

INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SCHOOL STATUS — APPLICATION

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

In light of the high level of interest in independent public schools in my electorate—we already have two—would the minister inform the house as to the number of schools that had applied for independent public school status at the time applications closed on 27 April 2010?

Dr E. CONSTABLE replied:

I thank the member for Southern River for the question. I am delighted to have the opportunity to update the house on the progress of independent public schools. Last year in August we launched the initiative for the first intake. There were 104 applications, of which 34 were chosen to be the first demonstration schools to roll out the independent public school initiative. Essentially, this gives schools more autonomy and flexibility to choose their staff and make decisions at the local level. One of the things that has come out of my discussions with principals at these schools is that they are very excited about the opportunity to have the independence to make decisions that are right for their schools. They are also finding that when issues crop up, they can make decisions much more quickly than they were able to previously, when they had to deal with a very large bureaucracy. There are also a number of people in the community who are eager to be part of school councils. We find, for instance, that a number of the staff from the Joondalup campus of Edith Cowan University have become involved with the independent public schools in the northern suburbs, including the Vice-Chancellor of Edith Cowan University, Professor Kerry Cox. She has joined one of the school councils because she feels it is very important for the university to be part of the local community and to be involved in schools.

In February we again called for expressions of interest, and 134 schools put up their hands for independent public school status. Those expressions of interest will be looked at by a panel of independent people, headed by Audrey Jackson, the former principal of St Mary's Anglican Girls' School. Lyndon Rowe is on the panel, as is David Wood, the former principal of Sevenoaks Senior College. The former chief executive officer of the Curriculum Council and others are also on the panel and will report to the Director General of the Department of Education on those schools that they feel are ready to take on the role of independent public school.

It is fair to say that this is the single most important development in our school system in a long time. There is now the opportunity for those schools to be more responsive to their communities, to be more a part of their communities, and to make decisions that are absolutely right for the children in those communities.