

ASHDALE SECONDARY COLLEGE — CLASSROOMS

Grievance

MS M.M. QUIRK (Landsdale) [9.36 am]: My grievance is to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Education and Training. It relates to the pressing need for additional classroom space at Ashdale Secondary College in Darch. The surrounding suburbs are experiencing exponential growth and it is vital for timely measures to be taken to expand the college to cater for the inevitable demographic pressures. It is the same local population growth that led the Western Australian Electoral Commission to create the new electorate of Landsdale in the last redistribution.

I was delighted when the McGowan government announced its 2021 election commitment of \$1.5 million to expand STEM capacity at Ashdale Secondary College. However, this will not adequately address the future needs of the young people in my electorate who attend Ashdale. The college attracts a significant portion of local primary students. The cluster comprises Ashdale Primary School, with 130 year 6 students; Madeley Primary School, with 59 year 6 students; Landsdale Primary School, with 107 year 6 students; and Carnaby Rise Primary School, with 50 year 6 students. There is also another primary school in south Landsdale that will open in 2023. In addition, I am advised that 40 to 50 students from local private primary schools also enrol at the college annually.

Ashdale Secondary College has an overall enrolment of 1 780 students this year. The current permanent capacity of the school is 1 670 students. It is predicted that in 2022 the enrolment will be 1 843 students—which is a very precise figure—peaking at more than 2 200 by 2030. In practice, this has meant that a number of demountables have had to be deployed: one for home economics, another for science and a further one for design and technology/metalwork. It is anticipated that more such rooms will be needed for general learning areas in the not-too-distant future. Further, the use of demountables is impacting on the available open space for sporting activity and recreation within the school.

I should stress that, despite these challenges, Ashdale Secondary College provides an excellent academic and non-academic program for its large and diverse cohort of students. It has a strong focus on STEM and is consistently formally acknowledged for its efforts in this area, the most recent acknowledgement being receipt of the Governor's STEM awards last November for inculcating a strong STEM culture amongst staff, students and leadership teams.

The college has close working relationships with the local cluster schools I referred to. This close interaction means a seamless transition for students from primary to high school. It also embeds a consistency of approach to amplify and maximise what is learnt. The college has a strong and sustained relationship with Edith Cowan University and with educational researchers at board and governance level, and provides placement for in excess of 50 pre-service teachers annually. It is also a teacher development school for science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. Although the exceptional work in STEM should be enthusiastically praised, I should add that I have also had exposure to and thoroughly enjoyed the work of Ashdale students in both visual and performing arts. I even sat in on a forensically adept mock trial!

This brings me to the heart of the grievance. It is absolutely fundamental to the education philosophy of the McGowan government that our young people have equality of opportunity at school. That opportunity enables students to pursue the path that most interests them—a path that encourages them to excel. That opportunity may, however, be constrained by physical infrastructure. In schools like Ashdale Secondary College, limited space restricts flexibility. In turn, that may inhibit the choices available to students. Limited facilities, combined with growing and emerging needs, means that students seeking quality programs in STEM are currently overprescribed within the local community. These are the very areas where future job demand is predicted to exist.

In recent months, many in the local community have expressed concerns about the emerging lack of capacity at Ashdale Secondary College. In fact, when Minister Ellery and Premier McGowan announced the construction of the new primary school in South Landsdale in December last year, residents were delighted, but they followed up with the question, "That is terrific but will the high school be able to accommodate the additional intake?" It is a no-brainer that if favourable consideration could be given to the major expansion of Ashdale, it would receive wholehearted and enthusiastic community support. Having listened to the community, it is incumbent on the McGowan government to now act. I am also confident that the remarkable staff, headed by principal Kylie Bottcher, will embrace such an expansion and handle the attendant short-term inconvenience with their usual equanimity. They want to ensure that they can deliver to the best of their considerable abilities, not only now but also in the future.

I conclude by quoting an extract from a letter sent to me by the school's board chair, Ian Brotherton. He states —

Growth has been significant over the life of the College since 2009 and more recently over the last five years from 1530 to 1780 students. This is not only reflective of the growth in Darch and the College's local intake area but also the increasing retention rate, with 90% of the eligible students maintaining enrolment in the Ashdale Cluster of Schools ... The College hereby is achieving the vision of becoming the school of choice for our local community.

...

Continued expansion cannot be planned to be an ever increasing series of transportable classrooms that are not connected to the rest of the College and therefore not connected to the important culture of excellence that has been established.

Parliamentary secretary, I would appreciate it if you could convey to the minister in the most robust terms how important this issue is and how it requires her serious and immediate consideration.

MR T.J. HEALY (Southern River — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.43 am]: I am responding to this grievance today on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training. I thank the member for Landsdale, the local hero of her community, for this grievance and for her ongoing support of schools in her electorate, in particular, Ashdale Secondary College, which provides for families in Darch, Madeley, Landsdale, Wangara, Gnangara and Alexander Heights. I know that the member for Landsdale is very passionate about this matter and all matters that involve her local schools. I understand that she raised the matter with the minister earlier in the year and has received a briefing from the Department of Education on future plans for the college. I also understand that Minister Ellery visited the school with the member during the last parliamentary term, and she was very impressed with the school. The Minister for Education and Training recognises that there is significant growth in the local intake area of Ashdale Secondary College and that this has put enrolment pressure on the schools in that area and the existing facilities of the school.

The college was established in 2009, with permanent classroom accommodation for about 1 670 students, which was larger than the standard block size of schools during that time of 450 students. Building the school with additional capacity at the time was an indication that the government knew it would be a very popular school and a growing area. Ashdale Secondary College offers an incredible program of courses, including an approved specialist program in information and communication technology, robotics and digital technology. The department also endorses a specialised autism learning program and a specialist soccer and netball facility. The member has spoken a great deal about the amazing STEM work that this school does. As a former careers teacher who used to run careers events, I love the fact that the school provides STEM Speedy Careers for year 9 and 10 students. That is brilliant. I commend the member for her advocacy in securing \$1.5 million at the recent election for STEM classrooms at this school. There is no doubt that this is a fantastic local public school that is a school of choice in the area.

The local intake area covers multiple suburbs, as the member has said. Large pockets of land around the school are growing. This is a growing area. The member for Landsdale has done her research and the statistics are correct. A total of 1 781 students are currently enrolled at the college, with enrolments projected to grow to 2 000 students by 2025 and 2 200 students by 2030. The Department of Education actively monitors enrolment growth and residential developments at schools around the state to determine when schools are coming under enrolment pressure and when relief measures will be required. Enrolment relief can be provided at schools in a number of ways, including by deploying transportable classrooms to accommodate fluctuations at schools, adjusting local intake areas, building additional classrooms and, of course, establishing a new school. As the member outlined, the department has already deployed a number of transportable classrooms at the college to accommodate enrolment growth. Six transportable classrooms are currently onsite, providing space for about 125 students. The school has applied for two additional transportable classrooms for 2022. That application is being assessed by the department.

It is acknowledged that deploying further transportable classrooms at this college will encroach on the recreational space and playing fields. Given that the school offers incredible programs in soccer and netball academies, restricting recreation space will impact the ability of these programs to be effectively delivered. There are more than 800 public schools in Western Australia, ranging in age from new to more than 100 years old. Priorities for school upgrades and expansion is given to projects that ease enrolment pressure in fast-growing suburbs and remediate facilities at the end of their life. Upgrades and expansions to schools will be considered against those other priorities across the state. As a result of the member's advocacy, the growth at Ashdale Secondary College is acknowledged. The minister has asked the Department of Education to look at options to manage this growth in the future.

I also take the opportunity to commend the principal of the college, Kylie Bottcher, who is the wife of a principal in my electorate, Paul Bottcher. They are a great family of educators and very hardworking. I want to thank the staff and the students at the school and all the families for all the work they do. The member mentioned the board chair, Ian Brotherton, and the work that he has done working with her.

Finally, on behalf of the member for Landsdale and Minister Ellery, I wish to inform members that there is a big performance at the college next week—the production *Back to the 80's...: The Totally Awesome Musical!* I am sure everyone in the chamber wishes them good luck with their performance.