

EDUCATION ASSISTANTS — INDIGENOUS PROGRAMS

**612. Ms J. FARRER to the Premier:**

This question is about the education cuts. I refer to the numerous issues arising from management of the education budget, and specifically how this management will affect regional schools.

- (1) Can the Premier confirm, or is the Premier aware, that the result of his cuts to local schools will mean that Kununurra District High School, which has 850 students of whom 51 per cent are Indigenous, will lose 17 education assistants in 2014?
- (2) Is the Premier aware that the community has been notified that the Clontarf program for disengaged boys in years 6 and 7 will be required to cease due to the loss of funding?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:**

- (1)–(2) Again, as has been said in this chamber many times and again just recently today by the Treasurer, the state government is increasing education funding by \$300 million. We are holding the number of teachers essentially constant throughout this year, and thereafter there will be growth. We have also announced that we will be reducing the number of education assistants by, I think, 350. That is a significant change; I recognise that. There is no doubt that the growth in the number of education assistants has been way above the number reasonably expected and is way above the levels in other states. As to education in general, again I make this observation: as the Minister for Education —

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the third time.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is a fact that across the education system in Western Australia, Western Australian teachers are the highest paid in Australia. It is also a fact that the education system across this state is the best resourced—in other words, the best funded—of any state in Australia. That is not disputed by anyone in Australia.

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** Just answer the question.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I am getting to the question.

Schools are comparing the resources they have today with the resources they thought they might get next year. There is not growth next year. There is a reduction in education assistants in the context of a growing budget, and yes, that is causing changes and shifts between schools. There are simply education assistant positions that could not be justified, and cannot be justified. Governments have to make choices. Over half of our budget is taken up by health and education services. I appreciate and I understand that is putting some pressure on some schools, but everyone is going to have to work with that. We do not have unlimited funds. We cannot simply keep increasing funding in education and health by seven to eight per cent a year. It cannot go on. The professional people working in the education system understand that.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** You did not on the ground.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** No, but we all visit our schools and we all know.

I am aware that Kununurra District High School is a good school and it deals with a range of issues. As the member said, it has a high proportion of Aboriginal students and it does a good job, but I have confidence in our school principals and our school leadership to manage this. Indeed, they are conscious that this system is great. Again, I say to people—perhaps not to members opposite, because they appreciate this—that if they go to a new high school or primary school in Western Australia, they will not see better facilities or funding provided anywhere in the world. Yes, there are problems in education in the Kimberley, as there are in the Pilbara and the goldfields. We know that! The opposition has simply picked out one example and tried to imply that somehow this government neglects education. I state for the record that this government has introduced independent public schools, and the previous Liberal government, under Richard Court, introduced early childhood education for kindergarten and preprimary-age children. No other state in Australia has matched that 12 years on, and no progress was made under the Labor government. This government is also committed to build child and parent centres at schools, including in country and metropolitan areas, so that the most at-risk and disadvantaged children and families are cared for and supported. There has been no recognition of that by members opposite. The public of Western Australia understand that the government has a great performance in education and that where there are difficulties we are dealing with them, and we will continue to do so.