

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - AT-RISK CHILDREN

602. Mr R.C. KUCERA to the Minister for Community Development:

I acknowledge the presence in the house of the principal of Coolbinia Primary School, the head girl, Dinah, and the head boy, Jayden.

I refer to the claim yesterday by the member for Hillarys that Labor Party ideology prevents the removal of children at risk from their families. Can the minister advise if the facts support this claim?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

I thank the member for Yokine for this question. As we all know in this place, the member for Hillarys, like a number of his colleagues on the other side, continue to deliver non-factual information to this Parliament. Once again, that was evident in his response and his contribution, if we can call it a contribution, to the debate we had in this place yesterday. The member for Hillarys claimed yesterday that children at risk were not being removed from their families as a result of Labor Party policy. We know that he bases many of his views on inappropriate and non-factual information. I take the opportunity to provide some facts on the number of children at risk who have been removed from their families by the Department for Community Development in the past seven years. We need to remind ourselves that central figures are not available for 1997-98. In 1998-99 there were 271 children apprehended by DCD. There were 273 children apprehended in 1999-2000. There were 263 children apprehended in 2000-01. They were the years of the coalition government. In 2001-02, there were 346 children apprehended, which was a big increase. There were 307 in 2002-03; there were 306 in 2003-04; and there were 355 in 2004-05. In every year of a Labor government there have been more at-risk children removed from their families by DCD than at any other time under the previous government.

But here is the key. Let us look at the 1994-95 annual report of the department when the cast from Fraggles Rock - that is, those opposite - were in power. They should listen to this because it is damning for all of them. The annual report said that more than 85 per cent of the children who were the subject of substantiated allegations remained under the guardianship of their parents. That is what the opposition oversaw when it was in government during that period. In eight years of government, the Liberal Party clearly demonstrated its neglect for children, ignored child protection and failed children. In its six years in government, this government has continued to ensure that it puts in place the very best possible child protection system. We will keep on doing it. We did it in the last budget and in the last consecutive budgets. We will continue to resource this budget so that child protection remains the key priority of this government in the future.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call to order the members for Alfred Cove, Nedlands and Hillarys.