

CARSON STREET SCHOOL — CONDUCTIVE EDUCATION REPORT —
PUBLIC SECTOR COMMISSION FINDINGS

434. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Premier:

I acknowledge in the public gallery students from the Carey Baptist College in the member for Darling Range's electorate.

I refer to the tabling yesterday of the Public Sector Commission's report into the matter involving the report titled "Orchestrating Lives: An Evaluation of the Early Intervention Conductive Education Trial at Carson Street School". Can the Premier explain the main findings of the report and how the member for Victoria Park's public statements and accusations in this house have been proved to be completely baseless?

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Take a seat.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I have a point of order about that question.

The SPEAKER: I know you have a point of order; I would like to give you the call, but other people are interjecting on you, member for Rockingham. I give you the call now.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The rules for questions are quite clear under standing order 77(1)(b); that is, questions should not contain argument, allegations or inferences. That question was unnecessarily argumentative.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Oh!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Premier knows it. I ask that you rule that question out of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr C.C. Porter: Unlike the previous one.

The SPEAKER: Attorney General, I formally call you to order for the first time today —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: — along with the member for Collie–Preston.

Member for Swan Hills, I believe the member for Rockingham has a very good point. There are imputations and allegations in that question. I will give you the opportunity to ask that question in another way.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Several members interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Can the Premier please outline the contents of the report?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

Mr Speaker —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Swan Hills, I have given you an opportunity to ask a question, but I think if it is going to be recorded in that way, we will not know what report is being referred to, and I seek some clarity on that.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Mr Speaker, it is the Carson Street report.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am not surprised that the Labor opposition would do all it could to suppress any discussion about this report; I am not surprised at all.

Mr E.S. Ripper: You should apologise to the Carson Street students and their parents.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Who edited the report?

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, there are opportunities in this place to ask relevant questions. I know that you can ask them; that is not the way to go about it. I formally call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. Papalia: Why isn't the education minister answering it?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, I formally call you to order for the second time today.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This is my third attempt to answer the question. This was the biggest issue for the Labor Party before Parliament concluded the autumn session. This issue dominated this chamber. There were secret little meetings in corridors, and motions to suspend standing orders. This was the number one issue; this was their big issue for the year.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I formally call you to order for the first time today, and the member for Warnbro for the third time today.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This was their big issue, and the government accepted that there were two versions of the report.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: So you accept that it was a big issue?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think the member for Victoria has said far too much already. I would not be opening my mouth if I were him.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: You're a buffoon and a hopeless minister who cut the money!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am a buffoon, am I?

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Yes; you are—you are.

Withdrawal of Remark

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park, I request that you withdraw that remark.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Withdraw.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Stand up and do it.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I withdraw.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The government listened to what the member for Victoria Park had to say. It was very quickly obvious that there were two versions of the report.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Three actually.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: He can have the opportunity. If the member likes, we will suspend standing orders to deal with the issue.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Well, go ahead.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We might do it.

Ms R. Saffioti: She was cutting funding.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: "She"? "She"? The member has got a lot to learn on manners.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I formally call you to order for the second time today. Member for Victoria Park, I realise this issue is very close to your heart, but I suggest that if you wish to ask questions about this report, you do so in another fashion.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In response to the various claims that were made towards the end of the last session, particularly by the member for Victoria Park, I, as Premier, said that I would have the Public Sector Commission conduct an inquiry into this matter, that it would not report to me, and, indeed, that the Public Sector Commissioner would report directly to the Parliament; that happened yesterday. I have read the report, and I hope members opposite took the time to read the report, as it was their number one issue during the last session. Surely members opposite found the 15 minutes or so that it takes to read it. In case they did not, let me run

through some of the conclusions. The Public Sector Commissioner, the independent umpire, found that there was no misconduct by the minister or her staff; no misconduct by any officer of the Department of Education; and at no time was there any undue pressure placed on the consultants. That finding reflects the commission's conclusion that "the report was not changed by either the Department of Education or the Office of the Minister for Education"—it is on page 5 of the report. There was certainly an administrative error—a significant one. That happened.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: He laughs. Perhaps he might laugh at the person sitting on his left. This is what he had to say during the last parliamentary session. These were the sorts of comments that came from the wanna-be-would-be leader of the Labor Party. His words were —

... condemns the Minister for Education and her office for deceptive and misleading conduct over the contents of the report ...

If the opposition has been deliberately deceived and that deception goes to the minister's office, she needs to resign.

He then went on to say —

That ... is where the source of this change will be ...

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Listen to it. This is the member's big issue; this is the issue he spent so much time on. He said —

That ... is where the source of this change will be —

That is, the change to the report —

somewhere in the minister's office.

He said also that a select committee needs to report back to this Parliament and make it clear whether the minister was implicit in any deceit. He went on and on and on. Did he have any proof at all?

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Yes—two different versions of the report.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: None—no proof at all. What condemns the member for Victoria Park is that, as I and others suggested when we first heard of this issue, there probably had been an earlier draft of the report. It was the December version, not the January version.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: You'll forgive us for not believing you.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member for Victoria Park should listen. We listened to him; he can listen now. There was an issue; I grant him that.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Yes, to cut funding to the Carson Street School.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Be quiet for a little while, member for Victoria Park. Just listen for a change.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr B.S. Wyatt: No; you cut funding to Carson Street School. That was the issue, and you know it. You can defend your little princess as much as you like; you know that's true.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: How patronising and sexist is that?

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Yes; I am emulating, you, Premier, in patronising.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park, I call you to order for one, two, three times today. Premier, I am going to call you formally to order for the first time today. It is an important issue in this house. I expect everybody to treat it with the respect and the importance it deserves.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The government conceded right from the beginning that clearly there had been two versions of a report.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We did. We are talking about a special education school. We are talking about children with severe disabilities, and we are talking about their families.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I want people on both sides of this house to reflect on whether they want question time to continue today, whether they want to get to ask questions that are important to them and whether they want to be able to answer questions that might also be important to them.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, I formally call you to order for the second time today.

Mr P.B. Watson: I am just answering a question.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, I formally call you to order for the third time today. I am presuming everybody wants question time to continue. Thank you for that indication.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker, we have a special education school, children with special needs and a review undertaken into the conductive education program. The member for Victoria Park is on the school council. He is aware, as he should be as a local member. The inconsistency of the earlier draft and the final report was a legitimate issue to raise. But what did the member for Victoria Park do? Yes, he raised that inconsistency, but at any stage during that period did he get up out of his seat and walk five metres across the chamber? Did he ever do it, as most members have done, and say to the education minister —

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Just listen, members.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker, I cannot even hear myself. Did he ever get up and walk across to the minister and say, “There is this review into this program. The recommendation is —

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker, I cannot hear myself. Did he —

Mr B.S. Wyatt: For 18 months the school wrote to her—not one response—and you expect me to do that after the funding had already been cut!

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park, I have suggested to you that you might like to ask further questions. That is what I am going to suggest to you again. I am going to suggest to you that interjecting at this stage is not going to help you. That is all I am going to say to the member for Victoria Park. If you would like to ask a question, I will give you the call. That is all I am going to say.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: We are now 22 minutes into question time. We are on the second question of the day. I think that if things were to proceed more hastily, as I think everyone would like to happen, the Premier should actually answer the question that was asked by the member, which, of course, was about the content of the report and not any other matter involving any other member. That was the question that was asked. The report does not in any significant sense go to the actions of the member for Victoria Park. All I would say is that the Premier should answer the question he was asked, and then question time would move ahead.

The SPEAKER: I take your point of order, member for Rockingham. I will give the opportunity to the Premier to conclude his remarks.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This very report is about the accusations made by the member for Victoria Park; that is the origin of this report. I had five years as an education minister. I know—I know the current minister would have experienced it—that on numerous occasions members on all sides of the house will raise issues about schools. The member for Victoria Park, on an issue that was clearly worrying parents in that school community about the future of this program, chose to bring parents and students to the steps of Parliament House for a media opportunity for his self promotion rather than to walk five metres across the chamber. What did the Minister for Education do? When the issue was raised, the Minister for Education read the reports. The Minister for Education went to the school, talked to the teachers, talked to the parents and looked at the school. The Minister for Education made a ministerial decision that funding would continue. I applaud the Minister for Education. I say to the member for Victoria Park that if he wants to attack the integrity of one of the most highly regarded people in this Parliament, he should do the work himself. He has simply —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: There are people in this place who I am sure would like to stay in this place for the remainder of his day. For some of those people, if they continue to behave in the way they are behaving, they are not going to stay in this place. I want to hear another question.

