

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

*Eighth Report — “Setting the Stage for Improvement:  
Department of Education’s management of student attendance” — Tabling*

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [10.20 am]: Before I table the report, I acknowledge the work of the member for Girrawheen on the Robert Cunningham and Catherine Atoms matter. I believe they were treated appallingly by the police over many years. I still do not think a proper investigation has occurred regarding the behaviour of police. I thank the member for Girrawheen and others.

I present for tabling the eighth report of the Public Accounts Committee entitled “Setting the Stage for Improvement: Department of Education’s management of student attendance”.

[See paper 2100.]

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Could I commence by acknowledging the diligence and hard work of my fellow committee members: the deputy chair, Mr Dean Nalder, the member for Bateman; Mrs Lisa O’Malley, the member for Bicton; Mr Simon Millman, the member for Mount Lawley; and Mr Vince Catania, the member for North West Central. Further, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank our secretariat: principal research officer, Mr Timothy Hughes, and research officers Mr Michael Burton and Dr Amy Lampard, for their excellent assistance and support. We all wish Mr Michael Burton the best of luck in his new adventures in Canberra.

There is a strong positive correlation between school attendance and academic performance. In general, students who regularly attend school achieve better results and those who are often absent from the classroom tend to quickly fall behind. Thus I note with some concern the recent report in *The West Australian* of 20 November. I quote —

More than 15,000 public school students have skipped a week or more of school this year without a valid reason, attendance figures show.

Data obtained from the WA Education Department revealed 15,184 students were reported as absent without an acceptable reason for six or more consecutive days of school in the first half of this year.

More than 7000 of those students, or 48 per cent, were listed as absent because they went on holiday during term time.

WA Secondary School Executives Association president Armando Giglia said principals were fighting a constant battle to convince parents not to take children out of school during term time.

He said —

“Sometimes you get an education experience by travelling around and seeing things, but that’s got to be with the family and more than just a holiday,” he said. “But just going to Bali for two weeks, I don’t consider that to be anything like an education experience.”

Despite a recent focus on improving attendance in WA public schools, the overall average attendance rate declined from 90.9 per cent last year to 90.7 per cent this year.

The figures also showed an increase in the number of children classified as “at severe attendance risk” for attending school less than 60 per cent of the time. There were 11,213 students in that category this year compared with 10,956 last year.

The number of students listed as truanting after a teacher or parent witnessed them leaving school grounds without permission fell from 7430 to 6489.

About 200,000 students, or 71.8 per cent, attended school regularly—or more than 90 per cent of the time.

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The department’s acting Statewide services executive director, Martin Clery, said it was the law that all school-age children should be in school or another approved education program.

He urged parents to take their children’s attendance seriously, to avoid missing out on vital building blocks in their learning. “No one wants to see children left behind,” Mr Clery said.

I do not want to condone any unauthorised absence from school but I think there is a qualitative difference between students who are absent from school to go on a family holiday and other students who are regularly absent from school. I will talk about this a little bit more, but, briefly, if students are away for non-family holiday reasons, it may highlight that they have a problem on the home front. As Armando Giglia has said, there is overseas travel and there is overseas travel. Going to Bali may not be sufficient from an educational perspective, but it may benefit a family. Of course, we do not want to encourage students to be away from school for family holidays, but we

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have to see that there can be a difference between students being absent for family holidays and students being absent for other reasons.

Due to the importance of attending school, it is incumbent on governments, policymakers and administrators to be eternally vigilant in evaluating student attendance rates and implementing measures to enhance student attendance.

In 2009, the Auditor General undertook a performance audit of attendance by Western Australian public school students in years 1 to 10. It highlighted opportunities for the Department of Education to improve its recording and management of student attendance in a report entitled “Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools”. The Auditor General returned to this same issue in 2015, conducting a follow-up audit to examine whether the department had “taken reasonable steps” to address the weaknesses identified in 2009. Although acknowledging that “improving attendance is never easy or simple”, the Auditor General found that “too many” students remained at educational risk in 2015 because of their non-attendance. The Auditor General’s second audit report, entitled “Follow-On: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools”, identified numerous shortcomings in the department’s response to the 2009 report.

Earlier this year, the Public Accounts Committee considered the Auditor General’s 2015 report and resolved to undertake its own follow-up of this situation. After holding a public hearing and receiving a response to some further written questions, we decided to prepare our own report to provide Parliament with our assessment of the extent to which the department has addressed the recommendations made by the Auditor General. Under the department’s student attendance policy, schools have primary responsibility for managing student attendance. However, the department must provide schools with the conditions necessary to understand and respond to student absence. The department must also provide the leadership and support necessary for schools to establish the foundations and systems needed to improve student attendance. Addressing poor student attendance is a complex and difficult challenge, with the reasons and nature of unexplained and unauthorised absences from school being multifaceted. Individual schools and the department each have significant and crucial roles to play, with schools needing guidance from the department on how to effectively intervene in cases of persistently unexplained or unauthorised absence. To provide this guidance, the department needs to regularly and consistently evaluate and update its student attendance strategies.

Since the 2015 audit report, the department has made some changes to improve its centralised guidance to schools, such as the online student attendance toolkit, which gives schools resources, tools and guidance to record and manage student attendance. However, more work is needed to address the Auditor General’s recommendations and improve processes for supporting schools to manage student attendance. We believe the department does not proactively identify schools in need of support to manage severe student attendance issues. We found gaps in the department’s evaluation of student attendance initiatives, such as responsible parenting agreements. Furthermore, the department has not fully evaluated the student attendance toolkit to determine its reach and usefulness across all schools with attendance issues. It is imperative that the department evaluates all its major attendance initiatives, and in doing so, ensures that any evaluation methodology is reliable, valid and useful in addressing student attendance.

We also believe that the department should take the opportunity to use its annual report to provide transparent information on student attendance, including information on variances in attendance and performance by school and region. However, care must be taken to avoid creating a self-perpetuating adverse effect in reporting on poor student attendance performance by individual schools. Although parents and students arguably have a right to know how schools and regions manage student attendance, care must be taken to ensure that the publication of any such information does not exacerbate the problem due to parents withdrawing children with good attendance records from poorer performing schools.

Although the Department of Education plays a critical role, other government agencies and departments, such as the Department of Communities, also have roles to play. We all have an interest in ensuring that our children attend school, so we all have a role to play in that outcome. A paper by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research titled “Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts” states —

Educators cannot do this alone: The community needs to be included

Any absence from school, whether authorised or unauthorised, must be discouraged and addressed. However, as research by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research has demonstrated, unauthorised absences are the greatest concern. While authorised absences are not good, the report states —

It is likely that unauthorised absences reflect more than just time away from school, but also possibly behavioural and school engagement issues.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 29 November 2018]  
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It is also the case that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are most often adversely affected by school absence. Under the heading “Some students are more adversely affected by absence than others”, the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research report states —

There are distinct gaps in achievement depending on where students live, their socio-economic status, mobility and Aboriginal status, and these gaps were observed at all levels of attendance ... Amongst disadvantaged students, achievement declined rapidly with increasing levels of absence.

More advantaged children had relatively high achievement levels irrespective of their level of attendance at school. This pattern is particularly evident in the primary school years, and suggests that more advantaged children have alternative and effective resources that help them achieve learning objectives, both at school and in the home, during the early years of school.

Community involvement in the education of our children is vital for student attendance, particularly for children from disadvantaged or troubled backgrounds. The Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership’s education program, which caters for students in years 6 to 8—who are between 10 and 12 years of age—recognises the multifaceted complexities and challenges in addressing poor student attendance at school. Under this program, which is funded by the McGowan government, students are transported from home to school, and home again at the end of the day. In a separate classroom and with a dedicated teacher, the students are provided with an alternative learning classroom experience to address varying literacy and numeracy abilities, learning difficulties, and overall emotional and cognitive functioning. Crucially, this program aims to ensure that participating students attend school on a daily basis. It draws support from the Department of Education, schools and their staff, the government, and local businesses. It is truly a community effort. Unfortunately, it is not possible to offer all at-risk students the resources available within the Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership’s education program. This brief description of the program demonstrates and reinforces that the department and schools alone cannot solve the challenge of improving student attendance. It is important that the Department of Education provides leadership and, by evaluating measures and programs enacted to improve student attendance, helps ensure that the best strategies are maintained and possibly expanded.

Another government initiative is the full service school trial at Armadale Senior High School. Full service schools, also known as extended schools, have been successful both in Australia and overseas in not only boosting student educational and social outcomes, but also providing crucial early intervention services in lower socioeconomic areas. Full service schools provide a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community. Under the full service model, additional third party and government services are provided to students and the community to complement the educational mandate of schools. This puts the school at the centre of a hub or precinct that offers multiple services for its entire community. Initiatives like the Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership’s education program and the full service school trial are important because the Department of Education is not solely responsible for ensuring that students attend school. Parents have a vital role, as, indeed, do local communities and other government departments.

We acknowledge the Department of Education’s efforts to provide schools with data, tools, resources and guidance to manage student attendance. Nevertheless, we have identified opportunities for the department to improve its processes to ensure that schools are in a better position to manage persistent student absence. We hope this will assist the department as it seeks to tackle the difficult challenge of improving student attendance at our public schools. We really need to address this issue because the Department of Education has a regular attendance satisfaction level of 90 per cent, which means that a student could be away one day a fortnight and still be considered to be attending school regularly. If that were continued over a 10-year period, the student would be missing out on one whole school year. Surely, that is not acceptable. The importance of school attendance for academic performance and societal development cannot be underestimated and I urge all policymakers, educators and anyone interested in the future of our students to engage with our recommendations. I should also say that the future economic success of this state depends on ensuring that our students attend school and are properly educated.

I conclude my contribution with a quote from the excellent Telethon Institute for Child Health Research report titled “Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts”, which states —

The reasons for absences and poor achievement are likely to be multi-faceted, and any approach to improving the outcomes for disadvantaged students will require multiple approaches with shared responsibility between students, parents, schools and a range of government agencies.

I should add also, with the assistance of the local community.

**MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman)** [10.36 am]: I stand in support of the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee’s comments on its eighth report, titled “Setting the Stage for Improvement: Department of Education’s management of student attendance”. I acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues, the member for Bicton, the member for

Mount Lawley and the member for North West Central, who worked with the committee's secretariat, Mr Tim Hughes, to review the Department of Education's management of student attendance.

I acknowledge the Department of Education's increased focus on attendance, but I would like to touch on two areas in the recommendations in addition to the comments made by the chairman of the committee, the member for Armadale. The first is the quality of initiatives and focusing on the correct areas. A couple of concerns were raised in the committee that I would like to point out. One concern was students who travel overseas on holidays with their families. A number of issues underlie student absence from school. I was concerned that perhaps there was too much of an emphasis on achieving a targeted number of school attendance days, which runs the risk of schools not necessarily focusing on the core issues underlying the reason students do not attend. If schools have to hit a number, it becomes too much of a focus. Therefore, they focus on the low-hanging fruit—that is, kids who are not attending because they are away on a family trip. We are not saying that this is or is not an issue, but it raises concerns that the focus can be diverted away from the core underlying issues that the department should be focused on to improve and better all kids' education.

The second area of concern was discussing the outcomes of these initiatives with the Department of Education. Although initiatives were being put in place, because of the broad underlying social issues that may exist in certain areas, there was not a huge expectation that we would see an improvement in results. That concerns me because worldwide we are seeing a trend for governments to commit greater resources to education without achieving a better outcome. One of the recommendations is the desire for the department to evaluate all the major student attendance initiatives. Recommendation 3 of this report highlights the desire that the department takes responsibility for delivering a better outcome with those initiatives. That is something I wanted to reinforce so that the Department of Education is guided in the correct direction. We in this place should not get hung up on achieving a 90 per cent attendance rate; rather, we should get to the core areas and support children's education so that they can become the best that they can be, which is the ultimate goal of supporting education in this state. We want our children to be the best that they can be and we want to ensure that we provide the environment in which they can do that. We encourage and support the Department of Education undertaking a vast array of initiatives to tackle this issue, but we recommend that it evaluate its initiatives, such that we are putting finite resources towards a particular program. It has to deliver an outcome or we have to say, "This does not work" and I fear that the department does not do that.

The second area I want to highlight is greater transparency in reporting. I am sure that the member for North West Central will take up this point further. The underlying issues are not really clear. We know that the attendance rate in some schools is closer to 50 per cent and that we may not want to nominate and specifically identify a particular school, but there must be greater transparency of the underlying issues so that we can make sure that resources are directed in appropriate areas to tackle the school attendance issue. As the chair, the member for Armadale, highlighted, a broad approach is required here because the education of our children is a community issue. We cannot rely solely on the Department of Education or government policy to resolve this issue. We need to tackle this issue more broadly in our community and work on ways to resolve it. I look forward to seeing that happen in the future.

I acknowledge the work of my colleagues. I look forward to seeing over time how the department further progresses this issue. I am hopeful for better outcomes for the sake of all Western Australian children so that they engage in our education system and become the best that they can be.

**MRS L.M. O'MALLEY (Bicton)** [10.42 am]: I rise to add my comments on the Public Accounts Committee's follow-up report into an agency's response to the sixteenth Auditor General's report of 2016. This report is a follow-up to the Department of Education's management of student attendance and is titled, "Setting the Stage for Improvement: Department of Education's management of student attendance". I also begin by thanking my fellow committee members: the chair, Dr Tony Buti, the member for Armadale; the deputy chair, Mr Dean Nalder, the member for Bateman; Mr Simon Millman, the member for Mount Lawley; and Mr Vince Catania, the member for North West Central. Further, I thank our secretariat: principal research officer, Mr Timothy Hughes and research officers Mr Michael Burton and Dr Amy Lampard for their hard work.

For each of us on the committee, the work of this report contains a personal connection of some significance. Each of us is keenly aware that achieving an education can be life-changing and that it is especially transformational for those students who live a life of disadvantage. Attendance at school is crucial to a child's learning, with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research's 2013 paper "Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts" noting —

In all analyses, average academic achievement on NAPLAN tests declined with any absence from school and continued to decline as absence rates increased.

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The nature of the relationship between absence from school and achievement, across all sub-groups of students strongly suggests that every day of attendance in school contributes towards a child's learning, and that academic outcomes are enhanced by maximising attendance in school. There is no "safe" threshold.

The effects of absence also accumulate over time. We found that absence from school was related to academic achievement in numeracy, reading and writing not only in the current year, but in future years as well. Parents need to be aware of these relationships, and understand that when their child misses school it can have an ongoing impact on their learning.

Children cannot learn if they are not present in the learning environment. I will take just a moment to reflect on the broad definition of the phrase "being present". Although the remit of the Public Accounts Committee's report deals with the issue of physical presence or attendance at school, there are the related issues of the engagement of the student in the learning journey, which I am also drawn to examine, as a factor in student attendance and that the learning is meaningful and future focused. Hopefully, this aspect will feature in some future area of inquiry by the relevant agency or a dedicated committee. If we can get our kids to school and engage them in learning while they are there, the learning journey can be truly transformational, especially for those kids whose lives are a daily challenge because of family dysfunction and violence. Education alone cannot solve all of society's problems, but it is a crucial part to the wider solution. This report identifies a lack of progress in addressing student attendance, a situation that has not changed since the first Auditor General's report in 2009 and, again, with the follow-up report in 2015. Our follow-up of the 2015 Auditor General report finds that although the department has made some changes to improve its centralised guidance to schools to assist them with improving school attendance, further work is needed to address the Auditor General's recommendations and improve processes for supporting schools to manage school attendance. Too many kids are still missing too much school and those students are absent from valuable learning opportunities that could change their lives. As stated in our report —

*Some students are more adversely affected by absence than others. There are distinct gaps in achievement depending on where students live, their socioeconomic status, mobility and Aboriginal status, and these gaps were observed at all levels of attendance .... Amongst disadvantaged students, achievement declined rapidly with increasing levels of absence.*

*More advantaged children had relatively high achievement levels irrespective of their level of attendance at school. This pattern is particularly evident in the primary school years, and suggests that more advantaged children have alternative and effective resources that help them achieve learning objectives, both at school and in the home, during the early years of school.*

It is vital that we recognise that school attendance is a shared responsibility, with parents, educators, policymakers and our wider communities all playing a vital role in ensuring our kids go to school every day whenever possible. The task of this committee was to focus on the Department of Education and assess the extent to which it had addressed the recommendations made by the Auditor General. Key amongst our findings is that we believe that the department does not proactively identify schools in need of support to manage severe student attendance issues. We found that the responsibility for attendance rests mostly with the individual school. This is not necessarily a bad thing as it allows schools to develop and implement strategies that fit their specific school community. However, we found that the department could be doing more to ensure schools were supported in finding and utilising programs to help them achieve better student attendance and that these programs should be regularly evaluated. The following recommendations address these findings. Recommendation 3 reads —

The Department of Education evaluate all major student attendance initiatives, including Responsible Parenting Agreements, and revise guidance to schools accordingly. This includes updating all policy, procedures, and guidelines provided to schools via the Student Attendance website.

Recommendation 4 reads —

The Department of Education revise its methods for evaluating the Student Attendance Toolkit to ensure that, at a minimum, it collects information on the reach and usefulness of the resource across all schools with attendance issues. To achieve this, it should be compulsory for schools to complete the Student Attendance Toolkit evaluation survey.

Recommendation 5 reads —

The Department of Education take proactive steps to identify schools in need of support to address student attendance.

I encourage everyone who is interested in our students and their future potential, which I hope is every single one of us across the state, to read this report and engage in its recommendations.

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In closing, I praise the many wonderful educators who go above and beyond to engage their students and everyone who participants in ensuring that our kids go to school each and every day—you are changing lives.

I would particularly like to recognise the Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership education program as a great example of what can be achieved in student attendance when many agencies and individuals come together with this outcome as its central purpose. I acknowledge the commitment of the member for Armadale to the success of that program.

I will finish with a quote on the transformational power of education from voicesofyouth.org. It states —

Education is certainly one of the most powerful weapons a person can poses. Knowledge is the most valuable and the most underrated thing that exists in this world. If only people spent their time wisely, investing it in education, our society would look immensely different. Prosperity, sincerity, welfare, happiness all hide behind education's shadow.

Education helps us understand the world. Education can transform a life. Education is our right. I commend this report to the house.

**MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central)** [10.51 am]: Firstly, I acknowledge my committee members—I will not mention them all over again—and the committee staff, led by Tim Hughes and Dr Amy Lampard. I make a special acknowledgement of Michael Burton, who has left us at Parliament here in Western Australia and gone on to more wonderful things.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** He's had enough of us.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** He has had enough and moved over east. I wish him all the best on behalf of the committee.

I start with the chair's foreword to the eighth report of the Public Accounts Committee, "Setting the Stage for Improvement: Department Of Education's management of student attendance". This is a quote from a report by the Telethon Kids Institute for Child Health Research titled "Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts" —

In all analyses, average academic achievement on NAPLAN tests declined with any absence from school and continued to decline as absence rates increased. The nature of the relationship between absence from school and achievement, across all subgroups of students strongly suggests that every day of attendance in school contributes towards a child's learning, and that academic outcomes are enhanced by maximising attendance in school. There is no 'safe' threshold.

The effects of absence also accumulate over time. We found that absence from school was related to academic achievement in numeracy, reading and writing not only in the current year, but in future years as well. Parents need to be aware of these relationships, and understand that when their child misses school it can have an ongoing impact on their learning.

I think that rings true. This committee report is all about ensuring that we analyse school attendance. I refer to the table "Student attendance categories used by the Department of Education" on page 2 of the report, chapter 1. Regular attendance is 90 to 100 per cent attendance. If a student misses up to 0.5 days a week, they will miss up to one year of school over a 10-year period. I was blown away by that, because as parents we often do not realise that. We say that one of our kids can stay at home, but we do not realise that it accumulates over time and could lead to one year out of 10 being missed. Indicated educational risk is 82 to 89 per cent attendance. If a student misses between 0.5 and one day a week, children can miss between one year and two years of schooling over a 10-year period. Moderate educational risk is 60 to 79 per cent attendance; missing between one and two days equates to missing between two and four years over a 10-year period. Zero to 59 per cent attendance can mean missing more than four years of schooling out of that 10 years. That really shows how important school is. Missing one day here and there adds up over the life of those children attending school.

The report states —

Under the Department's Student Attendance Policy, schools have primary responsibility for managing student attendance. Nevertheless, the Department must provide schools with the conditions necessary to understand and respond to student absence. This includes strategic direction, data, guidelines, and an understanding of what works to address student attendance. This central leadership and support sets the stage for improvement in student attendance.

It continues —

... the Department does not proactively identify schools in need of support to manage severe student attendance issues. Instead, schools are responsible for monitoring their own performance and identifying training and assistance needs.

I do not think that is good enough. The report clearly highlights that the Department of Education needs to take this on as a major issue right across WA and particularly in regional Western Australia. It has taken a bit to get the actual data on attendance broken down into regions, because the regions do not tell the full story. Of course, the overall metropolitan rate of attendance is 92 per cent. Regional attendance is 87.5 per cent. Overall, the attendance average statewide is 90.9 per cent. Everyone thinks that 90.9 per cent is not a bad attendance rate. However, let us break it down into regional centres. I will take the midwest, which encompasses Geraldton, part of the member for Moore's electorate, the Gascoyne and Murchison—from Meekatharra to Mt Magnet to Cue to Gascoyne Junction to Carnarvon to Geraldton. The attendance rate in the midwest is 84.4 per cent, but the percentage of students who have 90 to 100 per cent attendance is 55.9 per cent. I do not think that is acceptable in anyone's language. The Pilbara has 52.9 per cent of students with 90 to 100 per cent attendance. The Kimberley has 41.7 per cent of students with 90 to 100 per cent school attendance. Clearly, there is a problem.

I refer to the article that the member for Armadale read out from *The West Australian* of 20 November 2018, titled "7 000 WA students skip school for family holidays". We can focus on the families who can take their children out of school to go on holidays, but I do not think people who can afford to take their kids away to go overseas are the problem. Yes, it may have an impact on some of their schooling, but the real problem is that 15 000 public school students have skipped a week or more of school this year without a valid reason. This is what these attendance figures show. More than 7 000 of those students, or 48 per cent, were listed as absent because they went on holiday during that time. Let us take that 7 000 out of the equation and focus on the others, who were absent without a reason. We can relate those students who are missing school without a valid reason to regional Western Australia. We know that there are valid reasons that they are missing school, but when schools at Meekatharra, Mt Magnet, Cue and Carnarvon and north, at Onslow, try to engage students to attend, they have to use their funds to educate the kids on seeking programs to support the school to get kids to come in. The focus is not really on the education; the focus is on getting kids to school. Clearly, schools in regional WA need assistance from government.

Royalties for regions, whether members like it or not—we on this side of the house do—funded a lot of programs to take away the burden of schools using their finances on programs to attract kids to school. Now we do not have that. We are seeing the funds that should be used to enhance education being redirected to trying to get kids to school. The government and the Department of Education need to look at how they can provide the appropriate resources to schools, not only in a financial manner. When a teacher goes through the roll and school numbers are down at a certain point in time, that school's finances are affected by kids not going to school. A reduction in student numbers can mean a reduction in the number of teachers. That is a problem faced by schools in my electorate and right across regional WA. The education department needs to look at these figures more carefully. They need to be broken down region by region, and big centres such as Geraldton, the Gascoyne and the midwest should not be the only places considered. Schools perhaps do not need to be named, but there needs to be a comprehensive list to be able to drill down into the attendance rates of these schools in regional WA. This opportunity is being missed by the Department of Education and I think this report highlights the need for that and for other departments to step in and not to accept that 55 per cent school attendance is the norm.

**MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley)** [11.00 am]: I would like to start my contribution to the debate on the tabling of the eighth report of the Public Accounts Committee with two brief points. Firstly, the department should require schools struggling with school attendance to access the resources available. Secondly, the department should continue to work with other government agencies and departments, as the member for Bateman said, to provide a whole-of-government approach to what appears to be a very difficult problem. By doing so, I think the question of school attendance can be addressed.

Although my fellow committee members have spent a lot of their time focusing on some of the problems with school attendance, I thought I would focus on some of the initiatives that schools in my electorate and nearby electorates have undertaken to encourage and promote attendance. I will briefly speak about Sutherland Dianella Primary School and its principal, Jenn Allsop, and deputy principal, Blake Ingersole. Tomorrow night, I will have the great privilege of being at Sutherland Dianella Primary School for Roar and Snore. This is a fantastic initiative organised by the school to encourage parents to camp out on the school oval with their sons and daughters who attend the school. By doing this the school addresses the novelty of school for these young students. Barriers are broken down and familiarity is increased. Parents and children can share an experience at the school. Increasing familiarity encourages students to attend the school more readily and so promotes attendance. I pay my respects to Jenn Allsop, the principal at Sutherland Dianella Primary School, and her deputy principal, Blake Ingersole. I also pay my respects to P&C president, Sherron Papamihail; vice president, Hayley Cook; as well as Caroline Cousins; Susan Goodman; Kathryn Flynn; Laura Folety; Kelly Ngatai; Gemma De Knock; and Adrian Heil. This is a great initiative by Sutherland Dianella to encourage and promote school attendance. I will be there tomorrow night and am very much looking forward to it.

Two weeks ago I had the great privilege of being at Yokine Primary School, which runs another fantastic initiative, the breakfast club. It is run on a Friday morning and is designed to encourage students to attend school early in case they have not had breakfast. I place on record for *Hansard* and the Legislative Assembly my great appreciation of the work of the principal, Jenny Hirsch. I also acknowledge teacher Elle Demasi and education assistants Lynnette Fitzpatrick and Kim Prast. They volunteer their time outside their normal work hours in order to run this fantastic program at Yokine Primary School. I would also like to commend the parents of one of the students at Yokine Primary School—the member for South Perth will be interested in this—Makrina and David Barbaro who donate sausages for the school to cook for students as part of their breakfast. These fantastic parents run Barbaro Butchers on Preston in Como. They donate their time and product to support the school in this fantastic initiative. I commend the work of Yokine Primary School through its breakfast club, which promotes and encourages school attendance. It was a real privilege to be at Yokine Primary School two weeks ago for this event.

Just last month I had the great privilege of being in the electorate of the member for Mirrabooka, where I attended Balga Senior High School. I was there as a guest of the Girls Academy. People who are aware of this organisation will be familiar with the fantastic work it does. I commend some of the people in the Girls Academy. It was founded by champion basketballer and Olympian Ricky Grace, and I congratulate Ricky for the work he has put into this. I also congratulate my friends Phil Paioff, Emmanuel Hondros and Giovanni Torre who are all employees of the Girls Academy and work tirelessly and selflessly to promote its aims and objectives. The academy would do well and benefit greatly from increased funding to enable it to fulfil its job. The reason I comment on this and promote the Girls Academy is that the very first of its four key objectives is to increase school attendance. The member for Mirrabooka just mentioned to me that last night the Girls Academy had its awards presentation to recognise and award students whose attendance at school had increased materially. That sort of positive reinforcement does nothing but encourage greater school attendance.

Let me say a bit more about the Girls Academy. There are examples of great achievements by some of its graduates. Jayda Baron from Geraldton is in year 12. The Girls Academy helped her get into a traineeship at the Catholic Education Office where she will complete a certificate IV in business. Brooke Wilson is a year 12 student at the Girrawheen Girls Academy. She has just graduated and has gone straight into a full-time traineeship with Clough, the corporate partner of the Girls Academy. She is now completing her certificate III in business. Trudy Snow finished high school in 2013. She was a Girls Academy student and went on to graduate from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in my electorate of Mount Lawley. She now runs her own business in health and nutrition. Members can see materially the difference that this organisation makes to the attendance, participation and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women in our education system. The Girls Academy is getting these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engaged and enthusiastic about school and their futures. I put on record my personal gratitude to the academy for the work it does and commend it for that endeavour. I wish it more strength and more success. I also formally recognise that the academy would benefit from greater funding. I will continue to take up the fight for that on its behalf.

I also note Mount Lawley Primary School in my own electorate of Mount Lawley. This is much more of a personal note. There are myriad ways to promote school attendance; it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. There has to be a nuanced and multifaceted approach dealing with the idiosyncrasies of each school. I commend the principal of Mount Lawley Primary School, Cavelle Monck, who is at school at 8.00 am every day with the before-school program that encourages students to get in early and participate.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** People up in the gallery are more than welcome, but we discourage them from leaning over the balcony.

**Mr S.A. MILLMAN:** I place on record my warm affection for the work that Cavelle Monck does as the principal of Mount Lawley Primary School, particularly in encouraging students to attend. There is nothing quite like students attending room 17 being warmly greeted by Mrs Jenny Gordon and Ms Sue Stott with their broad smiles and encouraging demeanour. We just know that students are comfortable, confident and happy to attend school.

I think about the fantastic professionals who are employed in our education system and I am reminded of the work I did before I entered Parliament when I acted for a number of public sector unions involved with the education of our students in WA. I worked with the State School Teachers' Union of WA and the Civil Service Association, which represent the outstanding professionals working in our education department. I also worked with United Voice, the union responsible for representing education assistants. I know those unions campaign hard to make sure that our educational professionals are paid the correct wages—fair and equitable wages—for the fantastic contribution they make to the education of our children. When I see the effort, time, energy, enthusiasm, attention to detail, passion and commitment that people like Jenny Gordon, Sue Stott, Cavelle Monck, Jenny Hirsch, Jenn Allsop and Blake Ingersole put into their job, I know that these unions should be supported when they campaign for fair and equitable wages for these professionals. On that note, I recommend the report to members and I commend the work of the committee.

**MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton)** [11.10 am] — by leave: I will be brief. I commend the Public Accounts Committee for its work on this report because it is incredibly important. The member for North West Central and I see these issues in some of the schools in Geraldton, including the one that I am on the board of. The picture is as clear as anything: if a child does not turn up at school, they are never going to get an education. They will never pick up what they have missed, and there is a transition point between years 2 and 3 whereby, if the child does not make that leap, they can just about forget about getting an education at all. The student body at the school that I attended—I am on the board—is now 63 per cent Aboriginal, and it has a cohort of students who rarely go to school. Interestingly, the attendance rate on the first four days of the week is about 80 per cent and on Fridays it is always 70 per cent. That is as regular as clockwork. The reason is, frankly and honestly, that parents do not see the value of education. It is also clear that when those students try to get into the workforce, if they have had no education, companies cannot employ them.

As long as I have been in this place I have been trying to get the Department of Education to bring back truancy officers who proactively go out into the community and find kids who are not attending school and find out where they are supposed to be attending. Geraldton has a continuous problem. People move to Geraldton for four to six weeks and their children do not go to school. Their neighbours ring me up and say that the children have been there for a month and have not attended school, and they ask why that is. The education department in Geraldton is prepared to go and see them and find out why. Invariably, they are visiting from a place like Meekatharra or Mt Magnet and they do not see any reason for their kids to be at school, so their kids miss out on four to six weeks of school. When we ask the Department of Education whose job it is to get these kids to attend school, it says that it is the job of the police. I think the police have enough things to do than to be running around the streets trying to find kids who are not going to school.

I have a regular involvement with the Midwest Clontarf Academy in Geraldton and I pay credit to the work that Clontarf does to lift attendance rates and to get far better educational outcomes, in this case for young Aboriginal men. The Clontarf Academy in Geraldton is the second-best performing out of about 100 in Australia. I pay credit to Clontarf for the work it does.

This is one of the best reports I have seen a committee bring into this house. If we ask the education industry how we can lift the education attainments of Aboriginal students in particular, it will turn around and say, “Give us more money.” That is all it ever does; it just wants more money and more resources. It really bells the cat that for once a committee has said that it wanted to look at the extra resources the area gets and the educational outcomes that are achieved. I for one have always been quite cynical about it. I have my doubts that in most cases the extra money that is given for this purpose achieves very much at all. I thank the house for its indulgence.