

CURRICULUM COUNCIL AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Second Reading

Resumed from 30 August.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [8.34 pm]: I rise to support the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011. In doing so, I make the point that this bill has been around for quite some time. It goes back to a review that commenced in 2002 by the Department of Education Services. A report of the review was then handed to me as minister in 2006, and I tabled it in the Parliament in October 2006. Hon Mark McGowan drafted legislation, which I understand was pretty close to what we have before us today.

This is a fairly simple bill that basically updates the legislation. A sunset clause in the Curriculum Council Act requires it to be reviewed every five years. This is part of the ongoing review. What the bill does, however, is to streamline the act. It takes into consideration some of the changes that are occurring, particularly at the national level with the introduction of the national curriculum. The bill certainly facilitates those changes and their accommodation by the state. I want to quickly touch on some of the key changes to the act. Firstly, it will replace the Curriculum Council with a statutory body known as the School Curriculum and Standards Authority. Secondly, it will provide for a new authority with a board comprising individuals appointed for their collective expertise and knowledge of curriculum and educational standards. Thirdly, it will streamline the authority's functions by adapting some of the present functions of the Curriculum Council and introducing new functions primarily related to the monitoring of standards of student achievements across the primary and secondary years of schooling. Fourthly, it will enable the new authority to prepare reports on the standards being achieved by schools. One of the key features of the bill, of course, is that it repeals section 10 of the act. Section 10 currently requires all schools and home educators to provide schooling in accordance with the curriculum framework unless exempted from doing so. That is being replaced for a number of key reasons. It also does away with the curriculum framework as we historically know it, because we are moving to a national curriculum.

I will touch on standards and outcomes education, which has been around for some considerable time; it has not just evolved in the last five, six or eight years. In fact, it has been around since 1997; that is how far back it goes. It is reflected in the parent act, because that was the genesis of the parent act. There is no doubt that primary school teachers have been using an outcomes and standards approach in various forms for many years. The old saying is that primary teachers teach students and secondary teachers teach subjects. There is probably a lot of truth in that. Many secondary schools have been moving towards outcomes and standards since 1997, as I have already mentioned. Of course, the curriculum framework was introduced into schools for consultation back then, with the final version in schools in 1998. It was at that time that many teachers began to unpack the curriculum framework and commenced planning with the document in 1998. The curriculum framework was a comprehensive document. It clearly spelt out what we wanted students to achieve by the time they left year 12. It took the form of 13 overarching outcomes, and these were then broken down into eight specific learning area outcomes.

Teachers have always managed to develop programs to meet the needs of individuals or groups of students. I have to say that the extent to which teachers have developed programs and have the capacity to do that has varied from teacher to teacher and from school to school. One of the issues I encountered when I was Minister for Education was that teachers with more experience, particularly in the primary school sector, had a very strong history of understanding the curriculum, having a clear syllabus and being able to deliver their programs. Sometimes it could be argued that the curriculum was too comprehensive, because some teachers had a daily program that went into very intricate detail of what they were going to do. There is no doubt that they found the move to a standard outcomes-based education to be much easier than those teachers who were graduating from tertiary institutions and coming into a situation in which a framework existed, but about which they were not clear on the detail. It is fair to say that with the reforms that occurred from 2004 to 2007, there was a lot of confusion, misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and there were a lot of different points of view about how these outcomes and standards were to be implemented in the state. There is no doubt that that was a very interesting period in the history of curriculum development in this state. In my view, there is no shying away from the fact that reform has to be done quickly. A reform process cannot be effectively implemented over more than a decade. There are certainly lessons to be learnt from that process and I think that if we had to go down that path again, it would be very prudent for the execution of implementation of a major reform program to be done sharply and swiftly, and that all should be in place up-front before the implementation is progressed. Having said that, life is about lessons and we all learn lessons on the way through. I think it is very important for people to not get bitter and twisted about what happened during those years, because it would be very easy to do so.

I go back to the genesis, really, of the Vickery report, which was undertaken in 1993 under the then Minister for Education, Hon Norman Moore. If we want to go back to how we ended up with the curriculum framework in

1997, we have to go back to the time of Hon Norman Moore, who had the honour of serving as Minister for Education in this state.

Hon Liz Behjat interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not know that teachers liked him any more than they liked me.

Hon Liz Behjat: He was an outstanding Minister for Education.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not know; I am sure when he writes his memoirs, he will write in glowing terms that he was absolutely brilliant and everyone else was absolutely awful, but we know that that is not true because —

Hon Liz Behjat: Imagine what they'll write about you!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I know what they will write about me, because they have already written it.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: You used to be on the front page of *The West Australian* nearly every day!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is exactly right and I could get bitter and twisted about that and say that that was a bad thing, but I have to say that I have a very high profile in this state!

Several members interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I will tell members how it got between *The West* and me. Because I was in the newspaper, with the wanted poster, day in and day out, and I was on the radio day in and day out, I can remember crossing the road in Barrack Street and these guys winding their windows down and saying, "Don't let 'em get you love!" And I thought, "This is incredible!" That is the point I make about —

Hon Michael Mischin: Were they kids skipping school or something?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not think that there has ever been a minister of the Crown who has had an easy time in the education portfolio, and I certainly do not believe that any reforming minister has had an easy go of it. It does not matter who someone is or how good they think they are; if a minister is going to make a difference, at the end of the day it means making hard decisions and trying to get on with the job to the best of their ability. There is no doubt, given the players in the education system, that feathers are bound to be ruffled. I will not go into the behaviour of certain people within the education system, but for those of us who have been there, it is not hard to understand and appreciate who those people might be.

I want to go back to the Vickery report of 1993. When he was minister, Hon Norman Moore established a ministerial committee that was chaired by Therese Temby. The committee completed a report in September 1995 and the curriculum framework was pretty much born. In 1998, the then Minister for Education, Hon Colin Barnett, together with his cabinet colleagues, approved the implementation of the curriculum framework and I have to say that it was a major step forward in this state. It really has a long history, and the fact that we started on this framework back then makes it so much easier now to deal with some of the challenges as we move towards a national curriculum, because Western Australia is very well positioned to be able to take advantage of what is being offered at the commonwealth level. If I have to be critical, and I will be critical here, whilst Hon Colin Barnett was Minister for Education, he was very quick to get rid of the curriculum development branch within the Department of Education. That meant basically getting rid of curriculum and then getting rid of all the curriculum writers. Perhaps, in hindsight, he might have waited until people had got used to a framework and then weaned them off some of the curriculum to encourage them to develop their own ideas and to develop curriculum more suitable to the needs of their specific schools and students. I think in hindsight, over the longer run, together with some of the other confusions, that was probably a mistake. Having said all of that, we are very well placed to deal with some of the changes that will occur federally, and there is no doubt that those changes are reflected in the legislation for us. There is also no doubt that there will be major benefits from a national curriculum. Over many years there has always been a great deal of criticism about the fact that different jurisdictions have different education systems and that starting ages or curricula do not necessarily line up. There has always been an issue, when a student moves from interstate to Western Australia or vice versa, that they need to be adjusted—their grades do not line up and what they have learnt somewhere else does not line up because the curriculum is different and so on. One of the very good things the Gillard government has done is to progress the national curriculum and deal with the issue of those differentials, and I think we will be all the better for it in the longer term.

One of the things that used to frustrate me when I was the Minister for Education was parents ringing radio stations, as they did day in day out, so I had a lot of time to be frustrated, saying "I want my children to be taught the same way I was 40 years ago." I can understand that parents, rightly, expect their children to learn phonics and read and write properly and so on and so forth. But I also think that while there is a need to do all those things, there is also a need to prepare students to live in a rapidly changing world because we are going through a

period in which the rate of change is so phenomenal that apart from giving students the skills to deal with the future, we need to prepare them for some of the pressures in life. We need to build resilience in children while developing their academic thinking and their ability to be critical thinkers, to problem solve and to therefore deal with issues that confront them, to think outside the square and to contribute to the massive improvement of a great nation like this. They are the sorts of things we should be aspiring to provide for our students.

Hon Liz Behjat: Respect is important too.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes, it is. I guess one of the frustrations is that education is one of those things that everyone is an expert on because everyone in large part has been to school. It is very difficult for many parents to keep up with what their children are doing in school. Often they see educational progress as something that is quite threatening rather than something to embrace and something that will invariably be very good for their children.

I quickly want to touch on some of the issues surrounding the national curriculum. There is no doubt that the national curriculum will provide greater consistency for both teachers and students right across the nation and that it will deliver benefits to all concerned. As part of the national curriculum, I have to say that I am really pleased that in addition to a range of specific courses, we also have what are known as general capabilities in cross-curriculum priorities. Seven general capabilities run across the curriculum areas, which include literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, competence, critical and creative thinking, ethical behaviour, personal and social competence and intercultural understanding. One of the things I find disappointing is that not included in the list—I think it should have been included as one of the general capabilities—is problem-solving. I say that because the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has a very good program of international student testing called the Program for International Student Assessment testing and I think the ability to problem-solve is something that should not be underestimated—not only a person's ability to calculate solutions to problems but also, increasingly from a social perspective. I say that because since picking up the shadow portfolio of mental health, I am amazed at the number of vulnerable children and adolescents within our schools and our community generally. I think the ability to make young people more resilient is very, very important and should not be overlooked. The capacity for problem-solving could be a very good contributor to that. If they were going to include another cross-curriculum priority area, it should be the problem-solving area.

Hon Alison Xamon: Well said.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you.

I think the time frame for development of the Australian curriculum has been pretty clearly outlined. I guess we are already at the first phase of it, which includes the foundation to year 10 Australian curriculum for English, mathematics, science and history development. In 2010–12 the foundation to year 12 Australian curriculum for geography, languages and the arts will be developed. As we move to 2011–13 the Australian curriculum will include a focus on communication technology design, economics and a couple of other areas. I will ask the minister what stage we are up to in meeting these time lines and is Western Australia on schedule to meet those time lines and, if not, why is that the case?

As part of preparing for the national curriculum, the minister wisely got Professor David Andrich to review the curriculum framework. I have no doubt that some of that review also might have influenced some of the amendments in the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill before us. He was commissioned to review the curriculum framework and, in doing so, one of the things he looked at is how the commonwealth framework would line up with what is occurring in this state. His terms of reference were —

- To review the *Curriculum Framework* for curriculum, assessment and reporting with particular reference to years kindergarten to Year 10.
- To advise on the relationship between the *Curriculum Framework* and proposed national curriculum.
- To consider the impact of any proposed changes on teachers and schools in Western Australia.

He did that, as he usually does, in a most admirable fashion and made a total of 23 recommendations. I do not have time to go through all of them, but I think he picked up on a few really good points. The first recommendation is that the national curriculum in any learning area be implemented only when it is complete. That is very, very important. I say that from my experience of implementing a curriculum that was being implemented when I took on the portfolio of education, but it was not as complete as perhaps it should have been. I certainly want to know whether that will be the case in WA, minister. Professor Andrich made another recommendation, which is really, really important —

That in introducing the National Curriculum, it is not assumed that all schools are highly resourced and that the relatively modest resources of the majority of schools be taken into account immediately the curriculum is implemented.

He basically said that most schools have not had the resources to translate the outcomes—under the state system—into a coherent set of syllabuses for the immediate implementation by teachers. The national curriculum is intended to consist of content and achievement standards. It is being developed year by year and will include elaborations with the intention that all teachers can understand the requirements. However, it is recommended that the minister ensure that the national curriculum includes clear syllabuses. That was another weakness at the state level, which came from, if one likes, the fact that the curriculum branch was abolished and the people who were required to do these things—that is, develop the curriculum and the syllabus to inform the learning and to provide the pathways for the learning et cetera—were simply not there.

One of the points he makes is the question of resourcing. If we want the good implementation of curriculum and outcome standards that work, schools have to be resourced so that the job can be done. There is a great variance in capacity. The Western Australian education system is huge. It has an inordinately huge budget. In fact, when I was education minister, I think education took the greater share of the state budget. At the time, I think we expended some \$4.2 billion on education. It is a huge business. It is a major investment by taxpayers in this state. We have to make sure that we get the absolute best for that investment. Before we start to do that, we have to recognise the huge variations between schools across the state, and schools have to be adequately resourced to be able to implement reform. One of the things that are cause for concern is the current government's cutbacks to education. I sit on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations and through my work on that committee it has become apparent that the government, through the three per cent efficiency dividend and other measures, has since 2008 taken \$35.42 million out of the education budget. What is really disappointing—members can shake their heads; I got this information from the minister herself—is that one of the savings measures was curriculum improvement and assessment, from which \$1.35 million was taken. In addition, \$600 000 was taken from syllabus development and so on and so forth. Certainly, there has been a reduction of some 150 full-time equivalents, and for 2011 the targeted employee severance offer includes a savings target of some 150 full-time equivalents from the Department of Education. That is on top of the 141 FTE positions that have been lost since 2008. The point I make is that that appropriate resourcing of schools is absolutely critical and I want to know from the minister how much has been allocated specifically for the resourcing of any new reforms and/or the resourcing of moving towards a national curriculum. Has there been any additional money in the budget and/or additional resources to not only central office, but also schools; and, if so, what resources are being made available to assist schools to meet the challenges before them?

I had hoped to canvass a range of issues. I had thought that we would not be going into the Committee of the Whole tonight, but I understand that members would like to do so and that we therefore probably will. However, that will be to ascertain or obtain information on specific clauses so that we can get some certainty about what the amendments will mean in practical terms for students, teachers and even parents, because this bill is very much focused on setting standards, achieving standards and reporting standards. I think that that is in the interests of not only schools, but also, very much, parents who want to be kept up to date and informed about the progress of their child.

This bill seeks to replace the Curriculum Council with a statutory body to be known as the School Curriculum and Standards Authority with the structure and functions that highlight its role as a regulatory body with responsibilities for school curriculum standards and assessment. It minimises the potential for conflicts of interest inherent in the act's current provisions, which do not separate the regulators of school curriculum standards from the providers of schooling, which is, I think, a very important move in the right direction.

A number of issues concern me. I am happy for those to be canvassed during the committee stage. All in all, I think this is a good bill and one that will take the education system in this state that bit further. I am more than happy to support this legislation.

HON ALISON XAMON (East Metropolitan) [9.08 pm]: I rise tonight to indicate the Greens' (WA) support for this legislation. This bill amends the Curriculum Council Act 1997 and replaces the Curriculum Council with a statutory body that will be known as the School Curriculum and Standards Authority. The authority will be a regulatory body with responsibility for school curriculum, standards and assessment. The Curriculum Council Amendment Bill will streamline the authority's functions by adapting some of the present functions of the Curriculum Council together with new functions primarily related to the monitoring of standards of student achievement across the primary and secondary schooling years. It provides for the authority to be governed by a board that will comprise a chair and six members appointed by the minister. A change to the existing act is that members of the board are to be individuals appointed for their collective expertise and knowledge of curriculum and educational standards, rather than being a representational body. The bill will also establish two statutory advisory committees; firstly, the Standards Committee with five members appointed by the board with the

minister's approval—one being a member of the board who will chair the committee; and, secondly, the Curriculum and Assessment Committee that will comprise 13 members, with one being a member of the board who will chair the committee. Curriculum and assessment will be brought together into a single section rather than being spread across two sections, as is presently the case. I note that the board also will be able to appoint other committees as needed.

The bill addresses concerns with provisions in the current act, raising potential conflicts of interest, as they do not separate regulators from the providers. It also introduces new functions, including the provision of student assessment results to governing bodies, principals, students and parents. It will enable recognition of achievements attained elsewhere and admits students to examinations as private candidates—that is, students with no accompanying school assessment. It will be endorsing courses.

The provisions in the bill will enable the authority to prepare independent reports of the standards being achieved in WA schools. Relevant governing bodies will have the opportunity to make submissions on the draft reports, and the authority will have the capacity to request governing bodies to provide specified information. The aim is to identify how well students are achieving and to identify areas that may require attention. Currently, no state agency reports to the minister on standards in schools and school systems. The bill provides for more comprehensive records of individual students' results to be kept from kindergarten or the first year that they start school, which I think could provide more useful data for evidence-based research and policy development. I note that a copy of a student's record is available to the student and their parent. Under the existing provisions, the record may be obtained only by the student or a person authorised by the student. That amendment is necessary, given that records will now be open from a much younger age, because clearly kindergarten students are not in a position to give authority to access their own records. The bill removes the provisions that mandate implementation of the curriculum framework by each school.

In relation to the members of the board, the bill provides for a significant change in governance of the authority. As I mentioned, it shifts from being a representational council to a ministerially appointed board of experts. It will be interesting to see the outcomes of these changes. I note that the State School Teachers' Union of WA, universities, the Catholic Education Office, the education department and parents groups are all represented on the Curriculum Council. Many of these bodies would understandably like to continue to play a role. There has been some considerable discussion about whether a representative body is helpful and whether it actually means that it stands in the way of good decision making. In any event, I understand that separating the providers and the regulators was a strong recommendation from the review of the act.

Hon Peter Collier: That was the biggest thing that came out of the review.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Yes, and that this change in governance was a major impetus behind the establishment of the new authority. I have also heard the argument that the council was unwieldy in size, and that there were too many members trying to pursue their own agendas. Parents groups, unions, universities and heads of the different school providers obviously need to be kept informed and engaged in the process of curriculum development, standards and assessment. It is important that any changes are not developed in a vacuum away from those whose responsibility it will be to make them work on the ground. It will be interesting to see how the new structure works.

I note that, according to the minister, although the membership has not been decided, the current chair, Professor Patrick Garnett, who is relatively new in the role, will continue in the role. Professor Garnett is a former pro-vice-chancellor of Edith Cowan University, an eminent educator and emeritus professor.

The bill also removes functions related to professional development. This move was based on the argument that it is not appropriate for the curriculum regulator to plan and provide professional development for those responsible for delivering the curriculum. The question I have is whether this means that the minister intends that the School Curriculum and Standards Authority will not have any responsibilities for professional development. Although this may seem like a sensible separation, I am concerned that omitting this function from the legislation potentially leaves a gap. We know that the professional development of teachers across issues related to the curriculum is incredibly important, particularly given the upcoming introduction of the new Australian national curriculum.

The Interim National Curriculum Board has indicated explicitly that professional development on the implementation of the national curriculum will be the responsibility of the jurisdictions, so I am interested to hear the minister's response as to whether it is envisioned that this may be an issue. The Western Australian College of Teaching supposedly has some responsibility for professional development, although it is commonly acknowledged that WACOT does not currently have the capacity to undertake this function. Another question I have is whether the minister intends to introduce amendments to the Western Australian College of Teaching Act to facilitate the college's capacity to influence the quality of the professional learning available to teachers. If not, which body will be responsible for recognising and supporting professional development programs?

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has already referred to the big-ticket item, which is the introduction of the national curriculum. I note that the provisions in the bill before us are designed to facilitate the introduction of the national curriculum. In recent years we have seen new directions in commonwealth and state policies and quite significant changes in the way that we view education. Although many stakeholders have welcomed the move to develop a national curriculum, which is certainly going to be positive for those students who move between Australian states and territories when they are undertaking their education, from past experience in the implementation of new education curricula and assessments, some of which has already been mentioned tonight, we all know that failure to provide enough support, guidance and quality resources is a recipe for disaster. It is incredibly important for students, their parents and our broad schooling communities that we get this right, which does not mean that we will not; it just means that we need to be very conscious of that.

I understand that the final curriculum content has now been developed for English, history, science and maths and that we are now waiting for the finalisation of resources and validated standards. Although some WA schools are currently trialling aspects of the curriculum, I note the minister has reiterated that WA will not implement the national curriculum until everything is ready, which, to be clear, I am pleased to hear, although I note that that position is not going to be determined until a ministerial council to be held in October. I understand that New South Wales has already indicated that it will not implement the curriculum next year because the resources have not been finalised with enough lead-in time.

In the 2009 review of the framework for curriculum, assessment and reporting purposes in Western Australian schools, Professor David Andrich made a number of recommendations about the resourcing and support of schools to successfully implement the national curriculum. He particularly noted that smaller and less well-resourced schools will need quite comprehensive support. I would like to take the opportunity to echo this call. We need to ensure that our teachers and schools are well supported to make this change.

In relation to the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy, from the briefing received, I understand that it is the minister's intention that the new authority will be responsible for NAPLAN testing and results. I am interested in hearing the government's views on this issue, given the national rollout of NAPLAN and the publication of school results on the federal My School website and the accompanying media frenzy that this caused at the time. In recommendation 9, Professor Andrich recommended that the impact of publishing NAPLAN results should be monitored comprehensively and independently. I acknowledge that it is difficult to achieve the balance between increasing transparency and the danger that the publication of these figures can have a negative impact on schools and school communities that do not perform as well as their peers. I am interested to hear whether the minister has any plans to undertake a thorough assessment of this issue. I have a few other questions, but I can wait to the committee stage to ask them. They are just questions of clarification to ask as we go through the bill. I would be interested in hearing further from the minister at that point.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to make one last comment. In this place I have spoken about the issue of ministers providing briefings and I have said before that without exception every single minister in this place is excellent in ensuring that briefings are given to my office in a timely and responsive way. I acknowledge that and I am pleased. However, it was very difficult to get a briefing on this bill. We tried to get a briefing for six weeks and we kept getting dismissed. I have noticed that other ministers do not employ that practice. I thought I would mention that. I have expressed my concern and my disquiet to the minister's advisers. I thought I would put that on the record. Maybe I am a little spoilt because the ministers in this place are usually very diligent and make sure that their briefings are provided in a timely way.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon ALISON XAMON: No, it is certainly no minister in this house.

Hon Peter Collier: I rang up on Thursday and asked for the briefings to be arranged.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I had been trying to get briefings for six weeks. I tried to get a briefing as soon as this bill was introduced in the other place because I have quite a bit of interest in it.

Hon Peter Collier: I rang up on Wednesday; sorry.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Absolutely. I had been trying to get briefings for six weeks. The practice with other ministers is usually really good. It was frustrating to have to try so hard to get a briefing. The time was really limited when that briefing was made available. I thought I would take this opportunity to at least get that on the record.

The Greens support this legislation. I will have some more questions when we get to the committee stage.

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural) [9.23 pm]: I welcome the opportunity to make an address on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011. I want to put on the record my thanks to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich for her overview and understanding of this bill, given the long history associated with it, going back

long before 1997. She said that it is a rather simple piece of legislation; however, in my discussions with a range of stakeholders I found a number of issues and questions needed to be answered. Despite the fact that the actual content seems logical and straightforward and appears to indicate that we are continuing with this evolutionary path that, as I will point out a bit later, has always been part of education in Western Australia, I will raise a number of questions and issues. Given that we look as though we will go into the committee stage, I have a number of questions I also want to ask at that stage.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich mentioned a couple of things that I found particularly interesting. She talked about teaching kids and teaching subjects. Certainly, despite the issues associated with outcomes-based education back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the beautiful thing about OBE was that—I think Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich mentioned this—it really became a student-centred approach. I suppose that comes with a few problems because for a number of years parents have complained about literacy and numeracy. I was a mere economics teacher, head of department and teacher administrator, so I probably did not get down to learning too much about the modern techniques associated with teaching numeracy and literacy. To me, the beauty of this whole system was that the teacher became a facilitator; that was certainly the case with the staff I tended to look after. They adopted a problem-solving approach. I suppose the humanities and science learning areas lend themselves to that sort of approach. As I think the honourable member also mentioned, kids became critical thinkers. A lot could be said about this particular approach. As I will mention a bit later, I agree that a fair amount of confusion was associated with the implementation of outcomes-based education. As the honourable member indicated, that may well stem from the fact that the whole procedure was too drawn out. I have a sister involved in primary education and I think the primary school teachers showed the secondary teachers how to do it. They really took the bit between their teeth and went down the pathway a lot quicker than secondary teachers did. I suppose some complicating factors were associated with that in the secondary area.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich also made quite a point, as I will a bit later, about resourcing issues. One of the things that I found very frustrating working in bush schools was resourcing. As we move further away from books and sending kids off to libraries to regurgitate what is in the encyclopaedia, kids in the city schools of which we might have had some sort of knowledge had better access to information technology. Therefore, the capacity to learn and adopt this problem-solving approach, as it should have been adopted, was significantly greater in the city than in the bush. I want to put those issues on the record before I get going.

This bill represents a continuation of the sort of change that I have seen in my years in education and even when I was a student; the system is very much in a state of flux. I dare say that the sorts of changes that we can see in this particular amendment bill will be repeated five, 10, 15 or 20 years down the track in a different context. That is the nature of education. It certainly happened back in the 1960s and 1970s with the old leaving certificates, junior days and students doing matriculation exams in their leaving year. Probably not too many members could remember that sort of thing.

Hon Simon O'Brien: What a phenomenal memory you have!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I can certainly recall those bad days of sitting seven subjects for our leaving and then in the afternoon for four subjects we sat a matriculation exam for another three hours. That was the way to get into the University of Western Australia or the old Western Australian Institute of Technology or Curtin University as it is now.

Hon Peter Collier: We had to get three matriculation subjects.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: We sat for four, though.

Hon Peter Collier: Yes, but we had to get three to get into uni.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: How old are you guys? I must be a spring chicken compared with you!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I think the member has a better idea than what she is suggesting!

The thing about education is that society is valuing more and more the focus on quality teaching and learning for our kids. That certainly also applies to university and to training. One of my big regrets is that a federal Labor government introduced the higher education contribution scheme. That would be getting on towards 25 years or so ago. When was that, minister?

Hon Peter Collier: It was in 1988.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: That really, as far as I was concerned, was a retrograde step, certainly in a wealthy country like Australia. The introduction of something so financially burdensome, certainly for many students and their parents in Western Australia, and Australia for that matter, obviously, was a bad day. I think that the greatest investment that society can make is in education and in the development of human capital. But that is an argument for another day.

What I also want to mention is my particular interest in this bill and its application. I have spent a lot of time involved in rural and remote education, and, as with Hon Brian Ellis, I have chaired the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council. But I have a particular interest in distance education. I was involved in an organisation called the Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme. That would be 30 years ago. It was based at the old Graylands Teachers College.

Hon Peter Collier: You taught there, did you?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I was a course writer–tutor all those years ago.

Hon Peter Collier: When was that?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: It was from 1980 to 1983.

Hon Peter Collier: My sister was there then.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: She certainly was!

Hon Peter Collier: Do you know that?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: She certainly was! I have some information on the minister now! I am joking, minister! She was a very good teacher as well, as the minister would appreciate.

But education in the bush does require the sorts of things that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich made mention of—that is, a significant improvement in resourcing. Underpinning this particular bill I think is a requirement that governments of all persuasions, at state and federal levels, and particularly as we go down a national curriculum pathway, devote better resources and more resources to education.

Specifically, I would like to turn my attention to this bill and its focus. I was a bit concerned, when I looked at the *Hansard* from the other place, to see the sort of commentary on this bill that was forthcoming from members. I think some members even talked about things such as truancy. They were trying to relate truancy to a Curriculum Council bill. I thought maybe that is where some of them were when they went through the process of their own learning systems. But some of the comments certainly did not give me much cause for comfort. Having said that, it is good to hear the commentary that has been made on the bill in this place, because members have very much focused on this particular bill as a Curriculum Council bill.

I want to make mention now of the Minister for Education’s second reading speech. The minister made some very relevant points at the start of her speech. I would like to quote from *Hansard* of 18 May, when the minister said —

The Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011 amends the Curriculum Council Act 1997.

That is fine. The minister goes on to say —

The four main aims of the bill are: —

I think these need to be put on the record, minister —

firstly, to replace the Curriculum Council with a statutory body known as the School Curriculum and Standards Authority; —

I will make mention of that again in a while, because the term “authority” is something that may need to be better defined in this particular bill —

secondly, to provide the new authority with a board comprising individuals appointed for their collective expertise and knowledge of curriculum and educational standards, and reduce the potential conflict of interests inherent in the present governance arrangements; thirdly, to streamline the authority’s functions by adapting some of the present functions of the Curriculum Council, together with new functions primarily related to the monitoring of standards of student achievement across the primary and secondary years of schooling; and, fourthly, to enable the new authority to prepare reports on the standards being achieved in schools.

With that in mind, the aims of the bill certainly are in accordance with the opposition’s views on the necessary changes to the 1997 Curriculum Council Act. I am sure Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, as with the previous Labor Minister for Education, Hon Mark McGowan, would be very much in agreement with that particular stance. I might say, though, that the proposed new authority will see the appointment of these eminent educators and relevant experts to the board. It is noteworthy that the board members will have these qualifications, experience and ability to carry out their duties at the very highest level. That is very important, given the nature of the previous people who were in those advisory capacities. I think they were more—Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich may be able to confirm this—industry people, with a different level of skills and a different knowledge base when it came to the Curriculum Council Act.

Two statutory advisory committees will be created under this bill. One is the Standards Committee, and the other is the Curriculum and Assessment Committee. Both are necessary and appropriate to the proper functioning of the School Curriculum and Standards Authority. I would, however, like to make some observations about the functions of this new authority. Again, I would like to quote from the minister's second reading speech of 18 March, because the functions of the new authority are what this bill is all about. The minister said —

As to the functions of the new authority, the functions currently appearing at sections 9 and 12 of the act have, with some reformulation, been combined into a single section—namely, new section 9. In doing this, the intention has been to clearly state those regulatory functions of the authority and remove functions that more appropriately belong with the providers of school education. This will minimise any potential for regulatory duplication. Functions related to professional development will be removed —

As Hon Alison Xamon has already indicated —

from the current act. It is not appropriate for a regulator of the curriculum to be planning and providing professional development for those responsible for delivering the curriculum.

That to me poses a number of questions, and I would like the Minister for Energy to note these particular observations. Firstly, is the statement that I have just read out all about teaching and learning, or is it about developing good assessment tools? Secondly, what specific authority will the School Curriculum and Standards Authority have, particularly if schools fail to reach the stated standard? Is it just a case of reporting that the school may be broken, in a manner of speaking, or will the authority have mechanisms in place to support the school to reach the required standard? Thirdly, will schools be accountable to any reports made by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority in relation to things like the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy results?

Continuing with that line of thought on functions, an interesting new function that is not mentioned in the 1997 act that people have talked about thus far is the national curriculum. Getting back to the point I made about resourcing, a significant injection of funds and physical resources to support the national curriculum will be essential. The minister states also in the second reading speech —

A new function has been framed specifically for the purpose of recognising agreed arrangements between Western Australia and the commonwealth, and that comes under a Western Australian Statute.

There are other functions that members may wish to investigate, but I would suggest that they could do that within the context of the bill itself. Of the other functions and provisions contained within the bill, I would like to point out that schools will have the capacity to be flexible in the teaching methods used; and they should be encouraged to do so, particularly given the geographical variations across Western Australia. This is done, obviously, in addressing and pursuing the authority's necessary standards. The government's and the department's role will be to encourage, through appropriate resourcing, a great variety of learning experiences and strategies, particularly, as I have indicated before, in rural, regional and remote parts of Western Australia.

I have a number of questions further to what I have already mentioned that I would like the minister to perhaps take note of. These questions are not necessarily about money and resources. I am keen to ask about the state's capacity to respond to the challenges of implementing and promoting the changes proposed, especially in relation to the national curriculum. What can the government offer? Is anything set aside in the forward estimates? How will we equip the system as we progress even further? What is happening with year 7 students across the state? There has been no decision yet; I do not know of any —

Hon Peter Collier: I'll give it a go.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: The minister might be able to give us some sort of —

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You don't want to hold it up.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: That is the problem, is it not? Because decisions are being made; certainly, decisions are being made at the private school level, which impact on some district high schools. I know that late last year the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations looked at the problems associated with funding in that context. Also, what sorts of plans are possibly in the pipeline to train our teachers to cope with the changes? Teaching and administrative staff face many challenges in coping with new systems. A modern and effective curriculum framework is of little value if we do not have the best possible teachers.

I will now summarise my main points. I suggest that the role of the authority is quite simple; it is to regulate three things—namely, curriculum, assessment and standards—and I acknowledge what Hon Alison Xamon said about professional development. The role of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee seems to be very much as before. This sort of continuity has occurred since the early 1990s and certainly since 1997. That committee's role is very much to develop and accredit new courses via syllabus documents, set up and monitor assessment

processes, provide stakeholders with the results of student assessment, give recognition of achievements attained in other jurisdictions and endorse other courses.

The system is also concerned with the role of a Standards Committee, which is new. There are a number of issues and observations that really need to be made about the Standards Committee. I want the minister, if he can, to address issues such as the mechanisms that might be used to set standards for students, particularly in K–11, given that the committee will set standards that are expected to be relative to the curriculum. Secondly, given that the Standards Committee will seek to interpret student achievement relative to the standards and that the standards will be used to guide teachers in the allocation of grades, will there be any school-based moderation processes? Thirdly, if every student is to have an assessment record, does this indicate that a central record will be held about that student that will be added to as the student moves through school and maybe around the state of Western Australia? Minister, I will perhaps mention some of these issues that I have concerns about when we go to the committee stage of the bill. Fourthly, can the minister explain what the reports on statewide standards are all about? Finally, as the role of the Standards Committee is also to report on school standards and use such diagnostically, what accountability mechanisms are in place for that?

I realise that I do not have too much more time, so in concluding I simply say that I also have some broad areas of concern. I want to go through those at the committee stage, perhaps tomorrow. A number of my questions very much relate to those broad areas of concern, rather than specifically looking at the three areas that I have just mentioned.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to temporary orders.