

CAMP SCHOOLS — FAIRBRIDGE WA

Grievance

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [10.00 am]: My grievance is directed to the minister representing the Minister for Education and Training and is on behalf of our regional students and our smaller regional schools, in my electorate and around the state. As we are about to leave behind this tumultuous year for WA under a Labor-led government, the future of regional camp schools must come under some scrutiny from those who have valued this service for the decades before Labor came into office and decided to decimate them. Camp schools have traditionally been seen as a complementary entity to the Department of Education—they were an additional education experience offered to provide balance within the existing curriculum. By fobbing them off to the private sector, the government is saying that they were never part of the education system in this state. It is the same as deciding to sell off schools in this state to the private sector. There are countless students, parents and schools who would heartily condemn the notion that this outdoor experience is no longer part of the public school system.

The tender has been awarded and Fairbridge is now responsible for the management and future of the six regional camp schools. From a regional point of view, I am concerned that our smaller schools may now miss out on the opportunity to attend one of the camp schools. Feedback suggests there may be a minimum camp size before a booking will be accepted. This will be a severe disadvantage for small regional schools that have small numbers in upper primary groups. I also understand that next year's bookings are substantially down on the number from previous years. This is a result of a lack of surety around student fees and charges, as well as the services offered. Schools are reporting that they have not received any information about next year's service; therefore, they cannot plan the year in advance, which is traditionally what all schools do. Of concern to stakeholders who have an interest in this transition is that Fairbridge does not seem to be engaging in any discussions, which raises questions about the services on offer next year.

I understand that at this stage, no site managers appointed by Fairbridge are on site to manage the transition. As with any transition, existing staff would be useful to keep on board, as a flood of knowledge leaving such a well-established entity can put pressure on those who are recruited with lesser experience. My understanding is that those existing staff who would like to remain after the transition have not yet been spoken to. It is leaving the task of recruitment to a very late stage of the transition. Those who have not been spoken to or contacted may be forced to seek employment elsewhere, which will mean that Fairbridge will lose a golden opportunity to take on experience that it will not find in the future. Local communities have historically provided support services for the camp schools. It is my understanding that Fairbridge intends to bus staff into campsites from Pinjarra. This will not be welcomed by local communities, as the support they provide is a significant part of their business.

Communication with WA government schools has been minimal. They need to feel confident that camps will go ahead at a reasonable cost to parents before they can book for next year. I also note that the tender document said that the government would give consideration to proposals that do not accord with the reserve purpose. If the proponents offered ancillary activities to the reserve purpose, this would mean that it would more than likely be supported. From here, the wording becomes a little more concerning. It says that if the proponent were to deliver a service that was outside the reserve purpose, it might be necessary to seek a change to the total reserve purpose. Considering the reserve purpose on the government-owned sites is for the purpose of the School Education Act, what might these services outside the reserve purpose be and what impact would they have on the educational services for which the camp schools exist? Could we assume that the camp schools will now be used for corporate retreats, orienteering groups, mountain bike groups or such like? These groups would more than likely ultimately pay more and would be far more attractive to Fairbridge from a financial point of view over under-resourced public schools. It is a simple business equation. The Department of Education had to subsidise the camp schools in the past to provide the service. If the new provider cannot charge more for each student, there is no way it will survive under the current model without fee-for-service from other sources.

Fairbridge, as an independent school, would have a valued approach to the educational outcomes of the camp schools, but this would assume the need to recruit more teachers and support staff. Even if this were done on a casual basis, this would mean a substantial increase in staffing costs. If staff are to be brought in under a casual arrangement, sourcing people with suitable qualifications would be an added challenge in some areas in which camp schools are situated.

What reporting criteria does the government have in place to hold Fairbridge accountable for the services it will offer at the camp schools? Will Fairbridge need to provide statistics on student numbers and outcomes to enable its funding to remain in place? This grievance seeks assurances from the minister that access to the camp schools, especially for smaller regional schools, will remain unchanged. We also seek assurances that the camp schools will provide the same or higher level of outcomes that students in the past have enjoyed. The government seems happy to wash its hands of responsibility for the camp schools. This is not what government is about. As this government has discovered, reducing services in the regions will always be met with anger and discontent. The

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camp schools have been an educational highlight for many students over decades. This complete disregard for the significance of yet another service in the regions reflects on this government. I look forward to the minister's response on those items.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [10.07 am]: I am representing the Minister for Education and Training in responding to this grievance. I respect the member's right to raise grievances, but the repetitive raising of the same grievance with absolutely —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Mr Acting Speaker, this is a grievance; it is not an opportunity for a moron to interject.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Clearly, the minister does not know the rules of the house. He must address members by the electorate they represent.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Thank you, member; I have heard your point of order. Minister, please withdraw that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I beg your pardon? I said it was not an opportunity for a moron to interject. If he wants to claim the status of being a moron, I will give it to him.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Okay, I withdraw that the member for Dawesville has that status.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, no more, thanks.

Grievance Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member for Roe has raised this same grievance numerous times, without any additional information and in an increasingly ridiculous manner, suggesting that somehow there is some conspiracy. I do not know what the Nationals WA has against Fairbridge, which is a respected institution in Western Australia. Most people in Western Australia respect Fairbridge.

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Dr A.D. BUTI: The minister listened to the grievance in silence. He is now making a response. Some members may not like the response, but can the minister be given the due respect that he afforded the member for Roe?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Thank you, member. Members to my left, as the member for Armadale just stated, the grievance was given in silence and the response will also be given without interjection.

Grievance Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: However, I am willing —

Mr V.A. Catania: Don't ad-lib, because you clearly don't know what you are talking about.

Mr P. PAPALIA: You can call him.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thank you.

The ACTING SPEAKER: This is going to be a long day if you keep doing that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am willing to again repeat the facts.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: No, I am not going to send you home!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Getting the state's finances back in order after the disgraceful mismanagement of the Liberal-National government is a tough job. Part of the tough job is making tough decisions, and one decision was that we could no longer run camp sites; they are not schools. The program offered at camp sites has been well received and appreciated over a number of years. They offer activities that help develop important social and life skills. The role of the sites is to supplement education programs delivered by schools. Each camp offers its own individual activities. Although they are much loved and valued, they are not solely used by schools. One of the savings measures implemented was to seek alternative camp school operators to continue the services at six facilities—all, except Broome—ensuring students continue to have priority access at an affordable price.

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I repeat that: the government sought an alternative operator to continue the services. The change is that they will not be operated by the Department of Education. That was the decision. Camp schools will remain operational, with their management handed over to those in the best position to provide these services.

The minister announced the new operator in September. She was pleased to announce that Fairbridge WA had been selected to operate the six camp sites in Bridgetown, Dampier, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Pemberton and Point Peron. Broome Camp School will remain with the Department of Education. Public school students will continue to receive priority access to the sites. A requirement of the process was that public school students would have priority access at an affordable cost. The conditions of use also stipulated that the operators would be required to retain an educational focus and use. The expected length of the lease is five years, with two options of further extensions of five years each. Under the agreement, students will continue to have access at an affordable price.

The Department of Education conducted a robust tender and evaluation process to select the most suitable proponent to manage the six sites. Fairbridge WA is a fantastic fit to take on the provision of the six sites. Fairbridge WA is committed to providing students and other members of the community access to school camps and outdoor activities that are high-quality, affordable and available to all schools. The organisation specialises in camp accommodation and outdoor education, and has an emphasis on helping disadvantaged young people. In my role in a shadow ministerial portfolio, I experienced Fairbridge's activities. It is a good organisation and it is disgraceful that the Nationals WA are talking it down in the manner they have.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Fairbridge WA operates over three areas—heritage and general accommodation; education through the curriculum and re-engagement in education schools; and as an accredited registered training organisation. This is a great result for the camp sites and the community. The sites will remain accessible and affordable for school students, sporting groups and the general community, and they will be operated by a reputable not-for-profit provider.

It is obvious—it has become increasingly clear—that the National Party does not like Fairbridge. I do not know why. I have not seen any evidence to support its attitude, disgruntlement or anger with Fairbridge. I do not know why the National Party does not like Fairbridge.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: No-one in WA understands why the National Party is so vehemently opposed to Fairbridge. For some reason the member seems to have a particular grudge against Fairbridge, because he continues to raise grievances in this place. The Nationals can try —

Mr R.S. Love: You're misleading the house.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not seeking interjections.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Clearly the mid-range minister does not know what he is talking about. Can we please have someone who does?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Member for North West Central, sit down. There is no point of order, and if you continue to abuse the process that will also be recorded.

Grievance Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: The Nationals seem determined to run down Fairbridge as an organisation. That organisation is a great fit for these sites and students will continue to have access at an affordable price to the facilities they know and love. A condition of the new agreement was that public school students would continue to enjoy priority access at an affordable price.

Mr J.E. McGrath: They will be higher prices than they are now though. You say “affordable”, but they are —

Mr P. PAPALIA: Did the member just hear what I said?

Mr J.E. McGrath: You said “affordable”.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Okay. I am running out of time because of the interjections, but I will skip ahead to a little bit of history for members opposite.

On the matter of costs, the member may be interested in the history of price increases since 2008. In every single year the prices of camp schools went up. In 2010, the price for a child went up by 5.6 per cent, but over the period that the previous government was in power the prices went up by 27 per cent. It is a ridiculous accusation that somehow things will get worse because a reputable organisation like Fairbridge has been brought in to enable the government to save a bit of money and help fix the mess that we inherited from the disgraceful mismanagement

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of the Liberal–National government that resulted in a \$40 billion debt being imposed on the people of Western Australia. Future generations will be paying the previous government’s debt, and the opposition should be helping instead of accusing Fairbridge of being a bad organisation. The Liberal and National Parties should be helping. Instead of accusing Fairbridge of being a bad organisation, the Liberal and National Parties should be assisting in the effort to fix the mess that they created.