

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES - DISPARITY

Urgency Motion

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Nick Griffiths): I have received a letter in these terms -

Dear Mr President

I hereby give notice that today, pursuant to Standing Order 72 I intend to move:

‘That, as a matter of urgency, this House expresses its concern at the growing disparity with the delivery of educational services in country districts compared with metropolitan districts within Western Australia.’

Hon Peter Collier, MLC

Member for North Metropolitan Region.

In order for Hon Peter Collier to move his motion, at least four members should stand.

[At least four members rose in their places.]

The PRESIDENT: I invite Hon Peter Collier to move his motion.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [4.19 pm]: I move -

That, as a matter of urgency, this house expresses its concern at the growing disparity with the delivery of educational services in country districts compared with metropolitan districts within Western Australia.

The reason I have moved this motion is that although the education portfolio has been consumed by a number of issues in recent years because of the significant amount of change that has taken place in the portfolio, one area that has captured my imagination more than most is the quite vivid distinction between education delivery in rural areas of the state as opposed to that in metropolitan areas of the state. It is quite clear to me that the quality of education delivery, particularly in the north west of the state and in the eastern goldfields, leaves a lot to be desired. Unless we do something to stem the tide of disparity between rural and urban schools, the students in the north west and the goldfields in particular will suffer terribly in the next five to 10 years. They are already at a tremendous disadvantage in a number of areas, and I would like to think that we could do something to stem the tide of disparity. Do not take my word for it, Mr President. I will quote from the federal opposition’s education spokesperson, Mr Stephen Smith, who on ABC radio on 23 October 2007 stated that there was a serious divide between rural and city students and that the ALP was looking to halt the decline. Therefore, the federal shadow education minister has actually acknowledged that his Labor colleagues at the state level have provided country students with inadequate service delivery. He was obviously referring to his Labor counterparts because, as we all know, they are currently in power in each state and territory.

One aspect of education that has impacted most on service delivery is the prevalent teacher shortage. The current teacher shortage is without doubt the most serious issue confronting the education system and is most profound in rural and remote areas, particularly in the Kimberley, Pilbara and goldfields. I have tried unsuccessfully to get statistics on the breakdown of teacher numbers for those areas. I am having great difficulty in getting specific information from the Minister for Education and Training, particularly specific details of some areas of education. I will, however, quote from an article published in *The West Australian* on 28 April 2007 after the minister announced a bonus payment for teachers in schools in rural and remote areas. It states -

Teachers at country schools hardest hit by the growing teacher shortage will receive a \$4200 sweetener this year, the Education Department said yesterday in a bid to ease the crisis.

Acting director-general Sharyn O’Neill said the \$2.5 million package thrashed out with the State School Teachers Union was aimed at compensating 420 teachers at 11 country schools who had been “doing it tough” because of extra workloads.

...

The schools include three in the Goldfields, Mt Magnet District High School and Carnarvon, Merredin, Northam, Narrogin, Tom Price, Newman and Hedland senior high schools.

These are all schools in rural and remote areas. Also in the contents of a package I received last week following a freedom of information application - I do not know why I bothered, as I got about 20 documents out of 100 - the figures for 15 February 2007 indicated that those areas hit hardest by the teacher shortage were the goldfields, 19 teachers short; the mid-west, 12 teachers short; and the Pilbara, 20 teachers short. The vacancy hot spots were Eastern Goldfields College, Geraldton Senior College, Hedland Senior High School, Jerramungup

District High School, John Willcock College, Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School, Karratha Senior High School, Kununurra District High School, Merredin Senior High School, Mt Magnet District High School, Narrogin Senior High School, Newman Senior High School, Tom Price Senior High School and Toodyay District High School.

In addition, the answer to a question on notice I asked about vacancies in the district offices indicated, as we would expect, that the Pilbara has 6.2 vacancies; the Kimberley, 9.1; and the goldfields, 3.1. Each of those three figures exceed by far the vacancies in the metropolitan area. Of course, the metropolitan area did not even crack a mention in the answer to that question.

As I said, those rural and remote areas are suffering currently from the teacher shortage, and that will definitely impact on the quality of education delivery for those students. As well as that, more and more students in rural and remote areas across the state must rely on distance education; that is, through the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education or through the flexible learning in schools program. I have mentioned this point over and again. I will repeat some figures. In 2005, 1 687 students accessed SIDE; in 2006, 3 475 students accessed SIDE and FLIS; and this year 4 210 students are accessing SIDE and FLIS.

Hon Barbara Scott: What sort of an increase is that?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Exactly; it is three times the number of the previous two years. That will obviously impact on service delivery to students in those towns.

I am at pains to point out that I do not have a problem with SIDE when it is absolutely necessary. However, if we asked a parent or a student whether they would prefer to have a fully qualified teacher in front of the student teaching a subject or whether they would rather deal with SIDE or FLIS, of course they would choose the former.

To reinforce that point, I will quote from another article in *The West Australian* on 18 June 2007 titled "More students study from afar". It states -

Most public schools will enrol a few students in SIDE when they cannot provide their choice of subject or there is a timetable clash.

But this year many students were forced to study key subjects such as maths, science and English by correspondence because there were not enough teachers.

In April, there were 331 students in Years 8, 9 and 10 at Port Hedland and 17 from Kellerberrin who were studying science by correspondence, 100 Geraldton students taking English, -

Geraldton students taking English! Do members believe that? The article continues -

27 from Jerramungup and 32 at Northampton doing maths and 32 Year 11 and 12 students studying geography at Eastern Goldfields Senior High School.

We did not have a problem at Eastern Goldfields Senior High School when I went there, so it has obviously deteriorated; they were good years though. The article continues -

While schools across the State were struggling to find teachers, SIDE also took on the full-time equivalent of an extra 25 teachers to cope with the additional students.

That is one aspect, as I said, of the teacher shortage.

Another issue is housing and services for teachers in rural and remote areas. Members will recall the appalling example I gave in the debate on the motion on the teacher shortage of the two Victorian teachers who came to Western Australia and had to live next to an open septic tank. I will continue debate on that motion tomorrow. I might say that although there have been some incentives for teachers in the past few months, they are a little late. We must do a lot more not only to attract, but also to retain teachers to rural and remote areas.

I will read from an email that I received from another Victorian couple who have been treated appallingly and have had to endure exactly the same circumstances. Is it any wonder that we are having trouble attracting teachers to rural and remote areas of the state? Surprise, surprise! The situation for the other couple improved 24 hours after they told the Department of Education and Training that they had been in touch with me and that I was going to deal with it. However, 24 hours later the whole situation was resolved. Why do teachers have to go to those lengths? I will read from the email I received from the couple, although I obviously will not identify them. It states -

Subject: More disgraceful treatment of Eastern States Teachers by WA Department of Ed

Hi Peter,

I thought you might find this interesting. After reading about another Victorian couple's WA Department of Education disaster in Melbourne's Age recently, I had to send in our story.

My partner and I are both Victorian teachers who decided to come to WA because of the chronic shortage we were reading about almost every day. While we were happy living in the "cold, dreary depressed place" (Mark McGowan Sunday Times) that is apparently the Eastern States, we had taken a year off for a working holiday, and the promise (and desperation) of WA sounded so great that we decided to commit a full six months here, to a school nearly 600km from Perth that is apparently one of the 'difficult to staff' schools. Well we now know why the whole state is difficult to staff. We are teachers experienced in a wide variety of schools (and state departments) and we have never, ever come across such a lack of professionalism, bullying and disregard. It is phenomenal that there are any schools at all operating in the light of such an amateur administration.

The e-mail referred to a number of issues with which the couple had to deal with DET. I will read one or two -

* Teaching out of our area: We were given the impression that we would be teaching high school students, which is what we are trained to do. It turns out however that although the school is a District High School, we are actually teaching at least 80% primary. We wouldn't mind except that the principal refused to let us attend a professional development session to do with teaching our subjects to primary children, which was held on a weekend. Also, apparently our respective budgets had run out, which we have since found out is simply not true. It's strange that this has happened because we were recently told by the central staffing office that despite the shortage we could not be given jobs that are out of our area . . . If the department of ed here is serious about 'poaching' (again, Mark McGowan) Eastern States teachers, he had better make sure that he communicates the fact that even though they are called High Schools, it doesn't actually mean that.

The e-mail concludes -

Mark McGowan is so smug in boasting about 'poaching' Eastern States teachers. We think he will find the greater problem will lay in keeping them here. We will certainly be warning our colleagues in both NSW and Victoria against coming here, and encouraging our new WA colleagues to leave. Furthermore, though no amount of money could possibly keep us at the school we are at, some support for staff - and in particular those you are trying to lure from interstate with false promises and withdrawn agreements - might go some way towards keeping us here. We, among many others, are great teachers, with great references and professional standards. The Department does not meet these same standards. We came here expecting to get treated really well, because that's what a department that is short of teachers needs to do. Living in "an exciting, booming state" has certainly lost it's "appeal".

As I have said, if we treat teachers who come from the eastern states in that fashion, we will not be able to overcome the problems that exist in rural and remote areas. At the beginning of the year I had to deal with a number of issues involving teachers. In particular, two new graduates from Geraldton were not provided with housing. They were basically told to find their own or not take the appointment. Throughout this year, I have dealt with this issue of teachers who are simply not provided with quality or even adequate accommodation. Until we do that, we will have a real problem with, firstly, attracting teachers to rural and remote areas and, secondly, retaining them there. Yet again it invariably has more of an impact on education service delivery in rural and remote schools than it does in metropolitan schools. The gap is widening and we must stem the tide.

Another area I mentioned deals with facilities. The Investing in Our Schools program is a federal government initiative so, logically of course, the state government is opposed to it. The program means that the federal government is picking up the pieces by providing funding for additional extras in schools, but this state government has, in fact, lumbered on an extra 17.5 per cent for costs for the grant. It is a classic example of the state government allowing politics to interfere with education. An article in *The West Australian* of 4 April 2007 called "State fees rip off grants to schools" states -

The State Government is skimming millions of dollars from Commonwealth grants to schools for projects such as sports facilities, air-conditioning, assembly areas and playgrounds.

I raise this because its impact is most notable in country areas - again, where the costs are much higher. The article continues -

Figures from the Federal Department of Education and Training revealed that some country schools were slugged fees of up to 23 per cent of the money for school projects.

Tincurrin Primary School, 280km south-east of Perth, won an \$80,000 Federal grant in 2005 to build a shaded playground but was slugged a management fee of \$18,182 by the Department of Housing and Works, or 23 per cent of the grant.

Meckering Primary School received a \$9012 grant to build a shaded playground and was charged a \$2041 management fee by DHW, or 23 per cent of the school's grant.

In contrast, Catholic and independent schools applying for Federal funds keep the full amount with neither the Catholic Education Office nor the Association of Independent Schools seizing any of the money.

...

WA Council of State School Organisations president Rob Fry said it was particularly galling that DHW was ripping out more than 20 per cent to manage some country school projects.

"The State Government should ensure that every cent that schools are granted by the Commonwealth goes to the school, not into other areas of Government coffers," he said.

There are a couple of other articles that I could read from about this issue, but I am running out of time.

Another area that I have dealt with recently is Wubin Primary School. The education minister decided to close Wubin Primary School. The parents were notified on 6 August by a letter from the director general, and on 3 September the Department of Education and Training started the consultation process. It started the consultation process after it had already decided that it would close the school! Again, that is a complete disregard for students in country areas.

Inevitably, there will be a comparison between what the coalition provided in the 1990s and what the current government is providing. I will give a few facts and figures. During the term of the coalition government from 1993 to 2001, 71 government schools were opened, 34 of which were in either rural or remote regions. They included Warnbro Community High School, Laverton Primary School, East Busselton Primary School and Dumbleyung Primary School. They established a rural and remote advisory council to provide advice on education in government and non-government schools throughout rural and remote Western Australia. They introduced the rural remote teaching service: a package of incentives to attract experienced staff to remote schools. Benefits included an attractive salary package, improved leave conditions, more paid leave, a flexible school year, free rent, and preferential transfer rights.

I have run out of time, but it is quite clear that the disparity between education delivery in rural and remote areas and education delivery in metropolitan areas is widening, and unless we do something about it, it will get worse.

HON BRIAN ELLIS (Agricultural) [4.34 pm]: Education, along with health and law and order, is the most fundamental responsibility of any government. Governments owe the next generation the right to the benefits and opportunities that education can give. I thank Hon Peter Collier for raising this important subject in this urgency motion. He touched on a couple of issues that I would also like to speak on. Governments not only have a responsibility to deliver a good education for our children; they should also endeavour to achieve the highest quality of education for the whole state, not necessarily just the metropolitan area.

I also agree with Hon Peter Collier about distance education. It is a worthwhile and very important means of education. However, I wonder how many metropolitan schools will be forced to use distance education for teaching English, as has happened at Geraldton Senior College, because of the teacher shortage. The ABC reported on 12 March 2007 -

The mid-west's largest high school has had to cancel support courses because it is three-and-a-half teachers short.

The situation still has not changed because the Geraldton Senior College principal was quoted in *The Geraldton Guardian* on this issue -

The school, which was hit hard by a shortage of teachers in term one this year, is likely to suffer again, according to the principal.

Mr Simmons is expecting to be short of two or three teachers by the start of term one next year but as yet has not been allocated any teachers from the graduate pool.

Hon Peter Collier pointed out another example of the government's indifference to country education; that is, the way the government handled the closure of Wubin Primary School. The minister has shown contempt for the people of Wubin through his lack of consultation with the community and his disregard for the devastating impact that the closure of a small town's school has upon its community. Members would think that the very

first thing a minister would do when closing a school would be to consult with the community and the parents of children at that school - it just seems a logical thing to do.

Hon Peter Collier: It's in the act.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: As Hon Peter Collier says, it is in the School Education Act. It is the most sensible thing to do. I accept that schools can get too small and that there are some which will have to be closed or for which arrangements will have to be made to educate those children somewhere else. However, the consultation process should be carried out; it is the very first process that should be taken, rather than the minister just stepping in and closing the school and then trying to do the consultation process afterwards. Of course, people will be upset. I have already had the same experience with the closure of the school in my local community at Bindi Bindi. It got to the stage at which it was necessary for the school to close, and when it did, the children from that school went to four different schools, which had the devastating effect of closing the whole community. That is what the Wubin people are concerned about; it does happen. The people of Wubin probably had the opportunity to keep the school going because the numbers were borderline and there were indications that the numbers could grow in the future, perhaps from mining employees coming into the area. Therefore, if the minister had taken the care to negotiate and consult with the community, maybe the outcome would have been different.

There are many examples of deteriorating standards of education in the country regions due to the shortage of teachers. There is also the scandal of schools waiting years for urgent repairs, as was reported in the *Sunday Times* on 16 September 2007 -

- Bindoon Primary School said it needed federal money to refurbish its 50-year-old toilet block, which had been listed on the WA Education Department capital works program for years.
- Latham Primary School - 310km northeast of Perth - said it had no student resource centre library, with books and resources "stored between a tin shed, three storage rooms and classrooms".
- Morawa WA College of Agriculture's toilet blocks were second-hand when purchased and put on site more than 25 years ago.

Therefore, it is not only repairs; there is a strong case for new schools, as is the case in Chittering. The Shire of Chittering is the second fastest growing shire and the seventh fastest growing local government in Western Australia. The shire estimates that its 3 000-plus population will double in three to five years. Already, there are 200 students at Bindoon Primary School, with many other students attending schools in Bullsbrook, Gingin and Midland.

Apart from the repairs and maintenance that need to be done, we should be planning ahead in these regions. As a result of the population growth, it will obviously be necessary to plan ahead, and the government will be caught out down the track if it is not prepared for the explosion in population in a place that is not far from the city and has a very large community that is growing at a very fast pace. The government will be caught out down the track unless it plans for a new primary school there.

I acknowledge that there is a shortage of teachers in this state and that the minister has announced an increase in pay for some teachers and is trying to encourage teachers from other states and from overseas to come to WA. However, we must ask: why has this situation arisen? Is it a lack of understanding of what is needed to teach in the bush? The *Countryman* of 18 October 2007 contains a report that reads -

Eastern Goldfields Education Support Centre teachers Justin and Kelly Fare said a great deal of lip service had been paid to the plight of rural schooling but things had barely advanced at the coalface.

"As teachers in the bush we feel that we are often overlooked," Mrs Fare said.

"It is hard for those who do not live and work in rural areas to understand the challenges that we face as educators in the bush."

Justin Fare said State and Federal governments had to do more to retain teachers instead of boosting incentives to recruit new ones.

"Behaviour management in the classroom is an issue that teachers feel they need more support in," he said.

"Performance pay for teachers is a topic that has been discussed in the media, but as teachers we would like to know what this is, how it would work and how it would be regulated . . .

Could it also be because of a lack of funding for resources in schools, the push for unworkable teaching requirements, the lack of discipline in classes or the poor wage structure that discourages people from choosing teaching as a profession - a profession that should be held in high regard in our society, as it is most important for our children's futures?

The situation is best summed up by a principal of a small school in a small country town who phoned me with some of his concerns. He said that after taking into account his extra costs to live in the country, he would be \$50 a week worse off than a city teacher. He has concerns about the wage structure. As Hon Peter Collier pointed out, there was an increase in wages for graduates, as well as incentives for overseas or eastern states teachers, but at the same time those teachers who have been struggling in the bush and who have taken on the responsibility of teaching children in the country have been ignored. That principal had some concerns about that, because without those additional resources and additional wages, there will be no incentive for teachers to work in the country. Some of the costs that he was faced with included rent. The Department of Education and Training was charging him \$140 a week. He asked the education department whether it would lower the rent to a more realistic figure in that country town, and he was told no; that was the rent and that is what he had to pay. Therefore, he took matters into his own hands. He looked around - it is only a small town, so it has only one or two streets - and found his own accommodation, with a rent of \$40 a week. Therefore, he saved himself \$100 a week. I find that to be a great example of why incentives are needed for teachers to go to the country.

HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West) [4.44 pm]: I will talk briefly on Hon Peter Collier's motion and give my support to it. The motion refers to the disparity in the delivery of educational services in country districts and metropolitan districts. I take note of the very broad overview that Hon Peter Collier gave on a state basis. I will give an example of this situation in my electorate, the South West Region; namely, the Harvey campus of the Western Australian College of Agriculture. I will give members a brief account of its history. The school was established in 1954. In subsequent years, accommodation for students was provided in former army facilities. In 1999, 130 hectares of land was resumed to accommodate the expansion of the Harvey Dam, resulting in the relocation of the school farm operations and training to a site at Wokalup, a distance of some eight kilometres.

In 2003, the Bunbury District Education Office recommended that the education department sell the Harvey site and totally consolidate the school at Wokalup. In 2004, a strategic relocation committee developed a staged process to relocate the college over a period of three to four years. However, despite a blueprint being developed, no action has occurred since 2005.

A recent building condition assessment report by the Department of Housing and Works estimated that maintenance issues at the present site would cost in the vicinity of \$1 million. In response, the Fixing our Schools program allocated about \$290 000. Although I acknowledge the spending of almost \$2.5 million, or \$2.375 million, to be exact, to establish an agricultural educational facility in Kelmscott - this gives city students a glimpse of the rural world - it absolutely astounded me, when two major agricultural facilities are in need of serious upgrades, they being Harvey and Narrogin, that this government chose the city option first, when there is an excellent facility at Lockridge Senior High School.

Despite the obvious opportunities that could be developed by this government's committing the funds to give Harvey Agricultural College the serious upgrade that it desperately needs, further opportunities that could be developed through the school could include a state-of-the-art facility for both agricultural theory and practice; a facility that caters for an economy that is critically short of tradespeople - for example, mechanical knowledge in agriculture; aquaculture studies, as we seriously need to question where future domestic fish and shellfish supply will come from, and more research is needed; the ability to work with Murdoch University in veterinary studies; courses on better water usage; and a facility that offers short courses on occupational health and safety.

Over recent years, nothing has been allocated in the forward estimates. A question was asked about this in Parliament on Tuesday, 5 December 2006, and the answer was that the cost of relocating the college, at 5 December, was \$21 million. However, on 11 January 2007, the *South Western Times* reported that the member for Collie-Wellington, Mick Murray, MLA, had written to the Minister for Education and Training, Mark McGowan, requesting that \$10 million be set aside for the relocation. On 2 October 2007, the minister estimated the cost at \$25 million and valued the site at only \$3.5 million.

We all know that agricultural schools are expensive on a per student basis, but we also know that a lack of skilled young people graduating from these colleges has great implications for the future of agriculture, not only in this state, but also in Australia as a whole. Who will grow the increasing demand for our clean, green agricultural products and where will the trained and skilled workers come from to do this agricultural work in our regional areas? I believe that it is a very short-sighted government when it comes to this vital investment in our agricultural leaders of the future. I must commend Hon Peter Collier for bringing a motion such as this to the Parliament.

HON ROBYN MCSWEENEY (South West) [4.50 pm]: I, too, congratulate Hon Peter Collier for bringing this motion forward. Having had four children attend country schools, I am very much aware of the disparity between the delivery of educational services in country and metropolitan districts.

I phoned a teacher friend of mine - she shall remain nameless because the Department of Education and Training can be vitriolic against someone who speaks out - who has taught for many years in a country high school and asked her to outline the issues that she finds intolerable. She suggested that the biggest problem with education in the country is human resource management, to which Hon Peter Collier alluded. Staff placement issues cause job insecurity, which has implications for housing and the movement of children, and staff feel absolutely helpless because someone from a higher authority tells them where to go and what to do. There is no consultation with teachers about staff placement and that leaves them feeling powerless. Teachers should be given the highest of accolades. They look after our children from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm, and then they do many more hours of work. If an issue at a school affects its teachers, those teachers should be consulted about it.

My friend said that transport is another issue. Students' flexibility is reduced because of their reliance on school buses to get them home. If city students have to stay after school, they can always catch another bus. However, if country students have to stay after school, somebody is required to collect them, which is onerous. Elite programs that are offered to country students in the city - I refer to cricket and music programs - are not supported with hostel accommodation for those students and their parents. As a parent I found it difficult when my children attended school in the city, because it was an added cost. People might think that it is not, but if transport is not provided, parents must provide a car and find accommodation, which is not cheap. There are also other imposts. For some young people who have lived in the country all their lives, leaving home at 17 can be very hard. I remember moving to the city; it was rather startling at first. Students have to find their way around, which is not easy, especially when they have come from a small community.

Resources for difficult children are inadequate. Public schoolteachers must teach the students who enrol at public schools. Some kids who attend public schools are difficult - others are very difficult. Private schools can choose to not accept those children. However, they must be accepted at public schools. Many public schools do extremely well with the resources they have, but they lack the resources needed to deal with difficult children who interrupt classes. Such students can be expelled, but after a certain period the school must take them back. The resources that are available are too often used to deal with violent children. Once again, there is a lack of support and a lack of sanctions.

I refer to the marking of tertiary entrance examinations. The resources that are used to send those papers to Perth could be used in other ways. The teacher friend to whom I alluded is the only country teacher on a music reference group. Teachers in the country are not encouraged to participate due to costs. My friend has to pay for her airfare, accommodation and relief has to be found and paid for by the department; therefore, she is not encouraged to attend the reference group. There is a lack of networking opportunities; indeed, the department has no system for networking. For example, it has no head of learning area in dance or visual arts.

I refer to an issue in Mt Barker. Only so much money has been allocated to shift its school onto the one campus. The split site remains an outstanding issue. The K-3 students and staff remain at the Oatlands site, which is 1.8 kilometres from the main site. The split site complicates the promotion of seamless education. It is ridiculous having teachers on two different sites. Money should have been allocated to build one site instead of building two sites with transitional provisions. Parents are extremely concerned about their children getting transport to school, and this concern may result in a loss of more students to the private schooling system. Mt Barker has a good little school. The results reflect that. People are concerned that all the interruption will cause parents to remove their kids from Mt Barker and place them elsewhere, and a loss of pupils would mean a reduction in the number of teachers in that area. The recurrent costs of split sites - namely, staffing and maintenance - are a concern. There is very little saving from reducing the primary school site to K-3 only. The heavy demand for land in Mt Barker on which to build means that a significant value is locked up in the Oatlands Road site. This could be factored against the costs of completing the college program. One college comprising TAFE facilities will mean that all the schools are on the one site. Those promoting the college are still working hard to include the development of future TAFE facilities onsite. The division of education and training has a deleterious effect on student pathways, often forcing students to choose between school and TAFE and a move away from Mt Barker. Parents in the region are being very proactive. They want their children to be schooled in the town. There is no reason that cannot happen. It is a very good school. We must listen to the parents, because they are saying that there are problems. The Minister for Education and Training must provide the money for all of this to happen, as was promised.

TAFE facilities in Mt Barker are restricted, and parents understand that their growth is likely to be in the same industry areas as those of the high school. Sharing resources - that is, rooms, workshops and staff - would be a highly effective use of government money. Parts of the funding for this development may be in applications in partnership with the shire or TAFE for commonwealth grants towards an Aboriginal training centre. Mt Barker has a rather large Aboriginal population. There is great support for a Mt Barker community college. I remember

President; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Brian Ellis; Hon Nigel Hallett; Hon Robyn McSweeney; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich

only too well that the government promised money for a community college so that all the schools could be located on the one campus. That is one example of what is happening around the state.

I visited Yakamia Primary School, which is situated in Albany, with Hon Peter Collier. I have been there several times since being in Albany. The school is a rabbit warren. I do not know how teachers and students put up with the conditions at that school during winter. It is a run-through of transportables. In this day and age, students and teachers deserve better facilities. The transportables are terribly wet and damp in winter. I do not know how the teachers teach at that school in summer, but they do, and they do a fantastic job. Plans are in place to upgrade the school, but so far those plans exist only on paper - nothing more has eventuated. Another primary school in Albany that sorely needs fixing is Flinders Park Primary School, which is situated in a growth area. It has very old classrooms. There are definitely more resources for city schools than there are for country schools.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan - Minister for Local Government) [4.59 pm]: I thank members for their contribution to this debate. I was a bit surprised by the nature of the wording of this urgency motion. The motion asks that “this house expresses its concern at the growing disparity with the delivery of educational services in country districts compared with metropolitan districts within Western Australia”. The reason I was a bit surprised is that, as a government, we try to do the best thing by all students. The implication in the wording of the motion is that the government has some intended policy position that would cause regional and rural Western Australian children to be disadvantaged in their educational opportunities.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 6907.]