

BALGA PRIMARY SCHOOL BABY TALK PROGRAM

Statement by Member for Yokine

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [12.54 pm]: A new program in the Yokine electorate ensures that babies from eight months of age develop early language skills. Learning to listen and concentrate on language and sound is essential to the early development of all babies. Supporting parents in their roles enhances the capacity of babies to gain these skills. The Balga Primary School's baby talk program does just that across the community and encompasses schools, migrant and refugee groups, community groups, parents, families, single mothers and babies. Babies are programmed to learn to speak. However, the program helps parents to provide an appropriate quality of input to hasten the learning processes. By the age of eight months, it is possible to measure how well it has progressed to identify emerging learning difficulties. One in four babies in Western Australia do not develop early listening skills. Children who are not identified for support at this early age are very likely to have ongoing speech and language problems requiring long-term therapy or, at the very worst, drug therapy for so-called attention deficit disorders.

The baby talk program includes an assessment of a baby's listening and talking skills and visits by speech pathologists, resulting in specific high-quality programs for each baby and its parents. I take this opportunity to thank the parents, staff and principal Jean Blechynden of Balga Primary School. I also thank the Department of Education and Training and Sue Gawned and Dr John Wray from the State Child Development Centre for their involvement in this outstanding initiative.

Another key element is the Balga Senior High School childcare centre, which is run by Carol Lyons and her team of school-aged mums. The program is having spectacular results, but it is available only to families living in nine Perth suburbs and one country town. Early prevention of learning difficulties is far more effective than any other treatment, especially given that it may ensure positive drug-free outcomes, which are essential in this current climate of prescribing drugs to kids.

I commend the Balga Primary School baby talk program for opening the book of beginnings to generations of young Western Australians.