

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Mick Murray; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Bill Johnston; Deputy Speaker; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Speaker; Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Alannah MacTiernan

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS — REMOVAL OF YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES

Motion

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (a) acknowledges that the Minister for Education's plan to cut years 11 and 12 from 21 district high schools will force students to travel long distances, study through the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education or attend boarding schools;
- (b) notes that this plan will particularly disadvantage country students and has the potential to cause them to completely abandon their education at just 16 years of age contrary to the requirement for them to remain in education or training until the age of 17; and
- (c) calls on the Minister for Education to immediately reverse her decision and report to the house on how she can genuinely improve education opportunities for the students concerned.

I put this motion on notice some time ago now, but since I put it on notice things have got worse and not better. The information that has been dribbling out on this issue shows more and more what a poor plan this is. Interestingly enough, in response to some questions I have asked her on notice on this issue, the minister has said that year 11 and 12 classes are not being cut from district high schools.

Dr E. Constable: They are not.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am glad the minister has put that on the parliamentary record.

Dr E. Constable: I will put it on again and again before this is done.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Obviously, children and parents at the coalface have a very different point of view. Indeed, the ABC radio report is something very different too. A quote from ABC radio of 16 March states —

Western Australia's Education Minister Liz Constable has confirmed Year 11 and 12 courses are being cut from 21 district high schools.

Years 11 and 12 subjects have already been cut from schools including Wyndham, Dalwallinu and Wagin —

Dr E. Constable: No.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The minister can dispute it if she likes, but this is actually a direct quote from the ABC.

Dr E. Constable: And the ABC is always right!

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: What I am doing is quoting the minister something that was run on ABC radio. Did the minister attempt to correct it with ABC radio?

Dr E. Constable: Just go on.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Obviously, the minister did not take issue with it at the time but accepted it at the time, and now she has put entirely different answers on the *Hansard* record. I will go back to the radio transcript, which states —

Years 11 and 12 subjects have already been cut from schools including Wyndham, Dalwallinu and Wagin, while courses at other country schools will be phased out over the next three years.

Students affected by the cuts can either study through the School of Isolated and Distance Education, travel to the nearest senior high school or attend a boarding college.

Dr Constable insists that the scrapping of the courses is not about cost-cutting.

This is allegedly a direct quote from the minister —

“In fact, it doesn't save very much money at all but what it does do is give young people in Western Australia opportunities.”

That is not the feedback that I have had from people at a large number of those district high schools. I would also like to refer to some information that has come to hand in just the past couple of days. What we have now learnt, because Sharyn O'Neill, the Director General of the Department of Education, gave evidence before a parliamentary committee, is that her comments are at least in part at odds with what the minister has been saying. For example, the director general acknowledged that the department did not consult with parents, contrary to

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what the minister was quoted in her own voice as saying on ABC radio, when the minister said that yes, there was consultation. The director general said no. That is what she said at a hearing of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. In fact, she said that school budgets often vary and school communities were not consulted as a matter of course, and this was just another adjustment to the school budgets. Here we have the minister saying one thing and the director general saying entirely the opposite thing. The minister said that they consulted; the director general said that they did not. I have been to a number of these schools and spoken to parents and people from parents and citizens associations; in fact, I have had letters from a number of the P&Cs. In all that correspondence and in all those talks parents have told me that they had not been consulted. One has to ask what good that minister's word is when she has perhaps had a little attack of the Tonys.

This affects an enormous number of very, very small communities. As a little hint, the minister might in respect of her admission on cuts also look to the written information provided by her chief of staff to the ABC in the formulation of that news article. She might like to correct the record there and apologise to the people from the ABC for suggesting that they made a mistake and that they did not get her story right. The first school I will deal with is Gingin District High School. That school's P&C has written to Margery Evans of the Department of Education. That correspondence was copied to the minister and me and several other people. Let us put on the record what the Gingin P&C says is happening with years 11 and 12 at its school. This letter is from the president of the P&C, Sue Moir. She writes to the department —

I am writing to you on behalf of Gingin District High School P & C Inc. in relation to the phasing out of the Senior School Allocation funding.

The P & C is extremely disappointed with this decision and asks that you reconsider based on these issues:

1. Number of students currently doing SIDE at Gingin District High School (GDHS)
2. Overwhelming success of this program
3. Facilities and equipment already in place for all SIDE students
4. The inappropriate alternatives due to transport, distance and location
5. Commitment to existing programs from parents and the community
6. The difference between country students needs to those of metro students.

She details in the letter the number of students in each of those year groups. The minister, in response to this, has often talked about classes of under 10 not being viable. Just out of interest, the 2010 number of enrolled students quoted here by the P&C president for year 11 is 14 and for year 12 is 14, so that is a total number of 28 students in year 11 and 12 in 2010 at Gingin District High School. The president of the P&C goes on to say —

The program started at GDHS in 2000 and goes beyond academic achievement as it also allows the offering of transition programs into the work force. As the leaving age has been raised to 17, all students' needs must be met. Therefore there are modified courses for disengaged students who are cared and catered for on an individual basis.

Our current program is extremely successful. In 2009 ALL students completed their courses and graduated or achieved a Certificate level in qualification. This is because all students:

Were well supervised and supported by staff

Worked very hard

Had a safe environment to study in

Utilised excellent facilities at the school

Had well equipped classrooms with computers per each student

Wanted to study and succeed

Over the years many students have received several awards for their efforts from the community and different Government Departments. For example just last year one student won the Edith Cowan Citizen Award another student won the Premier's Vocational Education Award for WA and the Prime Ministers Award for Vocational Skills and Excellences in Schools for 2008 (the highest achieving student in Australia). The staff won a Teaching Award for a Drug Education Forum that was conducted in 2008.

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Many GDHS students have attended University and one ex student has returned to be the Chaplain at the school after completing her university studies. Other students have become teachers and returned to teach at the school.

Under the heading “3. Facilities and equipment already in place for all SIDE students” the president goes on —

Within the GDHS special classrooms have been established and all students have study areas with access to computers and their SIDE teachers. The rooms have been modified specifically for the use by our Senior Students and would not easily convert back into face to face classrooms without additional costs to the school. These classrooms were only established last year so they are not due for upgrades in the near future.

Under the heading “4. The inappropriate alternatives due to transport, distance and location”, which are particularly compelling arguments, the president of the P&C writes —

The alternative arrangements for the students are **NOT** appropriate for all students.

Alternative school suggestions: —

Bear in mind that these are suggestions for students currently attending Gingin District High School —

1. Clarkson Senior High School

This school is over 1hr 45mins away for some students living at or North of Lancelin, This precludes any student wishing to go to University as courses offered at Clarkson are not aimed for University entry.

2. Bullsbrook Senior High School

This school is nearly 2hrs away for other students.

3. Mindarie Senior High School was also suggested but even last year **our students were not accepted** due to numbers.

All these alternatives are outside of the Shire of Gingin.

New buses would need to be put in place for all of these schools. These buses would travel up the coast as far as Lancelin and inland to Wannamal. It is impractical and not cost effective.

Other options offered were hostel accommodation or boarding school. Not all parents can afford to place their children in hostel or boarding schools nor do they want to! Especially when the Department has issued literature encouraging parents to be involved in their child’s education, eg “helping your child learn to write” and “Family – School Partnerships” and this is very difficult to do when your child is living away from home.

Many of our students have been enrolled at GDHS knowing their education needs from Kindergarten to Year 12 would be met therefore students were able to build long lasting friendships and have a fantastic support network with the teachers of all years as well as the people in the community in which they live.

Under the heading “5. Commitment to existing programs from parents in the community”, the president of the P&C states —

Currently the existing program is well supported by parents and the community. Businesses approach the school asking for some students to do workplace training and after this many have been offered apprenticeships in their communities meaning children do not have to leave their families or country towns allowing our town to prosper. Many parents who are looking for a lifestyle change move to the Shire of Gingin and enrol their child/ren in GDHS knowing they can complete all their studies at the one school and reap the benefits of a close knit community.

There are then some further paragraphs on the difference between country students’ needs and those of metropolitan students. Again I will read these because they are illustrative of the kinds of comments I have received from other schools —

It is important to allow students especially Senior Students a comfortable and secure environment to study and especially in their own community with family support.. Asking a student to move from a group of approx 125 to one that has a cohort of 600 or 1200 would be very traumatic at such a young

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age especially when those already at the Senior School have established their own peer groups. Moving students from one school to another at a vulnerable age can cause devastating results

The GDHS P & C ask for the safety, educational requirements and needs of our children please reconsider your decision and in the knowledge that GDHS is a very unique school that caters for students from a variety of locations; from the coast as from Woodridge to Lancelin to inland of the Wheatbelt towns of Bindoon to Wannamal including the township of Gingin.

GDHS currently has funding for a one Teacher and one Teacher Assistant to supervise and assist the students and two face to face classes (each year this changes according to numbers) this year English and Woodwork have had face to face teaching. The financial outlay for staff does not compare to the cost of new buses.

The P & C understands funding is always an issue and if there were only 1 – 5 students we understand the cancellation of the program but at GDHS we have **28 senior students**.

The Minister – Elizabeth Constable – has argued strongly that we need to provide a complete education Kindergarten to year 12 in our schools. We already have this structure at GDHS, and we should be strengthening it, not abolishing it!

The Royalties for Regions was “putting it back into the community” not taking it away!

We look forward to your response and welcome the opportunity to discuss with you in more detail.

Last comment “If something is not broken why change it.”

That is the case in point, but the minister says that those classes are not being cut. The reality is that parents are having to face the very real option of either sending their child on a school bus for a very long journey to another school every day of the week, sometimes involving journeys of more than two hours in each direction; alternatively they are forced to send their child to a boarding school. One of the real anomalies is that there appears to have been no analysis of the real cost of providing the alternatives; for example, a school bus. In one answer I got among some questions I put on notice, the minister advised that in most cases there were buses in place anyway. But every time an issue is raised with me, that does not actually appear to be the case.

Another key point—while I am on the topic of buses—is that members will recall a situation at Wyndham District High School that was reported in the media in recent times. Wyndham was one of the first district high schools affected by the cut to education courses in year 11 and 12. It was exposed in the media that Western Australian taxpayers were paying \$250 000 a year for a bus to transport just two students. In that situation, surely it would have made more sense to continue to employ staff at Wyndham District High School than spend \$250 000 a year for two students to travel on the bus.

Mr M.P. Whitely: That’s unbelievable!

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: It is an incredible waste of money. I am advised—perhaps the member for Kimberley can tell us more about this later—that on some days there is no student on the bus. So, how much value is that for taxpayers?

Quite apart from this enormous waste of money, which contrasts of course with the Premier’s comments about belt tightening, this is just rank stupidity when it comes to education funding and precious government and taxpayers’ dollars. What is even more concerning is that this move has done exactly what we have claimed it would do: it has actually deterred students from being involved in education. The Department of Education itself has acknowledged that at least six students in Wyndham are no longer going to high school. These are 16 and 17-year-olds who were previously engaged with education. They would probably still be engaged with education if the courses were available at Wyndham District High School and if getting there did not involve an arduous bus journey in each direction. That is also worth dwelling upon. I asked the minister in a question on notice about the percentage of Indigenous students at all district high schools and I looked through the list of district high schools at which those classes were being cut. We know this, not just because we heard it on ABC radio but because the minister’s staff has provided that list. It is not because the minister put out a press release, announced it or consulted anyone, but because that information was sought and gained from her office.

The schools that have lost their year 11 and 12 classes this year include Wyndham District High School, which I have already mentioned—it has a 75.9 per cent Indigenous population—Dalwallinu District High School, which has a 19.2 per cent Indigenous population; Mukinbudin District High School, which has a 10.8 per cent Indigenous population; Quairading District High School, which has a 28 per cent Indigenous population; and Brookton District High School, which has a 14.8 per cent Indigenous population. It is not just the Indigenous

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kids at that age who can be disengaged from education and perhaps are not availing themselves of the opportunity; their parents may not have a level of educational attainment that matches some of the people in this chamber and these parents may not be in a position to homeschool their children. This applies to non-Indigenous people as well. I was speaking to a parent in Wubin who said, "I didn't finish year 12 myself. I was struggling to do year 10 or the junior certificate, whichever it was, and now I am being told that when my child finishes year 10, I could homeschool him!" That child can go on the bus to Moora each day, which the child did not want to do. I spoke to the young man, who is in year 10. He said that there is no way that he would travel on the bus to and from Moora. When one looks at the raw number of kilometres, it appears one could go there and come back in an hour or so, but that is the case only if that young man was driven there and back every day by his father or a taxidriver. The father said, "I have to work. I cannot be driving him for two or three hours a day." If he goes on the school bus, first he has to get through to Dalwallinu District High School. Once he is at Dalwallinu, he has to then board another school bus to get through to Moora District High School. The fact is that currently, as I understand it—it was certainly the case when we were in government—SIDE, or Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, students were provided with a classroom and some assistance to undertake their study at Dalwallinu. Under the minister's proposal, that is no longer to be the case.

Dr E. Constable: That's not true. That's absolutely not true.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The minister should look at the information put out by her staff. Is the minister aware of her director general's comments at the upper house committee?

Dr E. Constable: I am, and what you said about SIDE is not true.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I will put on record the other schools in this category. I think this unfairly targets all country people, but I have mentioned those Indigenous populations because it further adds to the disadvantage for Indigenous people. I watched the member for Churchlands for many years in this house as an Independent member. As an Independent member she used to wax lyrical about standards of accountability and how ministers should fully answer questions. Yet the answers I have got back from her on questions are dismissive, they do not provide the information sought and they are misleading. The member for Churchlands also waxed lyrical for years about her care and concern for Indigenous people, yet as the minister she has not put in place any policies to advance Indigenous educational learning at all.

Mr T.G. Stephens: She's one of the worst we have ever seen in this place.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The member for Pilbara well knows that Indigenous schools have been closed in his electorate, yet this minister, in answer to questions, when I ask how many schools has she closed, how much has she saved and so forth, answers that no schools have been closed. I wondered how the minister could say that no schools have closed or are proposed for closure. I thought that the member for Pilbara would be very interested in that, because schools in his electorate have been closed and are being closed. I then realised that the minister does not count schools in Indigenous communities. The schools in the electorate of Pilbara do not count because they are on Indigenous land. The minister is not taking ownership for those schools that she is closing. She is withdrawing the funds and taking away the buildings but she says she is not closing the schools. There is no school there; there was a school! The school is moving. It was a school provided by the Department of Education, yet the minister says that that school is not closing. It beggars belief. For someone who professed to care about outcomes for Indigenous children for so many years, what she is presiding over as a minister is nothing short of a disgrace. If we are to believe what she says when she says that this is not about saving money, why would she take this resource away from schools and communities that have such a high Indigenous population? We know that other schools are involved. These are all schools that involve small numbers of year 11 and 12 students, and some of them are in Indigenous communities and have a significant number of Indigenous people—others of them are in the Wheatbelt and in other smaller country towns. Again, these are communities whose results in terms of education have not been as high as they could have been. I fail to see how outcomes can be improved by removing services and having fewer year 11 and 12 students engaged in the education process. Some of the other schools affected this year—these schools obviously have Indigenous kids, but not as great a percentage as the others I outlined—are Narembeen District High School, Corrigin District High School and Wagin District High School. Schools that have lost year 11 but are still offering year 12 in the final year, I understand, are Kojonup District High School—I do not have information on all of these because the minister and her department will not put out any information about it—Gnowangerup District High School, Southern Cross District High School, Wyalkatchem District High School, Carnamah District High School—

Mr P. Papalia: You would think their local members would be standing up for them.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: They are not. There is Dongara District High School, which I will get back to in a moment. There is Boddington District High School and Gingin District High School. A couple of those schools

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are reportedly keeping their vocational education and training program. There is Wongan Hills District High School; Jurien Bay District High School, which is another school that has been in touch with me; Lake Grace District High School; and Mullewa District High School. While on the topic of Dongara District High School, the former government gave a commitment to a significant building program in the lead-up to the last election—I think it was in the order of \$30 million—and that promise was matched by government members when they were in opposition. They said that they too would spend \$30 million on Dongara District High School. In fact, at the end of last year, the minister announced the government was spending it. I was up there about a month or so ago and I could not see any evidence of any building works having commenced, despite the fact that the minister had been up there announcing it towards the end of last year. Maybe it will get re-announced in tomorrow's budget! I do not know. What I do know is that every last parent of children at that high school is asking why year 11 and 12 classes are to be cut from Dongara District High School. Compared to the other examples, it is a relatively short bus ride through to Geraldton. It would not be as arduous a trip as it would be for students in Wubin or somewhere else in the Wheatbelt, or students at Wyndham who needed to go to Kununurra. However, it is something that the kids simply should not have to do. The expectation of the parents and citizens association there was that the school would receive a significant new building program. Dongara is a growing and thriving town; why would it lose its year 11 and 12 classes? The minister might well say that there may be better opportunities on offer in Geraldton, that there may be wider subjects available in Geraldton, and that there may be some specialist courses in Geraldton—or indeed in Perth if they want to go to boarding school—but surely parents should have that choice.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Parents can and do make that choice now. If they want their child to go to a special program in the Perth metropolitan area or in Geraldton or elsewhere, they can enrol them there now. They can send them to a private school now. But some parents want to choose whether to keep their children at home. It is not like the old days. The Leader of the National Party, the member for Central Wheatbelt, says that it was good enough for him and he went to boarding school.

Mr M. McGowan: That's right; that's what he said!

Mr M.P. Whitely: You rest your case!

Mr T.K. Waldron interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: He is further adding to our case, I think!

Mr D.T. Redman: Three boarding school boys—three ministers!

Mr P. Papalia: So the parents are soft and wimpy for not sending their kids to boarding school; is that it, minister?

Mr T.K. Waldron: I will just wait to speak; sorry.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I think that in years gone by there have probably been kids who went to reform school who have done well in public life, too, but that is hardly the case in point today.

The reality is that people have much smaller families these days, and most parents do not want to send their children to boarding school. Most parents like to keep their children close and in the local community. I think that should be a matter of choice for parents, not something pushed upon them by the government. We could be talking about Dongara or Dalwallinu or towns around that area. In one country town I went to, people said that they thought this government was trying to close their town, which they found kind of ironic because they actually thought that they would benefit from the National Party being part of the government. I asked them why they thought that, and they said it was because they were having services and facilities removed from their town, and that their year 11 and year 12 classes will no longer be available.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Have you been out there?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I have been out there, probably to places that the minister has not been. They were people who provide various services in the town—without identifying people. It occurred to me that if I was a police officer or indeed a teacher or someone else in the public service—I will use the example of a police officer—would I want to go and work in these towns? Would I choose to go to work at Dongara Police Station as opposed to Geraldton Police Station if I had children at high school? I would say probably not. I would probably put in for a posting at Geraldton or Albany, or somewhere where my children could live with me and be five minutes or 10 minutes away from the local school and have that advantage. Why would police officers accept an appointment to Dongara and a house at Dongara knowing that they had to put their 16-year-old child—unless they wanted to send them to boarding school—on a bus to Geraldton every day?

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Dr E. Constable: Or they can stay in Dongara. They have a choice; lots of choice.

Mr D.T. Redman: Will you take an interjection?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Yes.

Mr D.T. Redman: Do you recognise that there are resource limits in terms of the cost–benefit approach even to education, because even in some of the most isolated rural areas we would dearly love to give every possible opportunity for a student to be educated in full?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: That is an excellent point that I am very happy to deal with, because not only do I realise that that is the case, but people in country communities realise it, too. I will use Wubin, near Dalwallinu, as a case in point. I drove through Dalwallinu, Wubin, Mullewa, Morawa, Geraldton and Dongara; I have been to all of these places in recent times. The Wubin Primary School was closed by us when we were in government because it had five students. The parents there said to me that they understood that, and that it was not too arduous for them to drive their children 10 or 15 minutes to school each day, although they would rather have had them in Wubin. They said that what was really arduous was having to either send them to boarding school—away from them—or for them to have to travel to Moora each day to attend secondary education. The fact of the matter is that there are kids in those country towns who are not particularly engaged with education, and if it is not easy and convenient, they do not want to go and want to do something else. They do not want to, are not going to, get on the bus or go to boarding school. Therefore, they get left behind. All the good work we did when in government in increasing the school leaving age to try to keep 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds engaged with education and training is now being lost because year 11 and 12 students are becoming disengaged from education.

Further to the matter of cost that the member for Blackwood–Stirling raised, I am not sure that any proper cost–benefit analysis has been done. I would like the minister to provide it. I actually asked the minister a series of detailed questions about the cost of bus services. The option is that there can either be a small number of students in year 11 and year 12 at a school, or they can be bussed elsewhere. When the costs of transportation and so forth outweigh the cost of providing the staff resource at a school, one really has to question whether that is the best use of taxpayers' money. If the member actually looks at what the Minister for Education claims to be saving by not providing these resources at a school, he will find that they appear to be, in the scheme of things, relatively small amounts of money. I think the member will also find that the cost of the school bus service, in many cases, actually exceeds the saving.

I will give members another case in point in case they have not thought about it: for people who live in a town in the vicinity of Dalwallinu, to go from Dalwallinu to Moora is really a second bus trip for a lot of kids. They have already had to go on a bus to get as far as Dalwallinu District High School. They have done the bus round, and if they live the furthest away, I am told that potentially they spend up to an hour on the bus before they reach Dalwallinu high school to board the bus to go to Moora high school. That, to me, seems fairly onerous. The other issue is that if a child has to allow, let us say, at least an hour—I am told that if there are stops along the way, potentially a child needs to allow an hour and a half or more to get from Dalwallinu through to Moora—what time will the child have to leave home in the morning? If a child wants to get to Moora at 8.30 am, presumably the child needs to leave Dalwallinu, at the latest, at 6.30 am or 7.00 am.

Mr T.K. Waldron interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Yes, but these kids will be taking two buses.

Mr T.K. Waldron: I thought it was 90 minutes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Some exceed that, member.

These children will have to make their way to Dalwallinu District High School by about 6.30 am. To do that, if they are the furthest children away and it takes, say, an hour to get to Dalwallinu in the first place, they must leave at about 5.30 am. That is quite a commitment to education—to get on a bus at 5.30 am or 6.00 am and travel on two buses for several hours, and do the same to get home every day. Those children would have to be pretty keen to succeed. A lot of parents do not want to put their children through that. Some parents I have spoken to said that they are thinking about leaving the country towns they live in. I do not see how police officers or other public servants could be attracted to want to live in those towns. Surely they want to live in the bigger towns where their high school age students have got ready access to education.

From my experience as Minister for Police, I can say that there was often a demand for postings in bigger towns that had better services, and police officers would rather live in a bigger town. If adequate year 11 and year 12 education is not provided at Dongara District High School, a police officer who has been allocated to work in

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Dongara will not make his kids spend an hour each way each day on the bus going to Geraldton and back. The police officer will ask for a police house in Geraldton and will travel to Dongara each day to service that community. Is that good for Dongara? Is that good for the smaller town? That is the practical reality of what will happen. The National Party has been scoffing at me and saying, “No, no, no; you don’t understand! We’re not seeing towns die; we’re not seeing people leave towns.” They have not really thought it through, because if they had—this is just one little example and examples could be made for very many of these situations—they would see that the reality is that if the officer is allocated to Dongara, he will not want to put his kids on the bus. He will want them to have access to a Geraldton education and a police house in Geraldton. The police department would probably comply and give him the house in Geraldton and he will be like a visiting police officer rather than being a police officer who lives in the town. I know from my time as police minister that one thing that country people really liked was having police officers actually live in their local town. That counts for a lot and it gives them a 24-hour presence.

The minister is trying to get her story right and is saying, “I did ring you; I did tell you.” She is lobbying the National Party members in their seats saying, “I told you this was going to happen and you agreed!” She is filling in the little gaps.

I received some information about the distances from the Minister for Education. I think some of those distances are worth putting on the record, so I will highlight some of them. I suppose the answer to this question on notice points out the deception in the minister’s answers. I asked the minister —

How many students are affected by the Minister’s removal of year 11 and 12 courses from eight district high schools this year?

Her response was that they have not been removed from the district high schools; therefore, they are still there and they “will continue to be staffed at formula”. There was no mention of the formula going down or being changed. I asked —

Will the Minister outline the consultations that took place for each of those district high schools?

It was already on record in the house that there was consultation, yet her answer to the question on notice is: “Not applicable. Refer to (1) above.” I asked whether a bus service had been provided in each instance. I had asked about each instance—that is, each of the 21 schools—and the minister could probably tell me about the bus service if she wanted to be fully accountable to the Parliament and to the member asking the question. However, this minister is not interested in being accountable to the Parliament; she is not answering the question. She obfuscated by saying in response —

Where required a bus service has been offered. In most instances students are able to access existing services.

There is no helpful information such as what the cost would be in a few other circumstances, and my response to that is: what does the minister have to hide?

Returning to the matter of how far students will be travelling, a student currently at Corrigin District High School—keep in mind that this is not necessarily the student’s first bus trip or distance he or she has had to travel because kids in outlying areas are already catching the number 1 bus to get to Corrigin in the first place—who wants to go to the nearest senior high school will go to Narrogin Senior High School, which is a 118-kilometre trip. Members might ask: how long does it take to travel 118 kilometres? In a vehicle it might take an hour and a half, but in a stop-start school bus it will probably take at least two hours. That is two hours in each direction; quite a hardship, I would have thought. From Dalwallinu to Moora is 92 kilometres. From Quairading District High School students are expected to go to Northam, which is 103 kilometres away. From Wyndham District High School students go to Kununurra, which is 101 kilometres. Even from Brookton to Narrogin is 69 kilometres. Looking at that people might say, “Well, maybe that’s an hour each way, not too bad” but it is not an hour each way because the school bus stops and starts, so it will take at least an hour and a half. That was about the first eight schools; so I asked how many schools are affected and what has happened with all the buses? Of course, the minister would not tell me what has happened with the buses and said that in most cases it is all okay, probably because she did not want to tell me about the Wyndham to Kununurra bus service. I asked how many students in total, by year group, will be affected over those 21 schools. Again, the minister told me that courses have not been cut from district high schools, which flies in the face of everything that parents and citizens associations are saying but again she denies it. I asked whether a bus service would be offered in each instance, and again the minister gave the same lame answer. Students at Southern Cross District High School have to go to Merredin to get to the nearest senior high school, which is 109 kilometres away. Wyalkatchem to Northam is 104 kilometres. Jurien Bay to Moora is 118 kilometres. The worst one on the list, the longest distance that students are expected to travel—this is from the minister’s own answer—is from Lake Grace

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District High School to Narrogin Senior High School, at 167 kilometres. Hands up if anyone in this chamber thinks that it is reasonable for a child to travel 167 kilometres each way each day to go to school?

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Does the member think that is good? From Lake Grace to Narrogin Senior High School it is 167 kilometres. Lake Grace District High School loses its year 11 and 12 classes and, according to the minister's answer, the nearest senior high school is in Narrogin, which is 167 kilometres away. Surely the government has to say that this plan has not been properly thought through. Surely the government must say that this plan is clearly not in the best interests of children or families.

How much money does the minister say she is saving? This is more sophistry from the minister. I asked —

How much money will be saved by not providing year 11 and 12 courses at the 21 district high schools?

The minister answered —

Year 11 and 12 courses have not been removed from District High Schools (DHS). DHS will continue to be staffed at formula.

There it goes, that little bit of sophistry, that little con, that little bit of, "Let's not tell the whole truth on this because that might actually hurt". How the member's standards have dropped! How the minister's standards have been lowered since she became a minister. This is the kind of answer that she would have caned minister after minister for and now she is doing worse herself. Most people comment to me what a major disappointment the member for Churchlands has been as the Minister for Education and I have to say that, sadly, I agree. A lot of people had high expectations and they have been well and truly dashed. My next question was —

Will the Minister please provide a list of the savings to be achieved at each of the district high schools and detail how each saving is comprised?

Keep in mind that she had just denied that anything was being removed, yet when the next question is asked about whether there are any savings, the minister has a list of savings, which kind of makes me wonder why she gave the first answer. The answer is —

The transitional Senior School Allocation was provided to support the raising the school leaving age and that is now being phased out.

Not cut, phased out; that is entirely different—not! The minister's answer continues —

Reductions in expenditure due to staffing schools at formula for 2010 are as follows (calculated using enrolment figures as at 23 March 2010 and an average salary of \$72 035):

Notably the comparison is not with 2008 or 2009 when we were in office, because I think that comparison would be worse. I will read out what the minister thinks she is saving by not doing anything. The answer stated —

Brookton DHS — saving of 0.16 FTE [\$11 526]

Corrigin DHS — saving of 0 FTE [\$ 0]

Dalwallinu DHS — saving of 0.16 FTE [\$11 526]

Mukinbudin DHS — saving of 0.16 FTE [\$11 526]

Narembeen DHS — saving of 0.08 FTE [\$57 628]

That is pretty amusing, too, because we have to think that maybe the minister needs to correct that answer. How is it that at Mukinbudin District High School the government can have a saving of 0.16 FTE—which, I will just point out is bigger than 0.08, so it is 16 out of 100 as opposed to eight out of 100—with a saving of \$11 526, but when 0.08 FTE is saved at Narembeen, \$57 628 is saved? Perhaps the minister will explain or correct that answer because something has to be wrong. We cannot save four times as much by cutting less of a full-time equivalent. The answer continues —

Quairading DHS — saving of 0.16 FTE [\$11 526]

Here it is—where has the member for Wagin gone? He has left the chamber. It is a shame he is not here for this because he suggested that perhaps we had to realise that some things were not very economical and we had to save some money, but the answer states —

Wagin DHS — saving of 0 FTE ...

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That is, zero dollars! Those kids are going to be disadvantaged, nonetheless. Wyndham District High School—a saving of zero full-time equivalents. The minister then said that there is no senior school allocation for students in year 11. I will now just say the dollar amounts rather than the FTE. In Boddington it is nearly \$75 000; in Carnamah, nearly \$75 000; and in Dongara, a miserable \$86 442. I wonder what the Speaker has to say about that? I do not think the Speaker would be very happy at all about that. There is an alleged saving of 1.2 FTEs from something the minister is not doing—she said that in part 1—and \$86 442. It is just crazy. This is chickenfeed; compare that cost to the number of students who will be forced to either go to boarding school or catch a bus, and the educational disadvantage to so many children well into the future.

At Gingin District High School, the case I highlighted in detail, there is a saving of 1.12 FTEs—\$80 679. I put on record in this house, through the excellent, long and detailed letter provided by the Gingin P&C association president, the real impact upon Gingin District High School. The minister can say that she is not actually doing anything, that we are all wrong and that nothing is happening, but the reality is that the president of the Gingin P&C has laid out the case of what is happening on the ground at her high school. Maybe the minister has received a ministerial briefing note to say that it is not happening, but there are dozens of parents on the ground who are saying that it is happening. This is having a real impact on their lives and their town, but all the minister can say is that there has been a saving at Gingin District High School of 1.12 FTEs, or \$80 679. I agree with the comments made by various members of the community, including members of the Gingin community. That is pretty miserable; they thought they were going to benefit from royalties for regions and get more out of the National Party's representation in government, but they are certainly not benefiting from the Minister for Education; instead, \$80 679 has been cut.

To continue: Gnowangerup District High School, \$11 526; Jurien District High School, \$63 391; Kojonup District High School, \$46 102; Lake Grace District High School, \$28 814; Mullewa District High School, \$34 577. That is miserable. When one considers the Indigenous enrolment at Mullewa, one really has to wonder what care or concern the minister has for the welfare, wellbeing and educational opportunities of Indigenous kids. Southern Cross District High School, \$17 288; Wongan Hills District High School, \$63 391; Wyalkatchem District High School, \$11 526. I think the musical toilet would probably cover all these costs! If the musical toilet had not been built in the South West, the minister would probably not have to make these cuts to children's education. This is nothing short of a disgrace. The Premier was formerly a Minister for Education.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: No; I think a normal, adequate toilet would be okay, like the ones that local governments usually provide in parks. I do not think they need a toilet that plays a special tune.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Some people obviously investigate interesting things! The member is making a bid for flash toilets all round! I actually think that children's education is more important than the standard of public toilets. I think providing a toilet that is adequate is good enough. It does not have to be flash and it does not have to play a tune! It is just a nonsense argument.

The Premier was formerly a Minister for Education and he knows that in the global scale of the Department of Education and its budget, this is chickenfeed. Yes, these are sizable sums of money—I grant the minister that—but in a state the size of Western Australia, the Premier knows that this is chickenfeed. The minister can say that nothing much is happening and that I have it all wrong, but I do not see how she can say that when I have been contacted by nearly every one of these communities and have received at least one letter, one phone call or one email from nearly all of them. I have been out to visit quite a number of these communities and have spoken to the people there. They are telling me about the disadvantages that are being inflicted. The other alternative—this is where the minister slips and slides out of it—is that people can still get distance education if they pay for it. When the minister gets to her feet, it will be interesting to hear whether the schools and communities can come up with this money for distance education, or whether the schools will pass the costs directly onto the students. I am already investigating a case in which it has been suggested to students that they might have to pay if they want to do Schools of Isolated and Distance Education next year, and that the schools will be billed and that they might then on-bill the students.

Dr E. Constable: That is rubbish!

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am not going to take rubbish from the Minister for Education because that is what her answers have been. She says that she is not doing anything and that we have got it all wrong. When I ask how much money she is saving, she lists the savings she will make at all the district high schools, but I have had letter after letter, email after email and phone call after phone call from parents who are genuinely distressed about this

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on behalf of themselves, their children and their communities. This really does call for the Premier to intervene. I cannot believe that he has sat by and allowed this incompetent minister to continue in this vein. I cannot believe that the National Party has not insisted on a ruler being put over this.

A \$500 000, two-year contract for a bus service from Wyndham to Kununurra is excessive. There were six to eight students in years 11 and 12 at Wyndham previously; now there are only two who allegedly catch the bus. I am told that on some days there is no-one on the bus, yet taxpayers are footing a bill of \$250 000 each way. If one can contemplate the amounts of money being saved in some of these places, they are amounts of \$11 000 and \$80 000. The minister would not give me an answer on how much it costs to provide the bus as an alternative; she obfuscated on that question, slipped and slid, gave a little dodgy answer and said, "In most cases there is an existing bus service". Those existing bus services will not actually match up because the bus that picks up kids to go to Dalwallinu takes the younger children—years 8 to 10—to Dalwallinu for 8.30 in the morning. They will either have to provide another bus to get years 11 and 12 to Dalwallinu so they can then go on to Moora at an earlier time, or they will have to get the year 8 to 10 students on the bus an hour earlier so they can get to Dalwallinu in time for the year 11 and 12 students to get the bus to Moora. She shakes her head. She is possibly right in shaking her head, because the children and the parents will not do it. They will either leave the towns, or the education of those year 11 and 12 students will suffer, just as the education of those kids in Wyndham is already suffering.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [4.58 pm]: It is great to hear in such detail the schooling problems that we will have in country areas. I would have thought that the Leader of the National Party and his colleagues would be in the chamber to hear about it. It was something that was dear to their hearts when they were in opposition.

Mr D.T. Redman: You're missing me!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The member does not rate!

The Leader of the National Party is not here. When the National Party was in opposition, one of its biggest issues was education. It reminds me of something I heard on the radio the other morning about three things that can get one on in life—education, education and education. Education will help get people jobs, get them out into the community, and afford them high respect. But if the facilities are not provided in country towns, a lot of people will not have that opportunity. It is bad enough in my electorate in the South West where students cannot catch a school bus to take them to where they can do specialised studies. We have been working on that with the minister but I do not see any outcomes at this stage. There is a new school bus rule. Imagine this: the school bus will not stop at the gate; it will stop at a pick-up area, which means the parents must travel three or four kays down the road to pick up their children, even though the bus actually passes their front gate. This means that if mothers and fathers are working, no-one will be waiting at the pick-up areas for their children, who might have to walk two or three kays to their gateway. It is an absolute disgrace that policies like this are occurring today because of red tape. These children spend about an hour and a half or an hour and three quarters on the school bus before being dropped off at a community hall where, supposedly, someone is acting as a marshal, and then they have to walk back to their place because the bus will not stop at their gateway. It is that sort of red-tape requirement that is stifling our education system.

I know for a fact that some of the children who use the school buses do not turn up at the pick-up place on time. If the school was in their community, the children would walk to school. They might get there 10 minutes late, but at least they would be at school. I have seen that in my area alone, and talked to the minister about it, yet there seems to be no acknowledgement of the 10 or 15 per cent of children who are a bit tardy getting up in the morning, do not have the social back-up they need and miss the bus. What will they do all day? We know what they will do—nothing. They will lay around; they certainly will not get the education that is available to them.

The other point I want to make is that if we allow the school attendance to collapse, it will collapse the town population. That is why I am very concerned about the lack of support from the National Party. A National Party member has just wandered in here from Carnarvon. We know some of the problems in that area that have been well documented, yet there is no support for the other towns within the National Party's hierarchical area—the areas from which it drew most of its votes. The National Party is abandoning the people who voted it in. That is a disgrace to this house. As I said before, when those members were on this side of the house education was the number one issue. Now that they are on the government side, they have sold it off and taken the money under royalties for regions.

People will come out of the woodwork with concern over their kids' education. I lived in a small country town as a kid and went to a school of 15 kids occupying grades 1 to 7. Why did my parents move out of that town? They

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wanted to give us a better education. I went to Collie, but, to be honest, I do not think I did it justice! My parents moved into town for the benefit of their children. In Donnybrook there are many small farms of around five to 10 acres. The average time people stay on those blocks is seven years. Why is it seven years? When the kids need to undertake further studies, the family has to move away. If that happens in country towns, they will collapse. What will happen to the sporting bodies when kids in years 11 and 12 need to go to boarding school and there are not enough children left in town to field the local hockey or football teams? Society starts to break down. What do those kids do on a Saturday afternoon? They get up to monkey business. They are certainly not getting life skills education. When kids play sport they learn to work with other kids their own age in a team environment.

We will see these small towns slowly but surely collapse. What will happen when the number of children in the classes drop and one or two teachers are lost, although sometimes they are only 0.8 or 0.4 of an FTE, a minimal level? We will see that impact on the economy itself, and that person may not even have had a full-time job. He or she will move out. Then we will say there is a shortage of teachers in that town because we cannot get teachers to go to country areas. Why? There are not enough students to justify employing them full time.

Hurray; the Leader of the National Party is back—you beauty! I bet he does not have the guts to cross the floor and vote for this motion. He will make many smart comments, but I am sure he will not stand up and claim to be a true independent, as the National Party members profess to be, and vote on this side of the house on this motion. It is about issues in their heartland, and the National Party is letting those constituents down. The member for Wagin does not have time to come into the house. Even the member for Moore is not here. They should be ashamed of what they are doing to the future of children in their electorates. It is unthinkable that they are not in the house at this time. A good, solid education is part of being Australian, and that education is not being provided at the moment.

As I said before, there have been concerns for many years over the collapse of student numbers at the Collie High School. It is only 60 kays down the road, but if a child is not studying a full-time course, it costs the parents \$80 a week to send the child to school—\$80 a week. That is inconceivable. I refer to the cost of staying at a boarding house. Why do people move out of town? It is too expensive to send two kids to board in the city to get their education. What do those people do? They pack up stumps and sell their house, if they can—everyone else is leaving as well—and move to the city for the betterment of the children. That is what it is about. In this case there is no betterment if the year 11 and 12 classes are cut. They should be maintained to allow our children to be educated.

I refer to earlier times when migrants first came to Australia. In the small town I lived in, the migrants lived in tents or Nissen huts, which looked like half-size rainwater tanks. The first thing they did after working on the railway line or for Main Roads and saving up a few bob was move to a town so their kids could get a better education. Some of those children are now the leaders of our society—on the top rung—because they were afforded that education. The way this government is heading, the likes of those people certainly will not get that education. I ask the Leader of the National Party, who is texting away and not taking one bit of notice of the debate —

Mr B.J. Grylls: I'm not taking any notice of you!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am glad to see he is in the house. The rest of his colleagues are not here. I ask that he give strong consideration to crossing the floor and condemning the proposal to cut years 11 and 12 from district high schools. It is not about money; it is about our future. How do we measure that in the future? I do not know. It saddens me to think that the National Party is soft on action and big on words in this house—they will not cross the floor. When have they crossed the floor this year? Have a look at them.

Mr D.T. Redman: How can you stand up and say that?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is quite easy when I look at the two members opposite. It is very simply because they are all talk. We have heard about the talking dunnies; the member for Blackwood–Stirling is starting to sound like a dunny that is full of it. It is about time we put that money in the right places so that the kids of our state can get their education.

Several members interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am sure the Leader of the National Party has seen that happen in many of the towns in his electorate where, once the rot sets in and the school population starts to collapse, that is the start of the collapse of the community. Parents get sick of seeing their children come home tired from being on a bus for an hour and a half, and then having to make sure they are at the bus stop to pick them up. In my travels in life I have heard many times all those things about the difference between life in the city and life in the country. It is all

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right for city kids, they can get on a bus for 50c and go to school; whereas in the country it is not just a matter of getting on a bus. It is untenable to have to spend an hour and a half or an hour and three quarters on a bus going to and from school. If they were my children, I would move out of that town. Once families move, the school teacher goes and the rest of society starts to fall down; the butcher leaves if the town is lucky enough to have one.

With those few brief words I ask of the National Party: have they got their communities at heart or have their egos become so big they have forgotten why they are members of this place? We are here to service our communities. I do not think they are doing that. They have their chance tonight, but I do not think they have the guts to stand up and show a bit of fortitude here tonight. But it is about time they did because all they have been doing is rattling the cage and not putting in the effort.

MRS C.A. MARTIN (Kimberley) [5.10 pm]: I just stand to add a few comments, especially about the school in Wyndham, which I have a real concern about. It is a small community on the coast. The school used to be the centre of the universe; just ask anybody in Wyndham. The kids have always been the most important part of that community. The community is located right on the coast away from everything and 100 kilometres from Kununurra. The school is right in the heart of that community. It is not at the periphery or out in the scrub, but right in the heart of the community. How symbolic is that? Yet here we are closing down year 11 and 12.

Dr E. Constable: We are not.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The funny thing is that that bus that goes across to Kununurra has no kids on it. The kids who are meant to be boarding over there are in a backpacker facility.

Mr B.J. Grylls: It is a brand-new facility.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The minister can get up and have his say when he is ready, but this is my opportunity.

Mr B.J. Grylls: There is a brand-new facility in Kununurra.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: There is not.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Stop bullying the member!

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I thank the member for that. For four months those kids had been travelling and staying in a backpacker facility. Is this true? Just look at me and tell me that these kids have not. I will believe the minister if the minister believes that it is right. Have those kids been staying in a backpacker facility for five months? They have been staying in a backpacker facility with adults and with two people supervising them. Forget about their education; that is rubbish! If the Minister for Education put my kids in a backpacker facility, I would have her in court so fast her head would spin. Those kids are more important than anything. What does the government do? It just dumps them over there in a backpacker facility. How dare it! Why are they over there? It is because there is no longer a year 11 or 12 class in Wyndham. As far as I am concerned, that five months is wrong. I would not want my kids living with strangers for five months. The boarding facility might be open now but it was not open on time. When those kids' parents signed up, they signed up with the state government. This is the problem. We did not have places for them at the time in Kununurra, did we? Why are they not in their communities? One thing we all forget is that Wyndham is not a little place by itself. It services nine remote communities. The kids come in and go to school there. Now we finally have something happening in Kununurra. We did start it, and that is not a problem. But it was not finished on time, was it? Who were the parents complaining to? Can somebody tell me that? They were complaining that the kids were living in a backpacker facility with these adults, these strangers, for five months.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I hope they did not waste their breath on this minister.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: They did, unfortunately. They went to lots of politicians, and what they were told was that it was because of the wet season. The government could not even organise a bit of education for a very small community.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Will you take a serious interjection?

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: No, I will not. If the minister wants to talk, he should get on his feet. The important part of this for me is that these are my kids. They are not the ministers' kids. They can just come and go as they please. I actually lived in my community. I see these kids grow up. I know those kids and I know their parents. When ministers want to upset somebody, they should go and have a go at their kids or not provide what those kids should have. They know that. I am not saying that ministers are not decent people, but somebody stuffed up here. Now we need to fix it. The ministers have got the opportunity to fix it and to put our children first. Yes, ours is

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the furthest town from this place, but that does not mean that those kids should not be afforded the same as those kids who live in Perth. Do government members understand what I am saying? That is why I am on my feet. Fix it. The ministers can, because they have the ability. When it comes to education, do not change things. Do not sacrifice our kids' future. Go and take the money from somewhere else.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Do you think the best option is in Wyndham?

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Get on your feet! Be man enough to get up put your views.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Yes, I will.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The minister should put his views on record. He does not give a pinch of salt for my kids.

Mr B.J. Grylls: I want you as the local member to tell me if Wyndham —

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Get on your feet and put it on the public record. I do not want an interjection from the minister.

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The minister is being completely disorderly. All injections are disorderly. The member is not inviting interjections. I ask you to direct —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Kimberley, carry on, please.

Debate Resumed

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I do not want to have to beg for the protection of the Chair, but I shall. If anybody has got another opinion, put it on the record. That is why I am on my feet. I just want to make sure that my kids are not left out in the cold again. I never want to see anything like that happen again, with kids—16 and 17-year-olds—living in a backpacker facility for months. The parents complained to the people at the Department of Education there. They said they understood but not to let it happen again. It did. I am saying put my kids first; put our kids in the country first, please. Give them the opportunity that the kids in the city have. That is all I am saying.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [5.16 pm]: I would like to make a small contribution to this debate. It is very good to hear so many speakers passionate about education. I will be very interested to hear the minister's response to the opposition's motion this evening.

I taught in a country town. I was born and bred in Northam and went to the state schools in Northam, both Avonvale Primary School and Northam Senior High School. I started my teaching career at Three Springs Primary School in the Mid West. When I was first posted to Three Springs Primary School as a graduate primary teacher in 1986, there were five new graduates appointed to Three Springs Primary School. The numbers of kids who went to the school, including preprimary, was about 151, from memory. I went to the centenary celebrations of Three Springs Primary School, which I think were in 2006. I have always had a great interest in country schools in particular because I think they are wonderful. Some of the best education in the state can and does occur in country towns. I am very proud that I went to Avonvale Primary School in Northam. I was very proud to teach at Three Springs Primary School for three years. When I went to the centenary celebration in 2006, I asked the then principal how many kids were at the school. I was quite devastated because there were fewer than 50 children. It was quite sad to look back over 20 years and see a net loss of about 100 kids from the Three Springs school catchment. It was very sad because, as I think the member for Collie—Preston and the member for Midland have already mentioned, schools are the central core of those country towns, no matter how big a country town is. My experience from Three Springs, which I am sure other members who have lived or worked in country towns will share, is that whenever the school needs something, the whole community comes together. Communities come together to support the school in whatever way they can because I think that they recognise that the school is the lifeblood of the place and that if the school is threatened, ultimately the future of the town or community is also threatened.

I remember that Carnamah District High School was the closest high school for kids from Three Springs. Many of the kids who went on to secondary education went to the former Swanleigh Anglican Community School. We now know that Swanleigh as an option is now closed.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Closing.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Closing! That is a great tragedy because Swanleigh has a rich history of providing quality education and quality support to kids from country towns. I know that a lot of kids from Three Springs and from the Mid West area went to Swanleigh. Now it is closing under the eye of the current Liberal—National government.

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Mr T.G. Stephens: And they are laughing about it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. We have seen Swanleigh's demise under the Liberal–National government. We also know that Muresk Agricultural College, another historic academic institution, just out of my home town of Northam, has met its demise under the Liberal–National government's watch.

Dr E. Constable: That's not true.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It has.

Dr E. Constable: Curtin University is pulling out of it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Questions have been asked in this place of members of the National Party, and the Minister for Regional Development in particular, about what they are doing about Muresk and what they are doing to make sure essential resources for country people are retained. When they are asked what they are doing to prevent the erosion of resources, they say they cannot do anything. They are doing nothing. They say they will have a few meetings, but they have not succeeded in restoring them. As the member for Midland highlighted, she has been contacted on this issue by numerous parents, community leaders and community members from a range of country towns throughout Western Australia. Who is telling the truth? The Minister for Education has interjected a couple of times on members on this side of the house saying, "That's not true. That's not going to happen. That's not true. That's not going to happen." The fact is that parents living in those country communities are saying that their choices are dwindling, diminishing or dissolving before their eyes. The member for Midland highlighted a range of great towns in Western Australia, the secondary education services for which are now under great threat. That means choice is limited for parents who want to keep their kids in these country towns. They want them to enjoy the real benefits of country living, as it is a great experience. I wish Mandurah was a bit smaller because I want my kids to grow up and experience what country towns offer—that is, a wonderful supportive community that really looks after and looks out for kids who live and grow up there. I would love to send my kids to a country school. The schools in Mandurah are great, but I would love them to have that country feel.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fact is that under the Minister for Education's watch and under this shaky Liberal–National alliance, a range of car wrecks is already beginning to pile up.

Mrs C.A. Martin interjected

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Kimberley!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: A carnage is now starting to be seen. We are seeing things piling up and problems building up in great places throughout the state in regional WA. What is the National Party doing—the party that pinned all its hopes on this alliance by saying, "We are the saviours of the country and of the regions"? The members of the National Party are doing nothing. They stand by and allow the Liberals to railroad them. They allow these car wrecks to continue to pile up. Swanleigh has gone, Muresk has gone, and so have years 11 and 12 in Wyndham, Dalwallinu, Mukinbudin, Naremben, Quairading, Brookton, Corrigin, Wagin and Kojonup, Gnowangerup, Southern Cross, Wyalkatchem, Carnamah—the member for Kalgoorlie is lucky there is nothing happening in Kalgoorlie—Dongara, Boddington, Narrogin and Gingin. These are great country towns. There are big question marks now over the provision of appropriate options for year 11 and 12 students who live in those areas.

Dr E. Constable: Wrong!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is a serious issue not only for the Minister for Education, but also for the future of Western Australia, particularly country regional Western Australia. I hope that we will have the National Party, the bastion of —

Mr T.G. Stephens: Musical toilets!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Musical toilets, cows and other things. Most of the National Party's members actually live in the city of Perth, not in their own regions. I do not want to name them. Most of them do; not like me.

Mr M. McGowan: You are a country member!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am a country member; lots of people will know that. While members opposite go off to their Perth apartments and the member for South Perth is driving his Mercedes Benz across the river to South Perth and parking in his —

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Mick Murray; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Bill Johnston; Deputy Speaker; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Speaker; Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Alannah MacTiernan

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: What is wrong? I am talking. I am not interjecting on myself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Come back to the point.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When National Party members are still here when the adjournment occurs late at night, just like it did last night before 12 o'clock midnight, they do not go back to their little country towns.

Mr A.J. Simpson: I did.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member for Darling Range does not live in a country town.

A government member: Not by train, you didn't!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, I cannot go by train because the last train leaves at 11.50 pm and we adjourned too late for me to catch it.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But National Party members went back to their plush apartments in North Perth or in other suburbs—these wonderful leafy places. That is where they went. I went home to my city, Mandurah—the regional city of Western Australia; the biggest regional city outside the metropolitan area. And I will keep doing it. I am not happy with the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Agriculture and Food for not giving seniors in Mandurah the fuel card, but I will not go into that now, as that is not for this debate. However, the fact is that there is now —

Mr B.J. Grylls: What time does that last express to Mandurah finish—11.50?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: About 11.50, yes. I think that is the last one. If I missed it, I would be trying to hitchhike to get back down the freeway.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No-one would pick me up! Have a look at me! No-one would pick me up! Imagine me on the side of the road! Imagine who would pick me up! No-one would! I would not even pick myself up! I diverge.

The fact is that this Minister for Education and this alliance, this shaky, rubbery alliance that we see here —

Mr M. McGowan: Ramshackle!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is a ramshackle alliance! There is now a growing pile of education demise.

Mr M. McGowan: Casualties!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Casualties! Carcasses!

Dr E. Constable: Meadow Springs!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Apart from Meadow Springs, which I am very pleased about. That is one thing the Minister for Education got right.

There is now a growing number of carcasses under this government that are actually right at the seat of the future existence of country towns. The government now has, with Swanleigh, Muresk Agricultural College and the list of schools that I have highlighted here, a very serious problem to deal with. How do government members deliver on all of their rhetoric on royalties to regions and other programs they are promoting in the regions? People are going to start putting a fine microscope on what is actually happening in the most essential service there is, which of course is education. They will be found wanting. If those school closures are allowed to occur under this government's watch, there will be grave concern about them actually delivering what they have promised in their rhetoric. I will listen to the minister very carefully to hear what her response is to this important motion that has been moved by the member for Midland. The member for Midland has outlined a plethora of information to this place. It is up to this minister and this government to ensure that country Western Australians—country parents and their children—have the best possible quality education available to them into the future.

MR F.A. ALBAN (Swan Hills) [5.28 pm]: I do not want the opposition to get away so cheaply! I rise on this occasion to oppose this motion.

Several members interjected.

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Mick Murray; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Bill Johnston; Deputy Speaker; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Speaker; Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Alannah MacTiernan

Mr F.A. ALBAN: It is okay; I have plenty of time. Of all members of this house, I have probably the most experience of living in country towns or country areas.

Several members interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I have lived in three states. Has any member opposite lived in three states? I have.

An opposition member: How old are you?

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I am older than the member. I have lived in three states in country towns and my kids grew up in country towns. At least I do not have the false passion that is coming across the chamber from members who have never lived in the country. I can do exactly what I have seen members opposite do today—quote country town after country town! All I need do is make a phone call to the department, which will provide the list. I have not heard exactly which school has had a year 11 or a year 12 class cut. Has there been one? I have heard some fantastic stories from members opposite in basic politico-speak: “Facing the real option”, and “The damage has already been inflicted.” They are very big statements. When have they been inflicted? One such district high school is in my electorate, the Bullsbrook District High School, so I know what I am talking about. I have another bit of history for the opposition, and they should listen carefully. It occurred before the member for Mandurah’s time in this place.

I scribbled this down while I was listening to the passion coming from members opposite. In this country, Australia, we have seen the gradual decline of our country towns and services over the past 40 years. It started in the 1970s, and has happened under both Labor and Liberal governments. This matter is a consequence of that neglect. It certainly happened under a WA Labor government. I am not sure how many farmers will put up their hands and say that the Labor Party has looked after them. This situation is a consequence of the decline of the agriculture industry. It has been reduced from 18 per cent of our gross domestic product down to two per cent. That industry keeps the country towns alive. If members opposite are not prepared to look after agriculture, they will not look after schools. I can say one thing, and as a Liberal it is probably embarrassing, but I believe that the National Party members of this Parliament are the hardest working and most dedicated of all.

Several members interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: If members opposite think I am going to sit in this Parliament and listen to rubbish from members opposite saying that National Party members allowed all these things to happen in their electorates, then I believe in the Easter bunny as well!

Mr D.A. Templeman: You are a patsy.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I thank the member for Mandurah very much! I wonder what he is, if I am a patsy! Members opposite have gone quiet. What has happened? Have they got nothing else to throw at me? This motion is designed to create mayhem with parents in the country. In fact, nothing at all has happened—at least that I am aware of. I would listen to members opposite if something had really happened and if they could say that school A, B, C and D have had year 11 and year 12 classes cut. Members opposite should speak up or forever hold their peace! Have any of these classes been closed down?

Mr D.A. Templeman: Did you not listen to the member for Midland? You’re a goose!

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Have any of those classes closed down? All we hear from members opposite is big jokes! This is not a joke.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You’re a goose!

Mr F.A. ALBAN: The stunt is over; no schools have been closed down! Members opposite have caused grief to my school as well. People are concerned, having listened to all the rubbish coming from members opposite.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Bullsbrook school has not had year 11 and 12 classes cut, notwithstanding all the rubbish that we have heard from members opposite, who want to look good! Members opposite will go out and say, “The government was going to do this, but we saved you! We saved you from the National Party!” Why do members opposite think that most of Western Australia is in a mess? Members opposite have only just left government! All this could not have happened in 18 months!

Several members interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I can quote all these figures, too. I am sure that members opposite are causing the same grief to my school. People out there are worried. Members opposite should not worry people over senseless things; they should make sure that they speak the truth before they worry all these country people, who are the most

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Mick Murray; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Bill Johnston; Deputy Speaker; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Speaker; Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Alannah MacTiernan

decent people in this state. Members opposite should not come up with all their Labor rubbish: “They’re going to do this. They’re going to do that!” It is all gonna, gonna! I think the best book members opposite could write would be the book of what Labor was gonna do! Most people write their memoirs based on what they have done; the former government should write a book of all the things it thought it had done or was going to do, but never did.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [5.33 pm]: I realise time is limited. I want to talk only briefly on this motion. I appreciate that the member for Midland has moved this motion because it is an important issue to country people. The motion is about district high schools around Western Australia and the removal of year 11 and 12 courses from those school sites.

Dr E. Constable: That has not happened.

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is what it is about: it is about the removal of the budget and the staffing for year 11 and 12 classes on those district high school sites. The plan the government has, as I understand it, is that those students who are undertaking year 11 and 12 studies at those district high schools will receive the courses via Schools of Isolated and District Education on those 22 or so school sites. That has not happened on a number of those sites, but the plan as I understand it is that that will happen. In fact, I asked a question in the house some weeks ago of the Minister for Regional Development. He said that he supported this plan, and it was of no great concern to him because students, if they wanted, could travel to a senior high school nearby or they could do the course via SIDE or, like him, they could go off to boarding school in the city. Obviously, for a lot of students, boarding school is not an option because they do not have the money to afford that option. That is what the issue is about.

I can tell members the experience of the former government in this regard because I was the education minister for its last 18 months or so. The plan to remove year 11 and 12 from district high schools was put to me by the Department of Education and Training as a means of saving on teachers, and saving on money as a consequence—the main thing was to save teachers because we had a problem attracting enough teachers to country schools. Members should bear in mind that when we left office, we were 28 teachers short around Western Australia and we had an unemployment rate of 2.3 per cent. There is now not a shortage of teachers in country schools around Western Australia, and the unemployment rate is around five per cent. As the unemployment rate reduces, the pressure on public sector workers around the state will increase; that is a fact. That is a consequence of a successful economy. As an economy gets more successful, those pressures increase. I will not go over the 20 or 30 initiatives the former government put in place to try to secure more teachers and keep them in the workforce. But as the economy improves and it starts to boom, this government will find that teachers in country towns, particularly in the north west, the Pilbara, the Kimberley and so on, will be attracted to other professions. Therefore, there will be pressures on schools in Port Hedland, Karratha, Kununurra, Mt Newman and so on. The government will find that it has problems. Nevertheless, members should bear in mind that in September 2008 the unemployment rate was 2.3 per cent and there was a shortfall of 28 teachers out of 22 000 or 23 000 teachers. That was the position the Labor government faced. That was a pretty good outcome; that is, a shortfall of 0.01 per cent. If the Minister for Education were to go to BHP Billiton or Rio Tinto or any other resource company, she would find that those companies have far greater staff shortages than the education department faced during that time. In any event, that is the issue.

The motion is about year 11 and 12 courses being cut out of schools. As I said, the idea was put to me by the department as an option to reduce the teacher requirements in these country schools which were under pressure. The proposal was that the department could remove teacher requirements—it was in the dozens—by removing year 11 and 12 from those district high schools, and the students could go to other senior high schools or study through Schools of Isolated and Distance Education. Do members know what? I will say it in this house because everything is true. I rejected that idea to save teachers. I approved some other options to move teachers from desk jobs back into classrooms, and I approved other options to take teachers out of non-teaching roles in our agencies and put them back into classrooms. I approved a whole range of measures. One thing that I said no to was year 11 and 12 courses being taken away from country district high schools. I said no because I know a price of being a big state like ours is that people live out in remote communities, such as Wyndham, where the local school is very important and whilst the schools might have only five or 10 students in years 11 or 12, we have a duty to provide a full education to those students, particularly in those locations where Schools of Isolated and Distant Education may not be the best option for students.

Members should bear in mind that we have compulsory years 11 and 12. We owe it to those communities and those students to provide them with a full education, even though it is expensive, even though it takes a lot of teachers, and even though it means a teacher shortfall might occur because the department is held against the

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Mick Murray; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Bill Johnston; Deputy Speaker; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Speaker; Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Alannah MacTiernan

standard of teacher numbers in those schools. I said no to the department's proposal. I said no to the department doing it. We now have an unemployment rate of five per cent. The government does not face the same pressures faced by the previous government in relation to the number of teachers required in those communities or the shortfall of teachers because the economy has dropped off. Nevertheless, the Minister for Education said yes to the department. That was what this issue was about. Irrespective of the royalties for regions program and the money the government has spent out there on those things, my view—I will say it around country communities—is that it is fine to have money in a certain program for building specific things, but if year 11 and 12 classes are taken away from those district high schools, the government is failing country students.

During my time as education minister the Leader of the National Party asked me numerous questions during question time about Wubin Primary School—I probably had to answer five questions about Wubin Primary School—which, I might add, the department, and not me, made the decision to close; it never came to me. The department decided to close that school and I supported it. It was a primary school that was 15 or 20 minutes' drive, as I recall, from the nearest major primary school. It had a massively declining population and was easily serviced by a nearby school. Some of the schools for which the government is closing years 11 and 12 are at places like Wyndham and Southern Cross. They are not five or 10 minutes' drive down the road for some parents, which was the case in Wubin. Some of the parents who had kids at Wubin could drive five or 10 minutes down the road to another primary school. The schools that the government is closing now are hours and hours and hours away from the nearest senior high school. That is the difference. But just bear in mind that when people consider this issue, Labor said no to this proposal and the Liberal–National Parties said yes.

DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands — Minister for Education) [5.41 pm]: The first few words of the members for Midland's motion state —

That this house —

- (a) acknowledges that the Minister for Education's plan to cut years 11 and 12 from 21 district high schools ...

I do not have to go any further—it is just not correct. That could not possibly be acknowledged. During the next hour or so we will show members that that is the case.

Before I address the motion directly, I want to outline the picture of district high schools.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: So these news articles out of country papers are incorrect, are they?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Midland!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: One thing I have realised about the member for Midland —

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Midland!

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Too much?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister has the call.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I will inform the house of the number of year 11 and 12 students in our district high schools. There are 56 district high schools. Of those, 41 per cent—or 23—have no year 11 or 12 this year. That has generally been so for a long time, I think. There are fewer than 10 year 11s or year 12s in 16 of the schools, which equates to 28 per cent. There are a total of 11 to 25 students in another 11 of those schools, or 19 per cent. That means that 90 per cent of district high schools have a very, very small number of year 11 and 12 students. Three district high schools have a total of between 26 and 50 year 11 and 12 students. One school has between 50 and 100 students, and two schools have more than 100 year 11 and 12 students altogether. We are talking about schools that were actually designed for kindergarten to year 10, not for years 11 and 12, and very, very few of those schools have more than 25 year 11 and 12 students. It is very important to keep that in mind.

I will now outline what has happened. We have not cut years 11 and 12 from the 21 district high schools in that group that have those small numbers. The 21 district high schools that we are referring to in this motion can continue to enrol year 11 and 12 students and can, therefore, obviously continue to offer a range of options for year 11 and 12 students. I will go into the detail of that in a little while. They will continue to receive the base funding allocations that all year 11 and 12 levels receive in all our schools. We have to keep remembering that district high schools are traditionally for children from kindergarten to year 10. In areas such as Bullsbrook, which is a growing area, those schools are growing and we are watching them to see whether their categorisation will change or which other schools around might support them. The other large school is Kununurra, which, of course, will continue to grow with the development of the Ord River over the next several years, I am quite sure.

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Mrs M.H. Roberts: Dongara is growing, too.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Prior to 2006, students from district high schools usually went on to senior high schools in years 11 and 12.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: No; in some of them the communities were growing and that did not happen. Prior to 2006 —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: But lots of them actually did have year 11.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: One thing that we have all realised about the member for Midland is that her listening skills are not good at all. If she listens, she might learn something from this.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Your ministerial skills are not good!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Prior to 2006, when compulsory year 11 and 12 attendance was being introduced, the majority of students from district high schools continued to go to senior high schools for years 11 and 12. They either travelled by bus, if bus services were available or appropriate, or boarded —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Are you going to read your whole speech?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Midland!

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It would be easier to listen if she actually spoke to me, rather than seeking your protection and just reading from a piece of paper in a quiet voice!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I call you for the first time! The minister has the call.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I recall that —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Don't speak into your page!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: — the member for Midland spent, I think—I was watching the clock—about 12 minutes of the 60 minutes reading a letter, non-stop, during her speech.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, can you please continue?

Mrs M.H. Roberts: You're not reading a quote—you're reading a speech!

Mr J.R. Quigley: She can't make a speech—get off her back! She can't make a speech!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Midland!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Before 2006 students travelled by bus if a bus service was available and was appropriate, or generally they boarded at one of the country hostels, or they might have chosen to board at other non-government schools. Some students, as the member for Rockingham indicated, studied with Schools of Isolated and Distance Education. With the increase in the school leaving age, the landscape has changed somewhat in district high schools. There has been an increased staffing allocation for year 11 and 12 students and a senior student allocation during that time. It was always considered to be, and was intended to be, a transitional allocation of extra funding during the phasing in and the stabilisation of the increase in the school leaving age. It was called the "senior school allocation". The senior school allocation is being removed from the 21 schools that have been listed, which was considered very closely. All other allocations remain in those 21 schools, which will allow a range of choices for students in years 11 and 12 at those schools. The senior school allocation was intended to help with the planning and transition to the increased school leaving age. That senior school allocation will remain in other district high schools where bus services are not practical, or where there are a larger number of students in years 11 and 12.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Is this all a quote from the director general? Are you just reading it all?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sit down, minister. Member for Midland, I am sitting in the chair and I am watching the minister—the minister is not reading it all.

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Maybe she can take her glasses off then.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I call you for the second time. The minister has the call.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Maybe that's how they work in South Africa!

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Mick Murray; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Bill Johnston; Deputy Speaker; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Speaker; Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Alannah MacTiernan

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sit down, please, minister. Member for Mindarie, I call you for the first time.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, I call you for the first time.

Several members interjected.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The increased school leaving age is now firmly embedded in our schools, and we have seen great benefits from the former Labor government's initiative. But we have now had an opportunity to look at —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: What is the participation rate?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The participation rate is now 95 per cent, if the member must know.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It's going down then.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: No, it is going up, actually.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carry on, minister.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It is very important that we continue to consider how best to provide for that small number of year 11 and 12 students in our district high schools. We have looked at that. There are some schools where bus services do not exist or would be totally impractical. Of the 21 schools in the list, all of them have existing bus services, so there are already students using those bus services to travel to the nearest senior high school. It was decided that the senior school allocation would no longer be given to year 11 and 12 students at eight schools this year and a further 12 or 13 schools next year. We are watching Roebourne District High School closely but this year, as I understand it, there are no students in years 11 and 12 at Roebourne.

This offers parents choice and I will go into that choice in a moment.

Several members interjected.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Members opposite do not listen; that is their problem!

The first choice is to go by bus to the nearest senior high school, and I will talk about what senior high schools have to offer in just a moment. The second choice is to stay at the district high school with a range of options there, such as involvement in a vocational education and training program within the community. I know that another member will discuss how well that is working in a number of communities where there is a small number of students in years 11 and 12, where there is tremendous support from the local community and where students can stay in that district high school and do VET courses in that high school. Other students are able to enrol in Schools of Isolated and Distance Education with supervision from the school. I recently visited Exmouth District High School where there is a sensational program for the year 11 and 12 students who are enrolled in SIDE, which is not paid for by their parents as indicated earlier by, I think, the member for Midland —

Mr M.P. Murray: Who actually pays for that?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The system pays for it; the parents do not pay for it. That suggestion is ludicrous. It is against the law to impose a fee on parents —

Mr M.P. Murray: What I am asking is, in the budget, if there are a dozen kids, who then adjusts the budgets —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It comes out of the local school budget.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It does not come out of the local school budget. An allocation is made to SIDE to cover the SIDE courses that students —

Mr P. Papalia: Will there be a SIDE line item in the budget so we can all identify how much —

Dr E. CONSTABLE: SIDE is a school and not every school is listed in the budget.

Mr P. Papalia: But it will change annually, won't it, so the number of students per school will change?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That is right and students at non-government schools can enrol in SIDE. The rule of thumb for the cost per course at SIDE is about \$4 000, so if a student is doing five year 11 and 12 courses, it would cost \$20 000 for that student. If a student is at a non-government school, that non-government school is required to pay \$2 000 towards that, so the full cost is not recovered for the non-government school students. It is a statewide service. It was decided a number of years ago that schools would, because in a sense they are getting it both ways, get an allocation for students and SIDE gets an allocation. Therefore, if the school gets the full allocation and SIDE gets a full allocation, it is a double whammy for that particular student. Government

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schools for some time have been told and understand that some part of the \$4 000 per course will be paid for by the school either through a reduced staffing allocation or out of its school grants, and that is 25 per cent of the cost of the SIDE course, or \$1 000. Schools have been aware of that for some time—in fact, years—and this is the first year that that has been imposed.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Given that there will be, as you said, a number of people taking the bus option, what additional funding has been put in the Department of Transport budget to cover these new bus contracts?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: They are not new bus contracts; they are existing buses. We are using existing bus services. At these 21 schools that we are talking about today, the students are using existing bus services. The bus services were there.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: So the Wyndham bus service was there all along, was it?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The information that I have been given was that they are schools with existing bus services.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: So how do you explain a two-year contract for a bus service, Wyndham to Kununurra, with only two year 11 and 12 students on it when they go?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The bus services are not run out of the Department of Education.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: There was no need for a bus service to Kununurra previously.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: But if you have changed arrangements so that new buses are required —

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I have not changed any bus arrangements. I am not responsible for buses; the Minister for Transport is.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The information that I have been provided with is that the 21 schools had existing bus services. If that is not correct, we can check that out, but that is information that I have been given over the past several months about these 21 schools.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Armadale!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I will go back and summarise the choices that I was talking about. Students could attend a larger school, a larger senior high school, and we all know the benefits of students attending a larger school. They are with a cohort of students of their own age and with a much larger number of students. There are more curriculum offerings and these days we want to ensure that students have a broad range of curriculum offerings out of the 52 courses that can possibly be studied. They have more specialist teachers and more specialist facilities, and we want students to learn science in specialist facilities, and they exist in senior high schools. Those students who have aspirations to go on to university have the option to bus to their nearest senior high school or, where bussing is not possible, to board, particularly in one of our country hostels that provide a superb service to young people and their families. They also have the choice, if they wish, to stay in their district high school and study through the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, supervised within the school, or they can stay at their district high school and take up a vocational education and training program or other training course with the town. As I said a moment ago, there is some excellent support in some of the country towns for students doing VET courses.

The senior school allocation was introduced when the school leaving age was raised to support those students and those schools in the transition.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: What evidence have you got that it was transitional? The director general did not have any the other day; have you got any?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The evidence I have is what I have been informed by the director general and by senior staff in the department.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: These decisions are not ever made lightly. They were discussed over a long time in great detail. I questioned every school and every suggestion that was made to me, and I was told by senior staff in the

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Department of Education that this was a transition allocation and only ever meant to be transitional. The raised leaving age is now firmly embedded in our system and, as I said, we are all very pleased that the previous government introduced that because it gives far more options and far more opportunities for young people in Western Australia.

It is my responsibility, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, to make the best possible decisions for all children and ensure that they have the highest quality of education. The funding allocations for year 11 and 12 students at district high schools are several. They get the regular staffing allocation that all students attract, they get curriculum access when required and they also get base funding for students who are doing vocational education and training courses. The funding is continuing except for the transition allocation that I mentioned a moment ago. This has affected eight schools this year and next year it will affect a further 12 or 13 schools. We are monitoring those schools as carefully as we can. The senior school allocation is still in place in other district high schools; it is just the 21 we are referring to. Students who are not too far from a senior high school have the opportunity to go to a larger school. Remote community schools also continue to get the extra allocations. We want to make sure that all public school students have the very best opportunities that they possibly can, and each one of these students and their parents have had individual counselling to help them make the right decisions for them—whether they go to their local senior high school or stay to do courses within their local community at the district high school. I repeat: a district high school, by definition, has in the past been for kindergarten to year 10 students, and we continue to review this as time goes on.

I would like to comment on some research on the impact of larger schools on young people. Research shows that education provision is strengthened for year 11 and 12 students attending senior high schools that can provide them with a range of subjects and appropriately qualified teachers to teach them. They also provide a breadth of vocational programs for students. There are more choices in senior high schools, so if it is at all possible for students to attend a senior high school, we should be encouraging them to do so. If it is not possible for them to do that or it is not the right decision for them, we must ensure that each and every one of those children have the best opportunities at their district high schools. Within senior high schools there are improved facilities, specialist facilities and specialist teachers.

The decision to cease the senior school allocation at these 21 district high schools was made for educational considerations, not financial considerations. Any financial saving that can be then put into other schools is minuscule in the scheme of the entire education budget. There was an educational rationale for this decision, and we want to improve the educational outcomes for as many students as we possibly can. The decision was made that these year 11 and 12 students, because they were able to access a local district high school, would have the best possible opportunities if they chose to go to the local senior high school. I believe that students, particularly students who wish to go on to university, should not be encouraged to stay at a district high school if they have the choice and the option is open to them to go to a senior high school within reasonable distance and by bus. Those students will have more opportunities, probably a wider range of subjects and more alternatives if they go to the closest senior high school. I emphasise that if these students want to enrol in a district high school, they can do so with support. Mr Speaker, you and I have talked about Dongara District High School, and the support from the town that is available for students there in vocational areas is excellent. The district high schools will continue to receive regular staff funding and curriculum access funding, and students will continue to receive the base allocation for year 11 and 12 VET courses.

I want to make a comment about SIDE, because there is an implication in this motion that SIDE is somehow not good enough.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: No, there's not!

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It can be read that way.

Mr M. McGowan: SIDE is good, but it's not suitable for a lot of children.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: SIDE is good, and I agree with the member; that is why there is this choice. If there is not an adequate range of subjects or it is not suitable for students, we want to give them a choice and encourage them to go to the senior high schools. In Exmouth I saw an excellent set-up with excellent supervision for year 11 and 12 students, who were very excited about the work they were doing through SIDE. However, there is an implication sometimes that perhaps SIDE is not as good as school. It is different, but it is interesting to compare the 2009 English results of students who studied through SIDE with the results of those who attended schools. The state mean for SIDE students doing year 12 English was 62.3 per cent; the state mean for students who did English in schools across the state was 54.93 per cent. We can assume that for many subjects, SIDE students will have great opportunities to complete years 11 and 12 and go on to university; many have done so with great distinction and great success. I would also like to emphasise that any students who are at risk will continue to

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have the support that they require during years 11 and 12—encouragement to stay at school, to succeed, to seek employment if that is appropriate and to do VET and TAFE courses. Curriculum engagement program support for schools is available to students —

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Through the duration of this speech, the minister has been reading from a document; I believe it may be an official document. It appears to be typed.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: They are notes that I typed.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Mr Speaker, it is for you to adjudicate, not the minister, whether they are typewritten. She has done nothing but read from them for the past 23 minutes.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I will certainly adjudicate. I ask the minister to continue with her delivery and I will require her to provide me with those notes at the conclusion of her speech.

Debate Resumed

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I want to refer particularly to the motion before the house. I started off by referring to the first few words, which ask the house to acknowledge the Minister for Education's plan to cut years 11 and 12 from 21 district high schools, forcing students to travel long distances and so on. No-one is being forced to do anything; people are being given choices. We are not cutting years 11 and 12 from district high schools; we are giving choices to students and parents. We are providing individual counselling and talking to parents and students to help them make the best choices for them. This is not about cutting off choices or forcing people to do anything; it is not about forcing people to study through SIDE. If a district high school has only five or six students in years 11 or 12, it is not possible to mount the full range of courses for them. SIDE can provide those courses; we cannot provide the specialist facilities, specialist teachers and whatever else those students might need. Those 21 schools had bus services and we counselled individual students. I think only 14 students were enrolled this year in the first eight schools. We are encouraging them to make the choices that are right for them. The right choice might be to stay at a district high school, study a VET course and be involved in work experience within the town. Some of the towns are doing a fantastic job of supporting students since the leaving age has been raised. This is not about cutting off choices, it is about making sure that students make the right choices; I cannot emphasise that enough. There has been a lot of hyperbole today about stopping things and forcing people. Nobody is being forced. We want to make sure that everyone knows what their options are and that they make the right choices for them.

MR T.G. STEPHENS (Pilbara) [6.09 pm]: I firstly want to sing the praises of the former Minister for Education, who told the house earlier that he was faced with a recommendation from his department to do precisely what has now been done by the current minister. The former Minister for Education had the good sense to reject that recommendation from the then Department of Education and Training. Unfortunately, this government has a new way of speaking. It talks about not doing any damage, as though it was not withdrawing services or closing something down. I have been carefully listening to this failure of a minister—the Minister for Education. She said, "We have ceased the senior school allocation." It is as though that is not a big deal. The difficulty we have with the minister is that she is doing enormous damage to the fabric of education in regional Western Australia and to the communities and towns that can ill-afford that damage. She has done it while deceiving herself. In turn, she is trying to deceive others by using language to imply that somehow or other ceasing the senior school allocation will not do any damage to those students, schools, school communities, towns and regions.

Those of us who choose to educate ourselves about what is happening know that instead of students attending the senior years of high school under the arrangements that were protected by the previous minister in the Labor administration, the students will disappear from the education system. They are not getting on the bus to go to the senior high school that is located some distance from their home towns and from their families and communities. Instead, empty buses are driving around and the minister defends herself by saying that she has made savings. The savings have had a minuscule impact because apparently empty buses are driving around while students disappear from the education system. I fear that those students will re-emerge among the unemployment and justice statistics in the court system, the police system and the jail system at a huge cost to themselves, their families and their communities. In the end, it will be a huge cost to the taxpayer. To achieve a minuscule saving, this minister has been hoodwinked by her department. She continues to show a flair for being one of the most incompetent ministers to ever have sat on the Treasury benches in the time I have been a member of Parliament. This minister has shown herself to be a bleeding heart but with no substance. She constantly parades herself as though she were interested in the needs of those who are in considerable need, yet she embraces policies that do great damage to those people in the education system.

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The students in Wyndham are disappearing from the educational opportunities that are apparently on offer in Kununurra. Some members know how the school system works in the East Kimberley. Wyndham is a comfortable, small community where all the families and individuals know each other. A small number of students in Wyndham, because of the decisions that were made and protected by the previous education minister in the former Labor administration, were offered additional support at the district high school under the senior school allocation that enabled the students to receive senior school education to year 12. That was not ideal but it was better than doing nothing for those year 11 and 12 students. The minister has apparently been hoodwinked by the department and she has hoodwinked herself. She now wants to hoodwink the Parliament and the community into believing that she is doing no damage to the education system because of what she has done.

This measure will achieve minuscule savings and money is being wasted by an empty bus that is being driven, so we have been told by one of our colleagues, between Wyndham and Kununurra. The minister said that it is happening in the first instance only for eight schools. I have looked at a variety of lists. I am not sure whether once Wyndham and others have been done —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It is a three-year plan going to 21 schools.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I fear that one of the other schools which will be affected and which I am more familiar with than a large number of schools on this list will be Roebourne District High School. I suspect that a similar situation will be delivered to the families and the community of Roebourne.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I don't think years 11 and 12 are being offered at Roebourne this year. The minister has claimed there are no students at Roebourne. I can only assume that she thinks there are no students at that age living in Roebourne, which you and I know is not the case.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: When there is a district high school in Roebourne and a district high school in the adjacent town of Karratha, people will not go down the road to Karratha to complete their senior high school education. Some students will, but not all students who are in need of years 11 and 12 will go there.

A case is building around the minister and the damage that she is doing to education. She has presided over the loss of educational support services that have been identified by the shadow Minister for Education in this house in this debate and others. This minister is sitting idly by and watching while facilities disappear from regional communities. In this case, it is the support services to the senior school years and in other cases it has been the boarding facilities that were available for some students who were lucky enough to get to Swanleigh Anglican Community School and Residential College until the present time. They will soon lose that facility at Swanleigh. Another National Party minister is laughing.

Mr D.T. Redman: I am not laughing; I am smiling.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why is the minister laughing? Are you just a clown?

Mr D.T. Redman: Give me a break! You have no idea what is going through my head and yet you have made a judgement that I am laughing at an issue that you have raised in this house.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why is the minister sitting there and laughing while I am pointing out to him that this Minister for Education is presiding over the closure of Swanleigh?

Mr D.T. Redman: I am very proud to have been a student who went to Swanleigh.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: What is the minister doing about it now that he is a minister in this government with this clown of a Minister for Education?

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The Minister for Agriculture and Food is sitting there while the Minister for Education allows Swanleigh to shut down for another bunch of students from my part of the world, a large number of whom are Indigenous.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That boarding facility will shut under the minister's watch. The Minister for Education is comfortable and confident about withdrawing the facilities and support services that meet the needs of the regional and remote residents of this state. In this case, most of the students at that college these days happen to be Aboriginal but that should be no justification for letting the heartless member for Churchlands sit there and do damage to the fabric of education. The Minister for Education probably suspects that I have completely lost respect for her as a person as well as a minister. I have watched some education ministers do damage to state

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education in the past, but this minister absolutely takes the cake by what she is doing. The minister is withdrawing facilities from regional and remote communities. She dresses it up with fine language and talks about buses but she does not mention that there are no students on them anymore. The people back in their tiny towns no longer have adequate support services to meet their needs, which were met previously and which were protected by proud members of a Labor Government that had the good sense to stand up to the Department of Education and Training when it came up with a silly proposal like this. The clowns in the National Party are laughing again.

Mr B.J. Grylls: I am laughing directly at you.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: They are the patrons of musical toilets and plastic cows while the Minister for Education has withdrawn the educational services of the people who are most desperately in need. If members sense that I am a little angry, they are right.

Mr B.J. Grylls: No; I don't think you are; you're making it up.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I am angry because we have the worst minister ever by a country mile in this Minister for Education. The worst part about it is she spent many years sitting up the back in this place acting as though she gave a damn. She gave our ministers hell. I used to urge her on and now I find her to be nothing more than a hypocrite in the way she has handled her portfolio and the administration of it. I thought she was serious. I used to urge her on in the pressure of issues around regional, remote and Indigenous education, but I have found that she is a fraud. The sooner she disappears from the government front bench, the better. There are capable people behind her who could do a better job than this person. She has all the background that indicates she has promise, knowledge and experience in the field of education and she has been a complete and utter failure.

Dr E. Constable: This is great therapy for you.

A government member: He is not marking arguments here; it is just straight-out insults. Make your arguments.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The argument I have been making is that she has buses running around empty and has ceased the senior school allocation. A small number of individuals inside the school system, in remote towns—largely Indigenous—will now miss out on the higher school education which would have been available for those senior years and which would give them a fighting chance in life.

Dr E. Constable: That is rubbish.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The minister knows damn well it is true. She is dressing it up in language when she finally admits it with “ceasing the senior school allocation” as though that is closing nothing.

An additional reason I am angry is that today is the day when in marched the removal van, picked up the school at the Patjarr community and took it away, while six kids ran around—there were six kids there today—without the telephone she promised them, without the computer facilities and without the support of the School of the Air. Meanwhile, the truck came in, picked up the classroom and took it away. Simultaneously, I am left in this debate to hear the minister tell us that she does not close —

Mr J.J.M. Bowler: There have been only two kids in the school the whole of this year.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Wrong, wrong, wrong. There are six students within that community who have been denied by the department the opportunity to enrol in that school.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler interjected.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Listen! That is what the minister does as well. The member for Kalgoorlie should not be conned by that language. Those school students were refused the opportunity to enrol in that school—they could not enrol. When the minister shut the school, she says, “I’m shutting it because there are only two students enrolled.” Yes, that is because the others were not allowed to enrol! The education department says, “If you move to Coolgardie, you’ll be able to go to school there.” But the government is not offering them any housing in Coolgardie. Those six students are no longer with School of the Air. A classroom and the teacher’s house are being transported away by truck. God knows where those music classrooms and teacher’s house are going at great cost. That is why I am angry with this minister.

I remember only too well the carry-on when she was on this side of the house. I thought she was serious and, clearly, she is not. The sooner she goes from her portfolio, the better. In fact, as far as I am concerned, the sooner she goes from this house, the better, because she will be replaced, whether by a member opposite or people on this side of the house, by someone who will care about education, even if that person does not have the fine qualifications she brings to that portfolio, in which she should know better. She should have been able to stand

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up to the department, as did the former Minister for Education and Training, and have the good sense to see that cutting classes from district schools would not serve the interests of people in these tiny towns of regional and remote Western Australia. With the challenges that come from being a metropolitan-based member of Parliament, he was able to see the failure of the policy that was about to be delivered to these tiny towns, small communities and families around those parts of Western Australia.

If the minister happens to notice that I am utterly sick of her presence in this place, she needs to understand that it is personal for me; it is personal because these families in Wyndham are families with whom I effectively grew up. I came into that region and those families and their aspirations became my aspirations. Some of them have become as close to me as they can possibly be.

Point of Order

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I cannot hear because of the incessant conversation by the National Party members.

Debate Resumed

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I will tell members opposite that I did not spend a lot of time when we were in government singing the praises of my ministerial colleagues.

Mr D.T. Redman: You were very quiet, we know that.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That is not true. In fact, if anything, I gave them a tough time because I always held up to them the challenge of doing better for the regional areas of Western Australia, in particular for the Indigenous communities. I have heard the story of the previous Minister for Education and Training and the courage and determination he showed, with scarce resources, in standing up to the department and saying that it would not implement this policy because it would do damage. Former Minister for Education and Training, I now belatedly sing your praise.

Mr M. McGowan: It is about time.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I know. Regrettably, he is now away from the Treasury bench, and an incompetent minister has taken his place, who is doing damage and, unfortunately, dressing it up with language that pretends that she is not doing what she is doing—causing damage, ceasing a program, ceasing support for families and individuals who need it. Don't shake your head.

Dr E. Constable: You have been yelling at me for 20 minutes so I will shake my head if I want to.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: She could do us all a favour and quit her portfolio.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Show us. Stop just being a princess from the western suburbs and get up and do something. You say, "I agree with everything." That is what you say all the time. "I agree; I agree." But what do you do? Where do you put a seat in a school like Challis or Queens Park? You don't; you just agree and do nothing.

Dr E. Constable: Go doorknocking.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That is the tragedy with this minister. I have had what I consider to be the experience of working on parliamentary committees with her.

Dr E. Constable: Oh! Don't start on that.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I thought she was serious about education. I had the opportunity of joining with Labor colleagues and watching with great interest the passion on display when she joined with colleagues such as the member for Bassendean and threw some hard bricks at our colleagues when they were doing the wrong thing. Unfortunately, I now see that she is not serious about these issues; they were mere platitudes on her part; the mere engaging in politics, not because she was serious about the issues, but, rather, because she had some appetite for getting rid of the government of the day. I was actually serious about the issues of education; I was serious about the challenges and opportunities for Indigenous people. I want to tell the house and my colleagues that I am sorry I was so hard on my colleagues because, compared with the performance and skill that is now on offer from this lot, my former colleagues look like giants alongside the pigmy that is now occupying the education portfolio. She is small of heart, lacking in compassion and doing damage to the Indigenous community of Western Australia because of what she is doing in her portfolio. She might prance around the place buying paintings from Aboriginal people, but she is doing damage to the fabric of those individuals, families and communities. She is doing it wilfully and deliberately and with maximum pain to those families.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Ms J.M. Freeman**.