

Mr Kobelke: Were those agreements made through form 22 applications or through the other ways in which a degree of disability can be registered?

Mrs EDWARDES: We can provide that further information and detail.

**Question put and passed; the substituted amendment agreed to.**

**The Council acquainted accordingly.**

## PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM, CRISIS IN CONFIDENCE

### *Motion*

**MR CARPENTER** (Willagee) [3.57 pm]: I move -

That this House condemns the Court Government for its poor management of the public education system in its failure to address the following critical issues -

- (a) increased school drop-out rates;
- (b) poor literacy standards;
- (c) poor teacher morale and teacher status;
- (d) lack of support for teachers to deal with new educational initiatives;
- (e) failure to address poor educational outcomes for boys;
- (f) failure to respond to needs of indigenous children;
- (g) failure to provide adequate support for children with special needs; and

regrets that these failures have led to a crisis in confidence in state school education in Western Australia.

I make two preliminary comments: Western Australia should have and needs a full-time Minister for Education; and that minister should immediately lift what is effectively a ban on teachers taking part in the public debate on educational issues in this State.

Mr Barnett: Give me one example where I have intervened.

Mr CARPENTER: An effective ban prevents teachers taking part in public debate when they are critical of the Government. The minister knows that in the past, teachers and administrators have been threatened with disciplinary action which has effectively placed a ban on them.

Mr Barnett: No, they have not; give me an example.

Mr CARPENTER: That is a disgraceful attitude taken by the minister. Teachers and administrators are intimidated by the Government at a time when their input into public debate should be encouraged, not discouraged. This State needs a full-time Education minister. The current Education minister has the Energy and Resources Development portfolios in Western Australia which are major portfolios. Education is the most important portfolio area for a State Government. Given the current circumstances in Western Australia, I do not believe that has ever been more the case. Despite the acknowledged attributes and qualities of the current Education minister - I am not delivering a backhand compliment - the State needs someone who can devote his or her energies full time to this portfolio area and drive the much-needed changes in this area in Western Australia rather than, as we have currently, a person who is fully aware of the issues but who is not driving the changes and, rather, leaving them to the bureaucracy of the department. We are now seeing the results of that lack of application which is most regrettable. We therefore need a full-time Education minister.

I said in the motion that a crisis in confidence exists in our state school system. I challenge any member of Parliament to deny that fact in their own private conversations. Members of Parliament will stand in this place and say that everybody has full confidence in the education system. However, that is not true and every member in this Parliament knows there is a current crisis in confidence in the state education system in Western Australia. That is evidenced by the fact that so few members of Parliament are educating their children in the state school system. The overwhelming majority, especially of government members, are educating their children in the private school system. I will not launch into criticism of members for that as both sides of Parliament, both State and Federal, have members who choose to educate their children in the private system. However, when one examines the numbers of members of Parliament who choose to educate their children in the private system, one can see where they believe their children will get the best education; it is not in the government school system. That is most regrettable and a matter that should be addressed as a matter of urgency in Western Australia.

In the past few years there has been an undeniable trend for parents to take their children out of government schools and put them into the private sector, in which there has been a proliferation of schools. There has been a movement of both numbers of people and funds into the private sector. I am sure an analysis would show that the growth in funding is inordinate in the private school system compared with the government school system.

Mr Bloffwitch: That is the fault of the Federal Government, not the State Government. Don't blame us for that.

Mr CARPENTER: The percentage of students in non-government schools in Western Australia in 1994 was 24.8, according to the Department of Education Services 1999 annual report. By 1998 that figure had grown to 27.2 per cent and was growing. The percentage of students in the government system had declined from 75.5 per cent to 72.2 per cent. A significant growth in the comparative numbers of students were transferring to the private sector. The member for Geraldton mentioned, by way of interjection, that the Federal Government's policies are driving that transfer. To a large extent I concur with that remark. Dr David Kemp is doing tremendous damage to the government schooling system around Australia, and in Western Australia. I acknowledge that the current state Education minister has acknowledged publicly the lack of federal funding flowing into Western Australia for education. Nevertheless, the State Government is responsible for managing and delivering the education system in this State. As members know, the State Government has also increased significantly the amount of funding to the private school system in this State, well above the increase in funding to the government schools in this State.

It is particularly galling for people who send their children to government schools to see government schools in a state of disrepair or dilapidation and knowing at the same time that the non-government sector is attracting record amounts of funding over and above the increases that are going to the government system. Every member of Parliament on both sides of the House should be concerned about that. I would be surprised if in their private moments virtually every member of Parliament has not expressed a concern along those lines. We cannot afford to allow that trend to continue and for a two-tier education system to develop in this State: One system for parents who can afford to send their children to the private sector or the very well-resourced government schools, and another system for parents who are unable to send their children to the private sector.

Mr Barnett: Don't you believe the Government should support low income Catholic schools?

Mr CARPENTER: The minister can speak when he gets his chance and can respond to every point then. I have the talking stick and I will use it. Currently in Western Australia we are consciously transferring resources away from the government sector to the private sector when the government sector is crying out for more resources. There are schools all around the metropolitan area - and in the country, as all country members would know - that need urgent attention.

Mr Bloffwitch: They are getting it.

Mr CARPENTER: They are not getting it.

Mr Bloffwitch: You speak for your own area and I will speak for mine.

Mr CARPENTER: I have just been to Geraldton where I spoke to the principal of the Geraldton Secondary College. It is not getting the physical infrastructure resources that it wants.

Mr Bloffwitch: It is.

Mr CARPENTER: If the member for Geraldton does not know that, he should be booted out of his seat.

Mr Bloffwitch: Is \$5m not enough? When I told him the news he was absolutely astounded.

Mr CARPENTER: The problem with the physical resource allocation is leading people out of the government sector and into the private sector. Page 12 of the Department of Education Services' 1999 annual report states that specific initiatives are also included from time to time, such as the State Government's 1999 commitment to provide an additional \$6m over four years to lift recurrent funding for non-government schools to more than 25 per cent of government school costs. Funds for this initiative were included for the first time in the 1997-98 budget and a figure of 26.5 percent was achieved by February 1999.

In the current state budget that has just passed through this Parliament, there was a 13 per cent per capita increase in the funding allocation to non-government schools. When the minister was asked about that in the estimates hearing, he said that in broad terms the Federal Government funds about 37 per cent of non-government schools, the State Government about 18 per cent and the remaining 50 per cent comes from the parents. He said that it is true the Federal Government has increased funding for the non-government school sector, that the Government has honoured its policy commitment to achieve 25 per cent and that is where it will stay. He said the Government does not intend to go beyond that because that figure is fair.

We have already gone beyond that. According to the Department of Education Services annual report last year, the allocation was 26.5 per cent and the minister has increased that funding this year by another 13 per cent. I have no argument about the 25 per cent figure but the budget is beyond that now, according to the minister's own government documents.

Mr Barnett: Yes, we believe we have met it.

Mr CARPENTER: It is not a matter of meeting it; it is beyond it. The minister knows, as he has been to many schools, that many state schools are crying out for small amounts of funding for items like playground equipment; additional facilities for children who want to study art and music; and for small items like fencing and covered assembly areas, matters to which I previously brought the minister's attention. Parents in the government sector are particularly galled when they see the private sector receiving additional funding over and above the commitment given by the minister in his own budget documents. If we want to maintain a bipartisan approach to the necessity for funding the private sector, we cannot endanger

that bipartisanship by infecting community attitudes with the belief that the private sector is getting too much. The minister is doing that as it is an effect of his policy. It is a very dangerous development for education in Western Australia, over and above the accompanying social issues. I have raised those matters in the Parliament before; I will not raise them again, other than to say that great benefit accrues in a government school system which draws people from all backgrounds, religions, levels of income and so on and educates them together. We change that factor of Australian society at our peril.

I have some Australian Education Union figures which I believe have not been challenged, although I am prepared to accept alternative figures if available. These figures indicate that the current federal budget will give private schools 65 per cent of all commonwealth school funding over the next three years. Also, federal and state budgets between 1993 and 1998 have increased spending on private schools in Western Australia by 70 per cent, at a time of reduction in federal funding at that level. It is not a healthy development. As the minister in charge of the department responsible for managing education services in this State, that should be an area of extreme concern. A 70 per cent growth in federal funding for the non-government sector is occurring at a time of real reductions in government sector funding from the Commonwealth.

Mr Barnett: Tell the full story. That is semantics. The government and non-government schools are lumped together. When you refer to the State, you only talk about the Commonwealth. Don't you think you have a responsibility as a parliamentarian to be consistent.

Mr CARPENTER: I am consistent; the minister does not know what he is talking about.

Mr Barnett: I must have missed the point.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister can get to his feet and respond.

Mr Barnett: I just don't like deception.

Mr CARPENTER: I am not deceiving. Combined funding for non-government schools has increased by 70 per cent in those years. I am prepared to accept alternative figures.

Mr Barnett: Why did you say that the Federal Government has reduced real spending for state schools? You refuse to admit that state government spending is 90 per cent of all funding of government schools. It didn't suit your crumby little argument, that's why.

Mr CARPENTER: It is not a crumby argument. Everybody in this House and in this nation knows that a huge transfer of funds has occurred to the non-government sector. Principally, this was driven by the Federal Government. However, the minister in this State has increased funding to the non-government sector by a percentile well above the percentile increase given to the government sector. Is that a fact?

Mr Barnett: It is because it is a fact of life, you fool, that enrolments in the non-government sector have increased by at least three times the rate of enrolments in the government sector.

Mr CARPENTER: That is because people can see what is happening. Governments at state and federal levels believe that only people who cannot afford to be educated in the private sector should send children to government schools; everybody else should be in the private sector. Policies are directed that way.

Mr Barnett: If you are such an authority -

Mr CARPENTER: The minister will get his chance to speak! The best indicator of the performance level of the state government system is the number of children who maintain their interest in education right through the system. Since the election of this Government, the high school dropout rate in Western Australia in government schools has increased significantly; that is, the retention rate to year 12 level has declined significantly. If that is not a matter of concern to the Government, it should be. I know it is a concern to the minister as he said so in this place and elsewhere publicly; however, he has not been able to do anything about it. He admits that. He has not been trying hard enough. He knows that government school retention rates are down to about 60 per cent, whereas eight years ago they were 65 per cent. Vague suggestions have been made of reasons for that trend. Nevertheless, no reduction in retention rates has occurred in private schools. The arguments about alternative forms of education and employment do not apply in private schools, for which retention rates are still high at about 80 per cent. Do we accept as a community that government school retention rates can decline to about 60 per cent? Incidentally, in virtually every other comparable country in the world, retention rates to the equivalent of our year 12 are 85 to 90 per cent. We are down around 60 per cent in Western Australia.

Mr Barnett: It is 71.5 per cent.

Mr CARPENTER: Is that in government schools?

Mr Barnett: It is 71.5 per cent in Western Australia.

Mr CARPENTER: That is because we have 80 per cent in private schools and 60 per cent in government schools. The government school sector is trailing the private school sector. At the same time, huge amounts of resources are being poured over to the private sector. The minister has acknowledged inside and outside Parliament that this is a concern. When I raise the matter, he throws other issues at me regarding children attending TAFE and uses the youth employment figures as an explanation. It does not apply in the private sector. Can anyone imagine all the government members who send their children to private schools being happy if a sign by the front door of the school said that about six out of 10 children at that school are guaranteed to reach year 12? They would not accept that situation, as we should not accept it

from our school management; namely, the Education Department and, ultimately, the minister. Those figures are very poor. As the minister knows, they are worse than the mere 60 per cent. When one breaks down who is and who is not staying at school, a critical problem in Western Australia with dropout rates is evident. High schools in the lower socioeconomic areas and some country areas have very poor retention rates. Some of the government schools in the metropolitan area are doing reasonably well which masks the seriousness of the problem in other government schools. The minister said that some government high schools have retention rates as low as 30 to 35 per cent. I received from the department a list of every government high school in Western Australia and its retention rate. I have it with me. The department also provided a breakdown of outcomes for boys versus girls.

First, we have retention rates in some metropolitan schools in lower socioeconomic areas around 30 per cent to 50 per cent, although some are doing better. The same applies in country high schools. What is happening to the other schools? Would it be acceptable for the Premier, who wants to send his child to, say, Hale School -

Mr Barnett: Emma will not be going there, I suspect.

Mr CARPENTER: I refer to his son, who probably went there. I think the Premier went there also. If John Inverarity said that three out of 10 Hale boys would finish high school, it would not be accepted. On behalf of the people who send their children to their local government high schools, we should not accept that three or four out of 10 students will finish high school. It is absolutely outrageous for the community to let that factor slide by and say, "Some of them are going to TAFE and some are getting jobs. We do not know that, but we think that is so". On 12 March 1997 in this Chamber, the member for Thornlie raised this issue with the Minister for Education, who said it was an area of concern and he was sure that the Education Department would do some research to find out why it was happening. Can the minister tell us, three and a half years later, what research has been done by the Education Department on the dropout rates from high school, why it is happening and what specifically is being done about it as a result of that research? I want to hear about this research. If there has not been any research by the department that is charged with administering education, we should know why not. We should call the Education Department in and let them explain why it is prepared to accept that only three or four out of 10 of our country youth are finishing high school. It is not acceptable. We should be ashamed of that rather than let it slide through to the keeper.

I underline the fact that at the same time the retention rates in the non-government sector are about 80 per cent. I am holding up a graph of our performance in retention rates over the past 10 years. During the 1980s, retention rates rose consistently in Western Australia from 25 per cent to 65 per cent. They tailed off by 1997 to around 60 per cent, and have remained consistent at that level. That is the performance level. We always talk about outcomes in education. Let us talk about the outcomes of the system. That has been that we are letting all these young children leave school without completing their education.

Mr Bradshaw: Maybe people have realised that is not the way to go.

Mr CARPENTER: Unfortunately, the attitude demonstrated by the member for Murray-Wellington permeates through the ranks of government members. It is wrong; it is out of date.

Mr Minson: Do you think it is realistic that all students in their seventeenth year will go through to complete their formal education or will go out into some other form of education? This is serious.

Mr CARPENTER: I agree with the minister: We should aim for a 90 per cent retention rate. The Labor party aims for that. The Government should aim for it as well. It is not. There will always be some people who do not fit into the system, and will find other areas of education or employment. Hopefully, they should find a combination of both. However, the Government is not doing anything about that; we are letting it happen.

The minister spoke recently at the opening of a community college in Esperance and underlined the point that country education outcomes need to be improved. The National Farmers Federation President, Ian Donges, hit the nail on the head on 15 February this year when he spoke about the critical issues that faced country communities. He focused specifically on education and bemoaned the fact that so few country youth in Australia go on to tertiary studies. He said the way they can secure their future and the future of their communities is through tertiary education. Our rural youth are not getting tertiary education; they are not finishing years 11 and 12. They should be, and we need to have that target in mind in our education policies and work assiduously towards that, and never mind the explanations that they can get a job. Of course, 15 and 16-year-olds might be able to get a job, but what kind of job and where will that leave them in two or three years' time or whenever they are too old to be paid junior rates.

Study after study has been done into the economic importance of maintaining people in education, let alone the social costs of letting people leave. During the estimates committee hearing, I asked the Ministry of Justice for a breakdown of the educational achievement levels of prisoners in our jails. They said that 76 per cent of prisoners in Western Australian jails have not finished primary school education, and another 12 per cent have only minimal high school education. Members can work it out for themselves. It is obvious. All members of Parliament see people coming through their doors every day who are the real outcomes of the system. They see people who have not adequately achieved, for one reason or another, in the education system. They see lack of employability, and the attendant social, health and family problems. Members of Parliament see it every day. We are allowing this trend to roll through the government education system without adequate attention being paid to it. If our budgets measure all of the activity of government by output, let us challenge ourselves to measure education by output as well. If that output is 50 to 60 per cent, what do we want?

I spoke about the difference between students attending schools in lower socioeconomic city and country areas compared with schools in the better off areas. Members will also see a significant trend in the breakdown between males and females completing year 12. Boys in particular are struggling in our education system at the moment. In country high schools the retention rate among girls is 10 percentage points above boys. Boys educated in the government school system are leaving school earlier without finishing their education. Members of Parliament have spoken on a range of issues affecting young men in their electorates - youth depression, suicide in country areas, and juvenile crime. It is all there and everything is connected. If we cannot keep students within the education system, there is a higher probability of their turning up in government statistics elsewhere - in unemployment, with social and crime problems, suicides and so on. It is an issue that needs all of the Government's attention, and the full-time attention of the minister. When compared with some other ministers, the Minister for Education sitting in this place has far more expertise than some of his colleagues. In a way that is a paradox, and everyone reflects on this: It is unusual to have a minister who we all think has great abilities but Education is struggling like hell and nothing is being done about it. Why does the minister not do something about it? It is probably too late because I do not think he will be here after the next election anyway. It is sad; he should have done a lot better. Maybe the answer is that nobody else on the government front bench is capable of taking the portfolio on. Perhaps we should have given it to the Minister for Fair Trading and made him do some work. Although he has demonstrated an unfortunate attitude to this issue in Parliament previously, so we should not dwell on that.

The number of girls achieving across the education system is much higher than boys. Quite a deal of educational research is being done in Western Australia by people like Ian Lillico that addresses the issue of education of boys. The Education Department should seize on this work being done in the community. Parents and teachers are driving this concern about the achievement of boys because they can see what is happening. Boys are struggling and failing and they want to know why. The department should seize on this work that is being done. It should develop policies and implement them straight across the system. It should not leave this to individual schools. Clarkson Primary School has implemented policies specifically to improve the situation for boys. From what I understand, it has had fantastic results. Today's newspaper carried a story about Singleton Primary School, and one or two others are also involved. It should be right across the system. A program should not pop up, and we watch it for two years and say, "Gee that's working well." We need a systemic approach to the problem, and the minister should seize upon this opportunity that is being provided by the wonderful work being done by Ian Lillico and others around the world that demonstrates how we can get better results out of education for boys. The Government is not doing that.

I have spoken briefly about the problems of not keeping boys and girls in the education system. I will quote *The West Australian* editorial, for what is worth, on 7 June 2000. I read editorials assiduously and every now and then they make a good point. This editorial made a good point on 7 June 2000. It reads -

. . . a drop in the retention rate for any group of students represents a waste of potential.

If we do not realise that we are stupid. To continue -

Students who leave school without finishing Year 12 have little hope of finding fulfilling jobs that pay more than a basic survival wage. Many are destined for the dole queues, or worse.

New South Wales Centre for Independent Studies researcher Jennifer Buckingham has observed that the drop in the boys' retention rate has been associated with unemployment, an impoverished intellectual life, delinquency and crime. In many cases, students who leave school early are doing no favours for themselves or society.

It goes on. It could have been lifted directly from a press release I sent the newspaper a week before. In fact, I suspect it was. It hit the nail on the head.

I now move on to other points. I do not believe that the minister takes issue with this matter of retention rates and dropout rates. It is a matter of being prepared to do something - not just leaving it to the bureaucracy in the department - and to jump in behind the wheel and say, "I will drive this thing and I want this to be done or they are out."

Another issue on which I want to spend a few moments is the conditions, the status of teachers and the position in which school teachers in Western Australia find themselves at the moment. School teachers in Western Australia say that the recognition for the roles they provide to the community is insufficient and inadequate, that they are not being supported sufficiently by the department in enacting the continuous change that is flowing out of the department's bureaucracy and which is expected to be implemented in schools and so on. They are very concerned about the status of teaching, not necessarily for themselves - although of course they are - but for the future of the system. How do we attract people into teaching and into government schools if the profession is not seen to be one which is attractive and into which people want to go? The whole question of the status of teaching and the status of education is bound together.

A month or two ago I released a discussion paper on the status of teaching and I did my best to address one or two of the issues. It went down reasonably well with the teaching community. At least someone was recognising that some action was needed. One matter I did not address in that paper was teachers' salaries. They are involved in the enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations with the department at the moment. It was early in the period and there was a state of some flux and I did not want to put out a paper which was subsequently made redundant because of changes that the Government might have announced. The current certified agreement with teachers has expired and they are still in the negotiation phase to get the next one done.

Mr Barnett: You might be interested to know that the teachers union has pulled out of the last four scheduled meetings.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister should let me go on. Critical to the negotiations - it is not the only thing about which the teachers are negotiating - is their salary package. That is not unexpected; it is quite reasonable. When the minister stands, I ask him to address this question: Has the minister said publicly in the past couple of months that school teachers in Western Australia have received a 15 per cent pay rise over the past two years?

Mr Barnett: No, I have never said that.

Mr CARPENTER: I am glad the minister said that. I will check some of the public records because I have either heard him say that or he has been reported as saying that.

Mr Barnett: They have received a 21 per cent increase since 1996.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister has not said publicly in the past couple of months that teachers have received a 15 per cent pay rise over the past two years?

Mr Barnett: No, because they have not.

Mr CARPENTER: I know they have not; that is why I am asking the minister.

Mr Barnett: What are we arguing about?

Mr CARPENTER: I have seen it reported that the minister has said that.

Mr Barnett: I haven't.

Mr CARPENTER: If we are dealing with an issue on which teachers are trying to get more pay, we must be honest about the situation: They are underpaid. Does the minister agree that they are underpaid?

Mr Barnett: I believe -

Mr CARPENTER: He did not want to answer.

Mr Barnett: Do you want an answer to the question?

Mr CARPENTER: School teachers in Western Australia are underpaid.

Mr Barnett: You do not want an answer now. You are a fool! I believe teachers' salaries should progressively rise.

Mr CARPENTER: I am not a fool! I am not the Education Minister who has presided over a downward trend in the outcomes of education in Western Australia. The minister is not a fool, but that is what he has done. When he leaves Parliament, he can reflect on the fact that fewer children were achieving in education when he finished than when he started.

Mr Barnett: No, there will not.

Mr CARPENTER: That will be his legacy. He understands the requirement for new buildings. He has done a good job in providing new buildings here and there. However, he does not understand the fundamental importance of education for a whole group of people - those who come from the bush and those who come from poor, socioeconomic backgrounds who need a vibrant, world-class public education system to achieve in life. The minister does not understand that because if he did, he would not have allowed this trend to continue and would not have abused and belittled people who raise those points. Unfortunately, that is what the minister does.

Western Australian school teachers are dramatically underpaid. They are intelligent enough to know that that cannot be reversed in a single year. What they want to hear is that there is a commitment from government to change that situation. They do not expect government members to walk down the street and say, "We will give you a 20 per cent pay rise to get you to the comparative position you were in 10 years ago." They want to hear the Government of the day, and probably every other member of Parliament, say, "We understand that the comparative position of school teachers has declined dramatically in the past 10 or 15 years and we are committed to doing something about it." That is what they should be hearing. I will draw on figures that the union has provided for teachers' salaries, so I am open to correction. The figures the union has provided me show that for new graduates, Western Australia has the lowest paid school teachers of all the States. Western Australia pays its new graduates \$32 925. It is the lowest salary of any State or Territory in the country. At the other end, the top increment -

Mr Barnett: I do not agree with that. Don't you agree that that is not a bad starting salary for a new graduate? What does a new graduate get after five years? I think you will find it is very attractive. I concede that later on in careers, salaries do not rise as quickly as those in other professions. However, starting and initial trainee salaries are high in education.

Mr CARPENTER: They are higher compared with what?

Mr Barnett: Compared with most other graduates out of university.

Mr Thomas: What about after five years?

Mr Barnett: From memory, a graduate would get about \$37 000. I am not sure of the figure, but I will get the figure before the debate is over.

Mr CARPENTER: According to these figures - I got them from the union, so they are open to correction - the top

increment for teachers is \$48 264. That is the second lowest salary in Australia above South Australia, which is currently in the process of negotiating a package which would put its teachers above ours. Most other States are in the process of negotiating their teacher salary packages and will go further ahead than Western Australia. New South Wales teachers have just negotiated a package which gave them about 18 per cent over four years

Mr Minson: What is the cost of living in Sydney?

Mr CARPENTER: It is very high, but so what? Western Australian teachers are the lowest paid in the country. The minister has said that one of the problems is that we cannot get enough people to go into teaching. Why can we not get people into teaching? One of the problems is that the average age of graduates is 28 years. Is \$32 000 an attractive salary package for a 28 year old? Of course it is not. We are facing a massive crisis. The minister knows this: A teacher shortage is looming. The department has done its work on this. At the same time, we are allowing the situation to go on and we are paying our teachers the lowest rates in the country. How stupid can we get? We must pay them more. As I said, teachers do not believe, and would not believe, that the Government will come out tomorrow and say, "We will put you on parity with New South Wales, which is where you were 10 or 15 years ago." In fact, I think the wages were pegged at that stage so that a pay rise in New South Wales flowed on to Western Australia.

What teachers expect and would like is a commitment that the minister understands or accepts that they are underpaid. He can give all the arguments about his budgetary situation, but they want to know that he is committed to reaching a situation at which their salaries are comparable to those in most of the other States.

Mr Barnett: They have had that.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister is not saying that publicly. What happens publicly is that he argues against their position. That does no good for the status of teaching. We end up with the lines that teachers get too many holidays and they do this and that.

We need to attract more people into teaching because a crisis is looming. Fifty per cent of Western Australia's teachers will reach retirement age within the next 10 years. However, insufficient graduates are available to replace them. To a very limited extent the Government is offering small incentive packages to entice graduates from other areas to do one year's Diploma of Education and then begin teaching. I think 30 scholarships a year are being offered, but that is not enough.

Primary school teaching requires four years of committed training. A primary school teacher cannot be trained in one year from another course; there is a four-year time lag. We must consider what will be the situation in 2005, how many teachers are likely to retire and how many graduates will be available. Why are they not coming in? We do not pay them enough. They will not become teachers and we will have a crisis on our hands in a few years. Manifestations of the shortage occurred last year and it will be more obvious as time goes on.

The Government is committed, for example, to reducing the size of early primary school classes, and a Labor Government would do the same. That will require extra teachers. We must plan and we must turn around people's attitudes. When did the Leader of the House become the Minister for Education?

Mr Barnett: Effectively beginning 1996.

Mr CARPENTER: I was working with the *7.30 Report*. We should cast our minds back four years to 1995 and recall what was occurring between the Government and teachers. A massive dispute was taking place over pay between the teaching group and the then minister and his chief executive officer, who had no educational background; he was a manager. The issue became very personal and bitter. Is it any wonder that the young people who were in years 10, 11 and 12 were not particularly excited about the prospect of becoming school teachers? Of course they were not. They did not want to become school teachers and see on television that profession being denigrated and school teachers being verbally abused. Their teachers were probably saying, "For Christ's sake, whatever you do, don't become a school teacher. Look what we must put up with." Four years later there are not enough teaching graduates. Of course there are not, because in 1995 young students decided they would not become school teachers.

Mr Osborne: Fancy denigrating your own profession and telling students in your class not to do what they did.

Mr CARPENTER: The member for Bunbury knows better than that. Would anyone being pummelled by an employer about the fact that they were lazy and took too many holidays recommend to students that they become school teachers? Of course they would not. The Government generated a crisis of its own making and now, four or five years later when we need all those bright young people to become school teachers, they are not there. We are wondering why and what we can do to encourage them into the teaching profession.

We must improve employment conditions and remuneration for teachers. There seems to be no understanding of the importance of that. One of the reasons is that we do not get teacher crises of this nature in private schools which the children of most members of Parliament attend. They are not affected because they will always attend well-resourced well-funded schools. Those schools do not have problems finding teachers because they pay them a bit more.

The people who rely on the government school system want to have the confidence to send their child to their local school knowing that not only will the teacher have a good attitude towards the child's work but also the physical environment will be good and the education will be first class. That is why it is so important for the department and the minister to come to grips with the current problems in the state school system. There are serious problems and we must come to grips with them.

The minister must acknowledge to school teachers in Western Australia that they are underpaid. He must show his commitment, at least in the medium to long term, to giving them the parity with other professions and occupations they enjoyed a few years ago. Otherwise our education system will face worse problems than it is facing now.

National literacy testing introduced by David Kemp is of little benefit in its present form.

Mr Barnett: Were you not just mounting a case for outcomes in education?

Mr CARPENTER: I have not finished yet; I want to refer to literacy. Testing is not an outcome. Literacy is the outcome. Kemp does not understand that.

Mr Barnett: How do we know the results if we do not measure the standard?

Mr CARPENTER: Before those federal tests were carried out, did school teachers know which children in their class had literacy difficulties?

Mr Barnett interjected.

Mr CARPENTER: They may not have known specifically, but in general terms they probably knew.

Mr Barnett: Every child matters.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister should remember that because he does not understand that.

Mr Barnett: I thought I just said it.

Mr CARPENTER: The testing introduced by Kemp indicates that on one day at one school a group of students may not have reached the benchmark. However, what occurs as a result of that? Nothing. I have been around to the schools, although not as many as the minister, in the metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas and asked what extra resources had been provided and how many extra teachers walked in the front door of schools due to the difficulties highlighted in the literacy test? They say that nothing had happened; they did not get any additional people.

Mr Barnett: Haven't you noticed the early childhood program?

Mr CARPENTER: Which school can I visit in Western Australia where additional, trained staff, who have expertise in dealing with literacy, have been employed because of the literacy test?

Mr Barnett: Every school in the State.

Mr CARPENTER: No school in the State. That is absolute rubbish. Nothing has occurred due to the literacy test.

Mr Barnett: Not due to the literacy testing. If you can develop the early childhood program it will not be necessary to employ extra people due to literacy testing.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister just said himself that nothing has occurred. No additional resources have been provided. Kemp has introduced a test to show that he is concerned about literacy and numeracy to provide himself with a political benefit. I am not arguing about the validity of the testing. I am saying that as a result of the testing nothing positive has occurred; the schools do not get any extra people and the children continue to suffer. They ultimately do not achieve and drop out of the education system at an early age. That is not good enough. I await the minister's telling us where in the State additional trained staff have been allocated to deal specifically with literacy problems highlighted by the testing. I do not think it will take him long because none has been allocated.

I have spoken about salaries and teacher morale. Nobody believes that we are not in the situation that needs dramatic attention. The Government has made a commitment to reduce class sizes by four by 2000.

Mr Barnett: We have reduced class sizes already.

Mr CARPENTER: I think the Government has made a commitment to reduce class sizes by four in the early primary school years of 1 and 3.

Mr Barnett interjected.

Mr CARPENTER: What is the average class size of year 2 students?

Mr Barnett: I will answer that when I get up, but it has been done.

Mr CARPENTER: I support that move; we should reduce class sizes.

Mr Barnett: You should congratulate us for doing that.

Mr CARPENTER: The minister has not done that.

Mr Barnett: We have.

Mr CARPENTER: He has not. He should visit his local primary school and see how many kids are in year 3. Will there be 24 children in the class? There will be 28. I am referring to a reduction from 28 to 24 students which I agree is a good initiative.

Mr Barnett: You agree. We have done it.

Mr CARPENTER: I have seen the class sizes at the school where I take my own children. I hope the target is reached by 2003.

This minister will not achieve that; we will. I think he conceded during a previous debate that serious attention must be paid to years 8 and 9, which is the transitional stage when children go from primary school to high school. We need to address the issue of class sizes with the same commitment that has been promised regarding the early years of education. This is a critical time in which many young people, especially boys, become alienated from the high school system and fall away. Regardless of what is offered in years 11 and 12 - the range of subjects is being expanded - they will not stay because their attitudes have become entrenched.

That is an area on which the Government needs to focus strong attention, particularly as the middle school concept is developing and taking off in different places using various models. The Government needs to seriously address the issue of class sizes. The Government has done the right thing in providing computers in schools. I understand the proposed ratio is 1:5 or 1:10, and the minister has said it is close to achieving that. I congratulate the Government on that; it is good, and I do not know anyone who thinks otherwise. However, I compare that with buildings and what goes inside them. It is not just a matter of providing the physical infrastructure; the Government must understand what computers are for. They are an education tool, and the ultimate aim is not just a ratio of 1:5 or 1:10. The Government must be able to provide the schools which now have computers with IT support so that when something goes wrong with those computers, schools do not lose the benefit of them for two or three weeks at a time while they wait for someone to fix them. The school at Wyndham was trying to get someone from Sydney to fix its computers because no-one from this State would provide IT support. The Government has a responsibility to provide back-up support and not just leave it to the individual schools. The Government has a responsibility to make the system work, so that schools get the benefits from the computers provided. It is good to provide the technology in the schools but that technology must function and be useful.

A further issue is the lack of IT expertise among teachers. Schools, or at least districts, need dedicated IT experts over and above the teaching staff ratios. It is not sufficient to designate an existing person at each school who is a whizz on computers to teach everybody else in the school. Teachers do not have the time to do that. When that teacher is helping others, who looks after his or her class? That is happening at the moment. Those designated as IT experts at schools - implementation officers - have their own teaching responsibilities and they do not have the time for other duties. Large numbers of teachers are not getting the professional support and development to use computers as an effective educational tool, and we are not getting the real benefit that should be gained from the provision of that technology. It is good that the Government provided it, but it does not understand what it is all about. The Government thinks it is merely a question of meeting a commitment to provide computers. The computers must have a function other than to sit on a desk.

I will touch briefly on one other issue. The minister has the rhetoric right in relation to education for indigenous people. Everybody realistically concedes that this is a very difficult issue on which to make progress and to get real benefits. My position is that the Government is not doing enough. It is not a matter of spending huge amounts of money, but of making the system work for indigenous children. The Government has some commitment, but it is not doing enough. Retention rates are the ultimate indicator of how the system is working, and the retention rates for Aboriginal children in our schools are not as high as they were seven or eight years ago. They have gone backwards, and it is not good enough. By asking questions in the Estimates Committee, I have stumbled by accident on programs within the education system to encourage Aboriginal graduates, but the number of such programs is small and their impact is minimal. It is a major issue. If any other ethnic group in Australia, or in any advanced nation in the world, were under-achieving in education to the level at which Aboriginal children are, something dramatic would be done. It would not be regarded as a side issue. It must be recognised that indigenous children in our schools need specialised approaches, and until that happens this State will continue to have the concomitant social problems that flow from any group of children who do not remain in the education system. I ask the minister whether the funding levels for Aboriginal specific educational programs were reduced from \$113 a head to \$62 a head from 1998 to 1999? Was that commonwealth funding to the schools through the State Government reduced by almost half because the previous year's allocation had not been spent?

Mr Barnett: I do not know the commonwealth allocation, but in this State we spend more year after year on Aboriginal education.

Mr CARPENTER: I will put that question on notice.

Mr Barnett: You might have to ask the commonwealth minister.

Mr CARPENTER: No, the money goes to the State Government and it is the State's responsibility to acquit it in the schools. I understand one year it was not spent and the following year the allocation was halved, but I do not have the documents to prove that.

In summary, first it must be accepted that education in Western Australia is at a critical stage. Comparatively WA is at the same point it was at in 1972 when the Whitlam Government came to power and did something about the education system. The world has moved on and the requirement for higher education is more than it has ever been. The education system in this State has stagnated. Under federal minister Kemp, and with no assistance from the State Government, WA is going backwards. I appreciate that there is only one minister, but the Minister for Education needs to be a full-time Minister for Education in Western Australia and not a minister who gives the Education portfolio second or third priority. The minister's primary focus is minerals and energy and resources development. I do not decry him for that, because that is his

background, but they are his primary focus. Education is secondary to him and the system is suffering because of that lack of attention. This State needs a full-time Minister for Education, and not a part timer. It needs someone with expertise who is interested in and committed to improving educational outcomes for children in Western Australia.

The Government should encourage, not discourage, dissent, argument and debate about education and what is happening among teachers. It should allow public debate and not stifle those in the education system, because they know what is happening and they have a right to tell people publicly and to disagree with the Government about the progress of education. Let us have a healthy debate within the system. People should not be clamped down and their views should not be suppressed by the department. The Minister for Education - he is preferable to anyone else on that side - should take on the Education portfolio as a full-time challenge and provide the children in government schools in Western Australia with the educational opportunities they deserve. Otherwise, this State will face the consequences in the long term.

**MR BARNETT** (Cottesloe - Minister for Education) [4.58 pm]: The member for Willagee has spoken for one hour, but I will speak only briefly in response. My first observation is that this Government regards education as its highest priority. This Government has an outstanding record of commitment to education. Indeed, proof of that is the number of members in the Chamber. I ask members to compare the interest on the government benches in a debate on education with the two or three opposition members present. These are members of Parliament who care about education for the boys and girls in their electorates and throughout the State, and they probably all want to speak in this debate. Only two or three members of the Opposition are in the Chamber. This is a commitment by people who go to schools and promote education for their children. The commitment of this Government is on display in the House.

The Opposition said that I am a part-time Minister for Education. It is typical of the Opposition, when it does not have a sound argument, to launch into a quasi-personal attack. I have two major portfolios, and I claim I cover them competently, if not well. Others can make that judgment. Since I have been Minister for Education I have visited nearly 500 schools in this State, averaging over 100 school visits a year. I have been to schools in every electorate, some repeatedly at the request of members opposite and on this side of the House. I continue every week to go to schools and visit classrooms and talk to teachers, parents and students. I continue to make decisions about schools on a weekly, if not daily basis. If that is not doing the job of Minister for Education, I do not know what is.

Mr Carpenter: You do not understand.

Mr BARNETT: I understand exactly.

Mr Carpenter: Turning up at a school with a group of gentlemen in black suits, staying for five minutes and walking out again does not constitute trying to understand the reality of that school.

Mr BARNETT: The ignorance of the Opposition is brought out by that one comment. I have been to 500 schools. I have never turned up with a group of people in black suits. As you would know, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Baker), I take one person only from my office, generally a woman. I do not turn up with armies of advisers. I have never done it and I never will. I want to speak briefly on some matters because other people want to have a say.

Mr Carpenter: You cannot even address yourself full time to this.

Mr BARNETT: I will be here. This will be a long debate; we will go for two weeks on this. We can see the interest in education on this side of the House.

Let us look at commitment to schooling, because the Opposition started off by talking about the growth of government versus non-government schooling and tried to convey a picture that somehow this Government has a secret agenda to promote private or independent education as distinct from government education. This Government has a clear policy position, which is one of choice. We believe that it is up to parents to choose education. Many parents, particularly Catholic parents, choose Catholic schools. I gained the impression that what the Opposition had to say about non-government schools is worth pursuing in this debate. About 30 per cent of the children in this State go to non-government schools. By far the biggest segment is made up of those children who attend Catholic schools. Many non-government schools, indeed most Catholic schools, have facilities which, on average, are probably below those in the government school system. Many of the poorest equipped schools in this State are low-income Catholic schools. I admire the job that the Catholic school system does, in particular in remote parts of the State where it gives a wonderful service to many disadvantaged families. Why should the Government of Western Australia not support all children and all parents in all schools? That is our policy, and that is what we do.

The member for Willagee seemed to indicate that our policy for the funding of non-government schools was wrong. We came into government with a clear policy commitment that we would fund non-government schools to at least 25 per cent of the cost of educating a child in the government sector. According to our calculations the figure stands at 26.5 per cent, mainly because of the timing of some low-interest loans on capital works. The non-government schools would say that it is a bit less than 26.5 per cent, but we have achieved our target. I take it from the comments of the member opposite, that Labor Party policy will be to cut funding for non-government schools. Is that the policy - yes or no? What is Labor Party policy? Will it go below the 25 per cent level of funding for non-government schools, because I want to tell all those Catholic families out there what the Labor Party is intending to do? What is the Labor Party's policy?

Mr Carpenter: When you finish, you can pick up a phone and speak to the Catholic Education Office and ask what I said when I was asked that question.

Mr BARNETT: This Government will maintain funding for Catholic and other non-government schools to at least 25 per cent of the cost of educating a child in a government school. That is a clear policy commitment of this Government. We will not take funds away from Catholic children in low to middle-income areas of this State. That is what the Opposition is promoting. We will not do it for low-fee Christian schools or any other group. We will provide equitable funding for all children and all families in Western Australia.

Let us talk about government schools which cater for 70 per cent of children. I remind members that the State Government and not the Commonwealth provides 90 per cent of all funding for government schools. They are state schools in every sense. The following are the funding increases by this Government for state schools: 1995-96, a 9.1 per cent increase; 1996-97, a 9.7 per cent increase; 1997-98, a 6.7 per cent increase; 1998-99, a 10.8 per cent increase; 1999-2000, an 8.3 per cent increase; and a 3.8 per cent increase for the coming year 2000-01. We have increased funding for government schools by an average of 8.1 per cent over each of the past five years when enrolments have been going up by about 1 per cent per year and inflation has been running at perhaps 2 to 3 per cent. We have never seen such a dramatic real per capita increase in funding for state government education in the history of this State.

What we have done is boost funding for non-government schools and boost funding by an enormous extent for the government sector. They are merely percentages. This Government spends, from memory, about \$145m on non-government schools. Currently on government schools we spend \$1 469m. Therefore, we spend nearly \$1.5b on the 70 per cent of children in the government school system and allocate about \$140m for the remaining 30 per cent. The increase in percentages has been higher in non-government schools, driven by higher enrolments, but the increase in real dollars spent has been heavily concentrated in government schools. We are proud of funding. I need say no more about that.

The member talked about retention rates. This is one area on which I do agree. I am concerned about retention rates in our school system; I am concerned about government schools and country schools; and I am concerned about Aboriginal children and a whole lot of other groups because it is an issue. However, one must be careful in the way one looks at it. I have said that I would like to achieve a retention rate of perhaps 85 to 90 per cent.

Mr Carpenter: Not "perhaps"; you said 90 per cent.

Mr BARNETT: Okay, 90 per cent. I would go for 100 per cent if I could get it, but that is not realistic. However, I would like to see the retention rate up around 90 per cent. That retention rate does not relate only to schools. I hope that around 90 per cent of young people will continue in education, whether it be in schools, TAFE, a structured learning program or in apprenticeships. There is no doubt that although retention rates have slipped in schools, which we all recognise, the participation rate in TAFE, apprenticeships and the like, has gone up. We must not look only at schools. The retention rate is too low. One can argue numbers, but according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the retention rate for Western Australia is 71.5 per cent, which is right in the middle of the Australian average.

Mr Carpenter: What about non-government schools?

Mr BARNETT: There will be a difference between government and non-government school retention rates in every State. The average retention rate for Australia is 72.3 per cent and for Western Australia it is 71.5 per cent.

Mr Carpenter: What about government schools?

Mr BARNETT: I have conceded the point that there is a difference, but there is a difference elsewhere in Australia not just in Western Australia. Western Australia's retention rate is about the national average. It is still too low. About 90 per cent of young Australians should continue in school or educational training. That should be a national objective, and it is. Some of the other speakers will talk about what we are doing practically to achieve better results in education. This Government has spent an enormous amount on restructuring and building schools, the new curriculum, middle schooling, early childhood education, rural education, vocational education and training schools, vocational programs and all the rest. It will take some time for the results to come through. I agree with the member opposite. We are absolutely dedicated to raising educational standards in this State, particularly for disadvantaged students, rural students and other groups.

I will pick up another couple of issues that were mentioned. The capital works program and the building program in this State have been unparalleled. I will not go into that other than to say that, despite what members opposite might suggest, we are building more and better schools in this State. Since 1993 the State Government has established 29 new primary schools and five new secondary schools, and a further 10 schools - five primary, four secondary and one with a special role - are under construction. That involves 44 schools over the same period in which 23 schools have closed or merged. This Government is expanding the school system and modernising schools throughout the State.

Teachers are the key to our education system. I recognise there are problems and that not as many talented young people take up teaching as a career.

Mr Carpenter: I will circulate what you say.

Mr BARNETT: The member can do that. Teachers are the key to our education system. In the 1950s and 1960s, young people had limited career opportunities and teaching was a way of getting into university and further education. It now competes with a wider range of careers and occupational structures. We are conscious that the nature of teaching students has changed. The average undergraduate is a 28-year-old woman who may have a stable relationship and children and who is taking up a second career. Those people are less mobile; they will not necessarily take up all positions offered to them. There is not a shortage of qualified teachers - except in certain disciplines - but there is a shortage of qualified teachers

willing to take up appointments throughout the State. I recognise that we must continue to raise the status of teaching and attract talented young people into teaching.

In 1996, this Government agreed to a substantial boost in teaching salaries of 15 per cent. Teachers' salaries have increased by 21 per cent since 1996. I have repeatedly told the State School Teachers Union and other teachers that I am committed to continuing real increases in teachers' salaries. This Government will continue to maintain teachers' salaries above the rate of inflation. The latest offer we have made to teachers maintains that. We will continue to maintain and raise teachers' salaries in real terms. That is not all we will do. Money is important, but it is not the only thing.

Mr Carpenter: You are offering 3 per cent.

Mr BARNETT: We are offering 6 per cent over two years, above the inflation rate.

Mr Carpenter: That is 3 per cent a year.

Mr BARNETT: We are offering that, plus a lot more.

Mr Carpenter: Plus what? You are taking things away.

Mr BARNETT: Permanency is one of the three biggest issues teachers have raised with me.

Mr Carpenter: You are taking away their bereavement leave.

Mr BARNETT: The member is continually interrupting. I do not mind interjections, but these are continuous.

Mr Carpenter interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Hodson-Thomas): Order! The minister has the floor.

Mr BARNETT: In the past one or two years, 828 temporary teachers gained permanency. By the end of next year, a further 1 060 teachers will gain permanency in the state education system. The State Government is allocating \$9.8m a year for professional development. In 1998, we created the Centre for Excellence in Teaching.

Mr Carpenter: What is that - \$50 a teacher a year?

Mr BARNETT: There are 20 000 teachers. The member can do the calculations.

Mr Carpenter: It is about \$500 a year.

Mr BARNETT: We have acted on the suggestion of the State School Teachers Union. We have reduced class sizes to an average of 28, and they will be further reduced in early childhood areas to 24 in 2004. We have provided extra duties-other-than-teaching time for primary teachers.

Mr Carpenter: No, you have not.

Mr BARNETT: Yes we have. We have provided an extra 20 minutes.

Mr Carpenter interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Many people in this Chamber would like to hear what the minister has to say. I ask the member for Willagee to stop interjecting so that people can hear the minister.

Mr BARNETT: The State Government introduced the remote teaching service, which addresses a quality of education issue. The service, which provided extra permanency, career and financial incentives to teachers, reduced turnover in remote schools from 85 per cent to 30 per cent in one year. That is quality of education. That is stability. We have also introduced a country incentive package. About 85 per cent of temporary teachers remained in a country incentives school. We have stabilised teaching numbers and conditions in country areas. In conjunction with the Minister for Housing, we are spending \$43m on 343 additional houses and units for teachers, 80 per cent of which are replacing old houses. When I started visiting schools five years ago, the most commonly raised issue was that of the quality of teacher housing. This Government has done something about it. A host of other things are being done to provide career incentives. We are about to offer teachers improved maternity conditions.

Mr Carpenter interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: We are discussing an education issue. I thought the motion was important to the Opposition.

Mr Carpenter: I wanted to speak uninterrupted but the minister would not let me.

Mr BARNETT: I will conclude now. I wanted only 15 minutes to speak.

Mr Carpenter: That is pitiful. You are the Minister for Education.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BARNETT: The reason I am speaking for only 15 minutes is that a good number of government members are here.

Mr Carpenter: You are the minister.

Mr Thomas: Not one of them is listening.

Mr Minson: The member for Willagee will not let me.

Mr BARNETT: This Government has an outstanding record of increasing expenditure in all schools and for all children, in both government and non-government education. We have been innovative. We have introduced new curriculum. Curriculum is the core of learning and of improving education. Nothing is more important than the curriculum. We have introduced the early childhood program. We have introduced universal schooling for 5-year-olds and kindergarten-age students. We have improved a range of terms and conditions for teachers through the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and the like. We have revolutionised middle schooling. We have undertaken an enormous capital works program throughout the State. We have introduced \$100m of new technology. We are updating schools. We have spent more than \$50m a year on school maintenance over the past five years and upgraded facilities throughout the State. The Opposition stopped doing program maintenance while it was in power. It did only emergency maintenance. That was the sort of legacy this Government inherited.

Mr Carpenter: What is the Government's accumulated maintenance cost?

Mr BARNETT: We are spending \$50m a year. Does the member want to know what the Labor Government spent?

Mr Carpenter: What about the teachers and the students? You talk only about the buildings and the curriculum.

Mr BARNETT: We will talk about the students. I will ask some of the government members who have taken an interest in education to talk about Aboriginal education; boys' education; what we have done for students at risk; what we are doing for students with disability problems; what we have done in the early childhood area; what we are doing in literacy areas; what we have done for rural education; the developments we have under way in vocational education; and what we have done with new technology in schools. That will take a while, because this Government has done so much. I want the member for Willagee to hear from the backbench members of Parliament about what is happening in our schools and what this Government is doing.

**MS ANWYL (Kalgoorlie) [5.17 pm]:** I think it is time we looked at the statistics. It is all very well to talk about the money this Government has or has not spent. The member for Willagee made the point that the Government talks only about buildings, computers and housing for teachers.

Mr Omodei: You have not been listening.

Ms ANWYL: It is important to look at the statistics. One of the reasons members on this side of the House are monitoring spending in government and non-government schools is that they are so concerned about the differing outcomes of those schools, of which the minister is well aware. Figures provided by the Minister for Education in this Parliament last year show that in 1998, the state retention rate of year 12 students in government schools was 60 per cent, whereas the retention rate in non-government schools was 79.4 per cent. We should focus on why it is important to make sure equity exists between government and non-government school sectors. It is important because they are providing different outcomes.

Dr Turnbull: Of course they do.

Ms ANWYL: "Of course they do," says the member for Collie, "It is meant to be that way. It is written in the Bible that children who go to private schools should have a better chance of staying on to year 12". Is that what the member is saying?

Dr Turnbull: I am not saying that. I will explain when I get my turn.

Ms ANWYL: I look forward to that. It is important to look at the percentage of students in the government and non-government sectors staying until year 12. Not everybody has access to non-government schools. I acknowledge many good non-government schools do not charge high fees, although the minister described those as having inferior facilities. I acknowledge that there are some modestly priced private schools in this State. However, not everybody can afford them. In my electorate, a significant number of people might like to send their children to non-government schools, but they cannot afford to do so. We must put this into perspective.

Mr Omodei interjected.

Ms ANWYL: I will not answer questions because I do not have time to deal with the inane interjections from -

Mr Omodei: No, this is a very important interjection.

Ms ANWYL: All right, one interjection, and it had better be good.

Mr Omodei: Do you know of any Catholic schools that have turned away students because their parents could not afford to pay?

Ms ANWYL: I know of a lot of parents who would not put themselves in the position of having to seek what they consider to be charity and who would not be prepared to put their families in that position.

Mr Barnett: Is there a Catholic school in Kalgoorlie?

Ms ANWYL: There are several. I am surprised that the Minister for Education does not know the answer to that, in that targeted marginal seat.

Mr Barnett: Those people will not be too happy with this speech.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Hodson-Thomas): Order, members!

Ms ANWYL: So far, I have quoted the Minister for Education. He is the one who said in this place that some of those facilities are inferior. In comparison, he talked about some of the remote areas of the State. I have just acknowledged that when it comes to outcome rates, non-government schools tend to have better retention rates and better academic rates. That is the reason everybody sends their children there - let us be real. Apart from the religious education side, which I acknowledge is important, there is also the consideration of the outcomes. Let us be honest and up front about the reason children go to those schools. The quality of the Catholic schools in my electorate is very high.

Mr Barnett: So you support the member for Willagee that funds to Catholic schools should be cut? That seems to be what he is saying.

Ms ANWYL: That is a ridiculous question from the Minister for Education. I was interested when the minister said earlier that we could have this debate for two weeks, because the sad fact is that in this House we rarely have a rational debate on important issues like education. It is not the Opposition's intention to cut funding for non-government schools. Perhaps the next time the minister is in Kalgoorlie, which I believe will be July when the Cabinet is there, he would like to visit some of the non-government schools in my electorate. Only this week I visited John Paul College, which is a secondary school. There is also St Joseph's Primary School and St Mary's Primary School. All of those are excellent schools. The fact is that those schools have better educational outcomes on the whole for a variety of reasons, which I do not have time to go into.

I referred previously to the comparison between retention rates to year 12 for government schools of 60 per cent and non-government schools of 79 per cent. That is a 20 per cent or a one in five difference, if one likes, between students staying on until year 12. That 60 per cent rate for 1998 is not the situation in many country areas. We are not talking here about the actual academic performance in the tertiary entrance examination; we are talking about retention rates; that is, students who stay at school. The figures at which I am looking were provided during the course of the estimates committee hearings. They are based only on semester 2 student enrolments, so they do not provide the true picture through to semester 4. In the high schools in my electorate, there has been a sharp decline in the number of male students completing year 12. In 1993, 40.8 per cent of year 8 students made it to year 12. That declined in 1999 to 29.3 per cent. Therefore, there has been a drop of just over 11 per cent. That is a very important issue to address.

I have been a supporter of the Education Department's decision to establish a senior college on a collocated site with Curtin University of Technology. One of the main reasons I have supported that is that I have done some homework - not as much as I would like - with educators around the nation, who suggest that this sort of scheme has an impact on retention rates. I read in *The Australian* only this week that my electorate has one of the highest per capita incomes in Australia, and certainly in this State; yet only 29 per cent of our young men make it to year 12. That is a significant issue. The overall rate is better for girls. I know that that is not a phenomenon that is restricted to my electorate; these trends are statewide. For girls, there has been an improvement from 1993 to date. That has gone from 41.7 per cent to 59 per cent. Therefore, the rate is much higher for girls. It can be seen that girls have a three times better chance of completing year 12 than boys. The overall rate is fairly static. The Minister for Education will probably be interested to know that since 1993 when it was 41.3 per cent - that is for both sexes - it has gone up to 42.3 per cent, so there has been a slight improvement over that six-year period. I hope that the development of the senior college will result in a marked improvement in the retention rate.

When I raise this issue, as I did during the estimates committee hearing on Employment and Training, I am often told that I am focusing too much on year 12 retention rates and that I should consider all the traineeships and other opportunities available to young people in my electorate. As a result of the estimate committee hearings, I have some figures for the goldfields-Esperance region relating to apprenticeships. As we know, certainly the mining industry tends to be a fairly male-dominated area, although, of course, other apprenticeships are dominated by women, such as hairdressing. When these statistics are married together, it is important to note that in the goldfields-Esperance region, for the financial year ending 30 June 1998 there were 224 apprenticeships, and at 30 June 1999 there were 223, so it was static. However, for the current financial year, as projected, the number is 125, so it has almost halved. Clearly, those boys who are not staying at school are not going into apprenticeships because those numbers have dropped sharply as well.

That leads to an interesting question. There can be all the new buildings in the world, but if the levels of resourcing within them are not adequate, there will be significant problems. There is a clear need for a facility in Kalgoorlie to cater for disruptive students. Many students are suspended and excluded from school, and there is no facility to which they can go. For Aboriginal education in particular, but also for non-indigenous education, there is a need to improve the resources available for primary school students who have difficulties with literacy and numeracy. There are many of those students. One need only talk to high school teachers. Government or secondary college non-government school teachers all speak of the challenges that confront their students, particularly Aboriginal students. It is not uncommon for students who are starting year 8 to have year 1 literacy skills. The statistics on Aboriginal education show that an Aboriginal boy in my electorate starting year 8 has a 1 per cent chance of getting to year 12, let alone completing it. That is a horrifying statistic. East Kalgoorlie Primary School does a wonderful job with many Aboriginal children who are at educational risk. The sad fact is that many of those children do not even complete year 7, and I am told by that school that very few of them will even get to year 8.

Frequently, students come from the central lands area, but they are too old to attend East Kalgoorlie Primary School and they will probably be around for only a short time. They have a desire to be at school, but no school can adequately cater

for them. Clearly, if a separate facility were available to focus on the literacy and other needs of those students who are either excluded from school or who will be available for schooling for a short time, that would be in the interests of all students.

The minister also mentioned that all schools have early childhood education facilities. The oldest school in my electorate, Kalgoorlie Primary School, does not. It does not have a four-year-old program. I am told that funds have been set aside in next year's budget for that purpose. However, I make that distinction because that is affecting the enrolment numbers at that school. As that is the oldest school in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and is also a very high quality school, as are all of the schools in my electorate, it is important that its future be assured with the establishment of a four-year-old program as soon as possible.

I have talked about students in my electorate, but further afield in the more remote areas the problem is even worse and many students do not access the full complement of secondary education. With the development of the senior college it is absolutely vital that the Government put some money towards the establishment of a country hostel facility. No state government funding is being put to that end in Kalgoorlie-Boulder at this time. There is an isolated children's hostel, but that is largely run from funds that are raised by parents, and some limited federal funding has been made available recently.

I wish I had more time to address these issues, but I stress that there has not been an improvement in the retention rates of eastern goldfields students, particularly boys, although there has been a marked improvement for girls and a slight improvement since 1993 overall. The issue of male education will need to be addressed. It will not be addressed by buildings. It must be addressed by resources.

**MR TUBBY** (Roleystone - Parliamentary Secretary) [5.31 pm]: I listened with a great deal of interest to the member for Willagee. It is a great shame that he did not come into this place 12 years ago, because the speech that he made today should have been given in his party room 12 years ago. The member for Willagee said exactly what I was trying to say in this place 12 years ago. When we came into government, the two major areas that we had to address were buildings and the maintenance of those buildings, and the need to make it a little more equitable for parents to send their children to non-government schools. We focused on those two areas and addressed them very quickly. In the last three years that the Labor Party was in government, the then Minister for Education, who I think was Kay Hallahan, borrowed \$20m for a three-year program to address the enormous backlog of maintenance in government schools. The situation was absolutely appalling. The toilets were atrocious. There were no covered assembly areas. The roofs of the schools were leaking. New schools were desperately needed all around the State. The condition of the staffrooms and administration blocks in schools was appalling. It has cost us a lot of money and it has taken us a long time since we came into government in 1993 to improve those areas.

Mr Carpenter interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Hodson-Thomas): Order, member for Willagee! I am normally a very patient and tolerant individual. The member for Kalgoorlie had one interjection. I ask the member for Willagee to allow the member for Roleystone to speak without interjection.

Mr Carpenter: He is addressing me directly. He is addressing his comments to me and is asking me to respond.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The member for Roleystone may like to address the Chair.

Mr TUBBY: As I was saying, the situation was quite appalling with regard to the buildings and the maintenance of those buildings, and also with regard to the equity that was provided to parents to allow them to make a real choice between sending their children to a private school or a government school. Since we have been in government, we have increased the recurrent funding to non-government schools from 19 per cent of the cost of educating a child at a government school to just over 26 per cent, as the minister said. We aimed at 25 per cent, and we have gone a bit past that this year. Those were two of the key issues, and we have addressed them.

If the member went to any of the schools in this State and asked them what the minor works and maintenance programs were like 10 years ago and what they are like today, they would tell him there is a vast difference. New and well-maintained school buildings can be found throughout the length and breadth of the State. That is not to say, as the member mentioned, that that solves all the educational problems. It does not solve all the educational problems. The member knows and I know that it takes teachers to solve educational problems.

Mr Carpenter: I do go to the schools. Twelve years ago is 12 years ago. Today is today. Today, 63 schools in Western Australia have reported that they have unhygienic conditions because of the poor standard of cleaning. That is today.

Mr Barnett: All you do is rubbish government schools.

Mr Carpenter: You are the ones who put in place a system which has resulted in 63 schools reporting that they have unhygienic conditions. This is not 12 years ago. This is 2000. Let us talk about what is happening today.

Mr TUBBY: Today, schools are far better off with regard to maintenance. When the Labor Party was in government and I was the principal of a local school in the metropolitan area, it took me three years to get a roof fixed so the water did not leak down the wall and into the art room. They kept having to come back with a tube of Silastic and put in more Silastic until we almost had a Silastic roof. However, they could not address the real problem because they never had the money to do it.

Mr Carpenter: That is unacceptable.

Mr TUBBY: It is absolutely unacceptable, and I kept telling the Government of the day that it was unacceptable, but it did not make one bit of difference. That is why I decided to get into politics and do something about it, and we have done a lot about it.

A few years ago we had a problem with girls' education, because girls were not performing as well in science and maths at school as boys. We focussed on that, and girls' achievements in education are now outstripping that of boys; and there is plenty of statistical evidence to demonstrate that. In year 3, 90 per cent of girls and 83 per cent of boys attained or exceeded the benchmark in literacy, and 88 per cent of girls and 86 per cent of boys attained or exceeded the benchmark in numeracy; so in numeracy they were almost equal. In past years, boys were much better at numeracy and girls were much better at literacy. We have improved the level for girls, but unfortunately boys have dropped behind. In year 5, 89 per cent of girls and 80 per cent of boys attained or exceeded the benchmark in literacy, and 87 per cent of girls and 87 per cent of boys attained or exceeded the benchmark in numeracy.

We often find when we go to school presentation nights at the end of the year, particularly senior high school presentations, that no boys receive major awards. I agree wholeheartedly with the member for Willagee that we do need to address that situation. In 1999, the top tertiary entrance examination prizes for chemistry, applicable mathematics, economics and accounting went to girls. This area used to be strong for boys, but girls have taken it over. Physics and calculus were the only maths and science prizes secured by boys.

Mr Osborne: Yes - Michael Osborne from Bunbury!

Mr TUBBY: In Western Australia last year, the retention rate in years 8 to 12 for girls was 77.5 per cent across all schools, and for boys was 65.8 per cent, which mirrors the 12 per cent difference quoted in a report that was published called "Boy Troubles". There is no question that we do have problems and we have always had problems. There are a number of reasons for that. Some of those reasons are biological. Boys mature much slower than girls -

Mr Carpenter: Has this biological problem happened only in the past few years?

Mr TUBBY: No. It has always been the case.

In maths and sciences, it is not that boys have dropped away but that girls have improved, because we have made a concentrated effort to improve girls' performance in the areas of maths and science. However, we have not managed to improve significantly boys' performance in literacy and numeracy. Because boys mature more slowly than girls, they do not pick up their reading skills at an early age and drop behind. There is a range of reasons that boys are under-achieving at literacy and numeracy in schools. That matter needs to be addressed, and many schools are addressing it. The boys who have a problem need to be identified and given extra tuition. Schools know that the problem exists, and they are dealing with it. There is no way that we can introduce, as the member for Willagee seemed to suggest, some policy from a centralised perspective that will cover all situations in all schools from Wyndham to Esperance and all parts in between. We do not do that sort of thing any more. We do not have the centralised bureaucratic control of our schools that we had 20 years ago. The Labor Government started to move away from that approach and say to the principal and staff, "Your educational problem is within your area and you have to address it. We will provide the resources, but you have to allocate those resources accordingly and target the educational needs of your school." From the central point of view, we are not going to tell schools how to suck eggs, because the eggs in Kalgoorlie are different from those in Willagee or in my electorate of Roleystone. All schools have completely different situations that need different solutions, and it is up to the schools to find those solutions, given the resourcing that is provided to them.

From a state perspective, we can do something, and we are. For example, middle schooling provides an opportunity for boys to undertake programs that are more in tune with the way they think and the things in which they are interested. They are in smaller classes and the focus is on need, not tertiary entrance examination scores and years 11 and 12; the focus is on years 8, 9 and 10. The State Government has established middle schools and developed middle-schooling principles at many government schools, including Belmont City College, Yule Brook College in my electorate, Ballajura Community College and Geraldton Secondary College. New schools that will incorporate middle schooling include Shenton College, Cannington Community College, Halls Head Community College - Coodanup and Mandurah Senior High Schools will revert to middle schools - and Eastern Goldfields High School. These are areas in which the Government is changing the system to address some of the problems mentioned.

As the member mentioned, some Western Australian schools will have single-sex classes. In some cases that works well and in other cases I have my doubts.

A considerable amount of time and money is also being spent on professional development. It is being offered to school administrators, teachers and district office staff to maximise educational outcomes for boys. EDWA is working with the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research on gender issues in education, and specifically strategies that reduce risk and enhance protective factors for boys.

There is no point trying to transform our schools into masculine environments in which boys will be able to achieve better results. If we do that in a coeducational setting, it will disadvantage girls. We must find different solutions for a problem that is becoming even more real. One of the reasons this problem has emerged is that we are finding it very difficult to attract males into teaching, particularly in primary school. Young boys therefore have no male role model in that environment.

Mr McGowan: What are you doing about that?

Mr TUBBY: That is a good question. What can we do? When I started teaching 35 years ago, male teachers were paid more than female teachers. That situation was changed in the 1960s. We implemented equal opportunity legislation and women earned the same as men. It became a very attractive proposition for women to go into teaching. What do we do to attract more men to teaching? In the past we have provided special promotions in country areas, but that is no longer done. We might be required to reinvent the wheel and provide more funds to employ the teachers we require in particular schools. If we cannot attract males into teaching, perhaps we should pay them more. That would be very unpopular, but a future Labor Government might like to introduce such a policy. I do not know what else we can do to attract more males into the primary teaching area. It is a difficult issue, but one that must be addressed.

There is no question that Aboriginal students do not achieve the same level of education as the rest of the population. That is not from lack of trying. This State spends \$105m each year on Aboriginal education and a range of initiatives has been put in place. Aboriginal children are collected from home in the morning and taken to school, where they are showered, given clothes and breakfast and then educated. At the end of the school day, they change their clothes and are taken home again. That is a very expensive way to educate, but if that is what it takes to get Aboriginal children into schools and to raise their level of education, that is what this Government will do.

During the Estimates Committee, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs informed members that Aboriginal townships were being landscaped and that swimming pools were being constructed. However, children cannot use a pool if they do not go to school. That is a good incentive. We must find more positive ways to get children into school. Once they are there, we must devise specific programs.

Aboriginal children learn differently from other children. They like to touch things; they learn by feeling. If a teacher puts felt letters on a board, they can touch them and learn. They also draw in the sand. Unlike the rest of the population, they are not very good at abstract learning. Therefore, we must devise specific strategies for them.

Mr Barnett: They are very good with computers.

Mr TUBBY: Yes, they are very good with computers because they can touch, feel and see what they are doing.

We must be more proactive in getting these children to school. Once we have them there, we must provide teaching strategies that will allow them to learn and to develop their skills. The Department of Education is devising programs for Aboriginal children. The minister has mentioned that a special Aboriginal government school will be established at Midland at a cost of \$4.5m. I do not know whether that will be the complete solution; I do not think it will be. However, it is part of the solution. If it is successful - I hope with all my heart that it is - perhaps it can be replicated in other places around the State. We must try everything.

The Government is not backward in coming forward in the education of boys or Aboriginal children. However, the situation cannot be changed overnight. We started from a low base in 1993 and we have made huge inroads into the problems we inherited, but we still have problems. Like the health sector, we will never solve all the problems in the education sector. There will always be challenges and we must adapt our budgets and devise new strategies for identifying and overcoming the problems.

**MR MCGOWAN** (Rockingham) [5.47 pm]: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Educating our children should be the No 1 government priority. I attended state public schools and I was fortunate enough to go on to further education, and it has served me very well. Governments must ensure that all children have the opportunities that we in this place have enjoyed. That is why I endorse what the member for Willagee has said. It had passion and force. The member talked about equality of opportunity between the sexes and high school retention rates. The number of children completing year 12 is now lower than it was when I finished my secondary education. The ambition of every generation should be to make the country better for the following generation. It has been about a generation since I finished high school. It is extremely important that we make the education system better rather than worse. What the member for Willagee said was correct. I am very disappointed that this Government has not addressed this issue.

I will mention an issue that I have mentioned a number of times in this place. The minister has heard me speak on this topic previously. I will not refer to class sizes or retention rates but to school sizes. Anyone with an interest in education knows that the size of a primary school is a determining factor in a child's educational achievement. Having the right size schools makes a big difference to the way in which children achieve. Earlier today I read a study conducted in the United States that stated that excessively large primary and high schools can have disciplinary problems. Any parent will say that one of their most significant concerns in education is discipline in schools. Primary schools with large numbers of children can see a breakdown of discipline of the children who attend those schools. School size is not an issue for the vast majority of members in this Parliament. It is an issue only for those members who represent outer metropolitan, fast-growing areas, such as my electorate. There are probably 10 members in the lower House of this Parliament who represent those outer metropolitan, fast-growing areas which have high numbers of residents with school age children, particularly young working families whom I represent. School size in those areas is a significant issue. My electorate of Rockingham provides the most graphic example of school sizes in the whole State. What I have to say is a serious allegation: The Government's decision on where to build new schools in this State has been totally politicised in the cabinet budgetary process. I absolutely believe that and I have evidence with me to prove it.

Mr Barnett: Okay, prove it. What you are saying is tantamount to an allegation of corruption, so you had better be very secure about what you are saying.

Mr McGOWAN: I am able to prove it right now with facts and figures.

Mr Barnett: Let us see your proof that we politicised schools.

Mr McGOWAN: On a number of occasions I have pleaded, begged and written to the minister, called his office, supplicated myself, met him and done everything to raise this issue with him. To his credit, he came to Rockingham and had a look -

Mr Barnett: That is right, more than once.

Mr McGOWAN: I did not believe the minister would come to Rockingham but, to his credit, he did. I have done everything possible to raise with the minister this issue relating to the suburbs that I and the member for Peel represent. Nothing has been done. I have been raising this issue now for three and a half years and the minister has done nothing.

Mr Barnett: That is not true.

Mr McGOWAN: Every year I open the budget in the hope that the issue will be addressed in the suburbs I represent. However, there has been no mention of it as yet. For the interest of members I will refer to the figures. I asked a question in Parliament more than a year ago about the largest primary schools in Western Australia. I called the schools concerned and the figures are roughly the same now as they were a year ago. The largest school is East Waikiki Primary School, which I share with the member for Peel, with 987 students. It is expected to increase to 1 009 students, according to the latest figures compiled by the Peel Education District Office. How many members in this place represent a primary school of that size? No other member has a school of that size in his or her electorate.

Mr Barnett: The member for Ballajura has one.

Mr McGOWAN: That is a good point. The member for Ballajura has a large school in her electorate with 70 students fewer than East Waikiki Primary School. However, the minister's point would be valid if it were the only one. However, the fifth largest school in this State is Koorana Primary School, which I again share with the member for Peel, with 853 students. The sixth largest school in the State, Charthouse Primary School, has 850 students?

Mr Omodei: What are the second, third and fourth largest schools?

Mr McGOWAN: That is a good point. South Ballajura Primary School has 929 students and Canning Vale Primary School has 840 students. I note a new school is being built in Canning Vale. Clarkson Primary School has 858 students. I note a new school is being built in that area. The member for Warren-Blackwood should not ask questions if he does not know the answers.

I now refer to the 34 demountable classrooms in these primary schools. East Waikiki Primary School has 14 demountables. The school was built for nowhere near the number of children in those classrooms. If members were to look at that school they would see it jam-packed full of primary school children. Of the six largest schools, three are in one small pocket. There are 554 primary schools in this State and the twenty-fourth biggest, Cooloongup Primary School, is just outside that pocket with 700 students. I imagine that three-quarters of the Liberal Party backbenchers opposite would not have one school in their electorates with 700 students.

Mr Minson: Some of the towns in my electorate do not even have that many people.

Mr McGOWAN: I am glad the member for Greenough is on my side. Obviously, the minister thinks differently. He believes that the way in which one's parents vote determines where a new primary school is built.

Mr Minson: Small communities have problems too, which I will talk about.

Mr McGOWAN: Absolutely, and I know there is a new primary school in Burekup in the member for Collie's electorate which services a couple of dozen students. Good on the member for Collie; it is a good thing that she has a new school there.

Dr Turnbull: I will have the member for Rockingham know it has 120 students; that indicates how it has expanded.

Mr McGOWAN: Good on the member for Collie. It is one-ninth the size of the largest school in my electorate; and next year her school will have another student. Well done!

Mr Bradshaw: Do you know why the Burekup school was built?

Mr McGOWAN: I know the member for Collie was an advocate for it.

Mr Bradshaw: It was because the white ants ate the other one.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Hodson-Thomas): Order, members! The member for Rockingham has the floor and I have shown a great deal of patience today.

Mr McGOWAN: The figures I have with me prove my allegation. The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party said I was alleging that he was corrupt. I cannot say that as I suppose it is unparliamentary. However, in my view, the way in which he allocates schools is tantamount to corruption because, as I said, there will soon be 1 009 students at East Waikiki Primary School. I suspect he will target my students now and probably close a school in my electorate after I have said that. The

largest school in the State has 1 009 students. The fourth, fifth and twenty-fourth largest are all within one little pocket. Despite all my pleadings to the minister and invitations to my electorate, no action will be taken in the state budget. As I indicated, there are 34 demountable classrooms in three of these schools.

The report published by the Peel Education District Office, which fell into my hands, states that toilet facilities for both children and female staff are inadequate and access to drinking and washing facilities for children is limited. It further states that congestion in the playground caused by increased numbers and reduced space places children in dangerous situations and places extra strain on the duties of staff to provide adequate care. The report refers to temporary classrooms having reduced the amount of recreational space, including hard court areas. Grassed areas have had difficulty coping with increased traffic. At Charthouse Primary School the oval had to be regenerated after only five years at a cost of \$6 000 and at East Waikiki a number of grassed areas had to be restored. The report goes on and on. The recommended area for an ordinary primary school site is four hectares. However, three of the largest schools in the State are in my electorate, and some house more than 1 000 students. For example, East Waikiki covers 4.1 hectares, which is the same area as other schools with the average population of 500 students. This year's budget outlines the five new primary schools including Carey Park, East Eaton, Florida, and North Quinns, all of which sit in Liberal Party electorates. I am familiar with some of those areas, and I am sure they all deserve new primary schools. However, a political decision is made in my electorate and that of the member for Peel. "No, you don't get a school." Schools in my electorate have the worst overcrowding of all in the State. It is the second fastest growing area in the WA, yet we do not get a new school. This area is growing faster than every other area of the State except Joondalup, which will have a new school at North Quinns. Every new school is to be built in a Liberal Party electorate.

Mr Barron-Sullivan: Are you saying that Carey Park and Eaton schools were the result of a political decision?

Mr McGOWAN: I said that a lot of areas no doubt deserve new schools, but government should not discriminate upon how people vote. Children are children and they all deserve a decent education. Members opposite may think that it is bad luck because someone's parents voted Labor. This is a politicisation of the process. I expected better from the member for Cottesloe, who professes to be an honourable and decent person. We have seen a terrible situation eventuate in this case.

I visit all the schools in my electorate regularly. I go to East Waikiki, Koorana, Charthouse and Cooloongup. I love visiting these schools. Each of the principals - they change a little - has been very good to me and very supportive of the school communities. The schools' facilities, ovals, changing rooms, undercover areas and classrooms all suffer from wear and tear. Build a new school in Waikiki Gardens, which is a simple solution to overcrowding. I cannot for the life of me see why the Government does not build that school as it builds new schools all the time.

Mr Omodei: Maybe it should have been built under a Labor Government.

Mr McGOWAN: I guarantee, minister, that it will happen when the member for Willagee is the Minister for Education. He attended public schools and knows about overcrowding. He has a strong commitment, and we will do something about it. I am disappointed that the Minister for Education has sat down and cannot respond to my comments.

Mr Barnett: I recognise that your schools are large. I have been out there. We have made some, albeit fairly minor, commitments to the area. You should wait and see what the Government will do.

Mr McGOWAN: Why not tell me? I have been asking the minister for three and a half years. We are becoming quite close with my asking all the time.

Mr Barnett: You called it political, but making decisions about schools is a very formal process. We are currently going through that process. If a decision is made, I hope you have the good grace to come in here and recognise it.

Mr McGOWAN: I will. The Safety Bay Primary School roof blew off, the toilet blocks came down and it sustained other damage last year. I think I congratulated the minister in here for the action at the time. The school is around the corner from where I live, and I saw the damage being fixed the next morning at seven o'clock. I congratulated the minister and gave credit where it was due. I have been asking the minister for years for these schools, but nothing has been done.

Mr Barnett: Things have been done.

Mr McGOWAN: The minister has given me cryptic answers for years. No more Russian dolls. What will the minister do?

Mr Barnett: We will wait for the formal process to reach its conclusion. I have been to the schools with and without you, and we have been done a number of things to improve facilities at specific schools. I will provide a list of the things done. As we conclude the discussions on the next round of new schools, we will see what comes from the process, which I will not pre-empt.

Mr McGOWAN: It was good. A music room was put on East Waikiki Primary School, and another temporary classroom at Charthouse.

Mr Barnett: It is different from the nothing you said. You reminded me of the music room. Do not get up in Parliament and say that nothing has been done. You ask me to go out, and I visit; we have done some specific things which you have the integrity to finally acknowledge.

Mr McGOWAN: It is a music room for 1 009 kids. Good work! However, a new school is needed.

**MR MINSON** (Greenough) [6.06 pm]: Much has been said about education, but some things were missed. I will refer to some of the government programs to help students at risk. Before doing so, I make some general points about education, which is a dynamic; that is, it is a relationship between students, parents, teachers and the use of available facilities. I have heard some comments which fill me with concern as they reduce education to dollars and cents and remove the need for a proper attitude.

I live in an area which is evolving rapidly when it comes to education. I have seen considerable change in my 12 years in this place. I reflected the other day on the role traditional occupations play in determining retention rates in schools. Interestingly, an area you and I share, Mr Deputy Speaker, has two extremely strong traditional occupations. A very strong and wealthy crayfishing sector places pressure on young people to continue to operate the family crayfishing business. Many very intelligent students who have the ability to pursue tertiary training choose not to do so as they reach a certain level of secondary education, and then go off to TAFE and work towards a skipper's ticket. Similarly, although agriculture seems to be depressed the world over, one must admit that if one were looking for agriculture in reasonable shape, it can be found in the Geraldton and northern wheatbelt areas. Pressure is applied, or an assumption is made, that children, sons in particular, will follow the traditional occupations.

I take exception to people drawing conclusions about retention rates in schools, especially in rural areas, without examining all the facts. It is a complex matter. My electorate contains district high schools, some of which have very good facilities; schools like Kalbarri primary, which have secondary education centres attached that cater to their clientele as well as they can; and senior high schools. It is not possible to make comments in a general way, as we heard today, without looking at the population of the school, and to whom it is pitched; in other words, is it pitched to satisfy local needs or to satisfy somebody who is conducting a statistical analysis? I am concerned - this was touched on by the minister by interjection - that when the government sector and the private sector are compared, for some reason schools like Hale School, Scotch College or Aquinas College are always chosen, and people want to compare those with a small country school somewhere. That is not fair. As members know, private schools are located in all parts of their electorates. Schools such as Hale School have been going for 140 years or so. They have been the beneficiaries of large bequests and the recipients of the proceeds of the hard work of foundations and so on. They have incredible facilities. However, disregarding schools like Hale School, in my electorate some private schools would kill for the sorts of facilities available in government schools. I would like the member for Willagee to acknowledge that. Some of the independent Christian schools and Catholic schools particularly are extremely proud of what they have been able to achieve. If parents were looking for a prospective place into which to book their child, and they compared those schools with the government schools, they would say that the government schools are far better equipped. Therefore, let us not distort the facts.

I draw the attention of the House to the support for students at risk. Statistically, we know that about one in five students is at risk. That has not happened magically. Because of culture, bullying, learning difficulties that perhaps are not picked up and addressed and social and economic factors, we know that one in five students in any school will feel threatened or alienated all the time or some of the time. That has been recognised for a long time. It was recognised by previous Administrations as well. People have tried to do things, and that is continuing.

I draw attention to some of the programs. The first is in-school support. Apart from the teachers themselves, who are receiving better training, school psychologists are becoming more common across schools. There are also welfare officers, social workers attached to schools and Aboriginal liaison workers. When I first visited the school in Mullewa, for example, in 1989, I remember that it had one of the highest populations of Aboriginal students, but it did not have an Aboriginal liaison officer; it did not have any Aboriginal aides. I am pleased that matter has been addressed. The student service teams that are operating are doing a good job. The chaplaincy program, of which I am very supportive, has been expanded. A couple of years ago the amount involved was \$90 000, but during the next financial year it will be increased to \$250 000. That will extend the chaplaincy program to over 70 schools in this State. If the minister does not mind, I ask that he continue to make progress with that because it is a very good program. A total of \$3.2m will be spent on the Making a difference program, which concentrates particularly on the 20 per cent of students at risk. Under that strategy, every school must have a retention and participation plan to increase attendance and to address truancy problems. Those problems have not arisen recently; they have been around for a long time. I know that because they were around when I was at school, and that is quite a while ago. Schools must have behaviour management policies that are targeted not just in a general way but to particular individuals. Good examples of that are to be found in the schools at Balga, Pinjarra and East Kalgoorlie and at the Andrew Ralph centre, which gives a full semester's instruction to try to correct some of these problems.

On the subject of specific schools, some schools are targeting students at risk. A couple of examples are the Gnowangerup Agricultural School and the Port Community High School, which is a joint public and private venture. Another program which is well recognised and well supported by everybody is the school drug education program.

I reject the notion that not enough is being done. Education is like Health: One can never spend enough. I would like the budget to be doubled, as would all members in this place, but where will the money come from and whose program would be cut to fund it? The increase in funding and the efforts that have been made during the past few years have been outlined by the minister. I congratulate him. I think he is doing a good job. There is always room for more, and we would love to see more. However, I reject the notion that standards are sliding and that nothing is being done.

**MR OMODEI** (Warren-Blackwood - Minister for Local Government) [6.15 pm]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate on education. Most of my remarks will refer to students with disabilities in schools in Western Australia. However, before doing that, I indicate to those in the House who do not know that I spent about nine and a half years at school. I went to a private school, St Joseph's Convent at Pemberton, and completed junior level. I am very proud

of that school and of all the schools in my electorate. There are about 26 schools, including government and private schools. Schools such as the Montessori school and the Forest Grove Nyindamurra Family School, which are alternative schools, do a very good job. The teachers are dedicated and the parent support is good, both in the parents and citizens associations and the parents and friends associations. The education system is alive and well.

There is a dramatic difference between the facilities and programs that were available 10 or so years ago and what is available now. Every one of those schools has had changes made to it during that time. Fortunately, it has been in the time that I have been the local member representing that district, which covers the area from Greenbushes-Bridgetown to Northcliffe, across to Augusta, at one extreme, and to Cowaramup in the north west corner. Many of the schools at Bridgetown and Northcliffe have virtually been rebuilt. There is a new school at Pemberton, and there is the Margaret River High School. They are now excellent facilities. In the Catholic schools system, I assisted to pull down the old school at Pemberton. I recall the old lunch shed in which we used to shelter when the hail was beating down in September in Pemberton. We took many unusual steps to keep ourselves warm in that school. I assisted in pulling down part of that school only a few months ago. It has been replaced by an excellent new modern school, with the assistance of the Commonwealth and State Governments. Of course, the local parents and friends association and the parish have also put a lot of money into it.

In Bridgetown, the situation is similar. Old school buildings have all been replaced in the past few years. When Steve Versteegen was the principal of the school there, he played a very important role, along with the parish and the parents and friends association. The St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is a new primary school in Margaret River. It was headed by Sister Kathleen Hancock. Steve Versteegen is at that school now. It started off with 69 children about five years ago, and now it has something like 269 children. The growth in student numbers has been significant, and I am pleased that the Government has been able to assist, not only in the construction of those new schools but also in the development of programs. The provision of new technology has been welcomed by the school community.

I am no expert on education matters. However, I am sure that the unemployment rate has something to do with school retention rates. During the 1980s when the unemployment rate was high, school retention rates were higher. At this time, when unemployment is low - almost to the stage that some country towns have full employment - and with the advent of Colleges of Technical and Further Education and other facilities to educate oneself, the retention rates are lower. We do not need to panic too much about the retention rates.

In the school complex in Manjimup, which is the centre in the eastern part of my district, the senior high school with in excess of 600 students was a 1950s building in decay. The Government spent \$6m over three or four budgets. The Government has shifted the TAFE facility so that it is adjacent to that school. The high school has a technology centre that can be used by the TAFE fraternity as well. The high school has a fully fledged industrial kitchen in which students can be trained in hospitality. They are dramatic changes. Also, the Commonwealth Government has given a commitment for what is known as a COFHE house - a centre of further and higher education - which will provide a new interactive technology facility in which, in a few years, students, even mature age students, will be able to take courses from any university in the world. The pace of education has changed dramatically. I am proud of the performance of this Government to ensure Western Australia has moved with the times, so that people have up-to-date technology in country towns in this State. I would go as far as saying there should be a bipartisan approach to education in this State. It is too important an issue to play politics with. I will now talk on the subject I wanted to talk about in the first place. I could not resist the opportunity to make sure that people who are making an excellent contribution to education in this State, particularly in my area, are recognised in this place.

The Disability Services Commission has just launched its second five-year business plan titled "Making a difference". This State has 7 900 students with intellectual, sensory, physical or multiple disabilities and also autism, who receive supported education through the Education Department. As well as increased programs for students who are deaf, blind and also specific planning for services for students with speech and language disabilities, the department has allocated in the 2000-01 financial year a sum of \$39.25m of additional funding for educational support teachers and educational assistance for students with disabilities. The commission has also allocated \$3.6m to develop inclusive education opportunities in mainstream classes for students with intellectual disabilities, and \$280 000 for improved teaching practices for students with autism. To give members an indication of the demographics, according to the 1995 Western Australian child health survey, 8 per cent of students in this State aged between five and 14 years have a disability. The commission provides extensive support to students with intellectual, physical, sensory and language disabilities. The commission has allocated \$1.5m to provide visiting teacher services to students with disabilities across the State. It has provided support, including differential teacher support, which has resulted in smaller class sizes, educational assistance time, specialised equipment to maximise students' access to the curriculum and modified the school environments.

Western Australia also has 330 students with impaired vision, and 850 with impaired hearing, many of whom do not have an intellectual disability. The commission provides a continuum of placement options available in the education of students with intellectual disabilities within government schools. For example, the commission has education support units within a school sharing a principal; educational support centres within a school but with their own principal; and educational support schools which are separate institutions. Many members will have these in their electorates. The Education Department has 13 education support schools and 43 education support centres - 18 centres have been built by the State Government since 1993 - and 251 educational support units. About 1 200 students with intellectual disabilities attend schools in rural locations where there are no educational support facilities within a reasonable distance for travel. These students attend their local mainstream school and are supported by the district education offices and the Centre for Inclusive

Schooling. Some intellectual disability students are in mainstream classes either through parental choice or the inclusion program. That program has been piloted and is now part of mainstream schools. The commission initiated the program in 1995 with six students with intellectual disabilities, and provided professional development for teachers and additional teacher support. The pilot was successful and we have built that up. In 1997, the State Government committed \$3.6m to the program which enabled 20 students to be included in the first year with a view to the progressive increase in the number of students taking part to a maximum of 50 in 2001. Demand for participation in the inclusive program exceeds the number of places available and currently 41 students participate in the program. The University of Western Australia is evaluating that program.

Other members will talk about technology and other matters. The Government has done a lot in the disability area to assist people with disabilities in classrooms. Ten years or so ago we would not have seen one person with an intellectual disability, or a physical disability, in mainstream schooling. Nowadays schools right across the State have included young people with disabilities in the school community, and they are supported by the school community. Not only are we giving those people new opportunities for education, and they have improved in leaps and bounds in their education, but also by adopting this process we have made people more aware that people with disabilities are just like them, the only difference being the disability. Our program of "See the person not the disability" has been advertised successfully across the State. The Premier launched the commission's second business plan "Making a difference" and an earlier program "Count Us In", although it was interesting that the Premier was not mentioned in *The West Australian*. I apologise to the Premier, but *The West Australian* selected the better-looking bloke. Jokes aside, Western Australia has much to be proud of in the way it has included people with disabilities into mainstream schooling in this State.

We have improved the education system over the past decade. If the member for Willagee thinks that the private school system's receiving roughly 26 per cent of its funding from the State Government is a bad thing, he needs to make that clear. I know that in the private schools I deal with which cost the State about \$2 500 per primary school student and \$6 000 per secondary school student, if it were not for the funds injected by the State those private school systems would collapse placing the full burden on the State, the result of which would be impossible to meet. Let us have some commonsense about this. A lot of poor people around Western Australia send their kids to private schools and must dip their hands into their pockets and fundraise to make sure those school stay alive. In my whole political career, I have not heard of one student who has been knocked back to go to a private school because he or she could not afford the school fees. We have a very good system; we should be proud of it. We should not be tempted into playing politics with the education system in Western Australia.

**MRS HODSON-THOMAS** (Carine) [6.28 pm]: I am sure not one person in this place would disagree with the premise that early childhood years from kindergarten to year 3 are the critical years in a child's education. Having children involved in quality education programs which focus on literacy delivered by dedicated and experienced teachers in the best possible facilities, which this Government has provided, gives children a solid foundation and a head start for their educational success and life experiences. This Government has implemented the most noteworthy expansion and meaningful reforms of early childhood education ever witnessed in Western Australia, and I commend the Minister for Education for that.

Since 1995, the Government has spent in the vicinity of \$148m to provide an additional 800 teachers and teacher aides and over 470 new and refurbished facilities to expand early childhood education in government schools. Every child in Western Australia has access to a government kindergarten. Four-year-olds can attend kindergarten for two half-day sessions a week. Members should know that the program is voluntary. Currently, 17 000 Western Australian students attend kindergarten. In 2001, that program will be expanded from two to four half-day sessions and will remain voluntary. Every five-year-old child in Western Australia has access to a four-day-a-week pre-primary program. While pre-primary schooling is not compulsory, it represents the first year of formal education and is critical for young children. In Western Australia, 21 000 students attend programs for five-year-olds. In 2002, the pre-primary program will be expanded from four to five days a week. The five-day program will continue to remain non-compulsory, but it will provide Western Australian children with a further year of full-time education.

The member for Willagee talked about class sizes. It is vital for members to understand that this Government recognises the importance of smaller classes. An independent study undertaken by Dr Peter Cuttance and Shirley Stokes in November 1997, entitled "The Impact of Class Size on Student Achievement" showed that smaller class sizes in the early years of schooling were associated with higher levels of learning. In 1999, class sizes for the early childhood years - kindergarten to year 3 - were reduced to 28. The Government has committed to further reducing those class sizes to 24.

Next year, the cut-off birth date for entry into the education system will change from 31 December to 30 June. Children born on or before 30 June will start pre-primary or kindergarten in 2001, and those born after 30 June will start their schooling in the following year. Western Australian students are among the youngest in the country when they commence school. This change will raise the average age of children in each year by six months. That will have a twofold effect: Our children will be better placed to take advantage of the expanded programs; and it will bring Western Australian children in line with the entry age of their counterparts in other State and Territories.

I know a number of members would like to speak in this debate and I made a commitment to my colleagues that I would not speak for longer than five minutes.

**MR OSBORNE** (Bunbury) [6.34 pm]: The member for Carine has won the backbench prize for hitting the five-minute target first. I will make some remarks about literacy testing and education in Western Australia. However, before that, I repeat some of the comments of my colleagues the members for Greenough and Warren-Blackwood that the problem with

a debate like this is that it tends to focus on the negative. I pity the member for Willagee, because his role as an opposition member is to attack the Government's program and make criticisms. The risk in that process is that the good tends to be forgotten. All the schools in my electorate - Bunbury Senior High School, Newton Moore Senior High School, Cooina Primary School, South Bunbury Primary School, Bunbury Primary School, Withers Primary School and Adam Road Primary School, which is the largest in my electorate - face challenges and wish they had more resources. However, they are outstanding schools. If we focus on the positive and look for the doughnut instead of the hole, we would see that all those schools have things to crow about. Bunbury Senior High School is the best school in the State for hockey and has won the state eisteddfod competition in past years, and Newton Moore Senior High School has an outstanding music education program. By focusing on the positive and looking at the great things being done in our government education system, we come away with a strong, on-balance impression that what we are achieving in government high schools in Western Australia is something of which to be proud, not ashamed.

I will specifically talk about literacy testing and programs. Literacy and numeracy programs are at the core of what any Government tries to do in education, and this Government is no different. It stands to reason that if students cannot read or do not have basic numeracy skills, they cannot access opportunities or education in any sense of the word, cannot find employment, and cannot lead fulfilling and happy lives. To unlock the opportunity for students to have a decent education, we must be able to identify those students with literacy problems and design and operate programs to address them. Schools are increasingly asked to do more. Schools are taking on responsibilities that were undertaken in the past by communities and families. The same is happening with literacy. Many members would have grown up in a family environment that encouraged them to read. Reading was a common activity in my family. Obviously, it is different today. Children in my home, and in others, watch more television and play computer games. Reading is not emphasised in families as much as it was when I was younger. The school system is asked, unfairly, to take up and rectify some of the problems associated with that. The government school system faces the responsibility of fixing the literacy problems in our primary schools. Western Australia is part of a national push to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes so that all children in the school system have access to the opportunities I mentioned. Those opportunities can be unlocked only if a child is able to read. The member for Willagee mentioned literacy and numeracy testing. The primary reason for literacy testing across Australia is that we must know the size and nature of the problem and where it is occurring before we can move forward. In 1998, the Western Australian Government was part of a historic agreement between all the State and Territories for national testing standards as part of the national literacy and numeracy plan. That national plan established and agreed on benchmarks against which students across the nation would be measured. In 1998, 24 000 year 3 students in Western Australia were tested. The Western Australian Government was the only State Government which reported the results to parents. Confidential reports were sent out to parents, showing the state average and the outcomes for boys and girls; children from non-English speaking backgrounds; and indigenous families. The reports also showed comparisons across educational districts. The testing found that 80 per cent of the year 3 students either met or exceeded the benchmarks that were established as part of the national program.

That was repeated in 1999 and was extended to year 5 students. In 1999, 48 000 students were tested, and I am pleased to say that the results were an improvement on the results for 1998. For year 3 students, 86 per cent were at or above the benchmark for literacy, and 87 per cent were at or above the benchmark for numeracy. For year 5 students, 84 per cent were at or above the benchmark for literacy, and 87 were at or above the benchmark for numeracy. In 2001, the national program will be extended to year 7 students, so next year, year 3, 5 and 7 students will be tested as part of the national program. In 2001, we will have a pretty comprehensive idea of where we are with literacy in Western Australian schools.

What will we then do about it? The member for Willagee said that some of the teachers in some of the schools that he visited were disappointed or critical and said that nothing was being done about it. I have two responses to that. Firstly, things are being done about it. An amount of \$2.5m is going every year into the learning difficulties team, and \$2.6m will be funded to the literacy net program over four years. We do have programs that are responding to the results that are being uncovered, and also the results are being incorporated in a seamless and almost invisible way into our whole approach to education. The literacy results are informing just about everything that we are doing in early education, for example.

I am disappointed at the response that was made by that teacher to the member for Willagee, because I believe teachers need to look at themselves as a profession. I said by way of interjection that teachers are also responsible for what is happening in the government education system, and if they can only see problems and refuse to accept that they at a school level need to take charge of this matter and do something about it, then no Government can do anything no matter how much money we throw at education. I used to teach in government high schools, and I went to a government high school. In fact, the member for Willagee and I went to the same high school. I am disappointed at the changes in government high schools from those days to today, because I believe that the standards are not as high as they used to be and I do not think a requirement is implied and said directly to students in government high schools these days that presentation and discipline and those sorts of old-fashioned virtues are important. I believe the teaching profession has a role to play in that. No single approach can be taken to addressing literacy and numeracy programs in our state schools. We have given the responsibility back to the school. The Government is part of the national program to identify where the problems are and to work out where a school or district is not coming up to the benchmark, and we can then ask the schools to design and purchase programs which address their specific school community, because at the end of the day they are the only ones who can make a good decision about what is best for their students.

**MR BRADSHAW** (Murray-Wellington - Parliamentary Secretary) [6.44 pm]: I would like to correct something that the member for Willagee said so that he does not run around the community misquoting -

Mr Carpenter: I am your greatest supporter.

Mr BRADSHAW: I know, and the member for Willagee has given me some assistance there, but we still do not have that ramp at Harvey railway station.

Mr Carpenter: I was wondering why I had not been invited to the opening!

Mr BRADSHAW: When we get it, the member for Willagee will be the first cab off the rank for an invitation.

The member for Willagee talked about the retention rates of students in years 11 and 12, and I made the comment that times have changed. Just so that the member for Willagee does not run around saying that I think it is a good thing that there is not a high retention rate of students in high schools, what I was saying is that some years ago, everybody thought that the best way to go was to go university and get a degree in some area. People have now found that that is not necessarily the best way to go, and many graduates from university cannot get jobs or can get only low-paid jobs, or not the jobs they expected when they went to university. Students are now voting with their feet and going into other vocations and areas such as technical and further education. Therefore, it is not as though it is all bad that retention rates are not as high as they used to be, because it is a fact of life that people are saying that perhaps they should become a plumber, an electrician or a plasterer rather than stay at school; and we certainly do not want a world that is full of only lawyers and doctors.

I also, like most members of Parliament, visit the schools in my electorate on a fairly regular basis, and I find that in general those schools are of a high standard. They are looked after quite well by the Education Department. The situation is obviously not perfect. I know that Tarcoola Primary School needs renovation and repairs, and I am pushing for that to be done. However, the other schools in general are in pretty good shape and have good facilities. Dwellingup Primary School has just had an undercover area built at a cost of about \$450 000. That made the school very happy and is a wonderful thing that has occurred.

I have found also that the teaching fraternity at the schools in my electorate is very enthusiastic; and I guess that is reflected in schools throughout the State. It is great that they are enthusiastic about their jobs and care for their students. It is unfortunate that some students do not come out the other end in the right way, and that needs to be addressed in a positive way to try to overcome that situation.

I would now like to talk about rural education. It is a fact that rural and remote students lag behind their city counterparts in some aspects of education such as participation and achievement. Only 47 per cent of rural students in Western Australia continue to year 12, compared with 73 per cent of metropolitan students. On the other hand, Perth students outperform rural students in literacy and numeracy assessments. Therefore, it is important that those areas be addressed, and the Government is addressing those areas of concern.

The other problem is the difficulty of attracting and retaining staff in country schools. In 1990, 65 per cent of teacher graduates were prepared to teach anywhere in Western Australia. That figure is now 18 per cent, so there has been a marked change in the attitude of teachers about whether they want to go to the country. It is a changing world, and I see that even in my electorate in the attitudes of people to a number of things. Service clubs are not as well patronised as they were in the past. Many of the young people who live in country towns want to get close to the water, so the young people from Harvey want to live in Australind or Bininup so that they are closer to the water and the larger centres. There is a change of attitude, and that is reflected in the teaching fraternity as well.

The Government is addressing these issues of teacher retention and attracting teachers to country areas. It is important to note that rural and remote students' access to information and education programs has been significantly expanded through technology. We are spending \$100m over a four-year program to increase the number of computers in government and non-government schools. Every school in Western Australia is now connected to the Internet, and all country schools now have digital satellite receiving equipment linking them to the Golden West Network, the Special Broadcasting Service, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Westlink programs.

The schools of the air are very important and have been around for many years and have played a vital role in the education of students in remote areas. The service provided by the five schools of the air has been improved by providing new digital equipment and upgrading transmission sites. Obviously there is a need to encourage teachers to go to country areas and also to retain teachers in country areas. A country incentives package has been introduced for teachers, and it will take some time to get this wound up so that teachers are aware of it and are prepared to go into country areas, but it seems to be working, and it is certainly a positive way to attract more teachers. These incentives will make postings to rural and remote schools considerably more attractive. We have provided \$43m over three years for around 340 additional and improved houses for teachers in rural areas. That is very important. Over the years much more accommodation has been provided for teachers. It is very important to do that, because often in the past teachers who went to country towns had to find accommodation, which was often substandard or below a satisfactory level. It is a disincentive for people, particularly if they have their families with them. If the wife is not happy, the family is not happy; therefore, there is pressure to return those people to the metropolitan area.

This is probably a federal issue, but when teachers go to the country, they lease their houses and pay tax on the rent they receive. They are living in the country and paying rent, but they do not get any tax deduction for that. That should be offset to make it more attractive for teachers to go to country areas. Often, it is a part of the job. Other people have the advantage of living in their houses and not having to pay rent. It is important that the Federal Government look at that.

Another issue is permanency. More opportunities have been provided for teachers to gain permanency by teaching in

country schools. I know permanency has been a vexed question over the years, but at least there is an incentive for teachers to go to country areas and thus have more chance of gaining a permanent position.

Another issue is country teaching practicums. Teacher trainees have been introduced via scholarships to get more teacher trainees to experience rural teaching first hand. Obviously, if teacher trainees go into the country areas, they might like it and realise that it is not as bad as they thought, so there is a good chance they will go back there to teach once they are qualified.

Rural internships for teachers in subject areas where teacher shortages are experienced, such as designer technology and computing, are now offered. Obviously, there is a shortage of certain teachers in some country areas, so the offer of internships will help with that problem. The Country High School Hostels Authority has introduced boarding scholarships for isolated school students committed to a career in the country to attract more young rural people into teaching.

Another matter which will assist rural students is the increase in the state boarding away from home allowance by 20 per cent to \$600 a year. The Western Australian College of Agriculture, made up of the State's five agricultural colleges, has been established to further strengthen the quality of vocational training offered to students. That is a new initiative which was put together this year. There are some top people in that body, which has been put together to look after those agricultural colleges.

The State Government has supported the establishment of regional university campuses in Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Albany, Broome and Esperance and has developed links between universities, schools and TAFE through joint-use facilities.

Another area of great benefit in the education system is what the Education Department has done in the Harvey area. It has acquired the Wokalup research station, which was becoming redundant to Agriculture Western Australia. There was a squeeze on the current Harvey agricultural site with the building of the new dam. The acquisition of the research station will mean there is a great future for the Harvey Agricultural College and, in the long term, more students will be able to attend that college. That is a firm commitment by the Education Department in acquiring that site. Within a short time a new dairy, as well as an abattoir, will be built on that site. At this stage there is a five-year program to relocate the students from the current Harvey Agricultural College site, because around \$15m in infrastructure is required to set up the students fully at the old Wokalup research station, which is now the Harvey Agricultural College site. It is a great thing.

As I have said, I see no problems with the schools in my electorate. They are not perfect, but I believe that they have a great standard. The quality and the maintenance of the schools has been very good. Early this year or late last year, the school at Waroona needed an extra classroom because of extra numbers. The transportable classroom, which was used as a music room, was going to be used as a classroom. People were not very happy with that, but the Education Department came up with another transportable classroom, so the music room is still there. The parents and the students are now very happy.

What the member for Willagee has said in his motion is not correct. We as a Government have done a great job in education in Western Australia. It is probably not perfect, but nothing is. We have increased greatly the allocation of funding to our education facilities. It is interesting that the member for Willagee criticised the amount of money going into private schools, and it will be interesting to see whether the Labor Party has a policy of cutting back their funding. I doubt very much that it will, because those private schools get very upset when one starts talking about cutting their funding. They have been lobbying for years to get more funding. They believe they make a great contribution to the education system in our State, and I think they do. They need to be funded to a reasonable extent to help them survive and provide that education. It will be interesting to see the Labor Party's education policy. It was also interesting that the member for Willagee griped and groaned about what is happening only in Western Australia. He failed to give any positive indication of the direction the Labor Party will take with its education policy or how it will fix what he thinks is wrong with the education system in Western Australia.

**MR BLOFFWITCH** (Geraldton) [6.56 pm]: I will speak about vocational education training in schools. In 1967, the Royal Australian Navy sent me to America to do an electronics course and to study the radars and the communications of the new ships we were going to get. The one thing that absolutely impressed me when I was there was the vocational education that was available to all service people and to anybody who wanted to attend. Most of the people with whom I went to class were doing an engineering course through vocational education, but a couple of students were doing psychiatry. That indicates the breadth of that American TAFE college.

Four years ago when we decided to form a single college in Geraldton, I spoke to the representative from TAFE and told him what was available overseas. I asked why we could not coordinate TAFE times with high school times, and he said that there was no reason we could not. Consequently, something like one-third of students at the high school are now attending TAFE courses. I know that several students are doing accountancy and have been doing so since year 8. By the time they graduate at the end of their studies, they will be fully qualified accountants. Those sorts of opportunities were not available when I went through school. Through the coordination of TAFE colleges and high schools, enormous opportunities are being offered.

Another opportunity which is offered is that a person who is in the electronics world can do a two-year electronics degree at a TAFE college, and a lot of people have enrolled in that course and are doing very well. What we have done with TAFE, the middle schools and the high schools for those people who are not interested in getting a high tertiary entrance examination score - let us face it, a lot of students are not interested in getting a TEE score - is give them an enormous opportunity to achieve something by the time they finish their schooling. I do not know of a better system anywhere else in Australia.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (15)

Ms Anwyl  
Mr Brown  
Mr Carpenter  
Dr Edwards

Mr Grill  
Mr Kobelke  
Ms MacTiernan  
Mr McGinty

Mr McGowan  
Ms McHale  
Mr Ripper

Mrs Roberts  
Mr Thomas  
Ms Warnock  
Mr Cunningham (*Teller*)

Noes (27)

Mr Ainsworth  
Mr Barnett  
Mr Barron-Sullivan  
Mr Bloffwitch  
Mr Board  
Mr Bradshaw  
Dr Constable

Mr Court  
Mr Cowan  
Mr Day  
Mrs Edwardes  
Dr Hames  
Mr House  
Mr Johnson

Mr Kierath  
Mr MacLean  
Mr Marshall  
Mr Masters  
Mr Omodei  
Mr Osborne

Mr Pental  
Mr Shave  
Mr Trenorden  
Dr Turnbull  
Mrs van de Klashorst  
Mr Wiese  
Mr Tubby (*Teller*)

Pairs

Dr Gallop  
Mr Riebeling  
Mr Marlborough  
Mr Bridge

Mr Prince  
Mrs Holmes  
Mr McNee  
Mr Nicholls

Question thus negatived.

*House adjourned at 7.06 pm*

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