

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION — SCHOOL-BASED CHILD AND PARENT CENTRES

117. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Education:

The minister made a very important announcement this week about the establishment of 10 child and parent centres on school sites. Can the minister tell us how these centres will benefit very young children in our communities?

Dr E. CONSTABLE replied:

I thank the member for Southern River for his question.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn, I am formally going to call you to order for the first time today. Member for Girrawheen, you are being formally called to order for the third time today.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I thank the member for Southern River for his question about the very important announcement that was made about the 10 centres on school sites that will be established for young children and their families. In every one of these 10 centres, every family will be welcome. When a family walks into a centre, their own individual needs will be catered for by the staff in that centre. The premise for putting these centres in place is that we want the very best for all children, and we know that parents want the very best for all children. But sometimes parents do not have the personal resources or the financial resources that they require, or would like to have, to do the very best for their children, so they will know that when their children come to school they will be ready to learn and be very happy little individuals.

So we are changing the way that we do things. Rather than asking parents to seek out and find those things for themselves, we are bringing them onto school sites so that, in one place, parents can find the things that they need. So we are taking the services to families.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Will there be a speech therapist at each of those 10 sites?

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

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Within those centres there will be a range of services integrating what we do now. It brings them onto those school sites so that they are a one-stop shop for parents. I will give some examples of the sorts of things that will happen. Maybe a parent has concerns about their child's behaviour. Within that centre, that parent will be able to come in, have their child assessed and find maybe some counselling—a school psychologist—or some other support. Perhaps there will be a positive parenting program that they can attend to add to their skills in working with their own child. Another child might have delayed language development. In that case, that child would be assessed to see where their language development is at. We all know how important language development is to a child's readiness for school. After the child is assessed, they may need a speech therapist. There has been great interest, Mr Speaker, you would be interested to know, from our universities to place senior students in their fourth and fifth years of study in speech therapy and occupational therapy in our schools. One school in Calista, where we announced this decision the other day, already has students and speech therapists. Of course there will be speech therapists and I expect that there will be occupational therapists as well, if that is required.

A parent might feel very isolated because they are a single parent or their partner is working up north or away from home. Often those people find it very difficult to access help and support. Within a centre such as this, there will be support for the parent as well as the child. There might be a playgroup. There might be an opportunity for that person who feels isolated in the community to make friends and to be part of the centre. For those parents who perhaps do not have the confidence to go to a centre, there will be an outreach program with home visiting from centre staff to assist those parents with their children. Therefore, a whole range of services will be co-located and integrated on these sites.

What we want is for every child to be ready to learn when they come to school. I have been very encouraged by some of the comments made by professionals and others in the community. I will read two or three of those to you, Mr Speaker, so that you will be aware of those as well. Professor Trevor Parry, from the School of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Western Australia said it is much appreciated. According to my notes, Greg Ryan-Gadsden from the Smith Family stated —

The Smith Family congratulates the State Government on its initiatives to facilitate the coordination and collaboration of vital early years services which will improve the life outcomes of all children, regardless of their circumstances.

I have comments from a couple of schools. The schools are absolutely over the moon that they will have buildings built and coordinators appointed, which they have not had before.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Warnbro, I formally call you to order for the third time today.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: According to my notes, Narelle Ward, the acting principal of South Hedland Primary School, stated —

I am very excited about this and appreciative of the support that will be provided to our school and community. Many thanks ...

The principal of Carey Park Primary School, Peter Rigden, according to my notes, stated —

Brilliant news this resource will make a real difference to the education of the very young children at risk in our community. We have been working very hard to encourage our families to access services and having them at school is a real win.

We will invest \$28.8 million in capital works at each of the 10 schools and we will appoint coordinators at those schools in the next few months. This is a major investment, not just in dollars; it is an investment in the future of children in Western Australia.