

TEACHERS — SUPPLY AND DEMAND

451. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Education:

I have noticed with interest the recent comments related to teaching levels. I know for a fact that we have actually had enough teachers at the beginning of each term because —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, I formally call you to order for the second time today. I would like to hear the question from the member for Swan Hills; some other people in this place might like to hear it as well.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I know for a fact that we have actually had enough teachers at the beginning of each term —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: A lot of people seem to like your questions, member for Swan Hills, and wish to provide you with assistance. I know that you do not need any.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I know for a fact that we have actually had enough teachers at the beginning of each term because I have 21 schools in my electorate. With this in mind, will the minister please provide the house with an update on teacher workforce supply in the upcoming years?

Dr E. CONSTABLE replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question, and I also note that yesterday the member for Victoria Park asked me a question about teacher projections and supply and demand. I want to just —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, I formally call you to order for the third time today. I presume there are people in this place who want to ask questions and get answers. Some members do not give me that indication, however.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I indicated to the member for Victoria Park that I would provide him with those figures. This is an issue that we all take seriously. I know that the former government did that during some very trying times over a number of years—2006, 2007 and 2008—when there were shortages. Since that time a lot of work has been done on modelling, but I might say that the modelling is based on very volatile assumptions, and each time I get the figures, which is every 6 or 8 months or so, those figures are tending to go down for a range of reasons, one of which I mentioned yesterday as an example: the global financial crisis made a huge difference to the number of resignations that we saw. For instance, the resignations fell from a peak of 1 143 in 2007–08 to 605 in 2010–11, so there has been a dramatic fall—a 47 per cent fall—in resignations over that time, and obviously that makes a difference to the supply and making sure that our schools are well staffed. Retirements have also fallen in that time, by way of another example, from a peak of 440 in 2007–08 to 358 in 2010–11. I think that we can fairly say that there have been fewer resignations and retirements for a couple of reasons. One is the GFC, and perhaps also one influence has been that teachers are now much better paid than they were.

If we go back to 2006, there were 20 vacancies at the beginning of the school year; in 2007, 264 vacancies, which was a very difficult year for the former government; and in 2008, 110 vacancies, when there was another difficult start to the school year. We also know that in 2009, 2010 and 2011 we started the school year with basically a full complement. Maybe there were one or two positions in country centres, but they were soon filled, if we take it from the very first day of the year. It is interesting that the early projections indicated that there would be a shortage for public schools, and the only figures I am giving are for public schools, which are about 70 per cent of the projected figures. For public schools for this year, an early projection, going back a few years, was a shortage of 441 teachers. Of course, we know that that did not happen. Again, I think we can safely say that the GFC, well-paid teachers and so on have made a difference to that. But it also illustrates the volatility of the projections that are given.

If we look at current projections, the most recent projections that I have received suggest that for public schools—I am talking only about public schools—there will be a surplus of teachers of 423 at the beginning of next year, and 125 for the following year, 2013. The previous projection, interestingly, had a shortage of 637 for public schools in 2012, and 833 in 2013. Again, this illustrates that it is very difficult to project the shortages of teachers. However, if we go by the current projected shortage for public schools, it is suggested in those projections that there will be a shortage of 440 by 2014, and as many as 1 575 for 2015. We have to remember that in 2015 the full cohort will be back in the high schools, with the half-cohort having gone through schools and finished year 12 the previous year.

It is important to note that the projected figures are the worst-case scenarios for public schools. I compliment the former minister for the work that was done on putting a number of attraction mechanisms in place. They are the

sort of things that we are looking at now. I know that the former government went as far as putting in place quite a detailed attraction program for overseas teachers. Obviously, we do not need to do that at the moment, but, if the need arises, we will ramp up our interstate and overseas programs to attract teachers in the next two or three years as we might need to. But we have scholarships for final-year pre-service students, the rural teaching practicum program and the Up-skilling School Support Staff program. Teach for Australia is likely to be part of our scene, with very high-quality graduates entering teaching through a different path. Teach Next is another one of the commonwealth government's programs for people seeking a career change and helping those people upskill their qualifications. The projections need to be closely monitored through this period because they change. As I have watched them over the last little while, they have gradually come down.

Going through to 2020, I am sure that the member for Victoria Park would be interested in the projections, but I would not set too much store by them. In public schools for 2016, a shortage of 1 580 is projected; in 2017, 1 264; in 2018, 1 288; and then it goes up again in the further out years: in 2019, 1 782; and in 2020, 1 754. I do not think those figures are worth very much because many factors could come into play. I expect that the recent global activity and problems will have a big impact again on teachers not retiring early, as they once did. Teachers are, of course, a part of the Skilling WA workforce development plan for Western Australia and are being very closely monitored through the Department of Training and Workforce Development and by the Minister for Training and Workforce Development.