative pathway for students looking to take on a trade or go back into the agricultural industry to complete their ATAR in a working farm environment. That obviously changes depending on whether a student is in Denmark, Cunderdin or Morawa; there are tailored programs depending on where a student is. The Western Australian College of Agriculture Cunderdin is in the central wheatbelt; it is broadacre farming, so that is the focus. I am very proud of the investment we made when we were in government. There were significant upgrades to the accommodation. Two new dormitories were built because there had been very little done and they were very out of date at that time. That was back in 2011, so members can imagine that the ones that remain on campus are now very out of date. I will talk a bit about what they look like in a moment if the minister has not had the opportunity to see them firsthand. We also air conditioned all the dormitories; provided upgrades to the piggery, shearing shed and farm workshop; and, over a prolonged period of time—it took us nearly two years working with the advisory committee, the school and the Department of Education—we managed to procure more land for around \$1.7 million. The college needs to function as a replica of a working farm. The students need to have an appropriate amount of time on the equipment, which means that the college has to be the equivalent of a normal-sized farm in the wheatbelt so that the students can all have time on the tractor when it is seeding or harvest time, they can go through the shearing shed and those sorts of things. We worked really hard to make sure that that remains an authentic

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experience that generates graduates who are highly sought after, and they are. Every single kid who goes through that school either has a job lined up before they finish or returns to a family or other farm, whether they are going into a trade or the agricultural sector. The industry knows that it is getting a great product. We need to keep investing in those colleges, whether it is Cunderdin, Denmark or the other colleges that we have across the state.

It was unfortunate that one of the first things this state government did when it came to power was to make a series of education cuts. That has been well canvassed in this house over a number of years. But one thing within that suite of cuts that was never reinstated was the garnishing from the agricultural college trust. The Minister for Education advised during estimates that that was no longer happening—that is, the 20 per cent was no longer being garnished from the trust. The trust sat there to provide support for those colleges not only so that when they needed new equipment—they could do that off the books of the government and not pull on the government's budget—but also to provide support for other schools across the state to deliver agricultural education programs. That was generated by the students through the commercial activities of those farms so, in essence, they were self-sufficient. This government saw that as a target early on in the piece and removed that funding and, as a consequence, when those colleges need to purchase new equipment or go down the path of reinvesting in their colleges, they now have to go through the department and convince the department through a budget process. I do not think that is an ideal way to operate when trying to create a commercial outcome for those colleges. The advisory boards do a magnificent job of making sure that they are run and overseen and provide contemporary support and advice, and it worked seamlessly for many years, so that was very disappointing. It would be interesting to know when the government stopped garnishing from that trust, and perhaps the minister can address that when he stands to respond.

As I said, I was at the Cunderdin ag college open day. The head students, Corey and Matilda, were on hand to show us around, and they did a fabulous job, along with principal Matt Dowell. I had the chance to look at some of the older accommodation that I am familiar with and had seen previously. I had mistakenly made the assumption that that accommodation had been retired, because I did not think that it could possibly still be in use, given that the new accommodation we built in 2011 was supposed to provide an alternative. This accommodation is essentially two dongas—the dongas with the single rooms that we see on campsites without the bathrooms. They are then covered with a tin roof that is insulated on the inside; there is a concrete pathway through the middle of the two and a door at each end. Essentially, the students are being housed in two dongas in a shed. I am told that some of the students actually quite like it because they are the only single rooms available in the accommodation. Having said that, I had a look inside, and it is not acceptable to me that our students are residing there. The demand for that college is only continuing to increase, so it would be a good investment to add to the new accommodation blocks that our government provided in 2011 to make sure that we have contemporary accommodation.

The other issues that I have raised previously with the minister, and I know that the college itself has raised through the Department of Education, is additional extensions to its workshop and further work for the piggery. There are also a number of staff who are accommodated on the grounds who are sharing accommodation. Unfortunately, that is not uncommon. Although people might raise their eyebrows, it is not uncommon in regional Western Australia. I know that a number of nurses and teachers in our regional towns have no other option than to share accommodation; otherwise, there would be nowhere for them to live where they have a job. I do not think that is acceptable in this day and age, either. I would like for the minister to provide an indication as to whether in the next budget round, or even before that, consideration is being given to the business cases that have been put up by the Cunderdin agricultural college to ensure that that investment is continuing and that we are accommodating and providing the best opportunity for our students at the college. Without a doubt, the priority is residential accommodation for the students, but I would reiterate that there is work to be done around the workshop, the piggery and the staff accommodation as well. Although some funding was provided for the college in this year's budget, it certainly did not address what I had raised with the minister and I know was a priority for the government. If that has changed and there has been movement on that front, I would be very happy to hear that from the minister today.

That is the contribution I make, advocating on behalf of all the colleges, but particularly in my electorate of Central Wheatbelt, Cunderdin, which has continued to turn out some amazingly talented and valuable students who have gone on to become assets in our regional and agricultural communities.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [4.57 pm]:** I rise to support the motion. At the outset, I acknowledge all the teachers who are dedicated and committed within our state, but particularly those in the regional areas who really do a lot more in lots of ways because they are under-resourced. They coach for sporting teams and help with difficult situations without the support that they probably need but cannot access because of the tyranny of distance. I acknowledge that group of people.

As the member for Roe said, I undertook all my primary schooling through the Schools of the Air, and I think I turned out reasonably well. I hope that institution remains in place. The Minister for Local Government made a comment when the member for Roe raised the distances and the sizes that we have to cover. He is welcome to come on a trip with me anytime! This equates to the same issues that are faced by people who need to travel. A lot of our regional

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managers or education providers who need to travel who are living in Geraldton, for example, actually need to travel inland to Meekatharra, which is a six-hour drive one way. These people are under enormous pressure to travel to meet their commitments, and there is no connectivity with air flights and so forth. From Geraldton to Exmouth, it is probably a 19-hour drive. It would be really helpful to have some of our people relocated back into some of the regional centres to take that pressure off. Obviously, there are housing issues; that is an issue as well.

I move to something the member for Roe touched on, which are the incentives for regional teachers to go to remote towns that are difficult to staff. I had a timely letter in the last week from a teacher who has moved to a regional town in the north, in a part of my electorate. The person pointed out the disparity between relief teachers working in rural, regional and remote areas and those who work in the metropolitan areas. The current high demand for teachers was acknowledged, especially for experienced relief teachers. It is not something that will change in the foreseeable future. It is particularly true in regional and remote areas. At the beginning of the year, this teacher moved to a regional or remote location and works at one of the local primary schools and often at the high school, between two and four days a week.

According to the letter, teachers in the schools up there are receiving amounts above their nominal salary—a country teaching program allowance of \$10 210, a locality allowance of \$3 469, plus an attraction and retention initiative allowance of \$17 000. Apparently this does not apply to relief teachers in remote areas, regardless that the cost of living is the same. This person has written to me saying they have contacted the Department of Education about this issue and the response they received stated —

Please be informed that as per your request about allowances for casual employees working beyond 26 parallel, I can confirm that casual employees do not receive any allowances anymore.

The relief teachers who are living in those towns are not being rewarded for the work that they do in the same way as non-relief teachers. That is a concern of a lot of teachers I talk to across the regions. They are asking for a modification so that allowances and entitlements apply to any teacher in regional areas, because some of the relief teachers are doing four days a week and they are very committed. They are not suggesting it should be applied to transient teachers, but to those who are living in the towns and who are performing the same duties as the teachers who are receiving those entitlements. I think attracting and retaining teachers in rural, regional and remote positions is something we need to change or refocus on. That would go a long way to making a difference to the people in the regions.

I want to touch on the alternative education space. The member for Central Wheatbelt spoke about creating spaces in which people can be educated in different areas. For example, in Carnarvon we have a research property on the river. It is a large horticultural area. There is a lot of scope there to think outside the box and maybe create some kind of educational opportunity for people who are living and growing on plantations and pastoral properties. It is not far from where they live so they can be educated in that space of horticulture and pastoral at home.

We have spoken about the School of Isolated and Distance Education. It is important for a lot of remote towns where there are people who want to do units and subjects that they cannot access in their high schools. Early education is another important piece of the regional puzzle. One of the challenges we have in the regions—it is challenging everywhere, but particularly in the regions—is access to child care. There is very little access to child care in many towns across my electorate.

I am not sure whether the minister is aware of bush classrooms. They have been successful in the Pilbara. They had a model in Carnarvon, which ran out of funding, and there is now one in Meekatharra, which is really successful. That is run by the ABC Foundation. The aim is to get children to transition from the bush classroom—some are eight to 11-year-old kids who have never been to school—and give them confidence to move into the education system. The group that provides that service says there is a need for better engagement from the Department of Education in terms of working with those groups. We are trying to put these kids into normal education but they are not ready, willing or able to join that cohort. They are happy and want to go through the bush classroom system and transition through to education. If we can create a better understanding between those two groups, that would go a long way to getting those kids back into the education system. I acknowledge some are living with challenges such as overcrowded housing, and there are other challenges. I hope the minister may visit a bush classroom to have a look.

In the regions we have issues with resourcing and specialist access to some of the services that the member for Roe has already touched on. My contribution is very short, but to recap: the attraction and retention of teachers and looking especially at relief teachers who are in our regional areas and maybe bringing them up to par with the teachers who are full-time and permanent would go a long way to helping teachers and encouraging more people into that space. We should also look at alternative education spaces. I think bush classrooms is a worthwhile model to investigate in more detail for the region that I represent.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [5.05 pm]: I rise to support this motion and put on the record some concerns that have been raised with me about the education portfolio. Those concerns support the motion

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that condemns the WA Labor government's blatant neglect of the state's education system and acknowledges its failures to prioritise the needs of students throughout the entire state. My focus today will be on my local electorate and the broader region surrounding the area of Vasse. I will also point to another school and school community in the state.

Firstly, I will focus on early childhood education. I know my colleague in the other place, Hon Donna Faragher, has done a lot of work in this area, as has our shadow Minister for Education who leads today's debate. Fiona Stanley had an opinion piece in *The West Australian* in February, titled "We must invest in our kids". She has long advocated for investment in early childhood education to secure Australia's future prosperity, especially in terms of sustainability and the wellbeing of citizens. She wrote —

That inequity which is threatening our social cohesion sits at the heart of inequity in health and learning outcomes for children—the so-called social determinants of health—and they demand our immediate attention. Today, —

That was 25 February —

with the National Early Childhood Summit concluded and an Early Years Strategy on the horizon, we have a new opportunity to invest in early childhood in a truly transformational way. If we get the early years right, every single outcome is better.

In July this year, I had the privilege of attending the official opening of West Busselton Primary School's Bindi Bindi program for three-year-olds. It was fantastic to see young children with family members enjoying a welcoming and stimulating space with age-appropriate learning opportunities. It also creates routine and provides support for families. The school has invested a great deal of time and effort into creating this much-needed program. Its delivery has not been without its challenges. It is a wonderful program. It does not receive any separate funding. It is currently covered through the school's existing online budget. The school does this with an understanding of the great value in ensuring that those children will be ready for kindergarten. It is understood that there are 38 KindiLink centres across the state, which were opened by the former Liberal–National government. The aim, like Bindi Bindi, was to help kids get ready to start school. Despite the integrated service model benefiting thousands of kids each year, the Labor government has opened just one extra centre since 2017. When questioned in Parliament about whether there were plans to expand the model, given its success, the answer was no. There are no KindiLink programs in public schools in the lower south west region and I am yet to be made aware of whether there will be any more programs for three-year-olds. My understanding is that a number of schools would be interested in running the KindiLink program, which would meet the objectives of this valuable program and the demand in the catchment area and beyond.

The WA government's early childhood website also promotes the Better Beginnings family literacy program developed by the State Library of Western Australia for preschool children and their families. The website states —

Our goal is to improve literacy and learning outcomes for all W.A. children by encouraging families to read, talk, sing, write and play with their child every day.

The KindiLink program certainly reflects those goals. That is what I saw and heard from the people at West Busselton Primary School. This raises the question of why this is not being made more readily available, as we had seen with the expansion of the program under the former Liberal–National government, given the demand from the school community, which is seeking the support provided through this program and the much-needed support that we are seeing on the ground from West Busselton Primary School. The primary school is delivering this program through its existing budget.

I have raised in this place the needs surrounding Cowaramup Primary School. I note that in *The Weekend Australian* earlier this year, Bernard Salt wrote an article titled "Leaving the city behind" that looked at the best places to live, using data from the 2021 census. The article filtered urban centres and localities using a range of demographic, social and civic criteria. The south west of Western Australia rated very highly, with Cowaramup being included in the top-10 finalists. We have seen its population growth expand rapidly. Between 2016 and 2021, we saw a population increase of 27 per cent in Cowaramup, 16 per cent in Dunsborough and 14 per cent in Margaret River. The chamber is no stranger to the ongoing struggle of Cowaramup primary to obtain significant funding to address the classroom and facility issues identified in the 2016 audit, despite Cowaramup being a rapidly growing community with more and more young families choosing to move to that popular town.

The school this month will celebrate its one-hundredth year, which is an incredible milestone. After 19 years at the school, principal Peter Howse retired in July this year. I acknowledge his commitment and dedication to the staff, students and school community over the years. It always has been an absolute pleasure to attend events at that wonderful school. I place my appreciation on the record. I am sure that all members in this place appreciate and understand the wonderful dedication of our school leaders, schoolteachers and staff. I am aware that the school has been reclassified to a class 5 primary school from a class 4 primary school, which recognises the central role

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that this school plays in a significant community. That also has a bearing on the principal pay rates and on the responsibilities that are attached to those classifications. However, the fact remains that significant funding for school facilities remains unresolved at that school, which is desperately trying to keep up with its ageing infrastructure as well as the significant growth rate it has seen. The issues have been unresolved for many years, with nothing further having been done since the start of the school year. I understand that the biggest issue is the transportable classroom used for the early childhood learning centre. That is an inadequate learning space and, at the very least, needs new contemporary and permanent infrastructure. Surely that is not too much to ask, given the significant pressures placed on that school facility.

I delivered a grievance last November and the response from the minister's parliamentary secretary was to criticise me for not seeking and securing funding when in government, which was prior to 2017. The Liberals and Nationals WA supported the audit and made a \$6 million commitment in the 2017 and 2021 state elections. The best that the WA Labor government could offer was \$60 000 to undertake some minor works, and that was only because some of the classrooms were sagging and were in a dire state. Labor has been in government since 2017 and has provided no significant infrastructure investment to provide facilities that are on par with other primary schools in the state. It is an absolute insult to the teaching and administration staff who do so much for the school community and to the students who also deserve better. It is unacceptable that the best we have seen is \$60 000 for a bandaid package of measures. That does not provide for or support the current needs, let alone the future long-term planning for that school.

I move on to another school in my electorate—Dunsborough Primary School. The Department of Education's facilities directorate in 2015 identified the undercover area and canteen as inadequate for a school of that size. All that was required was \$900 000 to provide the school with an undercover area and expand the canteen. Again, the Liberal and National Parties made an election commitment. Dunsborough Primary School is the only school in the district without an enclosed undercover area or assembly area. It is also considered a health hazard, with birds roosting in the ceiling. Instead of committing a small amount to bring the school up to standard, we have seen the government offer a pittance, with little support from the WA Labor government in the lead-up to the election. It committed a miserly \$25 000 to do the very bare minimum. I know that the hardworking parents and citizens association committee members, together with the school community, took the issue into their own hands to finance the installation of lining to improve the health and amenity of this area. This matter has been really disappointing. The undercover areas and canteen facilities were recognised as raising concerns from a health perspective by the local City of Busselton. The whole school cannot fit into the undercover area for assemblies and events and there are concerns about the canteen facilities. The undercover area is not enclosed. It is open to vandals on the weekends, which is a concern. This space could be better utilised for care outside school hours.

It is worth noting that the recent survey of the Dunsborough school community found that 187 families need a childcare provider. There is not one in town due to staffing issues and higher rents. That issue could be resolved by utilising the undercover space. That is a possible solution that has come from the community. Plans for the undercover area were redone and provided to the Department of Education and Department of Finance this term, but they have apparently been rejected. The school and community have done all they can. The P&C cannot appeal again to the school community to raise the funds; therefore, the school is left with inadequate space. I should note on the record that the P&C community has done what it can to get by with these facilities. It has certainly been significantly challenged to deliver the basics with these facilities that are no longer fit for purpose and bursting at the seams.

I also want to raise Como Secondary College in this place. It was built in the 1960s. I attended a community meeting last month with representatives from a range of public schools in the area regarding the need for significant investment. I heard at the meeting that one-third of school-age children living in this catchment attend public schools out of the catchment. Another third attend private schools due to aged infrastructure and a lack of resources at the college. That was put to me.

Following a question in the house the other day, I understand that these issues have been raised by Amy Birch and others in the community and there has been a positive outcome. I thank the minister for visiting the school on 7 September. At the meeting I attended, the school community and board members were concerned about the future plans for the college. A range of matters were put at that meeting, but the urgent need to address maintenance issues and broader concerns was very clear. I thank the minister for his response to the parliamentary question. It did provide some clarity, but it did not commit to a future works program. It simply outlined the investment of \$4.57 million that we have seen at this school since 2017. This needs to be put into context for all members in this place. The answer yesterday highlighted that; I quote —

The Cook Labor government is delivering significant upgrades to our schools as part of our \$1.5 billion investment in public education capital works. This program of works is the largest investment in public education capital works in our state's history.

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In that context, real concerns are raised about why schools such as Dunsborough Primary School, Cowaramup Primary School and Como Secondary College are being ignored. With the largest education capital works program ever undertaken in the state at \$1.5 billion, the Cook Labor government has only managed to spend \$4.5 million or 0.3 per cent of the total on Como Secondary School. Can I have a small extension, please?

**Dr D.J. Honey:** You can have a 10-minute one!

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, an extension is an extension. I guess I am seeking how much longer I have got from my people here!

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Yes, you are. You should be asking me!

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms L. METTAM:** In *The West Australian* on 1 September, before the minister visited the school, parent Amy Birch stated —

Ms Birch said public schools of a similar age to Como, such as Rockingham and Safety Bay Senior High Schools, had recently had cash injections of around \$50 million each.

“And Como got \$1 million for a canteen upgrade ...

Amy also pointed out that Como students have restricted wi-fi access and the roof was in dire need of maintenance. The Cook government spruiks its investment of \$1.5 billion in education as part of its budget, but where is the commitment to these aged schools? Even parents have had to fund maintenance works that threatened the health and wellbeing of students. I will touch further on this critical area as well.

The health and wellbeing of students and staff is a very key concern with wideranging issues. The issue of support for students without formal diagnosis but with special needs has been highlighted in my electorate. It certainly has broader implications as well. NAPLAN results released last month identified that 10 per cent of students across all year groups require additional support. The long-term outcomes for students who do not receive that extra support are significantly impacted, and we know that only one in five students identified as below the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy in year 3 will improve by the time they get to year 9. Students with learning disabilities without formal diagnosis are not eligible for funding for additional teaching support. This becomes a further pressure on the school's annual budget, which understandably has limitations. I am advised that this is an issue for every school that needs addressing. It has had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of staff, which we understand can lead to stress and burnout through teachers' additional workload.

The *Australian teachers' perceptions of their work in 2022* study revealed that 75 per cent of teachers plan to quit before retirement and 20 per cent want to leave in the next five years. Class sizes, unmanageable workloads and an increasing administrative burden were all common complaints. These are just some of the issues in this portfolio area. I have particularly focused on the electorate of Vasse for this motion, but from the concerns raised at Como Secondary College, we can quite obviously see that there are concerns right across the board. I have particularly focused on school infrastructure, but there are quite clearly real needs for better support for our teachers, who in turn support our students. I urge the minister to reconsider his approach towards the schools about which I raised concern, in addition to providing better support for our teachers and students going forward. I leave my comments there.

**MR D.A.E. SCAIFE (Cockburn)** [5.27 pm]: I obviously rise to speak against this motion, but I also want to thank the opposition for giving me the opportunity to speak in private members' business about the unprecedented investments that the McGowan and now Cook Labor governments have been making in education.

I firstly respond to the member for Vasse about Como Secondary College. I have a question for the member for Vasse. The Labor party has represented the seat of South Perth for two and a half years and I cannot imagine that the problems she referred to occurred overnight, so what were the Liberal members for South Perth doing over the previous 50 years?

**Ms L. Mettam:** We made a commitment. There had been upgrades —

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** Were they fighting for it? Did they get the government to deliver? It sounds to me like the current member for South Perth has the ear of the minister and he is delivering, but the Liberal Party neglected that area and took it for granted. This is classic Liberal Party: it takes its electorates for granted.

**Mr J.R. Quigley:** The member for South Perth never raised it in a million years, as I can recall. Not once!

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** That is pretty extraordinary stuff.

Several members interjected.

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**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Thank you.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** I am sure that the Leader of the Liberal Party says that the Liberal Party committed to things, much like it committed to the Ellenbrook rail line: it never delivered it. The Leader of the Liberal Party gives empty promises. What were the Liberal representatives for South Perth doing in all the decades that they took South Perth for granted? We are lucky to have a Labor member for member for South Perth now who has been advocating to the minister on this issue. The minister is clearly paying attention. It is an own goal for the Liberal Party to raise that issue, because it draws attention to how it neglected its heartland for decades. That is one factor that contributed to its epic loss in 2021.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** On that, even though I have great respect for and really like Hon John McGrath, neither Phillip Pendal nor John McGrath raised Como in their whole time in this Parliament, apart from Mr McGrath raising it just leading into the 2017 election.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** So the last gasp of a dying government was when the last Liberal member for South Perth raised this issue.

This government is making significant investments in public education. I am a very proud product of the public school system, as I know are many members of the opposition and government benches. It is ridiculous to suggest that this government is failing on education because it has been making unprecedented investments in public education. It does not matter where one goes in the state, whether the metropolitan area, outer metropolitan area, Pilbara or south —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** I will get to Rockingham, Leader of the Opposition; do not worry about that!

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Order!

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** The Leader of the Opposition is raising —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. The member for Cockburn is on his feet; you will get your chance.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** The Leader of the Opposition had the gall to raise Rockingham. I will get to Rockingham, Leader of the Opposition, and we will see what Hon Dr Steve Thomas had to say.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** The Labor government has been delivering throughout the state. I will get to Rockingham and will talk about what Hon Dr Steve Thomas had to say about the investments this Labor government is making in schools in Rockingham. Of course, it is typical to hear from the Leader of the Opposition on this issue at the moment. As we know, the Nationals WA are targeting densely populated areas for the next election. I assume that in their view Rockingham, being outer metropolitan, is a peri-urban or regional seat under the new configuration of the “MetroNats”, as the Deputy Premier referred to them. I will get to that.

I will first touch on the many investments the government is making all around the state, including \$18.3 million for a new performing arts centre, a new sports hall and classroom building at Lynwood Senior High School. That traditional Labor area is getting a significant investment from this Labor government. The government has provided \$22 million to build new facilities for students at Karratha Senior High School. We can go all the way up to the Pilbara to see a significant investment like that. In the south west, the government committed \$15 million to provide a new classroom block and science, design and technology facilities at Australind Senior High School. I am a particular supporter of that, being a graduate of Australind Senior High School. It is a big school that takes in a big catchment area on the outskirts of Bunbury and it has been under a lot of pressure. The school had about 1 400 students when I attended. The number dropped with the opening of Eaton Community College, but it has since grown again and I think is in excess of 1 400 students now. It is bursting at the seams. The members for Collie–Preston and Murray–Wellington have been doing an outstanding job advocating for those facilities on behalf of that school. I congratulate this government and the minister for delivering on it.

We are also doing great things in my neck of the words—the southern suburbs of the Perth metropolitan area. I acknowledge the Minister for Education. I will go into bat for this minister and this government any day of the week when it comes to investment in public education. Lakeland Senior High School, which covers part of my electorate, has historically had additional challenges. It deals with a cohort who often come from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, has a higher Aboriginal population, and has kids who struggle that bit more at school. This government puts its money where its mouth is and will deliver \$12 million worth of upgrades to Lakeland Senior

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High School. The first project—a \$6 million build of new classrooms and an education support centre at that school—has been delivered and opened. It is a great facility. The second phase is \$6 million for the refurbishment of the performing arts and sports facilities at the school. Again, that is a great investment from the government. It just staggers me to hear the Leader of the Opposition suggest that the Labor Party somehow takes seats like Rockingham and Cockburn for granted. This is evidence of the Labor government making investments.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Only when transitioning out of the seat to a new member do you decide to invest money there.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** Guess what, Leader of the Opposition: these commitments were made before I was elected. They were made before I was even preselected as the candidate. The Leader of the Opposition should get his facts right before he makes those sorts of comments, because it is not true. Those commitments were made before my time, but they are being delivered under my watch and the watch of this education minister. My community is thankful for those very significant investments in my electorate.

Of course, if we continue further south, we get to the area that the Leader of the Opposition decided to pick a fight on—quite unwisely, I would have thought—being the \$100 million worth of upgrades this government has committed to Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School. That is made up of \$60 million for upgrades to not only Rockingham Senior High School but also the education support centre at that campus, and \$40 million for upgrades to Safety Bay Senior High School. It is a fantastic investment. What was the response of the opposition to this announcement? The other day I talked about Hon Dr Steve Thomas chasing a headline. It is much the same now. In an article in *The West Australian* of 6 June 2023, Hon Dr Steve Thomas said —

“(Mark McGowan) advised everybody that he was hanging around to deliver the Budget and as a part of that—effectively pork barrelled his own seat ...

“These two schools have been advanced. There would be plenty of other schools that are older. Mark McGowan was thinking about a by-election when he made this announcement.”

That was a grubby comment. These schools deserve investments. They are old schools that have been around for decades. Like Lakeland Senior High School, these schools are attended by a cohort of students who experience socio-economic disadvantage but deserve first-class facilities just like anybody else in the state. Does the opposition agree that those announcements were pork-barrelling? Does the shadow minister agree that those announcements were pork-barrelling?

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** I have not criticised any of those. All I am saying is that Esperance is 10 years older. You can imagine how those people feel.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** The shadow minister does not agree with Hon Dr Steve Thomas. That is fine. We know that the opposition does not play as a team; its members are not on the same team. It is to the shadow minister’s credit that he does not agree with Hon Dr Steve Thomas on this, because it was a grubby comment then and it would be a grubby comment now.

The other question I have is more for the Leader of the Liberal Party. Did Hon Dr Steve Thomas check in with the Leader of the Liberal Party before he made those comments? The Liberal Party was still in the process of deciding whether to run a candidate in the Rockingham by-election. Why would the shadow minister run around and accuse the government of pork-barrelling the electorate when the Liberal Party might throw its hat in the ring? It would have to be the worst election strategy that anybody has ever thought up. The Liberal Party was lucky that it was a by-election in which the government’s attitude was essentially to ignore the opposition candidate, because I reckon Peter Hudson should have been doorstopped and asked whether he agreed with the comments of Hon Dr Steve Thomas. That would have been a very interesting press conference to watch. Those comments by Hon Dr Steve Thomas really tell us why the Liberal Party got such a shocking result in the Rockingham by-election. However, we would not know that because, to quote an article in *The West Australian* of 30 July 2023, the Leader of the Liberal Party said that it was the best result for the Liberal Party in over a decade in WA Labor’s safest seat. That statement was wrong. The Liberal Party’s result at the by-election was its worst result since Rockingham was created as an electorate. I went back and had a look at the results of every election in Rockingham since the seat was formed in 1974, and the Liberal Party had always made the two-candidate preferred count.

The only election for 50 years in which the Liberal Party has not made the two-candidate preferred count in Rockingham was in the 2023 by-election. That was its worst result. It got a primary vote of 17.7 per cent, which is actually worse than its primary vote at the 2017 state election, when it got about 18 per cent of the primary vote. The Liberal Party did worse at that by-election than in the 2017 state election when the Labor Party swept to power with 40 seats. It is the only election since 1974 in which the Liberal Party has not managed to make the two-candidate preferred count. I would be calling on the Leader of the Liberal Party to correct the record on those comments that she made to *The West Australian* because it is demonstrably not the best result. In fact, it is the opposite.

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The performance of the Liberal Party in the Rockingham by-election was the worst result it has ever had, and it is no surprise.

I want to give some credit to the new member for Rockingham because some criticism has been made in the media about her performance. I point out for the record that the new member for Rockingham actually got a higher primary vote than both Hon Mike Barnett and Hon Mark McGowan when they first stood for election. Hon Mike Barnett got 46.8 per cent of the primary vote in 1974 and Hon Mark McGowan got 48.5 per cent of the primary vote. The current member for Rockingham fell just short of 50 per cent with 49.33 per cent. She did the best for a new incoming Labor member for Rockingham, a testament to her efforts as a candidate and to the positive campaign that the Labor Party ran.

If the Liberal Party is not going to learn from its mistakes and be a credible alternative that appeals to people across the state, not only within its own sectarian areas, but also in the areas of Cockburn and Rockingham all the way through to the Pilbara, it will not be rewarded by the people of Western Australia and it will continue as an opposition—a lacklustre one at that.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [5.41 pm]: I am not sure why the member for Cockburn jumped in. What a disappointing contribution from the member for Cockburn, who has decided to become the hard man of the Labor Party. He has joined the ranks of the Attorney General in being offensive and having a general spray, which is really disappointing because I thought he was better than that. That is obviously not the case. I want to talk about a number of issues and to summarise the case put by other members in this debate. I also want to address a couple of matters specifically in and around my electorate.

In this year's budget, the government allocated significant money for the redevelopment of the Rockingham and Safety Bay Senior High Schools. I will put on the record quite clearly that I have been to both those schools and they are in dire need of additional funding. It is appropriate for the government to focus on improving those schools, but my concern is not that the government has allocated money to them, but how it goes about choosing the allocation of funding for those schools—that is, how it identifies those schools and how they are prioritised. It is unfortunate that it appears that the government has focused on a political allocation of funding, not funding based on need. As mentioned by the member for Roe, we welcome this new Minister for Education coming into this role. The minister might recall that we lobbied extensively for him to be promoted to cabinet in the last Parliament. I hope that the minister appreciates the hard work that we put in to promote his good qualifications for the role compared with those of some of his hopeless colleagues. It is good to see him coming into that role. He has been in the role for nine months so I do not think that we can hold this minister to account at this stage for the government performance on education. As the member for Roe said, the minister definitely appears to be making an effort to listen. I hope that the minister listens to the contributions from members today. As I said, I will summarise those contributions at the end of my speech and we see a response to those key issues. The way in which the government is allocating its funding seems to be related to political considerations, not the needs of schools in various areas.

I have one glaring example in my electorate that has not had a funding commitment from this government. I know that the minister is aware of this school because the minister and I visited some sporting facilities in the area of that school. I also discussed this with the former Minister for Education and asked her to visit the school. She indicated that there were problems, but that school is still in dire need of an upgrade. The Mosman Park Primary School also includes the Mosman Park School for Deaf Children. I was interested to hear the member for Cockburn talk about Lakeland Senior High School and the students at that school from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and the like. It might surprise the member for Cockburn that six per cent of the students at the Mosman Park Primary School come from an Indigenous background. For example, there is 50 per cent more social housing in my electorate, mostly in the southern part of Mosman Park, than in the seat of Rockingham. The member might be surprised by that in my electorate. I think that over three per cent of all housing is social housing that tends to be located in the southern part of Mosman Park and in what they now call Mt Claremont. It was once the old area of Graylands that contained a lot of social housing. The Mount Claremont Primary School, which is still called Graylands Primary School, will ultimately need to be upgraded, but it has been well maintained with upgrades to the administrative area and the like. The Mosman Park Primary School and the co-located school for deaf children is a marvellous model. In the school for deaf children, each child has their own individual assistant, but the children, when they can, participate in the classroom at the primary school so that they are not isolated and can mix with the primary school students. That primary school desperately needs an upgrade. Plans have been around for some time. I understand that maybe something is going ahead, but that school really needs to have its facilities upgraded. I vividly remember that not long after I became a member of Parliament I was invited to the primary school and a darling little Indigenous boy about six years old was sitting outside. Members might know that Aboriginal children are disproportionately affected by deafness because of glue ear and health issues that lead to that. I had been elected in April and I visited this school in the depths of winter in July, and the only place for this little boy to sit in a private space was on the veranda out in the freezing cold weather. The same situation still exists at that school.

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Some money has been invested in the staffroom. It had one toilet for something like 60 female staff, but that has been improved, but we still have demountable classrooms on that site and the school desperately needs an upgrade. If members went there they would be surprised by the condition of that school. As I say, we need some money to go into that particular school.

I will go through the way the government has allocated its funding. In the “Shaping the Future” announcements made by the government, 21 school projects are listed under the following three headings: redevelopment of secondary schools, construction continues, and upgrades and additions to primary schools.

How many of those 21 major projects announced by the state government are in electorates that would be considered traditional Liberal electorates? Not a single one—zero—out of the 21 projects. That is appalling. As members can guess, I have some time for the new Minister for Education. We were keen to see the minister elevated in cabinet, which happened as a reflection of his capacity. But this is a good opportunity for the minister to look at how that program was put together and realise that there are other targets.

Other areas in my electorate need dealing with. Do members know that there is not a single government high school in the electorate of Cottesloe? Not one. Shenton College was developed and is full to the brim. Bob Hawke College has been developed. It is in a western suburb, if you like, but it will rapidly fill up. I assume, minister, that the places in stage 2 of Bob Hawke College are pretty well taken up. There is a desperate need for a new government high school in the western suburbs, whether it be in my electorate, because there will be massive growth. The closure of City Beach High School goes back to our time in government and was based on the fact that the forecast of student numbers going forward would decline, but exactly the opposite happened. We are seeing in my suburb a massive amount of infill and a substantial increase in population. Three thousand families have moved into the City of Claremont, which had a population of 8 000. There has been a massive increase in the population and a generational change in the area. In my area, I am surrounded now by young families. Going back a handful of years, I was surrounded by retirees or at least people in the later stages of life.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** There was Swanbourne, City Beach and Scarborough.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Has there ever been a high school in Cottesloe?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There was Swanbourne High School in the Cottesloe electorate.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** There has never been much in Cottesloe itself, though.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Not in the Town of Cottesloe—no. Obviously, a massive number of private schools are in that area. The City Beach High School land has been allocated to a private organisation, but I hope that the government hangs onto that land for school purposes because we will rapidly be in the position of needing another school. Once schools start to reach 2 000-plus students, it is very hard for them to deliver pastoral care. They become large organisations past a certain point.

I now go through where those schools were located and the priorities of where those schools were located under the Shaping the Future program. The schools included Balcatta Senior High School, Kinross College, Darling Range Sports College, Wanneroo Secondary College, Aveyley Secondary College and Broome Senior High School, which falls within the electorate of the member for North West Central, so I stand corrected on that point. Other schools included Victoria Park Primary School and Arbor Grove Primary School in Ellenbrook. I can continue down the list. I contrast that. We heard comments that the government’s capital spend is somehow a record, but I beg to differ. I like to take members back to the achievements of the former Liberal government.

A government member interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The member will enjoy this. It is nice to have facts versus spin. In the Liberal–National government’s 2016–17 state budget, there was a 70.3 per cent increase—a massive commitment—compared with the former Labor government’s 2007–08 budget. Whatever faults members opposite attribute to Hon Colin Barnett, a former Minister for Education in the Court government and former Premier of this state, he had an absolute passion for education. He was criticised by a number of his colleagues because of that, but he had an absolute passion —

**Ms S.E. Winton** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The member for Wanneroo might also know that under the Barnett coalition government, teachers in Western Australia were the highest paid in Australia. Under this government, they are lowest paid in Australia. I think the teachers’ union upon reflection would say that they were golden times under the Barnett Liberal government. Teachers have suffered under the member for Wanneroo’s government with a relative regression of their salaries.

I look at the electorates in which the government spends money. This is not a focus on coalition electorates or Liberal electorates, but a genuine focus on what was needed for the state across all electorates. In 2013, Governor Stirling

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Senior High received \$63 million; Pearsall Primary School received \$12.5 million; Butler College, stage 1, received \$51 million; Baldivis Secondary College, which, at the time, was in a Labor seat, received \$44 million; Baynton West Primary School in Karratha received \$20.7 million; and Tuart Forest Primary School received \$14.5 million. Other schools included West Byford Primary School, which is, by the way, a beautiful school like something out of science fiction movie in terms of its quality; Exmouth District High School; and Dongara WA College of Agriculture. There was a complete rebuild of agricultural colleges around the state. The agricultural schools in Harvey, Denmark, Mt Barker and others are exemplars, as pointed out by the member for Central Wheatbelt. Overall, in 2013 alone, the former Liberal–National government completed \$372 million worth of school projects.

In 2014, Byford Secondary College, stage 1, received \$35.2 million and Bullsbrook District Primary School received \$24.4 million. Butler Primary School, Yanchep Beach Primary School and Hammond Park Primary School received a total of \$177 million. This is just in capital and does not conflate the other salary increases and all those things. This is purely capital spend on developing new schools.

In 2015, Joseph Banks Secondary School in Banksia Grove, Broome North Primary School and Golden Bay Primary School all received money for capital works; indeed, \$48.7 million was spent on Joseph Banks and \$14.2 million was spent at Golden Bay Primary School, which is in the City of Rockingham, which, at the time, was in the then Leader of the Opposition's electorate. Further, Baldivis Secondary College received \$26.3 million and Butler College, stage 2, received \$32 million. I am happy to table this summary of all the projects. I cannot go through them all because it would take up too much of my time.

**Mr T.J. Healy:** How many were public–private partnerships?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will go through the public–private partnerships. In 2015, the former Liberal–National government spent \$231 million. In 2016, Harrisdale Primary School received \$15.2 million; Alkimos Primary School received \$14 million; Halls Head Community College received \$25.9 million; Rivergums Primary School received \$18.5 million; Applecross received \$63 million; and Anne Hamersley Primary School received \$15.8 million, and it was completed at the time that the government went to publication on this documentation for the election. Moreover, \$133 million of the \$237 million for the year was in train for further commitments. There was more than \$1 billion in actual capital commitments that did not conflate with other things. When the government goes on about its record expenditure, it pales into insignificance.

[Member's time extended.]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I point this out because I want the government to recognise that its spend on schools should not be about enhancing its chances in electorates. It is about being fair across all areas of the state. I have highlighted some areas in my electorate, but other members before me highlighted significant opportunities—I should say not opportunities, but significant need—for increased expenditure by the government in those areas. I am optimistic that we now have a Minister for Education who will look at that, and I think it was to his credit that the Minister for Education so promptly came out to Como and looked at those issues.

I want to talk about Bob Hawke College. I certainly welcome the increased number of students there, but I am extremely concerned about two things at Bob Hawke College: the lack of playing space that has been allowed for students and the insecurity that will come to the school from having high-rise developments immediately around the oval. The only oval the school has access to is the old Subiaco football oval, which is now a reduced size. In this place, I have spoken before about how the Minister for Planning is allowing high-rise development around the periphery of that oval, and I think allowing that is absolutely appalling. This supports developers to profit from a prime real estate area, but that school does not have adequate facilities for recreation. It has one basketball court and the oval.

The oval will be a shared community oval, and I think that sharing school ovals with the community, outside of school hours, is a good thing. In fact, I know it already happens, but there is a lot of opportunity for school resources to be shared with the community, and that is something I welcome. I definitely do not welcome the high-rise apartments. They are not being built across a major road and are not low-rise apartments. They are literally being built on the oval. I will go through that in a little bit of detail.

This is fascinating to see because if we look at the Department of Education's 2020 draft policy, which was the continuation of a previous policy, and what it says about the relationship to nearby land uses, we will see that it says —

Common boundaries of school sites with residential uses should be avoided whenever possible. There are a number of activities conducted on school sites which can adversely affect the amenity of residential properties, particularly where they are located very close to a school site. This is a growing problem with the trend towards increased community use of school facilities after hours. To avoid potential conflict with residential properties, it is preferable that school sites are surrounded by a combination of roads, public open space or other compatible community, cultural recreation and sporting facilities.

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Section 3.6.2 of the draft policy states —

Land uses such as service stations, restricted premises, licensed premises such as taverns, small bars and liquor stores, consulting rooms and industrial uses are considered undesirable next to school sites and have real and perceived impacts on health, amenity and safety.

What did we see come out? The minister made a commitment to her developer friends that she will put in large high-rise buildings. When I say large high-rise buildings, this is the Subiaco oval precinct schematic. Members might not be able to see it, but they should have a look at it. The schematic shows buildings that must be greater than 20 storeys right on the periphery of the school oval. There is no road and no public open space between them. They are on that oval. That is a matter that concerns parents and me.

It has been a longstanding policy, but we see that it is now being degraded by the government. Unfortunately, that land has been allocated. I hope that, if it is at all possible, the government will stop it. I know there is a shortage of housing, but we should not compromise—and the government is compromising—the safety of children in doing that.

We understand that commercial developments will be in those high-rise buildings, including a tavern or the like that will sell alcohol. In the former policy, it was very clear that we should not have that on a school oval. In this case, it will be on the edge of the school oval. I think that is profoundly wrong.

I have heard the minister try to defend this, and she very theatrically got up and said, “Do other members have buildings opposite their schools?” No school has high-rise properties built on its oval, as in this case. Some schools may have a two-storey or three-storey building across a main road. No-one has high-rise apartments immediately across the road from their school.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Can I correct you there? It is a private school, but I think you will find that Mercedes College does. Even though it is a road, it is not a major road.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** They are across from —

**Mr T.J. Healy:** St George’s College.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Do you mean the university college?

**Mr T.J. Healy:** St George’s in the city.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It does not have high-rise buildings immediately across the road.

Until the minister made the decision to give the developers their heads on that land, it was a very clear direction from the Department of Education that that should not happen. I think there is a very good reason for that, and I will have time to go through that a little bit. That is a retrograde step, especially given that that school has such a dearth of area; it is a multistorey school. If ever a school needed large recreational areas for students, that is the school. Primary schools of 200 or 300 kids in my electorate have substantially more recreational space than Bob Hawke College, which I think will have about 2 500 children or the like. I think that is a sad thing. I welcome there being more places for kids to go, but I think the way that has been done is poor. If we look at other governments in other states, we will see that they have banned this. The Victorian government is known to be pretty favourable to developers, but even it clearly rejects that.

It is not just that I have some sort of odd view about this. I do not have time to go through the debacle of the thought bubble of putting a school in Northbridge. Imagine putting a school in the heart of Northbridge, with the range of social issues that we see in that area. I hope good work is going on to deal with it. There was enormous outrage behind it.

This is an article from the *Post* of 4 March 2023. Lest members think that I have some sort of strange aversion to the idea of putting high-rise immediately adjacent to schools, this article from page 11 of the *Post* states —

Student safety, security, privacy and wellbeing are at risk from the McGowan government’s vision to redevelop the former PMH and Subi Oval sites, according to Perth Modern School’s Parents and Citizens Association.

That article talks about concerns and continues —

It says the situation around schools will “get worse, not better” under the new planning schemes and the government should take a second, closer look before tower blocks start going up.

It said that that should be paused. It continues —

Towering blocks beside the school—not four storeys as voted for by 650 P&Cs at the 2022 West Australian Council of State Schools conference—were outlined in the master plan and precinct guidelines.

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“Regretfully the ...

Plan that has been put forward —

has nothing that prohibits young people from being under constant surveillance from anyone recreating around the school oval or visiting, dining or staying in private developments that will tower over the edges or adjacent to school spaces ...

The P&C committee went on. These are real concerns from the parents at that school and others.

I will just go through what other members of the opposition said. The member for Roe gave an excellent round-up of a whole range of issues and I will focus on a couple of those. A number of members on our side spoke about the co-joined issue of teacher shortages, having partially trained teachers in the schools, the burnout from teachers having enormous workloads, headmasters having to fill in and other staff having to do excessive hours. A close relative of mine is a retired teacher and is doing many hours of relief teaching because there is constant demand to fill the spaces, and the spaces may be being filled, but this problem is building and we see that.

Regional areas have a lack of resources, and some things here go hand in hand for the government. The lack of safety in many regional communities is driving staff away. Staff not feeling safe is a major problem. They cannot take their families into those communities because they do not believe their families will be safe, especially in the north of the state. There is also the issue of accommodation for the staff. We heard about the allowances for teachers in regional areas. I am certain the minister will look at the issue of the difference between the allowances for permanent staff and the allowances for relief teachers. Clearly, the relief teachers are suffering the same shortcomings in those communities.

The member for Central Wheatbelt talked about the issues at Western Australian College of Agriculture in Cunderdin and the government’s garnishing of 20 per cent of the funding. Those funds are critical for those agricultural colleges so they can make big purchases. If the college were to buy a large tractor now, it would cost anywhere between \$500 000 and \$1 million, but the state Labor government took money out of that account. It has garnished 20 per cent of that income for a long time, and that money should be put back. It is there to carry those farms through tough times.

The member for Vasse talked about no funding being provided for the growth of KindiLink centres. I thought a critical theme of this government was to get children into appropriate education as soon as possible.

Our side has made compelling arguments. As I say, I do not hold this Minister for Education responsible for the shortcomings of this Labor government. I know that this minister takes his role very seriously and I am encouraged by his focus on the tertiary sector as well, but much more effort needs to be put into schools in Western Australia.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member.

**MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education)** [6.12 pm]: That was compelling—not at all! I intend to make a really short contribution because I am aware that the Minister for Education wants to respond to the motion and lots of people on this side of the chamber would also like to make a contribution. We have a number of educators who have lived in the real world of education and who actually know about and can generally compare the performance of a Labor government, and how it invests in public education, with the performance of a Liberal government when it is in office. I can personally attest to that, having been a schoolteacher for 27 years. I have experienced significant periods when we have had a Liberal government and a Labor government and, without fail, every single time it is a Labor government that invests in public education because public education is in our DNA. It is what we are born to do because we believe that free, good-quality public education is at the core of equality and providing opportunities for people.

This is my first opportunity to rise as the Minister for Early Childhood Education and speak on the topic since December when I was elevated. I am also the first ever early childhood education minister, and I am very proud of that fact. It signifies, very, very strongly, that early childhood education is a key priority for this government. We know that early childhood education is fundamental to young people—to set them up in their earliest years so that they can achieve as they progress through our public school system. It has been a great privilege to work together with Minister Buti to progress our significant aspirations to continue to make the public school system the best in the country.

I want to speak on a couple of themes. Importantly, too, we must recognise the federal Labor government, which thinks the same as we do about public education. The federal government’s priority is very much on early childhood education. It is really important that we are part of the national conversation and investment into the earliest years of a child’s education.

I will highlight some of the significant infrastructure investments, particularly for early childhood education, that were in this year’s budget. Investments include a \$11.6 million investment to Brabham Primary School to build an offsite early learning facility. I was there with the Minister for Education and the local member, the Deputy Premier.

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We also invested \$3 million into an early childhood block at Camboon Primary School. Construction has started on a new early childhood block for the South Bunbury Education Support Centre. Construction of an early childhood block has been completed at Kyilla Primary School and Wickham Primary School. In fact, in the 2023–24 budget, there is some \$106 million in infrastructure investments specifically for early childhood education. That, of course, is part of the bigger picture of a \$6.4 billion investment in this year's budget into public education in Western Australia. That is up some \$532 million on the previous year.

I want to mention some good things that are happening in the early childhood education space. Kindergarten is a really successful program in Western Australia. In fact, 95 per cent of our four-year-old kids choose to go into the school setting to get that important education in that year before compulsory schooling. Recently, I announced the new Western Australian kindergarten curriculum guidelines, which is a really important document that further strengthens and supports teachers and educators to develop curriculum that is responsive and most appropriate for the development needs of kindergarten children in Western Australia.

We also released the phonics initiative under the previous Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, which has seen a significant investment in our schools to support teachers to deliver formalised phonics learning to support children in their youngest years to develop good reading and writing skills. It is a great program. I have spoken to many teachers about it, and it is a great investment that this government has made into the early years of education.

The Early Years Partnership that I have spoken about in this place is a partnership between the Minderoo Foundation and the state government, which covers four locations. The first location is Armadale West, and the Minister for Education would know that. The second location is the central great southern, which includes Katanning and the surrounding towns. The third location is in Derby, which takes in Mowanjum and Pandanus Park, and the fourth location is Bidyadanga. This Early Years Partnership is an incredibly important program whereby families and communities are brought together to develop their own action plans of what they need to support their children from birth to four years old. We will make sure we do everything we can to support those families and communities to get their young children ready for school. Each action plan, whether in Derby or Armadale or Katanning, is slightly different, as it should be, because it has been formulated and guided by the voices of the local families who know best what their children's needs are.

I will also mention the child and parent centres, which are a great initiative. We have a number of them around the state. I have one in my electorate, in Banksia Grove. They are great facilities that are co-located with schools to provide support in a number of areas for families with young children. It makes those important connections into school. Likewise, we have over 50 KindiLink programs running throughout the state, and I have had the privilege to visit Kalgoorlie, Katanning, Broome and Bidyadanga. KindiLink provides up to six hours of learning a week for young children prior to the compulsory years of schooling, but, importantly, jointly with families to support those children and families to develop a positive relationship with the school that will be ongoing and enduring as they journey through school.

I have noted previously that the Leader of the Liberal Party focuses on KindiLink and child and parent centres. I agree that they are really good things. The Leader of the Liberal Party likes to spruik the point that they were Liberal Party initiatives. Yes, they were Liberal Party initiatives, but they are good things. What I am trying to say is that if she wants to own KindiLink and child and parent centres, she needs to own everything that the Liberal Party did in education. If she is going to spruik KindiLink and child and parent centres as the Liberal Party's, she has to own all of it. The bit I am talking about is the absolute decimation of education assistants out of the system in the Liberal Party's last term of government and the devastating impact that that had on children in classrooms. If she is going to own KindiLink and child and parent centres, she must own the fact that the Liberals decimated the public school system by taking hundreds of education assistants out of the system. Not just teachers, but every parent knows the value of education assistants in every single classroom, particularly for the vulnerable children in our classrooms.

What did we do on coming to government? We put them back. We put over 300 ed assistants back into the classroom. Aboriginal education workers were taken out of the system. Of course, the Liberals did a lot of sly things in taking a whole bunch of teachers out of the system as well. I can talk from experience about the level 3 classroom teacher system. High-achieving classroom teachers were given 0.1 hours of non-teaching time to support and mentor other teachers. The Liberals took that time away from teachers and thought that nobody would notice. There were 1 000 level 3 teachers in the system, so, if we do the maths, that meant that the equivalent of 100 schoolteachers were ripped out of the system by the Liberals taking that time away.

I am happy to speak on this Labor government's record in supporting the public school system. I do not want to go back past 2017; it is too dreary, but I will. If members opposite are going to cherrypick bits of their time in government, I will continue to remind them of the bits that were absolutely devastating to the public school system.

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This government has spent the last six years rebuilding the system and valuing education assistants and Aboriginal education workers and the critically important work that they do in supporting teachers to support children in the classroom.

**MS A.E. KENT (Kalgoorlie)** [6.23 pm]: I rise today to add my contribution against the motion that the Cook Labor government is not prioritising students' needs in the WA education system. I came to the position of member for Kalgoorlie from the position of manager of intergovernmental relations with the Department of Education. I spent 13 years in that position and I absolutely loved it. It has been very interesting to sit through this debate and listen to people who think they know quite a lot about education.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** She's bitter and twisted because she lost the footy tipping to me!

**Ms A.E. KENT:** Ha-ha! People who have not worked in the education system seem to think that they have all this knowledge about how the education system works. I am here to tell them that it is quite different being in the system. I got to see firsthand how important education is in the lives of our children and how investing in our education is paramount and what can be achieved when someone understands what drives the system and what results can be derived from that.

In my role, I worked with the commonwealth government to implement what was termed as the Building the Education Revolution, which was led by the then federal Minister for Education, Hon Julia Gillard. Julia Gillard instinctively knew and understood what was required to progress education.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Another Welsh.

**Ms A.E. KENT:** She is! Yes, exactly; we are claiming that, too.

She created, amongst other things, the national partnerships. The Council of Australian Governments national partnerships that I was responsible for implementing with a team across education for quite a number of years included the low socio-economics national partnership, the literacy and numeracy national partnership, and, importantly, because this seems to be a bit of a discussion point today, the universal access throughout the schools national partnership. Not many people would realise this, but prior to 2008–09, children across Australia were not funded to go to preschool. The federal government put into the school system 15 hours of early childhood education a week. We all know how important early childhood education is to our children and to our schools. It was that government back in the day that did that.

From about 2008 to 2013, the national partnerships implemented across the state achieved so many things. Not only did I see those fantastic results being achieved, but, also, unfortunately, I saw what the Liberal governments under Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull did not achieve, as they wound back the funding through the national partnerships. It was such a disappointment.

With my experience and knowledge, I know what working closely with our schools can achieve, and, as the member for Kalgoorlie for the last two and a half years, I would like to tell the house what I have been doing in my electorate.

Firstly, there is the primary school science program. Nine schools within the Kalgoorlie electorate have received funding through this program for science equipment. Boulder Primary School and Kambalda West District High School specifically received funding for classrooms to be converted into science laboratories. The other schools that will receive equipment include Kalgoorlie School of the Air, Leonora District High School, Menzies Community School, Mount Margaret Remote Community School, Norseman District High School, O'Connor Education Support Centre and Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School. These investments help our kids prepare for the jobs of the future and inspire the future chemists, doctors, geologists and miners, who are very important in my area. Let us not forget the \$1 million for the new STEM classroom at Kalgoorlie–Boulder Community High School.

Now let us look at virtual power plants. We have a virtual power plant at the high school and it was closely followed by three at Hannans Primary School, Kalgoorlie Primary School and O'Connor Primary School. We know that a virtual power plant can help a school better manage its energy use, cut its electricity bills and focus on equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to explore new possibilities for WA's energy future.

A priority of mine is helping children deal with their mental health. In late 2021, I met Ashlee Harrison, an inspiring woman from Zero2Hero in Perth, a not-for-profit group that is kicking goals in addressing mental health issues amongst young people. A lot of what this group does was based in the metropolitan area at the time. I was keen to get Zero2Hero to the goldfields. With the help of some wonderful sponsors, we were able to create the inaugural Goldfields Young Heroes Tour for schools. Over 2 600 high school and primary school students last year received much-needed skills to recognise mental health symptoms in themselves and their mates and how to get help. I am incredibly proud of taking these important programs all across my electorate. Every school had a visit from Zero2Hero. The feedback from teachers and students was that it was absolutely fantastic. This year, more

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schools have taken part in these programs. Moving forward, we will be running them with my help over the next few years.

I have not finished yet. I make sure that every school in my electorate receives \$300 every year. This is provided by way of local business vouchers so that P&Cs can raise funds through raffles et cetera. This is the third year I have been doing this, and schools are really grateful. I was in Norseman last Wednesday and handed over vouchers to the schools. On Thursday I was in Leonora handing out vouchers at Leonora District High School. Schools love these vouchers. It is part of my ongoing interaction with the schools.

Such is my passion for schools and education, I am on the Coolgardie Primary School board. I work with the community. I involve myself. This is what I contribute. I know about education; I have actually worked in the system. I talk to the schools, principals, students and teachers every week. I listen and I act. The Cook government listens and acts. I am very proud to be part of this government that puts so much into education.

**MS E.J. KELSIE (Warren–Blackwood)** [6.30 pm]: I want to say with regard to this motion—what a load of old nonsense! It sounds like rubbish to me. The Cook Labor government continues to invest to improve educational outcomes across our state. We invest in education. We understand, unlike those opposite, that investment in education is an investment in the future. The 2023–24 state budget included \$6.4 billion for education—an increase from \$532 million in the 2022–23 budget. We have \$6.8 million for upgrades at agricultural colleges and farm schools around the state. We have over 30 schools in the Warren–Blackwood electorate—primary schools, district high schools, senior high schools, Catholic schools, independent schools, a Steiner school, a nature school and a very much revered agricultural college in Denmark. I work very closely with these schools. Recently, the Minister for Education visited my electorate twice to meet with and hear from representatives from many of these schools. We toured Pemberton District High School and Mount Barker Community College, and visited Denmark Senior High School.

Pemberton has a strong retention strategy and it is working. Its numbers in the senior years are increasing. The students, teachers and school leaders we met, including students in the classes we joined, talked with animation about a love of their local school. Proud is how I would describe those we met, especially the young folk who recently came joint first in a school robotics challenge. They were proud to show us their robot and their coding, and we saw them in action. Pemberton District High School's vision is to provide a caring, positive and creative learning environment that treats each student as an individual, and to provide tailored educational programs to celebrate their strengths, extend their potential and inspire lifelong learning. We saw this in action.

I recently hosted the Minister for Education in Manjimup, where we held an education round table. Actually, since being elected, this is the third education forum hosted by me with a Minister for Education in the electorate of Warren–Blackwood. We have met with school representatives in Denmark, Walpole, Mt Barker, Margaret River and Augusta. During the last education forum with the current education minister, we met with school leaders and representatives from Boyup Brook, Manjimup, Nannup, Bridgetown, Greenbushes, Pemberton, Balingup and Northcliffe. We met, we talked and we listened. This is what investment in the people on the ground delivering education looks like. This is what investment in the needs of students looks like. It is about listening and learning—listening and learning that helps inform policy decisions.

To say that this government does not prioritise the needs of students is complete nonsense, as I said earlier. It is a load of tosh! Again, we are delivering record dollars—investment—into education across the state.

Recently, the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council, or RREAC, as we like to call it, visited the great southern, touring schools in Albany, Mt Barker and Denmark. We came together to share information, knowledge and experiences, capturing accomplishments as well as challenges for the region. I was proud to show my friend and parliamentary colleague the member for Kimberley, Divina D'Anna, around the WA College of Agriculture in Denmark. The member for Kimberley and I were joined by a large cohort from across the state, including representatives from Southern Regional TAFE, the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, Catholic Education Western Australia, universities, the State School Teachers' Union of WA, regional chambers of commerce and Aboriginal education and training interests, to tour the facilities. RREAC provides evidence-based and solutions-focused strategic advice on education and training to the Minister for Education. I was proud for RREAC members to meet and chat with many of the students—students who come from local communities and further afield across our great state to gain a hands-on education with a very strong pipeline to work.

I work closely with the agricultural college, where I believe the previous member for Warren–Blackwood was principal back in the day. Excellence and innovation in agricultural education is what is offered at the WA college of ag over its 560-hectare working farm and educational facility. Spots at this college are highly sought after by students in years 10, 11 and 12. The vision of the school is to educate the rising stars of the agricultural sector in an exceptional specialist school that the industry values, protects and nurtures. This is what RREAC had the pleasure of experiencing—students gain industry-relevant, hands-on education and experiences that give them the best possible opportunity for either undertaking further education or entering the workforce. I am a proud sponsor of

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the graduation awards for the college. I know that my colleague Hon Sally Talbot is a sponsor of a scholarship for these awards as well. What is clear at the ag college, among other schools in my electorate, is that the needs of students are prioritised. I was also proud to recently join the Minister for Education as he visited the agricultural college in Denmark. He returned to my electorate to meet students and staff and to tour the facilities, including the shearing shed, the trades area and, my favourite, the robotic dairy.

It is evident that students at the college are engaged. They are engaged in their education, respectful of their environment, and keen to learn, graduate and get active in the ag sector. When I ask students what they hope to do after their time at school has finished, many proudly state that they already have jobs lined up. The pipeline to jobs is strong. The principal told the minister and me that industry truly values students coming from the college and that many are offered secure job pathways before they leave. Often, these pathways are created by the college and their work experience program. Often, pathways are sought out by industry proactively contacting the school to find out who the top students are and how to secure them for their businesses.

We have excellence in education at each corner of the electorate. Three schools in the Warren–Blackwood electorate were in the top 75 ranked schools across WA in 2023 by median ATAR scores: Margaret River Senior High School, Manjimup Senior High School and Denmark Senior High School.

My good friend and colleague the member for Albany, Rebecca Stephens, and I have firsthand experience delivering training, education and careers support to students at educational risk in the great southern and goldfields regions. We were responsible for the delivery of alternative engaging pathways in education as part of the Department of Education’s participation program, delivering a certificate II in business in Albany and a certificate I in leadership in Kalgoorlie for young people at educational risk. These alternative pathways are important. Not all young people fit the traditional school model. Some need additional support—mentally, physically and emotionally. We work with local schools, TAFEs, jobs and skills centres, local employers, counselling services, students and their families, where relevant, to support our students to the best possible outcomes for them. I still get messages from some of those students. We prioritised the needs of our students to help them achieve to the best of their abilities. Some of our students had additional learning needs, some were accessing NDIS support, and others had low literacy and numeracy skills. All needed a supported learning environment.

I remind the house that the Cook Labor government is investing \$626.8 million in building and upgrading schools and school facilities, including \$53 million on new and improved infrastructure in regional WA. The total spend to deliver quality education in Western Australian schools has been increased by more than half a billion dollars to \$6.4 billion. Again, this is what investment looks like. This investment prioritises the needs of students across the entire state, including regional Western Australia. I think the motion is rubbish.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Education)** [6.40 pm]: I thank the member for Warren–Blackwood for that outstanding contribution. As she said, I have joined her in her electorate a number of times to talk all matters education. I thank all members who have contributed to the debate, including the member for Cockburn, the member for Kalgoorlie, the Minister for Early Childhood Education and the opposition, led by the opposition spokesperson for education, the member for Roe. We have had a wideranging debate on the motion, so I will not be able to answer all the points made on the various issues raised by the opposition. I thank members who have a keen interest in education, as education is incredibly important for the future of our current and future generations.

The government opposes this motion. How could one even think that the Labor government is neglecting the state education system? I would love to have a few hours to go through all the different points made by the opposition, led by the member for Roe, but I will not have time. It was interesting that the member for Roe cited the State School Teachers’ Union of WA. I know very well his hatred of unions, so it was interesting that he referred to the SSTUWA. I have a very good relationship with that union. With regard to the review that he mentioned, I assume that it will be handed down in the next month or so. I met with the union on that. When the report is released, I intend to meet with Dr Lawrence and her team on it.

As mentioned by other members, the most recent budget committed \$6.4 billion to education—the first time it has gone over \$6 billion. How could one say that the government is neglecting the public education system? As Minister for Education, I put up my hand and say that there are enormous challenges in our education system. How can there not be when we have about 837 public schools in a state with a geographical area as large as Western Australia? Members of the opposition have to realise that it is incredibly challenging to provide a quality education system throughout such a geographically large state with a dispersed population, but we are committed to doing that. It is really insincere—one could even say hypocritical—for the opposition to say that the government is not committed to supplying high-quality education to every student in Western Australia, because it knows the challenges from when it was in government. The opposition might have had royalties for regions, but most of that did not go into education. It is not possible in a state the size of Western Australia and with such a dispersed population for every single school, teacher and student to have everything that we want them to have. People in the city cannot have

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that. However, we are trying to ensure that we do the best job possible. That is why we have invested over \$6 billion in education. That is in the 2023–24 budget and is an increase of \$532 million—a whopping nine per cent increase on the previous budget.

As I said, I will not have time to go through all the issues, but I wanted to allow members of the opposition and on our side to raise the issues they wanted to raise about education in Western Australia. At the top of my presentation, I thank all the principals, all the teachers, all the parents and citizens associations, all the school boards, all the education assistants, all the AIEOs, all the cleaners, all the gardeners, all the frontline office staff, everyone who works in the Department of Education, and everyone who works in statewide services. Thank you for what you do for Western Australian education. It is a challenging job, but it is one of the most important jobs that any person in the public service of Western Australia can do. I know the member for Roe's wife, Andrea, is a committed educationalist. She has done some outstanding work, and it was a privilege to go out last week to meet the WA state school sports people at what was formerly Tuart College. Besides the office staff, the board or the committee are all volunteers. I thank them for all the work they have done.

Let us try to go through part of what the motion talked about—our so-called neglect. An amount of \$6.4 billion certainly does not show that we have neglected the education system. In the delivery of education, one of the hallmarks of this government is the quality teaching strategy. A key component of that strategy is to strengthen a profession-led model of support, built on quality teaching strategy-led schools. This is where we are trying to ensure that we provide sustainable leadership and teaching strategies to deliver high-quality education. That includes the annual delivery of \$1 million for the second iteration of the WA Centre for Excellence in Explicit Teaching of Literacy, \$2.5 million over five years for the phonics initiative, and a state government commitment of \$44.4 million over five years to expand education adjustment allocation funding for public schools to enable staff to provide targeted support for students who need it. That has allowed us to increase additional support for the lowest 15 per cent of students in NAPLAN; previously, it was 10 per cent.

The member for Roe mentioned a speech I made at the Western Australian Primary Principals' Association in which I talked about the importance of that allocation. I also talked about funding for students with special or complex needs and disabilities. We work on a medical model, so there needs to be a diagnosis before the extra funding can be provided. I am looking into the issue of whether we can adjust that and look at a functional model, but there are major budgetary considerations involved in that. I will work alongside the Minister for Disability Services, who is a passionate advocate for people with disabilities in Western Australia. We are looking at what we can do to ensure that students with disabilities, complex needs and undiagnosed needs can be properly supported and funded. I am incredibly committed to that mission.

The Western Australian government in 2021 committed \$185.5 million to recurrent election commitments over five years. This included a number of new and expanded statewide initiatives related to student support and wellbeing. We know that the wellbeing of students has become an incredibly important focus, and we are very, very committed to that. I talked about the education adjustment allowance; there is an individual ability allocation, and the student-centred funding model provides flexibility to ensure that each school can cater for the specific needs of their students, but I also want to look at what else we can do in that space. We also provided a further \$18.2 million in the 2022–23 budget to increase the number of specialist learning programs for students with autism spectrum disorder. This government initiative is incredibly important.

In recent headlines, there has been a major focus on domestic and family violence. Our government has been rolling out the respectful relationships teaching support program. No previous government did that; we did that. We will continue to look at what we can do to ensure that our students understand the importance of respectful relationships. From next year, there will be a mandated consent program in our curriculum, which Hon Nick Goiran lampooned and criticised. How he could do that is shameful. I do not want to be sidetracked by this point, but when we compare the federal education policies of the Liberals with Labor's—in the higher education space, also—the conservatives are driven by ideology, while we are driven by a commitment to provide the highest quality education for students.

I work very closely with the Minister for Early Childhood Education. She mentioned the previous Liberal government's slashing of education assistants. That was ideologically driven because it wanted to damage one of the unions representing the education system. That is just deplorable. There might be a difference of opinion about educational strategies, and there will be. It is interesting. The discussion and debate on various education systems is a contested space—I get that—but it is very disappointing when the policies of the conservatives in the federal and state spheres are driven by political ideology and not education ideology. That is an incredible disappointment. I challenge the opposition to show when WA Labor has instigated educational policy based on political ideology. I think they would have a very hard time doing that, but we would easily be able to identify where that has been the case.

[Interruption.]

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**Dr D.J. Honey:** God's got another view!

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** That is right!

As I said, I really do not have time to go through what I really want to. The government made a major commitment regarding school psychologists. The opposition rightfully brought up the issue of teacher shortages and so forth, which I will talk about in the few minutes I have left. I was at an education forum a few weeks ago in the electorate of Kalamunda with the member for Kalamunda. I was sitting with a principal. One principal rightly made the point that if the teachers are not there, they are not there. As the Minister for Education, I cannot suddenly snap my fingers and make those teachers arrive. There is a worldwide shortage of teachers. This is not even just in Australia. Apart from maybe Ireland, where there seems to be a surplus, there is a worldwide shortage of teachers. However, we have put in place a number of strategies to try to alleviate that issue. We have an international recruitment program going. I think that the member for Roe draws a long bow to say that the announcement by the former Premier in February 2022 is the reason that we have a teacher shortage today. I really do not think that is the case.

As the member knows well, and I think one of his colleagues mentioned, the decrease in the number of graduates from our schools of education is a major issue. There has been a significant decrease in teaching graduates from our universities. That has correlated with the increase in the qualification requirement from a one-year diploma of education to a two-year master's degree. Universities are debating that because, of course, they have a particular interest in that. However, I think we really need to look at whether we need that two-year master's degree. I thought it was a good idea when it was first proposed because it might have increased status and expertise, but listening to principals and teachers, the quality of students coming out from the two-year master's course does not appear to be better than those with the one-year diploma of education.

One thing we need to look at, and it was mentioned in the national report by vice-chancellor and principal professor, Mark Scott, is improving the quality of teacher training in schools. There is one thing about which I will drill the deans of education. I have already raised this issue, and I know the Minister for Disability Services will be interested in this: apart from one university, universities do not allow their trainee teachers to do practicum teaching at an education support centre or a special school. I will ask them for evidence that this is not the case, but I have now been told this by at least three principals from education support centres or special schools. If that is true, it is absolutely shameful. It does not allow us to train teachers to operate in education support centres and special schools, nor does it improve those teachers' abilities to cope with mainstreaming when there is an increase in students with complex needs. I am sure the members for Roe, Cottesloe and North West Central would support me in prosecuting the case because if it is true, it is absolutely shameful.

I turn to capital works. There has been \$1.2 billion for capital works. The issues of Como Secondary College and Esperance Senior High School came up. I do not disagree that Como Secondary College, Esperance Senior High School and Kent Street Senior High School all need work. There will not be an argument from me that they do not, but there is always an issue with state governments of unlimited demand and limited resources. That is the basic rule of economics. We would not need economics if we did not have unlimited demand but limited supply. That is just what we have, so we must prioritise. I agree with the member for Roe. As he mentioned, I have had discussions with people in Esperance. I have been to Como, and today I was with the member for Victoria Park at Kent Street. The communities of Kent Street Senior High School and Como Secondary College are very lucky to have incredible, strong local members. I will give it to the member for Roe that he has been advocating for Esperance, and he will keep advocating for Esperance, as he should do. We put on about four or five new schools every year, and we have a continuing maintenance program. Every school I go to presents a case that can be justified, so we need to prioritise the body of work.

I think I have about half a minute left. The member for Cottesloe talked about the sharing of school facilities and ovals. I am a big believer in and supporter of that. I think school resources should be shared by the community. Performing arts centres and school ovals should be shared by the community. It helps improve the linkage between the community and the school, and I am sure it has particular benefits in regional centres. As the Minister for Education, I am very committed to ensuring the best quality education and that every student who goes to school in Western Australia achieves their potential. That is why I also instigated the post-secondary pathway for our students, as I think some of the practices and offers of our universities do not provide incentives or motivation to ensure that every student, whatever their course, aptitude or capacity, achieves their best possibility.

I thank all members for their contributions. We completely reject the premise of the motion. I know members who spoke today, and I think all members—even though I do not agree with some of the comments made by the opposition—are passionate about education.

One final thing: agricultural colleges are incredibly important. I have visited the one in Denmark. They do outstanding work. I am also committed to seeing what we can do in that space.

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 13 September 2023]

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**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Did you shear a sheep while you were down in Denmark agricultural college?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** No. I wanted to, but I did not have time. I will come to Katanning; I will come to the farm to do that!

I think I should call it to an end. I am proud to be the Minister for Education in the Cook Labor government. As the Minister for Early Childhood Education said, public education is in the DNA of Labor members.

**MR T.J. HEALY (Southern River — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.59 pm]: The member for Cottesloe talks about sharing spaces, but all schools that have public–private partnerships struggle now to share their schools. I thought I would throw that one in briefly.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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