

CURRICULUM COUNCIL AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Second Reading

Resumed from 18 May.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [4.14 pm]: I am the lead speaker on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011. I inform the house now that the opposition will support this legislation. This bill has had a long gestation. A clause within the Curriculum Council Act 1997 provides for a review of the legislation after five years. That review commenced in 2002 and the subsequent report by the Department of Education Services was given to Hon Ljiljana Ravlich in 2006, which she tabled in Parliament on 17 October 2006. It has been a long time coming. The former Minister for Education and Training, the member for Rockingham, drafted, I believe, legislation that was very similar to the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011. I have not seen that draft legislation, but certainly the briefing that was provided to me by the Department of Education led me to believe that the legislation is very similar. There are some differences mainly around the number of members of the board of the new School Curriculum and Standards Authority; nonetheless, the legislation itself is, indeed, similar.

I say now to the Minister for Education that we find ourselves with a precedent that was set last week concerning legislation introduced into this place. The precedent was set by the Premier and the Minister for Housing when the member for Southern River sat in the chamber with his adviser, who was providing advice to that member on his private member's bill. The Leader of the Opposition made the point fairly clearly that members who introduce legislation are entitled to bring in here advisers whom they see fit, because, ultimately, they are strangers on the floor of the house and it is the member himself or herself who is providing information to members in the house. The Premier certainly made it crystal clear in his statements to the house last week, on 10 August 2011, when he said —

... if an adviser before the house has had or has a pecuniary interest in the matter before the house, should that stranger be allowed on the floor of the chamber? In my view, the answer is clearly no.

This had not been raised before the Premier raised it last week when he was attacking the member for Southern River during debate on the member for Southern River's private legislation. More interesting was the Minister for Housing's remarks, when he made the point that unless the adviser had been specifically involved in drafting the legislation, that person knew nothing about the legislation at all. The Minister for Housing stated —

I am sure the member for Southern River can get advice from his adviser who knows nothing about the legislation, because he was not involved in the drafting of it ...

I do not believe there has previously been a requirement in this house for advisers generally—it is mainly members of the public service who give advice to ministers—to have been specifically involved in the drafting of the legislation. However, this is something that the government has now decided is a requirement for, as the Premier said, the integrity of debate. Questions will be asked of the minister's advisers to make sure, as the Minister for Housing said, that those advisers have been involved in the specific drafting of this legislation, and, as the Premier said, as strangers on the floor of the house—not non-public servants, the Premier said, but strangers on the floor of the house—they must be interrogated. Members are entitled to interrogate strangers on the floor of the house about any pecuniary or commercial interest they may have in connection with legislation upon which they are advising the member—in this case, the Minister for Education. It is new, and although no-one has accused the Premier of being an arch conservative, he has certainly introduced a new practice into the chamber, and it is something that the opposition will pursue when we move into the consideration in detail stage.

This is the minister's first piece of legislation —

Dr E. Constable: Second.

Mr B.S. WYATT: It is the second piece of legislation that the minister has introduced into this house, but the first piece of legislation that I have had the pleasure of debating with her in my role as shadow Minister for Education. The bill has bipartisan support because, as I have already pointed out, similar legislation was drafted by the member for Rockingham when he was Minister for Education and Training; however, when the election was called in 2008, that legislation never made its way onto the floor of the chamber. As Mr Acting Speaker will appreciate, I have a very keen interest in receiving commentary or input. Despite the opposition's support for this legislation, I was keen to get input from those involved in the delivery of education in Western Australia, and I have sought, by way of letter, advice from a number of different organisations—the State School Teachers' Union of WA, the Western Australian Primary Principals Association, the Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association, the Catholic Education Office in Western Australia, the Association of Independent Schools of WA, Murdoch University, University of Western Australia, Curtin University, Edith Cowan

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University and University of Notre Dame. I will not name all the various subject associations, because there are many, but I also wrote to those organisations seeking their input and many—not all, but a number—replied with their views on the legislation. Whilst questions were raised and comments made, many of which I will pursue during consideration in detail, broadly there is support for this legislation, and certainly there seems to be acknowledgement of and support for what the 2006 report found, which is the importance of separating the provider and regulator functions that currently are effectively combined in the Curriculum Council Act 1997.

I will reflect on the thorough review conducted by the Department of Education Services. The review certainly gave me some knowledge of the history of the development of curriculum in Western Australia. It outlines in quite some detail exactly how we arrived at the Curriculum Council Act 1997. The bill was introduced by Hon Norman Moore when he was Minister for Education.

Mr M. McGowan: Is that right? It would have been the now Premier.

Mr B.S. WYATT: The member advises me that it was the member for Cottesloe, the current Premier, who introduced it. I will check that because I am pretty sure that Hon Norman Moore set up the committee that recommended the Curriculum Council. Again, I am pulling this out of the Department of Education Services' report.

Mr M. McGowan: The member for Cottesloe was the minister in 1997. Hon Norman Moore ceased being minister in 1995; he might have established some sort of review group, but I am pretty sure it was the member for Cottesloe who introduced it.

Dr E. Constable: I think the member is probably right.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I will quote page 12 of the report, which reads —

In June 1994, the then Minister for Education, Employment and Training, Hon. Norman Moore, appointed the Ministerial Committee to Review Curriculum Development, chaired by Mrs Therese Temby.

...

The Ministerial Committee completed the Review of School Curriculum Development Procedures and Processes in Western Australia (the 'Temby report') in September 1995.

It went on to say —

The Temby report contained 23 recommendations, in response to which the Minister announced six 'major decisions', together with a response to each specific recommendation.

The DES report outlines those recommendations; the first is the establishment of the Curriculum Council with about 14 members. That was the first major decision made by Minister Norman Moore that led to the Curriculum Council being established by way of the Curriculum Council Act. The conclusions that were reached by the DES report were —

- that the Curriculum Council continue as a statutory authority;
- that items for attention be referred to the statutory review pursuant to the section 36 review of the Act to commence on or after 1 August 2002;
- that a new five-year review provision, equivalent to section 36, be retained in the Act ... and
- that the general consideration of the Council's performance, efficiency and effectiveness be incorporated in the statutory review under the new review provision.

When the former member for Victoria Park, Hon Geoff Gallop, became Premier, a functional review of the delivery of government was commissioned by the Labor government in 2002. That review recommended that all agencies in the education and training portfolios be amalgamated to form one department. However, as time moved on, the government decided not to amalgamate all the organisations, which would have included the Curriculum Council, into the one department, simply because the development of public policy called for the separation of the provider and regulatory functions.

The report goes into some detail on the history and context of the Curriculum Council Act and then highlights its own conclusions. The report made the point that having professional development by combining regulator and provider functions was indeed unusual and recommended that they be split. It also made the finding that, in respect of section 9(1)(c) of the current act, there was no means for that function to be carried out. A number of weaknesses were found within the Curriculum Council Act. Page 61 of the DES report reads —

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We believe it would be prudent for the Council to also review, in the interests of good governance, its induction process, code of conduct and the professional development of Council members and senior staff to build the expertise of the governing body and ensure that all are clear about their duties and responsibilities.

That is something that the opposition will pursue in consideration in detail. The 2006–07 DES annual report also noted that the review, which had been tabled in Parliament in October 2006, concluded —

... that the Curriculum Council is basically a regulatory body that should set standards for what should be taught and learnt in schools and assess student achievement in relation to those standards. The Act, however, combines provider and regulatory functions and the review queried the wisdom of this, proposing that most, if not all, of the provider functions could be placed elsewhere.

Whilst that perhaps is one of the more significant findings in the report, the change in governance structure is considerable and will require some investigation. However, it was interesting to read some of the Curriculum Council's own commentary in its 2009–10 annual report in light of the fact that the minister's bill is specifically removing from the board of the Curriculum Council organisations that under the current act have the right to representation. The State School Teachers' Union and the various universities have representation; in addition, one representative is nominated by the Catholic Education Office, two representatives are nominated by the education department, three representatives, effectively, are nominated by the minister and one is nominated by the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations. There is specific representation on the current Curriculum Council board of organisations involved in schools and various organisations; for example, parents and citizens associations and representative bodies. The correspondence I received from the universities—certainly from Edith Cowan University—was basically contained in the letter that was provided to the minister. Whilst the universities acknowledge that they support most of the changes being brought by way of this legislation, they would like to see specific university representation on the new authority or on one of the subcommittees to be established. The minister would appreciate that members of the education sector who currently have the right under the Curriculum Council Act to be on that board would like a role to play. I am focusing at the moment on the university sector because of some of the commentary outlined in the 2009–10 annual report of the Curriculum Council.

I want to read into the *Hansard* one part of that report. Page 14 of the Curriculum Council annual report on year 11 and 12 school enrolments states —

In the 15 years since 1995, the number of 17-year-olds has increased by 21 per cent ... Over this same period, the number of students staying on to complete Year 11 in school has increased by 49.3 per cent ... This represents an increase in retention rate from 74 per cent in 1995 to 92 per cent in 2009. Similarly, the number of students staying on to Year 12 has increased. In 1995, 17,308 Year 12 students completed at least one accredited subject. By 2009, the number of Year 12 students completing at least one course unit or unit of competency had increased by 22.2 per cent to 21,151 students. Despite the increase in enrolments, the overall retention rate for Year 12 has remained relatively constant between 65 per cent and 70 per cent.

Importantly, the report went on to say —

The number of students who sat for at least four examinations also increased between 1995 and 2009.

...

Despite this increase, Western Australia continues to have the lowest proportion of Year 12 school leavers eligible for university entrance compared with other Australian states.

That is, the lowest proportion of year 12 school leavers in the Australian Federation. I think that fairly raises the question—a question we will put to the Minister for Education to explain during consideration in detail: why is it that the university sector and other organisations that currently have the right to be on the Curriculum Council board no longer will have that right once the amendments are passed? As I have said, the opposition will support the legislation, but we will certainly make those points to the minister.

The legislation creates two subcommittees—the standards committee and the curriculum and assessment committee. In her second reading speech, the minister went through the roles that those two committees will perform. However, again, a number of questions that have been brought to my attention by various organisations in Western Australia, and I will be pursuing with the minister the roles of those committees and the make-up of the government structure.

The opposition will support the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill. It is the result of a process that started back in 2002, which led to the drafting of legislation by the former Labor government, but unfortunately it was

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never introduced because of the calling of the early election. Here we are now, three years into the term of the Barnett government, finally dealing with this bill. The opposition has a number of points to make and a number of questions to ask the minister during consideration in detail, but we will certainly support the passage of this legislation.

MR T.G. STEPHENS (Pilbara) [4.33 pm]: In the context of it having been explained to the house that the opposition will support the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill, there is an obvious question about this legislation that has been finally brought on: what took the government and the Minister for Education so long to deal with what should have been a fairly simple matter of advancing legislation through to this point, considering that it was gifted to the minister when she fell into the portfolio?

The passage of this bill through Parliament provides us with an opportunity to raise issues about the capacity of Western Australia to respond to some of the challenges we face, now that there is the advance of a national curriculum that requires investment by the state government of Western Australia of significant funds that are yet to land on the table in adequate amounts to prepare the education system to embrace the national curriculum opportunities that will come our way.

When one represents an area like I do in the Pilbara, where one sees many people moving in and out of the region to and from other parts of the nation and the globe, one can see how important it is to take up the opportunity for a national approach to the educational system in this country. In my view, a message has to be delivered by the opposition benches to the Minister for Education, to the government of which she is a part and to the Curriculum Council, to get on with the task of equipping the education system in this state with the resources it needs to embrace these changes.

This Parliament has also been the recipient of reports by parliamentary committees that have dealt with some of the problems we face within our education system. It is not adequately delivering skills in literacy through the educational techniques and styles that have been adopted in our classrooms over the past couple of decades. It is galling to find that we still, to this day, have a Curriculum Council that has not adequately taken notice of bipartisan parliamentary reports—pleas by Parliament—with recommendations made to the Curriculum Council, the government and the Minister for Education to mandate an appropriate approach to the teaching of English and the acquisition of literacy within Western Australia so that we can, in this state, catch up with literacy levels that are on offer in other English-speaking countries.

We have seen international reports from all the other English-speaking democracies, including Canada, the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom—those countries with which we have, perhaps, the most to share in terms of the ways in which we deal with the English language—yet we find that our curriculum and the way our curriculum is being dealt with in our classrooms is not delivering for us, as a state, an appropriate framework that we know will work with more certainty than that which has been on offer in our schools to date. The pedagogical style and the teaching techniques that are loosely associated with the whole-language approach of the left-wing philosophies of education that emerged in the late 1970s in this state have failed the most vulnerable. They have failed the values that the people of the left in education always said that they were committed to, and have left the most vulnerable floundering with inadequate skills in English literacy. We know that there is a framework and a pedagogical approach, a curriculum approach, that should be mandated for the teaching of literacy to secure, for both the vulnerable and the proficient, opportunities for advancing literacy skills with certainty.

We are lucky in Western Australia that we have resources that make us a wealthy state. Recently, my wife and I were travelling in the United States and we bumped into countless people who know about Western Australia because they see us as a resource-rich, lucky group of people whose lifestyle is bolstered by the resources that are ours. But that is luck that should be built on and not taken for granted, and it is luck that is unevenly spread, even within our own state. The worst indicator for putting Western Australians on a trajectory that does not take advantage of the luck with which we are blessed as a rich state is the number of people who do not thrive in the education system—the vulnerable; people with learning difficulties, and people with a propensity for some of the conditions that can loosely be described as dyslexia, for example, or a lack of phonological awareness and processing. They are the types of skills that can be rectified by a mandated pedagogical approach in the classroom, which was the approach that was on offer in the classrooms of the past. When I was a lad, and when many people in this Parliament were younger, there was an approach to direct instruction that more securely advanced, evenly, the educational and literacy outcomes of our classrooms. Alternative approaches were adopted that have not impacted upon 50 per cent of the population who thrive anyway, but the vulnerable have failed miserably, and we are rapidly producing this long tail of inadequately equipped sections of our population. The grandchildren of totally literate grandparents in my electorate are proving themselves to be scarcely able to read. Here we are debating changes to the Curriculum Council that seem to me to be perfectly entitled to the support of the chamber, but they should not be passed without at least a firm message on the new structures that have

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been put in place—a firm message to government, and a firm message to this minister to get on with it and place some demands on the education system that will more securely advance the educational opportunities and the literacy outcomes for all children in Western Australia. We need more than has been on offer through the Curriculum Council and through the styles that have been adopted in our classrooms, in the education department, in the Catholic school system and in the independent schools of Western Australia. A multitude of approaches are simply people tinkering around the edges of what the parliamentary reports and the big inquiries from England, Canada and the United States tell us we should be doing, yet the Curriculum Council still sits there gutless and spineless, and not encouraged by its minister or this government to adopt the bleeding obvious and mandate an approach to the teaching of literacy that will more evenly advance the interests of all our youngsters.

The cost of this failure is enormous. The alternative investment required is huge. There is stupidity in some of the approaches that have been funded, such as the reading recovery platform that has been put into schools, including the Catholic school system, in the Kimberley. Its name would alert any educator to how futile and expensive such an approach is. We are required to have a reading recovery approach for youngsters who should be more confidently acquiring skills in their classrooms with a pedagogical approach to, and methodology for, the teaching of literacy that will secure advances in the acquisition of literacy. There would not then need to be this tailor-made, individual approach to reading recovery for youngsters who have just gone through primary school and have still not picked up literacy. The teachers emerging out of our universities are still landing in our classrooms without the training or confidence in what is needed to deliver literacy programs to the students of this state.

For me, I cannot help but sit in this chamber and accept my responsibilities, which are to press for action on the reports that we have delivered to this Parliament. I am, quite frankly, a bit sick of sitting opposite a Minister for Education for whom great hopes were held out that she had the skills to advance education in Western Australia in her term in government, while she sits on her hands and slothfully deals with these crisis issues with legislation like this that is, by and large, machinery and of no great argument. She has taken her time and has not advanced the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011 into this place expeditiously so that we can get on with, and she and the government can get on with, ensuring that there is mandated in our schools an approach that works more evenly.

Members of this Parliament, both current and past, have diligently gone about the work of looking at the research on these questions and the other reports that exist around the world to determine the curriculum that should be adopted here in Western Australia to advance with certainty the literacy skills of our youngsters. It seems that the meta-analysis of all of the work that has been done can leave one with confidence about which way to go to shrug off the approaches of the past. I am a bleeding heart of the left of politics in Western Australia, but I have no time for approaches that do not work and that fail the people in need. That is what happened with the whole-language approach. We pulled out the reliable language approach of Scandinavia and shoved it into our English language context, which is very irregular and desperately needs a thorough knowledge of how it works. It has to be taught in ways that require rote learning that is not boring or dull or unentertaining but, rather, takes an approach to adopting the teaching of English literacy which is direct, repetitive and fun and which delivers steps upon which all youngsters can advance to the acquisition of literacy with more certainty than they have.

As this bill is dealt with, I do not want to miss the opportunity to give the Curriculum Council, the officers of the education department and, most importantly, the education minister a whack and say, “Get on with it!” There will be consequences, eventually, and ministers who hold their portfolios now, I predict, will face the consequences of people coming after them because this system is continuing to fail in the delivery of literacy skills to our youngsters. In the past, ministers, Curriculum Councils and education departments and directors general might have had the defence that they just did not know—well, they damn well know now! They have unanimous parliamentary reports and they have reports from around the globe that tell and chart the way forward, yet the inaction is self-evident. I arrive in classrooms around my electorate and around the state where young teachers are still floundering and are not guided by their principals with any certainty, and with professional development that still draws off the worst aspects of the whole-language approach, which is this guessing approach to the teaching of English. It is the Mem Fox approach, that somehow or other reading is magic. Well, there is nothing magic about the learning of English literacy; it is hard work for most, and it requires skilful teaching, supported by a Curriculum Council that should know what it is doing. It has not displayed that competence to this point. There will come a time, I predict, when people will take legal action based on the reports before the Parliament. They will be able to draw on these reports and we will see curriculum councils, directors general, the Catholic education system, the independent school system and ministers in the courtrooms defending themselves against a whole class of vulnerable people who are missing out on the basic

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skills needed for participating in the economic prosperity of a rich state like ours, which should be theirs by virtue of their birth. I do not know how I can make it any plainer than that.

My anger over this issue is increasing. On this issue I might seem like a calm person on the exterior. However, I can tell members that seething underneath this speech is a volcano of anger as I watch the failure of our schools to deliver a pedagogical approach to the vulnerable people of Western Australia. Increasingly, statistics indicate that 50 per cent of youngsters cannot get access to speech therapists and will never have any prospect of getting access to them. In those circumstances they need classrooms that have a curriculum that works, and by and large they do not have them. I am of course in large measure thinking of the needs of the Aboriginal community of my electorate. I watch the pathetic attempts at current measures that represent best practice delivered by the Curriculum Council, the Catholic education system and the independent Aboriginal school system. They are not working. People have recommendations in reports on how to improve the system but have not adopted them. This debate gives me an opportunity to demand of the minister and of the people who work with her on the education portfolio: take seriously the unanimous reports that have landed in this Parliament on this question and get on with it.

MR A.J. WADDELL (Forrestfield) [4.51 pm]: I find it odd that we are told that this Curriculum Council Amendment Bill is very similar to that which was proposed in 2008. I find it odd because the situation we face in 2011 is fairly distant from where we were in 2008. Members will recall that in 2008 we were just coming out of the great outcomes-based education debates; whereas today we are faced with the issues of independent public schools and implementation of the national curriculum, and the problems those particular plans bring to our education system.

I find it quite interesting that we can present a bill to this place that is similar to the one of 2008 when clearly the terrain has changed to a very large extent. I think members will find that the Curriculum Council is caught somewhat in a pincer move here. On one hand there are independent public schools. The Department of Education's website, in answer to a question in the frequently asked questions section for teachers about whether independent public schools can teach what they like, states that independent public schools, like all private and public schools in WA, can introduce curriculum that is relevant to their students' needs and in context provided that it is consistent with the Curriculum Council Act, the curriculum framework and the national curriculum. It is, therefore, clearly giving a nod to the national curriculum and a nod to the state curriculum, and stating that teachers needs to be consistent across the board but they can do what they want. Essentially, we are relegating the Curriculum Council to being one leg of a multi-legged beast.

On the other hand, the Australian curriculum is coming in. In Western Australia we are known for "WA" standing for "Wait Awhile", and in WA we will get the national curriculum a year later than everyone else. It is due here in 2014, as opposed to 2013 in other states. However, there are some obvious similarities between the various curricula on the national curriculum website and the Curriculum Council website. I was particularly looking at the mathematics curricula for primary school students, as I have spent a lot of time in recent days considering those curricula. I will go into that a little later. However, those websites indicate that we are a little behind the national curriculum. From my research and my understanding from speaking to parents, we are more than a little behind our fellow states in terms of where they are at in a similar year. Therefore, the curriculum that we teach our year 5s is possibly being taught in year 4 in other states. That is not necessarily anyone's fault; it is a result of changes that have occurred as a result of historical elements. It is a result of a range of things. The reality is that we are coming into a national curriculum and students will be presented with a new syllabus for which they may not be adequately prepared, simply because they are behind their counterparts in the eastern states.

This is a matter that concerns me a bit. I recently had a constituent in my office talking about social security matters—obviously nothing to do with this bill. It was about them having to provide payments to their child who was residing in Tasmania. The background to this story is that the mother and daughter had decided to come and live in WA. They came over here, the parent applied for the daughter to go to one of the local schools and was told that because she was X age, she had to go into X year. In that year she would have been taught pretty much the same as she had already learnt the previous year back where she was in Tasmania. Essentially the system was saying to this girl, "You need to repeat a year because you have made the mistake of coming to Western Australia." Naturally, like any rebellious teenager, this teenager chose to walk and is now residing in another state with another parent. It is not the first time I have come across this situation and it is certainly not the first time I have spoken in this house about our one-size-fits-all education system. I have certainly raised it in the context of gifted education in the past. I have raised it in the context that our education system is utterly and completely obsessed with chronological age. It is tying learning to the age of the child. It is like saying, "You have a left arm which has a bone length of 30 centimetres and therefore you can now do fractions. It's not about

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your capacity, it's not about what you already know, it's about when you happen to be born." We have built this inflexibility into the system over the years.

A lot of people have asked me over the years why I do what I do and why I am a member of this place. I say, "Well, if you get enough good people in Parliament, you can actually change things; you can reform the system; you can really make a difference." They say, "How can you do that?" Oddly enough, for a long time, long before this bill ever came to our attention and long before I even developed the interest in education that I have developed over the last couple of years, I used the Curriculum Council as my example. The reason I used the Curriculum Council as an example is that it demonstrates our fundamental problem. Our problem is that we are very good at solving problems, or at least trying to solve problems. Problems come up, problems are in the community, problems are out there and people demand that we do something. So, we do something. What do we do? We have a review. We create a committee. We create a body. We create an authority. We fund that authority. That authority does something. It either works or it does not work. What we do not do well is to then ask ourselves, "Did that work? What happens after the facts? Why does a Curriculum Council exist?" Once we have developed a curriculum, why does the Curriculum Council need to continue to exist? We could argue that standards evolve and circumstances change. That is certainly true, but do they change on a year-by-year basis? Do we need to continue to tinker with the system? If we continually change what is happening in our schools, will our teachers ever get to a level of competency at which they can perform their job adequately? Will we ever get to a point at which teachers know very well what they are supposed to be doing, without being offered professional development every 30 seconds to learn whichever new system we are trying to introduce, so that they can start to deal with those very at-risk students previously spoken about?

Why is it that we seem incapable in 2011, with all our wealth, with all our technology, with everything we know, of producing the same level of literacy and numeracy that was created 40 or 50 years ago? Why is that? I think it is because we keep tinkering. We keep changing. We keep developing the standards. We have taken the commonsense out of the system. We do not even allow teachers to teach anymore. It is by the book; it is step by step: this is what the Curriculum Council says, this is what the national curriculum says, this is what this regulation and this guideline is, and so forth and so on. It is to the point at which we are too worried about priming our students to pass the next National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy test. A state test on science was done last week, and again I saw teachers obsessed about making sure their students did well in that test. Why? It was because they were to be assessed against that test. Schools get funding in accordance with how well their students are doing, or how poorly their students are doing, according to these tests. These tests become king, and we move forward on that basis.

Therefore, the question I would raise is: is this an opportunity to ask ourselves whether we need a Curriculum Council? Seriously. The national body will be providing what will be 90 per cent, I should imagine, of our curriculum in the future. What will the Curriculum Council be doing? If we are seriously committed to the concept of independent public schools, and if they will have a say in their curriculum, and if they can adapt their curriculum to the needs of students in their particular area, why do we need a Curriculum Council? Why can those schools not simply make reference to the national standards, implement that at a local level, and cut out the middle man? Why do we need this? Is this not an opportunity for us to claw back a dividend? Is this not an opportunity for us to say that we need not keep doing it the way we have done it in the past?

In going through the bill, it is interesting to see that certain things will be taken out of the existing Curriculum Council Act. One of the things that quickly comes to mind is section 10. The second reading speech for this amending bill states —

An existing section—section 10—which requires all schools and home educators to provide schooling in accordance with the curriculum framework unless exempted from so doing is to be repealed for three main reasons.

The second reading speech then outlines the historical basis of how the Curriculum Council Act was passed before the current School Education Act was passed, and that essentially both those acts are attempting to put that same mandatory nature on schools, and there is no need for two acts to prescribe the same standard.

The School Education Act talks about how schools must implement a curriculum in accordance with what is mandated by the Curriculum Council Act. I hope the minister will take an opportunity in her reply to address how the mechanics of that might work, because I have a sense that we are caught in a bit of circular argument here. We are mandating it in one, and then saying that we can do what is mandatory in the other; however, if we take away the mandatory element of the Curriculum Council, it will really free up schools to do whatever they want. I will not necessarily argue that case, but I certainly think that may be a defect in the bill.

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The other thing that I noted in the minister's second reading speech was the discussion of a database. The speech states —

The authority will hold in its database the results of all assessments of student achievement it has made, caused to be made, or has recognised. These include the results of national and international tests. Results of other assessments conducted by schools of their own volition and for their own purposes will not form part of the authority's database.

This of course raises questions about who will have access to that database, what privacy protections will be put in front of that database, what accessibility will be provided, and whether we will transfer that record to other similar authorities in other states at their request. Is this really what they call in TV land the “permanent record”? What opportunity will students have to correct errors in that database, and will students have an opportunity to know what has been recorded against them? Administrative mistakes do occur. It would be very unfortunate to have a so-called permanent record in a database that a student never has the opportunity to correct and has to keep having that same fight over and over again and face a sort of nightmare of a schooling lifetime trying to constantly correct what may have been an administrative error in the past. So again I would hope that the minister has an opportunity to discuss what safeguards have been put in place to protect against that.

The other thing that I noted in the second reading speech was that it talks about the authority having the power to accredit courses and to safeguard the results of tests conducted either directly by it or under nationally agreed arrangements. It says also that the authority will ensure that education providers are clear about what schools ought to be teaching across those years.

In the independent school system, obviously schools have the ability, in conjunction with and through this framework, to set their own curriculum. This raises the question of whether independent schools, if they seek to make a variation from the curriculum, will need to seek accreditation back through the Curriculum Council in order to proceed with that variation. Again, I ask: is this another layer of bureaucracy that will be put over independent schools or can they run alongside that process?

I note that the Curriculum Council in its new form has been set up as a perpetual authority, so we assume that it will last forever—or at least I imagine until we decide otherwise in this place. We need to be thinking about allowing cycles of curriculum to embed themselves in the system. Seriously, I do not think the school system should be operating on electoral terms. We should not be thinking about four-year cycles. If we are to be running changes through the school system, we should allow them to run through 12-year or 20-year cycles that will enable teachers to become completely aware of and familiar with the material, to develop it, to learn it and to adapt to it, and, at the same time, to allow parents and students to achieve what their expectations of the system are.

That takes me back to an earlier point I have been dealing with; namely, mathematical curricula for primary schools. I have spoken in this place about my own family and my daughter's education needs. I have for some time been tutoring my daughter in mathematics, not because in any way she needs any remedial tutorage—probably quite to the contrary—but so that she has an opportunity to learn some mathematics. Early in this process I discovered something quite remarkable. Those of us here who do not have primary school aged children, have not had them yet, or had them a long time ago, might be quite shocked to learn that we do not give textbooks out to kids any more. The first question I asked my daughter was, “Can I have a look at your textbook so that we can begin to work through it?” She went, “What's a textbook?” She did not know what it was and does not have one. That surprised me greatly, so I began to search. Ultimately, we ended up buying some textbooks out of New South Wales and Singapore. This is where I made the observation that we are in fact considerably behind in terms of what work I was seeing coming through in my daughter's schoolwork and that of other children I have spoken to and what was being set for those year levels. I would say we are a good 12 months behind New South Wales in the mathematics area, and probably 18 months to two years behind Singapore in the mathematics area. That is quite a shocking revelation. The reality is that our school system does not allow for children to learn at their own pace these days.

These frameworks seem to mandate that students are expected to know a, b, c and d for a given year, which is tied to their chronological age. Once students know a, b, c, d and e, they are entertained with puzzles and little games to keep them on the side. There is no inclination to push students that little bit further and bring them into learning for later years. I think there is an endemic fear in the system that it is going to run out of things to teach students. If students start learning year 6 curriculum when they are in year 5, what are students going to be taught in year 6? Schools are not set up to teach year 7 curriculum in year 6 and so on. We really need to start thinking about how we can begin to stream children into areas of competency and areas of their own need.

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I come from an area in the lower socioeconomic range. We have a lot of at-risk children, but we also have a number of very well performing children. It is difficult seeing them wither on the vine simply because they lose interest in school, because the school appears to lose interest in them. If they are not being taught anything new, they do not think school is for learning. That is the situation I find myself in. I am constantly pushing the boundary with my daughter. That is why I teach algebra to my nine-year-old. That is why I have a nine-year-old who can actually multiply fractions together, and she can do it quite easily and quite well. I find myself in the odd situation in which each night my wife and I ask ourselves, “What are we going to do about our daughter? What are we going to do about her schooling? She is not learning anything there. What shall we do?” We have seriously started to consider homeschooling. I always used to think that people who homeschooled their children were people who had particular views of the world that I did not agree with. They had particular ideologies or belief systems.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr A.J. WADDELL: I thought that parents who homeschooled their children felt that they did not want their children to be indoctrinated into mainstream schooling. I thought they were fringe dwellers. I find myself increasingly one of those fringe dwellers. It is not that I want to ensure that my child believes in obscure and weird things like global warming or, for instance, that it is okay to have a marriage in which there is a single gender or anything like that. I feel that she will pick all that up in time with her own intellect. It is simply that I want her to be in an environment where she is challenged, where she believes learning is fun, where she can achieve the maximum that she can. I do not want to take my daughter out of her school. I do not want to isolate her from her peers. I do not want to do any of those things. I am faced with this balancing act now. I am not alone; I have spoken to dozens of parents in the last month who have expressed the same feelings. Some very good friends of mine have recently taken that same jump, and they have started to homeschool their child for the same reasons.

It is a shame that we are forcing parents into the situation in which they believe the state system and the private system are failing them to such an extent that they have to take matters into their own hands. In a wealthy state and a technological society such as ours, that is a disgrace. We have the capacity and the ability to differentiate between people. We have the ability to say, “There’s a certain ability group there. Let’s build the resource they need so that they can move forward”. In New South Wales, for instance, there are 26 primary schools that are aimed at gifted children and providing them with their educational needs. It is about bringing together children of like ability and therefore allowing them to have an accelerated curriculum to allow them to expand on topics and to not be held back by other students in their class. It is also very important not to demand so much of their teachers that they are taking away from the other students in the class. It is about ensuring that everyone is getting the optimal learning experience.

I call on the minister to look seriously at that model here in Western Australia. I understand some pilot projects are operating in my electorate right now at Wattle Grove Primary School, which is considering putting together one of these programs. We need to ensure that all the resources that are necessary to allow that program to run successfully are delivered. I also think we need to consider the expansion of the Perth Modern School. We only have one high school in Western Australia that is aimed at children who have accelerated learning capacities—it is right, bang, in the middle of the city. If students are in Joondalup, Kalamunda, High Wycombe or Maddington, it is going to be quite a hike to get to that school. Most of us will do whatever we can to ensure that our children get the best education they possibly can, but some people do not have the resources to do that. We need to ensure that each region has a school that meets the needs of these students.

No-one in this place would say we should not have special education schools that cater for children who have learning disabilities. Nobody would say, “They don’t deserve the same rights as everyone else.” Nobody would suggest we should not have an education system that will provide for them to (a) survive the education system and (b) have the necessary life skills to cope with the challenges they are going to face. Nobody would say that. I think it is time we considered the other end of the spectrum as well.

As the member for Victoria Park indicated, we will be supporting this bill, but a lot of questions need to be answered. Firstly, there are issues with the mechanics of the bill itself and how it will work, but also with the philosophy behind it. If this government is seriously committed to independent schools and it expects to devolve some of its energy back down to the local schools, surely it is time for it to start unwinding that central bureaucracy and questioning whether or not this is one that we need to continue.

I would certainly like to know how this government intends to implement the national curriculum. I would certainly like to know how we are going to deal with the fact that we will be the last state with year 7 in primary school. How is the curriculum going to be designed around the idea of specialist mathematics and English

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teachers who will be teaching a curriculum aimed at year 7s in a high school context and how are we going to implement that without having those specialist teachers in our primary schools? The reality is that we are going to have to get with the program; we are going to have to move forward. I think it is about time that we got some details. Parents out there want details; we want details. The public deserves details. We want to know what it is going to cost and when we are going to do it. As the previous member said, it is time to just get on with it.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [5.17 pm]: I am very interested in the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011, as are a number of members in this place. I want to congratulate the members who have spoken so far. The member for Pilbara made a very passionate speech about the particular failings of the current system for many of his constituents, particularly Indigenous children in Western Australia. I also acknowledge the work and efforts of the member for Forrestfield, who I know has an interest in education, particularly in the area of gifted and talented students, who in themselves create a whole range of challenges for the education system. As the member has highlighted, children who demonstrate gifts and talents continue to not be given every opportunity that they might have, although we have in place systems such as Primary Extension and Challenge, which I was involved in towards the end of my teaching career.

It is very interesting when we talk about curriculum development and curriculum councils. I am sure that there are records in *Hansard* that probably date back 100 or more years about the very debate we are having tonight and some of the issues that have been raised. For instance, how do we put in place the best possible structure—that is, our schools and the resourcing of our schools—and garnish those schools with an overall curriculum framework that ensures that all the students who attend that school, no matter their ability or disability, reach their full potential? I have no doubt that 50 years hence, when most of us, if not all of us, will not be here, the same type of debates will be presented.

The member for Pilbara and the member for Forrestfield both highlighted some of the cyclical history of education—some of the fads of the time. When I first started teaching as a fresh-faced graduate at Three Springs Primary School in 1986, I can always remember the most experienced teacher there—a long-term teacher—saying, “David, fads come and go. The fad for a particular way of teaching literacy and numeracy will come and I’ve seen it go in cycles.” We have constant debates about whether children, particularly in those very early years, should be taught phonics. I do not know whether the minister remembers a wonderful woman—I think she has passed on now—named Thelma Jones. She taught early childhood education at the Claremont campus of the then Western Australian College of Advanced Education. When Thelma took students of my ilk in the early 1980s, she was an exponent of phonics. Her approach and what she delivered in teacher instruction was very much focused on phonics being the key element for literacy, learning and reading in early education.

As the member for Pilbara mentioned, towards the end of the 1980s, from memory, we went through what was known as the First Steps initiative, which put children on a continuum, particularly in the areas of literacy—spelling, writing and reading. If children had attained certain skills and knowledge, the teachers would put them on the continuum. The students who were advancing rapidly in their literacy achievement or capacity would move along the continuum much more quickly perhaps than the students who were not. At around the same time, the whole-of-language approach to literacy was gaining momentum, from memory. This was also being introduced to trainee teachers in the mid to early 1980s. It was very much focused on language experience. I remember a wonderful lady who now calls Mandurah home, Dorothy Newland, who was a literacy teacher with the education department for a long time but also co-opted into the university sector. I can remember her doing some great language experience demonstrations, as they were called, in the teacher’s college at the old Claremont campus. I caught up with her late last year and reminisced about the sort of curriculum that she was delivering to trainee teachers at the time.

The member for Forrestfield highlighted in his speech the challenge for teachers in particular. I am sure all of us talk to teachers. I think he is right. So many teachers complain that they are finding it increasingly difficult to just teach. There is a plethora of paperwork and so-called accountability requirements demanded of them. If they analyse the amount of time they are effectively teaching, it has diminished over time.

I do not know about members in this place but many of us look back at those teachers who made an impact on our own development, particularly in schools. People’s recollections of what makes a good teacher vary. I know that is not being debated here. Essentially, we ultimately still rely on teachers—the people who are presenting themselves face to face with the students to deliver the curriculum and to deliver the learning opportunities. We can have the best and most modern curriculum framework that is available in the modern world, but, at the end of the day, if we do not have quality teachers in the classroom, that is where we will fail.

I have a personal view. It relates to the criticism made of the minister about the year 7 issue. I know and understand that the minister does not want to rush the decision about what happens with the year 7s; that is,

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whether they go to high school or stay in the primary sector. As she would know, the private sector has already anticipated her potential decision. Many schools in the private sector have already moved towards the year 7 transition or have been in the process of doing that for some time. One of the things that always puzzles and concerns me is that we now live in a world in which no-one fails. I am absolutely astounded that we have graduation ceremonies in kindergartens. I am not being too critical because for the teachers and those involved in early childhood, it is the celebration of a year et cetera. There is almost this graduation process at that young age. When we go to certain schools, we see some of the outlandish expenses that are almost forced upon parents. I am not just talking about school balls and formals or things like that. This sense that we have to compete and make things bigger than *Ben-Hur* is an emerging concern. A kid can get a certificate for blowing their nose properly!

Dr E. Constable: In Mandurah?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No. I am not joking. It is that world of “no-one fails”. Every time a student might achieve a small incremental achievement, we go and give them a certificate. That is fine, but the modern world, the world that these young people are going into, actually has some major challenges for them. In my view, we set them up for greater failure when they come out of the system after 12 or 13 years, and some after eight years of primary school, and they cannot read, but they will show you a range of certificates on their wall that highlight that they have made massive achievements. How many times have members in this place had a parent come to see them and say, “My child has just graduated from year 7 and now I’ve suddenly realised that she can’t read or add up, and her numeracy is at a three, four or five-year-old level. I was under the impression she was doing well”? How many times have members heard that? I have heard it. Then they say, “Well wait a second, they are going into high school”, and this is a disaster because, now, the inability of that student or young person to take basic literacy or numeracy skills to high school becomes even more magnified. It should never get to that stage. I reckon we are making our kids too soft, quite frankly. I think we do not want them to get dirty; we “risk-avert” every single thing. We do not want them to climb trees. “The tree will fall over and hurt them.”! We do not want them to experience a bit of rough and tumble.

Dr E. Constable: Yes, we do.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I want them to.

Dr E. Constable: So do I.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Everything has become too clinical. I do not blame teachers for being scared to take kids out of school on excursions. Many schools now do more incursions than excursions. The reason behind that is they are afraid of any legal action or legal liability. I do not blame teachers for that, but is it not sad that we have reached that stage?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): No; it is because they cannot afford the bus fares.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, although the bus fares are not too bad. Most schools arrange for a sort of sterile, not quite real, experience to come to the school so the kids can touch some furry farm animals, and get exposure to a couple of bantams and a couple of woolly sheep.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Those sheep can be a bit scary!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They can be! That is the stage schools have reached.

The minister is probably going to ask me: what does this have to do with this bill? I will tell her what it has to do with this bill.

Mr M. McGowan: How old are you?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I almost feel as though my body has been invaded by the former member for Moore, Bill McNee! I am going to stand here and point at members and talk about sheep, horses and ducks and other poultry!

Mr P.B. Watson: Grab your braces!

Mr M. McGowan: Smelly old fish!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But I will not do that. As we move to a national curriculum framework and, as the member for Forrestfield said, we have a situation in which one size fits all, I think that is quite sad.

This bill provides for a number of new functions for which the School Curriculum and Standards Authority will be responsible. I am very interested in the elements that relate to student assessment. The bill provides for student assessment functions and advisory committees to advise on course development and student assessment

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functions. I think also one of the issues canvassed in this bill is how we can expect schools to report on their students' progress or otherwise. I will be very interested in what the minister says when she replies to this debate about where she sees that part of the responsibility coming to fruition. As we have heard from other speakers, students in our schools are already expected to undertake a series of tests, if we like, and they form part of the overall report on the competency of the students and of the schools.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Something that has always been of interest to me is the portability of students' records. This is dealt with in the explanatory memorandum under the heading "Amendments to Part 3A — Student Records". We know that it is important that student records are accessible when a child changes school or state. I am interested in the implications of amendments to section 19C of the act. If I am reading this correctly, the portability of student records is currently compulsory only after the eighth year. Is that right?

Dr E. Constable: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am astounded by that; I did not know that. I understand then that part of this amendment to section 19C will provide for the portability of records much earlier, particularly in the early years. I am interested in that because I think it is critical. It is certainly pertinent to all students, particularly vulnerable students. I mean not just students who may have difficulties in numeracy and literacy, for example, but also students with particular family-related circumstances that will influence that portability. For example, one of the biggest criticisms of the child protection system was the lack of record keeping of children in care and/or children in foster care and the failure to ensure that the continuity of a child's progress was recorded. I will be interested in the minister's comment on that.

I am also interested, by way of comment if the minister has the information, in whether we know how many students' records go missing for whatever reason and are not retrieved. How many records of secondary and primary school students are not up to date even though it was compulsory to keep them from year 8? I am interested in that because, again, the portability of those records becomes important. I agree with what the member for Pilbara said—it is sad to see it—if we have not done so already, we probably will very quickly reach the stage at which those sorts of records are legal documents that can be potentially used as strong evidence in court against schools and against teachers. I think the liability issue and the capacity to prosecute teachers, schools and/or the system—the minister—will become more apparent than perhaps has been in the past. That will mean records, whether it be a report a teacher writes or a portfolio a teacher compiles with a child, will have legal status if they do not already do so. I am not a lawyer, but I am assuming they already have some legal status. I reckon we will enter a period in which they will be drawn upon more and more as legal documents to be potentially used against teachers and/or educators. I would like the minister's comment on that.

Finally, as I said during the estimates hearings—this is not necessarily related to this bill—if our kids are not going to school and being exposed to that curriculum and the learning related to it, it will not matter what curriculum we have in place. I was astounded to hear in the estimates hearings about prosecutions of parents who had not ensured their child attended school as specified by the School Education Act. Does the Minister for Education remember the question I asked? The minister advised that since 1999 two parents had been formally prosecuted through the courts. I did not have a problem with the minister's answer, which was that the school—student services et cetera— wanted to work with the parents and the students before it got to that stage. I have to say that, for some, only a legal prosecution might jolt them into realising that they cannot devalue education.

In the estimates hearing the minister highlighted another phenomenon that schools are coping with already. This is occurring in my electorate and I am sure in many other electorates and it is related to fly in, fly out family relationship issues. Maybe the minister could ask schools to report, just for interest sake, on how many parents are pulling their kids out of school for significant periods in the year. Our kids are at school for five days a week, 40 weeks of the year. That is not an insignificant time, when we break it down into a range of days, but more and more parents are taking their kids out of school for their one-week, two-week or three-week Bali holiday.

Dr E. Constable: One day a fortnight from years 1 to 10 equals a full year of schooling.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is devaluing education. I know why some parents are drawn into it. Quite frankly, many of them are in a fly in, fly out situation and they are compensating for lost time with their kids by taking them on these trips—the cheap trip to Bali in particular—and they think it is some way of rewarding the kids. In my view, it is compensatory and, basically, the parent is saying, "I do not spend enough time with you week to week, month to month, because of work circumstances, so I will take you out of school for one or two weeks." Most of the time they take them out in non-school holidays because the school holiday period is a very busy time in Indonesia.

Dr E. Constable: And fares are more expensive.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They are more expensive. This is a real issue. I also think—maybe through the independent schooling process—there will be a move to look at the whole issue of hours in schools, opening and closing hours et cetera. I think we are coming to that as well. I know that some independent schools are already raising this issue.

Dr E. Constable: It is being looked at now.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think the pressure of modern life will demand that. The school that my eldest son will go to next year has an 8.20 am start and a 2.40 pm finish. I was brought up in Northam with an 8.50 am start and 3.15 pm finish. That was in a period when parents' work hours were significantly different from the sort of pressures that parents might be under now. I think we will have to look at those issues. At the end of the day, those issues will influence the framework of curriculum that is offered in schools in general. This is an important debate. It is good that we debate education in this place and that we throw up ideas on how we can improve things. I am going to be very interested in the minister's response to a couple of the points that have been mentioned.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [5.44 pm]: I have the unfortunate privilege of following the entertaining but also very informative member for Mandurah. I must say that this debate on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011 has been informative and interesting. Even though we have strayed from the bill, I am sure that the minister will also have found it quite interesting. All speakers have had significant input into where our education system should go. I have had a longstanding interest in education, as we all do. I was previously a schoolteacher; and Professor Andrich taught me at the University of Western Australia. He was an outstanding teacher, who actually made education statistics interesting. Anyone who can do that has to have a special flair for teaching, so I have a high regard for Professor Andrich.

Curriculum is the basis by which we design our educational learning system. The curriculum sets goals that we want our children to achieve. It provides the framework in which teachers then impart the subject knowledge to the students. Any bill dealing with curriculum is of significant import to the education system. But, in many respects, as has been mentioned by speakers before me, this debate is a mechanical exercise as we will not be opposing the bill, although we will be commenting on some clauses during the consideration in detail stage. I want to use this opportunity, as many other speakers have done, to talk about a number of curriculum issues, and education in general.

In a previous debate we talked about whether year 7 classes should be located at high school or stay in primary school. I said it was inevitable that the minister would make the decision that year 7s should go to high school because of the national curriculum and the private school system, but I personally was against that. However, I am starting to rethink that after speaking to some teachers and principals over the last couple of weeks. I think the member for Balcatta raised this issue in a previous debate. The previous Labor government changed the school starting age of students so that now many students are entering year 7 at least six months older than previously. These teachers and principals believe that year 7 students are ready for high school, and it is very hard to keep them in primary school because they are six months further in their development than previous year 7 students. Even though I am still not completely convinced that year 7 should be relocated to high school, as I said, it is going to happen and maybe there is now a good reason, besides the private school and the national curriculum issues.

I was interested to hear the member for Mandurah push the issue of legal liability a few times in his speech, and I thought that the member for Mandurah was going to criticise lawyers. Of course, legal liability is a very pressing concern for teachers and principals, and the member for Mandurah is right that many excursions that would have happened in our time now do not happen because of the schools' legal liability. I keep hoping that things will change in the future.

The member for Forrestfield, as usual, made a number of interesting points and I want to get to some of his more pertinent points in a minute. The member referred to textbooks. He is right that textbooks seem to have gone "out of fad". In 2005 I spent eight months in the USA and my children went to school in the USA. They were enrolled in a local school that was not overly well resourced—it was not a well-off school—but the number of textbooks that were supplied to students free and the other supplies like pads, pencils, biros et cetera was very different from our system. I was quite surprised at how their education system, which overall is funded per student much less than ours, was able to afford these students incredible material support. We need to revisit the issue of what teaching aids we are providing our students. I am not sure why textbooks are not "in fad" any more—maybe it is because of all the online resources that are available.

The member for Mandurah mentioned school hours. This is a real problem. He mentioned the fly in, fly out scenario, which I am sure is a major factor in this. What I am going to say is only a personal view and is not very

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well informed, but I have a gut feeling that we should have longer school days. I do not think our school days are long enough, particularly with what we expect teachers to teach. In my view, they should be teaching more subjects. Our school days should be longer, and the fact is that a lot of parents would probably prefer them to be longer, especially in families in which both parents are working. In many respects, I do not think that parents would necessarily be up in arms over a longer school day. Of course, that would then have an impact on after-school club sport, music rehearsals et cetera, but maybe those things could become more school focused. I think that one day we will be looking at longer hours, because there are longer school hours in many other countries. In Italy, the students actually go to school on Saturdays, although they probably go only until about lunchtime, the siesta, and do not necessarily go back in the afternoon, but they do go to school on Saturdays. With all the things I would like students to learn, I think school hours should be increased.

A couple of speakers mentioned the issue of teacher quality. We can have curriculum development and we can put in the apparatus for the machinery of curriculum development in the education system, but if we do not have quality teachers, it does not really matter what curriculum we have. From my time as a teacher, and from observing teachers as a parent, out of professional interest, three main things go towards the quality of a teacher. Number one is passion. Number two is actually content knowledge—if teachers do not have knowledge of the content, it is very hard to teach; it does not matter how great they are as communicators or how passionate they are. They need to have passion, they need to have content knowledge and they also need to be effective communicators. The quality of people entering the education courses at university has, unfortunately, deteriorated over the past 10 to 15 years. Somehow we have to redress that and make the profession of teaching more appealing. That does not relate to just improving the conditions, salary-wise, of teachers; we may need to look at what we do in academia, but on a smaller scale, whereby we provide study leave after a certain period of service, and different promotional pathways for outstanding teachers.

The member for Forrestfield made a number of points about curriculum and the lack of diversity in curriculum in respect of whether curriculum development is catering for the various needs of our students. I am in total agreement with the member for Forrestfield; even if we grant the Minister for Education some acknowledgement that independent public schools, in some respects, seek to increase flexibility in the system, what they really do is increase flexibility in the sense of allowing principals to determine their staff. The same staff are still flowing through the whole system; it is just that each individual school may have greater determination. Without an increase in resources, schools will still be very limited in curriculum diversity, so we will still be stuck with generally very monolithic curriculum goals for our students. We say, “This is the average student, and we’ll teach to this structure”, so if students do not fit within the four walls of that structure, they can become marginalised and either drop out of the system or become otherwise dispirited. What we need to do is cater for the outstanding students and for the students who have learning difficulties, whether they are because of a biological issue or from a cultural perspective.

One of the greatest criticisms I have heard from speaking to teachers and principals in the short time I have been the member for Armadale is about the Schools Plus system, which is, as the minister very well knows, there to provide funding for schools to engage assistants and added support for children with disabilities. Many teachers state that they find the process demeaning and that it is a tick-the-box process that is really not appropriate and does not cater for the special needs of some students.

There is no getting away from the fact that we must have greater resources put into education if we are to have greater curriculum flexibility. We have to cater for not only average students, if there is such a thing as an average student, but also outstanding students, students who have learning difficulties and students who have cultural issues. Unless we do that, we are going to develop a class of students who will go into the workforce if they are lucky, but if they are not lucky, they will become disenfranchised from society, and we all know what can happen when a large body of disenfranchised or marginalised youth are in a society.

The education system is the most critical part of the development of a child, besides the input from the family. I still believe that family input is the number one determinant of a child’s future prospects, but the quality of educational instruction that students receive will be the most significant determining factor in the success of that child, whether from a career point of view or from a sociological point of view. We can talk about the machinery of curriculum, but we need to talk about curriculum development in a flexible manner. Unless we do that, we are failing our students, we are failing our education system and we are failing our society.

The member for Mandurah talked about school assessment. I think we all agree that students need to be assessed; of course they need to be assessed. But I have heard, time and again, that because of the emphasis on the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy, and other external assessment models, teachers are under pressure to teach to the assessment and not to the education of a student. We are preparing students to pass the tests or to do well in the tests; that does not necessarily mean that we are educating them well. I do not know

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the answer, but I do believe that we need to reassess the way we are assessing our students, particularly the external assessments that our students have to undertake, which put incredible pressures on our teachers, especially as we now have the My School website, which allows comparisons between various schools. If I had to decide whether that initiative had been advantageous or not, based on my anecdotal conclusions I would say it has been detrimental to the educational process.

Dr E. Constable: You need to take that up with your federal colleagues.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, I know that. But the minister is in agreement, from my understanding. Is the minister in agreement with it?

Dr E. Constable: Well, we agreed as a state, but somewhat reluctantly, I must say.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not saying that we need to throw the whole thing out; we need just to reassess it, because it is really putting incredible pressure on our teachers and principals—not that teachers and principals should not have pressure put on them, but it has to be pressure for the right reasons. The pressure should be to provide the best education, not necessarily providing the best test scores, because they are not necessarily the best determinants of whether a child is being properly educated.

My solution to a great education system is greater resource input and flexibility; we have to look at flexibility, so that we can try to cater for the needs of all children. Of course, we will not succeed at that, but that is what we have to aim for. We have to aim for a system that caters for the child who has a great IQ, for the child who has a learning disability, and for the child who is marginalised. As I have stated previously, there are many, many students who would probably learn better through sport, through dance or through music; maybe we should look at that. Not everyone needs to sit down for six or seven hours a day behind a desk listening to a teacher. There are other ways we can instruct our students and produce better outcomes for our students, which will, of course, be better for the wealth and the wellbeing of our state and our nation.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

MR M.P. WHITELY (Bassendean) [7.01 pm]: I have been looking forward to the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011, and I will make some general comments about education, the future of education, and some of the challenges in front of this minister and subsequent ministers.

One of the themes that has come through in some of the other speeches, particularly those of the members for Pilbara and Forrestfield, is how education has suffered from fads. We have had different fads at different times when different models of education have been imposed upon the system, often because somebody in a decision-making position has a particular enthusiasm for a particular innovation or model. That has, I think, been at the cost of kids' education. I support the member for Pilbara's comments about the need to go back to an emphasis on phonetics, or phonemic awareness, and the need to move away from whole-of-language teaching, although I have to say that I do not think it is quite as easy as just imposing a system of phonics and phonemic awareness on current teachers—particularly primary schoolteachers—because the reality is that many of the people teaching in primary schools these days would have been taught using the whole-of-language approach. I think it is far easier for someone to teach in the way they were taught than it is to learn a new system. I think if we are going to go away from a whole-of-language approach towards a phonetics approach, we need to look at the issue of how we properly train in-service particularly young teachers who will not even have learnt, during their own time at primary school, an approach based on phonetics.

I think the problem with the whole-of-language approach is that in many cases it actually assumes that kids entering school have prerequisite knowledge. As we have discussed many times in this place, many children have unmet language development issues that often need the attention of speech therapists because they are not getting that sort of accidental and incidental education in language that happened in previous generations typically around the foot of mum in the home. They are not getting that accidental education that happens before school because of a whole range of reasons that I have spoken about previously, and they are rolling up to the school with the schools expecting kids to have language skills—not letter skills, but language skills—that, in some cases, do not exist. The problem with a whole-of-language approach is that it actually assumes kids have the verbal and listening skills that are often not present, which exacerbates the problems of a move away from phonetics. Indeed, whole-of-language may have worked better 30 years ago, when kids had better incidental language skills developed informally in the home. For all sorts of social reasons we are seeing more kids who do not have those sorts of language skills, and, more than ever, we need an approach that emphasises phonetics. That does not mean there is not a place for a whole-of-language approach, and that does not mean that the majority of children will not learn well in a whole-of-language situation, but my fear—I think the evidence backs it up—is that a whole-of-language approach sees a cohort of children, particularly those who do not have strong language skills, being left behind. I think that is one long-term fad that I think kids—not all, but a significant

minority—have suffered from, and it is one of the reasons we have seen, in some ways, a deterioration at the bottom end of literacy and language skills.

The other fad that I think was imposed on the teaching profession, to a great cost in Western Australia—I know the minister has some sympathy for my thoughts on this, because we were on the same parliamentary committee—was the experiment with outcomes-based education. Within the confines of my party room, I was a fierce critic of the OBE approach; in fact, it is fair to say that the former member for Wanneroo and I were the drivers of the parliamentary inquiry into OBE. Both she and I recognised that by imposing that inadequate model on, particularly, year 11 and 12, when it got to that hard end of education where there was a need to rank and measure performance, it was not a system that could cater for that. For those who did not understand the problems with OBE, it was quite easy to explain them. The idea was that there could be eight descriptors of levels of achievement that could differentiate between who was going to go to university and get access into medicine and how children were performing in year 1. It was said that the eight descriptors of performance could actually provide the sufficient fine-grade distinction to make those sorts of distinctions, which was a complete nonsense. It got initial energy under the former Court government, and it got too much energy and too much of a head of steam up under the previous government. Looking at it retrospectively, I think our inability to deal with the problem and turn it around earlier was one of the reasons we sit on this side of the Parliament. I think that fad did significant damage to the education system in Western Australia.

When we got to the pointy end and when we started to talk about those fine-grade distinctions that need to happen at year 12—at the end of someone's education—it became obvious that the system was completely inadequate, so that is when the turnaround was made. We did turn it around, and I think some credit needs to go to the former Premier, Alan Carpenter, for recognising the need to turn that around. I am happy to say that I played a role with him in identifying some of the problems, and I was actually a conduit in speaking to Greg Williams, who was the head of People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes at the time. Greg Williams had been dismissed by some on our side as a critic of change, and some had even dismissed him as being a mouthpiece of conservative forces, which I thought was complete and utter rubbish. I am happy to say that I played a conduit role with him. I congratulate the former Premier for actually recognising the problem and taking action. I also want to congratulate the current manager of opposition business, the member for Rockingham, for the job he did in turning around some of the excesses of OBE in his time as education minister, but in a sense I think he inherited a poisoned chalice and the damage had been done and it was too late to turn that around. Nonetheless, I think the point I am making is that OBE was another fad. It always struck me as being one of those situations of someone having been to a conference or having done a PhD in a particular model of education, and then coming along and somehow getting the authority to impose it upon the good folk of Western Australia.

As a backbencher, I approached people at the Curriculum Council to get some information on outcomes-based education because I had concerns with it. I will not name the people I spoke to because that would not be fair; they do not have the opportunity to defend themselves. However, I was particularly struck by their approach. When I asked basic questions of them, I was told not to ask those questions because I was interfering with their presentation. If this was the response government backbenchers were getting, I wondered what response ordinary teachers were getting. The feedback I consistently got from teachers was that their concerns were not being listened to. Frankly, I think our inadequate response to that issue at the time is one reason we now sit in opposition. As I said, I think the former Premier and the member for Rockingham did a good job turning it around, but unfortunately the ship had moved on and, in some senses, a significant proportion of teachers had lost confidence and faith in us by that stage. Despite the good works of the former Premier and the member for Rockingham, teachers had stopped listening; the ship had moved on and it was too late. I think this actually built up a culture-of-change fatigue amongst the teaching profession. My electoral officer has been with me for 10 years—in fact, we reached that milestone two weeks ago. Linda Gordon is an exceptional electoral officer who still works one day a week as a primary schoolteacher. I often listen to Linda's concerns. Linda has consistently said that teachers are sick of two things; they are sick of change and they are sick of busy work—you know, filling in forms and meeting the accountability measures that interfere with teaching. Some teachers are also sick of the amount of testing that goes on. They have been particularly critical of the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy testing as well as its predecessor, the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment.

As a parent, I was a huge fan of WALNA. It was not until we got the WALNA test results for my son in year 3 that we actually saw that he had particular issues that needed to be dealt with. His school reports said that he was a lovely child, was a pleasure to teach, had good manners and was socially adjusted. That was true; he was a great kid and he has grown up to be a great young man who is now having considerable academic success. I am incredibly proud of how well he is doing now, but at that time he was not doing well at all; he was doing very

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poorly and had some specific issues that had to be dealt with. The school reports were telling me that we had a lovely child who was progressing brilliantly, but the reality was that when the WALNA results came in, he was below benchmark and, in some cases, in the bottom 10 per cent of the population. We knew that he was a smart kid and we knew that he had enormous potential, but until that report came home, there was no moment of truth. For that reason, I am a real fan of WALNA and now NAPLAN testing. I am a real fan of standardised testing, not as some way of ranking kids or making kids fail but as a way of providing information. As a parent, it was incredibly useful, because we could see that he needed help. He had some issues with his eyesight—he had some issues with tracking. We got him the necessary support and the kid blossomed as a result. Frankly, the catalyst for me taking the situation seriously was the WALNA test. My wife was far more awake to it than I was. She knew there was something not quite right, but I said, “Look at his school reports.” Frankly, I had dismissed her concerns. His school reports were saying that we had a wonderful kid who was progressing brilliantly. Yes, we did have a wonderful kid who in many ways was progressing brilliantly, but he was not progressing brilliantly academically. Until we got that WALNA test result, we did not know the truth. I am a fan of having meaningful analysis. I am not a fan of having busy work, which I think is so much of the outcomes-based focus; it is basically about ticking boxes to say that a teacher has measured a child in an abstractly worded descriptor of educational performance, and that has to be shown a certain number of times before the child can progress through the levels. I think that is a lot of busy work.

Another example concerns my other son when he was in year 8 at a government high school. He is a bright boy; he is doing very well at university these days. He started well at high school. We were pleased with his effort. He did a bit of homework every night, which I thought was pretty good stuff for a year 8 student. He seemed to be getting good results. His first term report came home and he got level 3. I asked him how that made him feel and he said that everybody else got level 3 as well. There was no incentive for the kid to do any better, because there was no capacity for measurement and no meaningful analysis of how the kid was going. A kid who was initially motivated at high school basically asked what the point was if everybody got level 3 and when they all seemed to move through at roughly the same pace. He asked what the point was in making any extra effort. His experience in year 8 was the genesis of my concern about OBE and its imposition in years 11 and 12.

I will relate an experience I had when I was a teacher. It is important to understand that good teachers will do what good teachers do regardless of the models imposed on them by various authorities. I was a teacher at Christ Church Grammar School for six years. It was a wonderful school to teach at. I must admit that, having been educated in the government system and having, I guess, a little bit of reverse snobbery in me, I was a little nervous about entering a bastion of educational conservatism, as I thought it was at the time. But they made me an offer I could not refuse, so I took the money and went and worked there. It was a wonderful place to work for a number of reasons. In my second year in teaching we were given a huge document—I cannot even remember the name of it—which had been handed down from on high by the Curriculum Council. We, as teachers, were expected to run it across our courses. It was not for years 11 and 12, because they had very defined curricula which one taught, and that is as it should be for years 11 and 12. This was for our year 9 and 10 courses. I taught business studies at the time. I was only a second-year teacher and when I looked at the language in this huge document, I could not understand any of it.

Mr D.A. Templeman: When was that?

Mr M.P. WHITELY: This was in 1996, 1997 or 1998.

Mr D.A. Templeman: It wasn't the unit curriculum?

Mr M.P. WHITELY: I am not sure what it was; I honestly cannot remember. Members will understand why I cannot remember when I explain it. I looked at this really large document that I was supposed to run across my courses. I was the course controller for some of the year 9 and 10 courses at that time, and I think for year 12 as well. Year 12 was not a concern, but the years 9 and 10 courses were. The head of my department looked at the document and said, “Don't worry. You're a good teacher. I'll take care of it.” He grabbed it, put it behind the door and used it as a doorstop. He said, “Go on with what you're actually doing at the moment; I'll make sure we tick all the boxes so the school looks like it is in line.” I just think there is a real danger in having things like curriculum imposed from on high by people who are not actually classroom teachers.

If I ruled the world—if I were education minister for a day—one thing I would do would be to get classroom teachers to have some time out of the classroom to do curriculum development as part of their paid duties. I do not think that people can confront the reality of teaching unless they are in a classroom. Teachers should be the drivers of curriculum development.

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Dr E. Constable: With the national curriculum, over the last couple of years at least, teachers have been trialling content, so they have been having absolute input into the final product. I think that is part of what you are saying as well.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Well, it should be. They should be the drivers of the actual change and not just the triallers of the change.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Before I was a teacher at Christ Church Grammar School I lectured at Curtin University for four years. I spent three years in the Centre for Aboriginal Studies as a lecturer in financial management in the community management course, and one year in the bridging course. My experiences at Christ Church Grammar School and particularly at Curtin made me suspicious of some of the language of education, such as the terms “student-directed education” or “student-focused education”. They are fine sounding words. We can all talk about having a class of 25 individuals and needing to tailor 25 different programs to the 25 kids. That is the sort of rubbish that is spoken about by people who have never been classroom teachers. The reality is that we have one teacher, a 50 or 60-minute session, and 25 kids. There is one voice. I do not want to portray that I am saying all teaching should be chalk and talk, because I am not, do not get me wrong; I do not want to overstate it. We need to be real about models and about the capacity for teachers to deliver material. A teacher cannot develop 25 different lesson plans. There will be one lesson plan but a good teacher will be able to structure it in a way that everybody in the class, from the very bottom to the most able students, will get something out of the lesson. When I was teaching well—I like to think I was a good teacher; certainly the feedback I got was that I was a good teacher—I made sure that the kid who struggled the most in the class was with me. I built on that base. There was something there for the other kids. Elements were added all the way up to the very brightest kids. We have to be real about that. There is still one teacher, one lesson plan, one class. We cannot have this notion of individual children determining their own educational pathways and determining what they want to learn and pick up. It does not work in reality. People who think it does work have never been in a classroom, or they were in a classroom and probably were not a very good teacher. That is the reality of teaching. We need to have the experience and reality of teaching embedded in our curriculum development and in our programs.

I want to say something about what I think the key element of success in education is. It is something that is missed. It relates to panic; this flight that is happening—the flight from government to private schools. It is a fundamental challenge to the character of Australia. My generation had access to a good education that catered for aspirational kids no matter how wealthy their parents were. I relate that to my experience at Como high school. Como high school was a fairly mixed school. It serviced a diverse area in my time. I was at Como high school from 1972 to 1976. There were some pretty rough characters at Como—in fact Bradley John Murdoch was one, who members will know as the Falconio murderer. He was a year above me at both Manning Primary School and Como high school. He was not even the biggest bully at Como high. We had some pretty big bullies. Most kids in the suburbs of Como, South Perth, Karawara, Manning, Collier, and Salter Point went to the local government high school, so there was a real melting pot. In some ways it was a rough environment. There was not quite the approach to bullying we have today. Back in my day the approach was “turn a blind eye and sort it out yourself”. When we rolled up on day one, year 11, about two-thirds of the kids had actually left school. The parents of the third who were left were aspirational. There were a wide range of abilities. Some of the third who were left were not academically gifted but their parents valued education. There was a sudden change in culture at the school, from one of trying to get through the school day in some ways—I am being perfectly blunt here—to one of it was good to excel and okay to succeed.

My mates were typically the kids who had a degree of academic ability. Some kids came from the old State Housing Commission backgrounds and were not particularly wealthy. Very few of them had parents who had finished high school let alone gone to university. They got dragged along with the mainstream because the middle-class kids were going to that school and there was an expectation of success. Two changes have occurred since. It is now compulsory to stay to year 12. That is a good thing, but we have to recognise the enormous challenge that presents. There are kids in school who do not want to be in school. It is possible for the culture of the school to be dragged down to be less aspirational. That is a real challenge. It is not enough to say we will keep students at school until year 12; we have to think about these sorts of things. We have to make school meaningful for them and we have to protect the aspirational kids.

The other thing is that middle-class parents are panicking about their kids' academic performance. They are sending their kids to private schools. I have two boys. One completed his entire education at a government school. It was beautiful; it worked perfectly for him and that is great. The other did nine of his 12 years in a government environment and then three years in a private school environment. It is horses for courses. I am not saying to parents, “Do not send kids to private schools”, because we make the best decisions for our kids.

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However, this fear of failure in the government system has the danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fewer and fewer aspirational parents are sending their kids to government schools, which is dragging down the other students.

I noticed that the member for Forrestfield spoke about the need to have more elite government schools. I have a concern about that. The problem is that we are dragging the high-performing kids out of good schools, like Lockridge high school and Hampton high school in my electorate, into elite schools. We have this flight from the ordinary government schools. One of the keys to the success of Australia as a tolerant, well educated and aspirational land of opportunity has been the success of the government education system. Where I lived, if you were a Catholic you might go to St Pius and possibly Aquinas. Anybody who was really rich might have gone to Wesley. Just about everybody else went to Como high school. There was this melting pot and this aspiration at the end that dragged the kids up. A good friend of mine Bill McEwen is a senior Treasury Corporation officer. He has a great mathematical mind. He came from the most working class of backgrounds; the most struggling of backgrounds. He got a great education at Como high school. He got caught up in this culture of competition. He even dragged people like me along with him. My fear is that fewer and fewer kids will have the opportunity to come through the system if we lose that aspirational thing. I am concerned about that. It is a real challenge for the education system. It is a real challenge to continue something that is so good, important and essential about our current education system.

I do not have a lot of time left. There are a couple of other issues I want to talk about, particularly the year 7 transition issue. Regardless of what we might think about the desirability of it, it is a reality that has been imposed upon us. The private schools—partly as a marketing tool—probably said, “Let us get students a year earlier —

Dr E. Constable: They were given permission from the then minister.

Mr M.P. WHITLEY: They have actually made it an inevitable reality that we need to look at transitioning kids in year 7 into high school. That is not an easy task. It is a real challenge, but one we have to embrace.

I briefly want to talk about an issue that is difficult to talk about; it is something that I would be absolutely negligent in my responsibility as a local member if I did not discuss it. I will be blunt about this: I believe I have the highest Indigenous population of any metropolitan electorate. I am concerned that many Indigenous school-aged kids do not attend school.

Mr D.A. Templeman: All kids.

Mr M.P. WHITLEY: I will be honest with the member: there are certainly other kids not attending school. I know of particular families, often in very difficult circumstances, whose kids are enrolled in school and there is a dedicated school bus that makes it easy to get kids to school. The school bus arrives, but on many days nobody gets on it. The bus departs with nobody on the bus. There may be as many eight to 10 kids living in some of these three-bedroom houses who should be at school. There is a dedicated bus service and they do not get on the bus. I do not think a punitive approach to families will work. It concerns me that these kids often go to independent schools that rely on government funding as their only source of revenue. I have a suspicion—it is a suspicion and I do not have empirical evidence to back this up; I do not have a report that generates that evidence—that these kids truant and the schools collect the payment. The schools do not have to deal with these kids in a sense because the kids are not there. This needs to be investigated to see whether the reality I encounter translates through in evidence; that is, whether schools get the payment for servicing the kids, the kids do not roll up and the schools do not have to externally report the truancy. I am not sure that these kids have ever been caught in the system as being truant.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Unexplained absence is what they call it.

Mr M.P. WHITLEY: Yes. These kids who desperately need education opportunities are missing out. I do not think that a punitive approach to parents will work. We have to tie the funding to the schools—to real attendance. The schools will be rewarded when they get kids in the school system who succeed. It really concerns me. As I say, it is a difficult issue to discuss, but I would be absolutely negligent if I did not raise my concerns in the chamber. I hope that the minister will take this matter on board because it is a reality that would be experienced—let us be honest—mainly in Labor electorates and less commonly in conservative electorates. It is a huge issue that needs to be addressed.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Nollamara) [7.32 pm]: I rise to speak on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill. There are two issues in the bill that I am interested in gaining some better understanding of from the minister. I understand that the board of the new authority will be made up of a chair and six members appointed by the minister, who —

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... have, between them, the knowledge, experience and expertise needed to enable the Authority's functions under this Act to be performed effectively.

I am interested to know whether one of those criteria will be knowledge of diversity issues. With that, I particularly want to raise one of the issues that occurs within the Sudanese community that has been raised with me. I note that the member for Forrestfield raised the impact of the curriculum on age-based learning. His comments were obsessed with age. The issue I will outline has been raised with me on many occasions by the Sudanese community. I understand that the Office of Multicultural Interests has consulted the community, but it does not look as though it has done an education consultation yet.

Dr E. Constable: I don't think they have.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No.

It was an issue I raised with the Equal Opportunity Commission when it did a consultation about substantive equity issues. Although I have also obviously spoken to a few different people, I do not think I have raised it formally with the minister. Nevertheless, when I raised it with the Equal Opportunity Commission, it came back to me and said that in its investigations it had raised the issue with the Department of Education and that the issue was not perceived as a problem. I want to point out that I have heard that it is not just a problem that happens in our communities. I quickly sent off an email to some of the communities asking them to get back to me so I could specifically give the minister some of those details. A case study of Sudanese youth in Noble Park in the electorate of Mulgrave, Victoria, was conducted in 2006, and was published by the South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre in March 2007. It was a complete study of some of the issues faced by Sudanese communities in that part of the world. This study mentions this issue as well. I quote —

When young Sudanese refugees arrive in Australia, schools usually enrol them in an age-based level. Placing these students according to age is not necessarily productive or wise. Students who have missed years of primary education are placed in secondary schools, resulting in those students being disadvantaged when their academic performance is compared with longer-term Australian students. Inability to understand the curricula or to live up to such standards results in some students becoming disruptive or leaving school altogether.

That is probably a very eloquent way of putting what a lot of community members have raised with me. They note the problem of younger people becoming quite disillusioned with education. It is worth noting as a background that according to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's 2007 report, the Sudanese community was one of the fastest growing communities in Australia. In the past 10 years, the number of arrivals born in Sudan increased by an average of 34 per cent a year. From 1996 to 1997, we had 20 000 settlers born in the Sudan, 40 per cent of whom were aged under 17 years. The 2006 census for Nollamara, which is largely a young community, indicated many people from Sudan and other African nations lived in that area. I have not spoken to the Karen community.

The feeling in the area at the moment is that we are getting a larger number of Burmese, Karen and Chin people coming into the area. Schools have given me feedback that people from these communities also have difficulties. A Karen or Chin refugee living on the Thailand border does not even live in a United Nations camp because the UN does not recognise the refugee camps on that border; therefore, that refugee gets even less education than some of the Sudanese humanitarian refugees who have been sitting in Kenya and such places from a very early age. In saying this, I recognise the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning—SAIL—program, which does weekly tutoring run by volunteers in our community to assist Sudanese people with some of these issues. It is beholden upon us, when looking at curriculum and such areas, to ensure that someone on those boards has expertise to ensure that these issues are not only recognised, but also understood—and understood in ways so that people can be assisted.

The other issues raised in a different way by the member for Bassendean, which I have become aware of through personal experience with my son, is the paltry aspect of the teaching of Aboriginal history in our curriculum. I took my son to the Perth foreshore to witness the live broadcast of the apology to the stolen generations and mentioned to the teacher that it was an opportune time to talk about the issues of modern Aboriginal history. I raised with the teacher how concerned I was that the apology had not been discussed in class. She commented that it was okay because the children had done Aboriginal studies; they had studied dot paintings so that they could get an understanding of Aboriginal culture. We never want to be the ugly parent in the room, because our children are there, but it concerned me because Aboriginal culture is more than dot paintings. The minister will know that I send her a letter every year saying that it is the anniversary of the apology. I have noted that since that time—my son was in year 7 then; he is now in year 10—at no stage in his education has the apology been discussed in the context of it being a remarkable benchmark occasion in terms of Aboriginal history or in the

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context of the recognition of the stolen generations and the impact that period had on modern Aboriginal history. It is important when we look at curriculum that we have that recognition.

When I recently had the opportunity to travel to Turkey with a delegation, a member of our delegation commented that in comparison to Turkey we are a very young country. I almost choked on my Turkish tea because we have a 40 000-year history! The problem is that if we are not learning about that history as part of our curriculum in the time that we can learn it, we do not identify as Australians who have an Aboriginal history as well. I think that is a very important thing to consider when we talk about the curriculum. I note that the explanatory memorandum states —

The bill contemplates the Authority publishing a document that sets out in general terms the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to attain through a school's curriculum and how attainment ought to be assessed.

I hope that one of those things is an understanding of Australia's full history, not just the settlement history. While I am talking about that, I note that it is the holy month of Ramadan. Hopefully, many of us in this place will go to the iftar dinner on Thursday night.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Inshallah. I note that the New South Wales curriculum has the option for year 7 to 10 students to study Islam and history. Given that Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world and that Indonesia, one of the largest Islamic nations, sits off our border, it is extremely important for our young people to have an understanding of Islamic history in a cultural context—not necessarily in a religious context, although I think there can be a historical understanding of the religious context—and to know that Christian and Islamic communities lived peacefully alongside each other and that it is really only in modern history that some of the conflicts arose. In a growing community with amazing diversity we want to be able to celebrate the richness of our community. This is about setting the curriculum and those people who will set the standards and assess those areas. If the minister is the person who will appoint the six people who are about to sit on the Curriculum Council and she has that power, I really urge her to consider those issues that I have raised and to ensure that one of those people has the expertise, understanding and knowledge, not just seeking that knowledge, of those sorts of cultural contexts of the wider aspects of what our curriculum should have, to ensure that we have a harmonious and inclusive society.

Another point I want to raise is that I have a 15-year-old son who is studying at Mount Lawley Senior High School, and the studies there are very good. However, the situation is that my son loves history and social sciences but he comes from a family who are a bunch of pacifists, basically—we marched against sending troops to Afghanistan—and in the past two years the history curriculum, which is supposed to be modern Australian history, has been dominated by the study of Australia's military involvement in conflicts. My son has tried to raise this issue, but it is very difficult for students to raise issues and say that there are other histories they would like to learn about. For example, my son has an interest in Aboriginal history, probably because his parents have taken an active interest and ensured that we have taken him to places around this state and the rest of the country to learn more about Aboriginal history. One of the things that I want to see is that students' input is included in any curriculum development. The member for Bassendean thinks that I am naive and that I have never been in a classroom, so I do not understand; however, I read about lots of kids who my son is on Facebook with who rail against the fact that there is stuff that they do not have the opportunity to study. These are bright kids; these are our kids who will be future leaders. I think that it is an important lesson to learn that this is their education and if they are going to be engaged in their education, there must be some way that they can have input into that other than have a parent rock up to the school because we are also trying to teach them independence in those sorts of things.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Will you take an interjection?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No, simply because I am going to be quick; I will finish before the timer.

Mr M.P. Whitely: You misinterpreted what I said slightly.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Okay —

Mr M.P. Whitely: I just probably didn't expand on it —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I apologise, member for Bassendean.

I do not want to be a bleeding heart. My son is in the process of trying to set up a student union at his campus and I think that is driving his principal absolutely crazy, but all power to him and his friends in doing that.

Mr M.W. Sutherland: A socialist collective he's setting up, is he?

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Ms J.M. FREEMAN: No; he wants some student activism there. Clearly, there are some very bright and active kids who have great minds that are challenging lots of the parameters of understanding both at that school and other schools. More power to them for doing that because these students have a right to look at and have input into their studies.

My last point is that I asked a question on notice and raised the issue, which the member for Bassendean also raised, of truancy. I asked a question on notice about truancy because for me it is very important to have an understanding of what is going on in the electorate I represent so that I can raise issues with the minister that there are aspects that need to be addressed. It is my role as a representative to advocate as well as I can for the needs of the community. I asked that question and all I got back was, “Well, we don’t really count truancy.” I got one of those loophole answers that it is really about unexplained absences, so the department cannot tell me what sort of figures there are. Therefore, basically, I got a “We can’t tell you what the level of educational attainment is and whether there are children missing out on educational attainment in all the public schools in the electorate of Nollamara” answer. I think that is very disappointing. The question was asked with the good intention of being able to raise issues with the minister if there was a concern about the percentage of truancy at the schools. I think that these are really important issues. I came back and asked what the unexplained absences are and got a whole bunch of principals to jump through yet more hoops because the education department did not want to give me full and frank information.

Dr E. Constable: It is not kept; the attendances are kept.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Attendance clearly —

Dr E. Constable: Breaking down non-attendance is actually quite difficult.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister needs to know about non-attendance, especially in those schools. There will be a lot of analysis of the London riots and a lot of issues will be raised. I do not want to be one of the people who jumped on the bandwagon, but I have been interested to read some of the issues around that because I represent a diverse community that can have problems, such as some of the social issues that may have occurred in those riots. Hopefully, that is not the case and we do live in a harmonious community that gives people the services they need, which is part and parcel of that. One analysis is that a high number of people—this is an analysis; it is not in stone and I am sure that much research will be done on it—about 12 to 20 per cent of kids, leave and do not get a complete education, end up in a welfare system in which they have high unemployment for a long period and become socially disoriented and dispossessed from our community. Therefore, the minister should know about, especially in the areas that we represent, the unexplained absences. I know that Mount Lawley Senior High School keeps that information, because every time my child is not at school, I get a text from the school asking for an explanation. Even if he is not at school for one period, I get a text sent to me and I have to explain his absence, or I get something at home and I have to explain. That information is certainly kept at Mount Lawley Senior High School. I could ask questions at other schools, but we should know when kids are not going to school.

Dr E. Constable: The information is not kept centrally.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If the Curriculum Council is about to do one of its major reports, that information should be provided. It is no good knowing that the kids at school are doing okay. If most of the kids are not at school and they are like how the member for Bassendean described them, we are creating rods for our own backs. Education is the way to employment and employment is the way to be included in our community, and that is what all communities want. That is certainly what the Sudanese community wants. I am a bit worried that that information is not available centrally. I am very worried that it is not something that the Department of Education is monitoring on an ongoing basis for the benefit of our communities.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham) [7.51 pm]: I rise to say a few things on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011. As I understand it, the opposition supports the legislation. I think that is a wise thing to do given that the genesis of the legislation goes back a few years to when the former Labor government was in power.

I looked over past information and I found a press release that I put out in 2007 to indicate that we would introduce legislation to come up with an education standards authority, which, according to my press release, would largely do what the new Curriculum Council will do. The exception is that the Curriculum Council will have some role with national curriculum, which was not particularly on the commonwealth’s agenda at that point. The formation of such a body has had a gestation period going back a few years. From my recollection, and as the member for Bassendean referred to, the idea arose from the curriculum, syllabus and content debate, otherwise known as the outcomes-based education debate of the mid-2000s. It was probably 2005–06 when the debate reached its crescendo. I remember arriving in the portfolio in early 2007 and announcing 10 or so

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significant changes to how course content would be decided in Western Australia from that point forward. This legislation was one of the major changes alluded to at that point. We came up with a new body to administer curriculum in Western Australia.

The problem with the old body was that the structure was created in the mid-1990s and in many respects it was too representative, if there can be such a thing. Roughly 14 individuals were on the board and they were representatives of different interest groups across Western Australia. I met with them and they were all well-meaning people. However, that body was unwieldy; in a couple of cases its own interest groups were pursuing their own agendas and they were not acting in a particularly collegiate fashion. Parties from that body were leaking to the press because the press had a massive interest in all these issues. That interest has dissipated since the reforms that were put in place in 2007–08. To be honest, the interest is not there anymore in the slightest. In 2005 or 2006 *The West Australian* ran 17 front pages in a row on the state of the education system. Frankly, some of those front pages were disgraceful and shocking; anyone who saw some them thought that the situation was straight out of another country—horrible sorts of front pages. It was an issue that had to be resolved.

I had difficulty with the fact that some people on the Curriculum Council were leaking information. Once a camera or a microphone was put in front of them, they would say things exactly contrary to what had been agreed upon in a Curriculum Council meeting. The body needed to become something that people had more confidence in. It needed to be a smaller body, perhaps, made up of more eminent people who would defend the positions that they had arrived at, rather than the body I just described. That body was not doing the job it should have in the way that it should have. The idea was to create a body that was eminent and above the hurly-burly, so that Western Australians and people sending their kids to Western Australian schools could respect and have full confidence in the curriculum framework. That was the basis of what was proposed.

I had great confidence, and still do, in Bill Loudon and Dave Wood, who was the then CEO of the Curriculum Council. Bill Loudon is an eminent academic. I would not be surprised if he ends up vice-chancellor of a significant university. He is already deputy pro-vice-chancellor or something of that nature at the University of Western Australia.

Dr E. Constable: He is the senior deputy vice-chancellor.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is he the senior deputy pro-vice-chancellor?

Dr E. Constable: No, he is just the vice.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Bill Loudon is a senior deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Western Australia and the sort of fellow who could be a vice-chancellor at a university in Australia and may well be so in the future. I had great confidence in him, but I outlined the difficulties with the Curriculum Council. The difficulties were part of the broader debate surrounding curriculum and syllabus. It is often forgotten—I found a press release—that the whole debate commenced in 1998 with the institution of what became known as outcomes-based education. The member for Cottesloe was then the Minister for Education. The wheels started to fall off when the idea of a syllabus was taken away. We have a curriculum, which is an overarching document, and under that we have a syllabus. The syllabus was in place for all years of schooling up to year 10. In the late 1990s, the syllabus stopped getting updated and only older teachers had the syllabus. The syllabus did not go to the degree of providing daily lesson plans, but it was a much more comprehensive document that gave teachers guidance on what to do in their daily teaching activities. The syllabus was abandoned and the idea was—we can see how this idea came about philosophically—to let teachers use their judgement, experiences and skills to create lessons to meet the needs of their students.

Students would be judged and the success of the system would depend upon the outcomes that students were achieving rather than what they were taught, if members understand the distinction. Rather than the teachers teaching all the time and not worrying about what students were achieving, they should worry more about what the students were achieving. That as an idea is difficult to disagree with. We have to worry about what kids are learning rather than what they are being taught. Being taught does not mean that you are learning. That was the idea behind it. Unfortunately, the way it all transpired, it did not quite work out that way. As the member for Bassendean referred to, there was way too much paperwork and the levelling process for marking students' work was way too involved and difficult for many teachers. Perhaps the levelling process was over-engineered by its creators or some of the practitioners took it way too seriously and tried to level every piece of paper they got from a single student. I always thought that was a bit over the top. Teachers were unhappy with a whole set of work that they were required to do, and there was the whole process of school reports, which I think was overly complex and difficult for people to understand and which perhaps did not reflect traditional reporting, and parents could not understand where their children sat. All those things had to be resolved; therefore, we went to traditional reporting and we allowed teachers to mark according to how they had traditionally marked. We imposed a greater number of exams in senior high school. Not all students were undertaking exams, but I

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certainly intended to impose more exams on students undertaking year 12. I had hoped to get 60 or 70 per cent of year 12 students to take exams—that was the intent—thus imposing a greater number of examinations.

We also undertook to get rid of some of the unnecessary paperwork, reintroduce the syllabus, return to some of the traditional courses and make sure the new courses of study in years 11 and 12, which were violently objected to by some teachers, were supported by the teaching profession generally. All those things happened in 2007–08. I am not sure how the examination process worked out and whether 70 per cent of the students were taking exams. I know that a lot of the schools, for various reasons, do not want their students to do exams. However, I was keen for a much higher level of exams to be put in place. One thing I regret and which I think the department and I were wrong about was that we abandoned the requirement for primary school teachers to provide student portfolios for parents. As a parent with kids in primary school now, which I did not have then—my kids were perhaps approaching primary school at the time—I understand the value of the portfolio for parents to see what their children are doing and to understand what they have done for that term of schooling. There is no longer the requirement for portfolios; it was a requirement until 2008 but was removed as part of the Classroom First strategy to allow teachers to concentrate on teaching. I honestly think that that accountability measure for both teachers and their students was a good thing and should be reintroduced. It was a mistake to remove it. Some teachers hated producing portfolios. Sometimes teachers must comply with accountability requirements, and if a portfolio is something that has to be done, it has to be done. All those—there are numerous others—were put in place, and they were all designed to put tradition back into the classroom and the schools. The then Education Standards Authority, now the curriculum and standards authority—what is it called —

Dr E. Constable: The School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is now called the School Curriculum and Standards Authority—in the fine tradition of the Barnett government’s changing the name of something that the former government was going to name in order to gain ownership of it, of which the Heath Ledger Theatre is the most celebrated example. There other examples of changing the names things —

Mr J.H.D. Day interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The minister is awake! I thought he was asleep.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: He is normally asleep; I know that. However, he is awake. It was just a test; I was only testing.

Mr J.H.D. Day interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: This is one of those exams that I was talking about; I was testing to see whether the minister was awake!

Mr D.A. Templeman: And you passed!

Mr M. McGOWAN: He passed with flying colours. However, in the finest tradition of changing names, the name has been changed. I also note that a couple of extra people have been added to the school curriculum and assessment authority —

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Standards.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes, that is the one. I notice that its membership has increased from five to seven, which was the original intention. I know that it has responsibility for standards across the system, which is a good thing. There has to be some responsibility for standards. The member for Bassendean correctly identified that people are and have been concerned about standards. Even though the concern over curriculum and syllabus has, I think, dissipated, the overarching concern for parents is, and always will be, to make sure that their children have the best education possible and the best opportunities in life provided by that. He correctly identified the one per cent, or thereabouts, a year drift from public schools to private schools. We have to do something to arrest that decline. Irrespective of everything governments do and all the good intentions of ministers, it is difficult to find a solution to arrest that.

I return to the bill.

Ms J.M. Freeman interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: High-quality education is one, and I was going to talk about the quality of teaching a little later. We now have this new authority, which is a good thing; we now have a syllabus reinstated as of late 2007; we now have more exams; we now have all these initiatives out there, but people refer to literacy and numeracy and to teaching quality. Despite all these good intentions and all this work, it is always difficult to translate that

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to the classroom because some teachers will have been in the workforce for a long period and some for a short period. However, it is what happens at the upper level to translate the instruction, intention or desire down to individual teachers in individual classrooms that is difficult, especially considering in Western Australia there are 800 schools across Western Australia with 22 000 or so teachers, and another 10 000 or 15 000 private school teachers. To translate all that initiative and work to those individual teachers is very difficult. Irrespective of what is said about phonics or whole-of-language teaching for literacy, translating what this Parliament decides, what the minister thinks or what I thought when I was minister to the individual teachers is very difficult. Irrespective of what we say, those teachers will keep doing what they have done for the past 30 or 40 years. That is not going to change. To be honest, I know there is now a huge focus on phonics, but, in my experience, there needs to be a mix. For some kids, phonics works; for other kids, it does not. While on that subject, teachers need to be flexible and able to teach both methods. For some kids, particularly my second son, a bit of both works; that is, looking at the picture and the word works for him. My older boy picked up phonics very, very quickly by just spelling out the word. In a nutshell, on that subject, different approaches will work for various children. However, translating down to individual teachers in the profession all this effort and initiative, all this legislation and the creation of a new curriculum body is very difficult. Whatever is done and however many courses are put in place, it will not affect a lot of teachers and the way they teach because they have been teaching that way for a very long time.

I want to touch on a few of the other issues raised by members. I support exams. The member for Mandurah made some seventeenth century remarks on that subject. I support exams in year 12.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I did not say that I did not support exams.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: In any event, I totally support exams in years 11 and 12. I support exams in high school. I support testing. I support the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy. I was very supportive of NAPLAN when it was introduced. I supported the Western Australian literacy and numeracy assessment testing in schools and we put the WALNA results online.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr M. McGOWAN: I supported all of that.

I am concerned that in primary schools we somehow categorise kids at a very early age with the homespun philosophy referred to by the member for Mandurah. I am concerned about that. I think we need to reward kids. One of my children—again, homespun on my behalf—had a graduation ceremony from preprimary. It was nice. It was nice that all the kids were acknowledged for what they had done during the year. Any sociologist or child psychologist will say that kids need praise. They do need praise. Our Western Australian public primary school system is wonderful. Children need the praise that very many of the teachers give. If that means that they get a reward, certificate or acknowledgement, that is a good thing. It is not a good thing to put them in an environment in which they are tested and fail at a very young age. I do not agree with categorising kids in the sixteenth-century style that the member for Mandurah wants to implement in Western Australia. I am trying to think of a sixteenth-century politician who would be appropriate. He is certainly not Machiavelli. That is not the way to go in my view, but the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy, or the Western Australian literacy and numeracy assessment before it, is a good way of identifying where students are at, allowing their parents to know where they are at and allowing schools to know whether they are doing well or need to do better. Schools and principals need to understand where they are at. If NAPLAN testing means that teachers are concerned about ensuring that their kids get results in the exams, that is a good thing. They should be concerned; they should be worried. If a school does not do well, and it is held accountable for that by the parents or, hopefully, the department or us in this chamber, that is a great thing; it should be held accountable. It has been too long without that level of accountability. It came in with WALNA, and the results were published. NAPLAN lifts it to a new level. That level of accountability is a good thing. Some purists will say that it is not, that teachers are teaching to exams and that there is too much pressure. I do not agree. But I also am not that far out on the right as is the member for Mandurah to suggest that somehow younger children need to be in that highly competitive environment when they are emotionally fragile and very easily upset. They need to understand that doing their best is the main thing, and coming twenty-fifth out of 25 students could be very disturbing for their future life. I suppose there is a middle course in all those things.

On the issue of the quality of teaching, as I have said, there is an overarching document and this will be an overarching act. People will implement it at that overarching level. In my view, the two key things for students to do well are the quality of teaching and the interest of the parents. A lot of academics will say that it is the quality of the teaching. Papers can be found that indicate that a lot of the additional resources put into education over the years have not resulted in higher levels of achievement. It is about ensuring that the resources are put in

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and that they go in at the right places, that teachers understand there is a requirement for quality and accountability, and that there is an interest by parents in education. That is a difficult thing for a lot of parents, because they never had involvement in education. If members were lucky enough for one of their parents to have been a teacher, as one of mine was, they are lucky. My children have one parent who is a teacher, so my children are lucky as well. Every night there is homework. My wife understands exactly where they should be because she is a primary school teacher, but a lot of students do not have that. There needs to be an emphasis by government. It can try, but it cannot just be enforced by government. I certainly was very keen on providing the raw material for parents to involve themselves in their kids' education. But if we have those two components—high-quality teachers and parents who are interested—students will do well.

I want to mention two other issues. We are dealing with the curriculum. I am still awaiting some results of the independent public schools initiative to assess whether it meets the overall needs of the system. It is a difficult thing to discuss because it is complex, but I support there being more flexibility for people in education to achieve a high standard. We always have to make sure that that is what is happening in schools—that is, if schools are provided with greater flexibility, it is about achieving a high standard. There needs to be some analysis of that in independent public schools, so that we do not see an increase in paperwork for principals that means that they spend less time on educational pursuits or what have you and that they are intent on making sure that their schools do better. We need to ensure that there is some overarching analysis to make sure that this initiative is working.

I have some areas of concern in relation to the initiative. I have a concern about those teachers who go to our more rural and remote locations. I have a great deal of time for those teachers. My favourite teachers, bar none, were those teachers I met at remote Indigenous communities. I had the utmost respect for them, for where they were and for the conditions that they worked in—often in the middle of the desert, essentially. They were compassionate and wonderful people. I would not like to think that teachers who are in more difficult locations, whether it be in the country or the city, are inhibited from getting to, as they say in education parlance, some of the leafy, green schools. I would not like to think that this initiative prevents or provides a disincentive to teachers to go to those locations. I would also not like to think that there is some opportunity for schools, as I have seen written, to pick their curriculum. When the initiative was originally announced, there was a series of dot points, one of which indicated that schools could pick their curriculum. There are a lot of curricula out there on the shelf. I would not like to think that somehow schools could avoid all the best efforts and work of the state and that some off-the-shelf, unusual and maybe even bizarre curriculum could be picked up by a principal because that happened to be his or her whim. I would hate to think that that is what this initiative means. The Catholic and Anglican school systems do not allow schools to just select whatever they want. I have seen that written in the minister's press releases; that is what this initiative would allow. I have three initial concerns about the independent public schools initiative. The first is the analysis of how it is working, the second is what it is doing to teachers in more difficult locations, and the third is what it means for the selection of curriculum.

Lastly I want to touch on two people. I have mentioned Dave Wood. I thought he was a very good person and he did a very good job at the Curriculum Council. Every year there were difficulties with exams. The final year exams for students in years 11 and 12 will always have a spelling mistake here or there; that will always happen. As I recall, last year or the year before, when Dave Wood was there, significant resources were withdrawn from the Curriculum Council and there were mistakes, and then he got the boot. I was sad for him for that because he was a good educator and a good person. I was sad that he was treated in that way, because I thought he had done a good job in difficult circumstances during the so-called outcomes-based education debate when we had to resolve all those issues.

The other person I want to refer to is Sharyn O'Neill, who became head of the Department of Education at roughly the same time I became minister in early 2007. She is an excellent and outstanding educator. She rose from a primary school teacher to be head of the Department of Education in her early to mid-40s. As far as I am aware, she holds the most senior position ever held by a female in the Western Australian public service. It was a difficult time. It is a difficult agency. When it has 36 000 or thereabouts employees, it is a difficult organisation to run. I understand that the department is the biggest organisation west of Melbourne. West of Melbourne, there is no bigger organisation than the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, as it then was; it is now the Department of Education. Sharyn O'Neill was brilliant. I am sad about the way she has been treated lately, and I do not think it was necessary for her to be treated in that way. A word of advice to the minister: Sharyn O'Neill is a good person. I saw the minister on the news the other night refusing to express confidence in her. The thing that comes with being a minister is that you have to take it on the chin. When things go wrong in your agency, you take it on the chin. That is your responsibility, and you have to accept it. To blame or refuse to express confidence in someone of that quality and stature will just say to public servants across Western Australia, "What's the point of trying to work so hard to get to one of these positions if you're going to be

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treated in that way by your minister?" I do not think the minister did the right thing by Sharyn O'Neill the other day; I do not think the minister did the right thing at all. Fortunately, the Premier stepped in and expressed his confidence in her, and so I suppose she feels better now about her position. All the people in the agencies who have time for her and respect her would think that. I think the minister needs to realise that in the Westminster tradition, the minister must take it on the chin. It is your fault and your responsibility when things go wrong. Do not take it out on your chief executive.

DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands — Minister for Education) [8.21 pm] — in reply: This has been a really interesting and wide-ranging debate tonight on the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011. I think seven opposition members have spoken on it. Interestingly, members opposite have accepted the bill, although I am sure that we will debate some aspects of it in more detail in the consideration in detail stage. It has been very interesting to hear about the issues in education that are important to members. The member for Pilbara asked for a mandated way of teaching, particularly in the areas of English and literacy. At the other end of the scale, the members for Forrestfield and Armadale wanted much greater flexibility. We have had everything in between those two views expressed in the debate tonight.

I will begin by thanking members for their comments and also for their general support of the bill. In some ways I can see why people have strayed from it, because the bill states what we will do in a fairly straightforward way. I will highlight four of the essential things the bill does, just to bring us back to what the bill is about. It replaces the Curriculum Council with the School Curriculum and Standards Authority. It will establish a board—members made some comments about the board, which I will get back to in a moment—that is to be appointed for its collective knowledge of, expertise in and ability to discharge broader functions, rather than representational interests. I think there is an acceptance that that is the way to go. It is certainly the way the previous government was going to go with this legislation, following the review of the Curriculum Council. The bill will also streamline the current functions and introduce new functions relating to the setting of standards of student achievement. That is something that members generally were supportive of and were calling for. The bill will also enable the new authority to prepare reports on the standards being achieved in schools. That is a very important aspect of what the new authority will do. Standards were one of the common themes of a number of members' comments.

I want to clear up one thing because, as many members have said, this bill has been a long time in the making. It is my understanding—I checked again during the dinner break—that this government requested from the Leader of the Opposition not long after the 2008 election a copy of the bill that the former government prepared, and there was never any response to that request. Members opposite have commented on the amount of time this has taken. We had to go back to the beginning and to the review and start this process again without the benefit of having the work that had been done on the former government's bill. It was the Leader of the Opposition's prerogative to do that, but it explains, to some extent at least, why this has taken the time it has.

The member for Victoria Park highlighted one of the major aspects of this bill—that is, the importance of separating the provider and the regulator. That is exactly what this bill does. Not having a representative board and, instead, having a board of seven experts plus two committees will allow that to happen. The member for Victoria Park said that there should be a representative of the universities on the board because that is something the universities want. I can assure the member that, although the membership has not been decided, the current chair, who will continue, is a former pro-vice-chancellor of Edith Cowan University, an eminent educator and emeritus, Professor Patrick Garnett. He has many of the qualities that the universities would be looking for.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Minister, I am not making the point that there should be someone from the higher education sector; I noted the comments made by the member for Rockingham that that question will be put to you in consideration in detail as to why not, because I had some correspondence from universities that obviously want that. You may convince me that that is not the appropriate way of doing it.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I am sure that through the board of seven, the assessment committee, the standards committee and the curriculum committee, the expertise of the people on the board will ensure wide representation of the areas that the member wants to be represented. Certainly, we often look to university academics for their skills and knowledge when it comes to a high level of assessment. As I said, the current chair, Pat Garnett, who was recently appointed and who I am sure will be the continuing chair, has many of the attributes that the universities would consider represent the knowledge of what universities must do. I think that will be covered. The member is correct; we will come back to that at a later time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.R. Mitchell): Excuse me, minister. Could the members for Midland and Rockingham please talk quietly outside?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The member for Victoria Park said Western Australia had the lowest proportion of university entrants. There was some publicity on this recently. It is another of those situations in which apples

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and oranges were not being compared. Victoria looked like it had 91 per cent of its students getting an Australian tertiary admission rank. I think that is what the member was referring to.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: I was quoting from the annual report of the Curriculum Council.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: There was also some recent publicity on this, and it is worth commenting on it this evening. Victoria takes out the vocational education and training students from its analysis, whereas we do not. The member for Rockingham said that in 2006, 52.2 per cent of students did four-plus courses in year 12, and I can add that in 2010, which is the latest information we have, that figure had risen to 61.2 per cent, bearing in mind that we are talking about all our year 12s, including the extra 12 per cent of students who now stay at school because of the raised school leaving age. When we analyse the Western Australian data and present it, it has all our year 12s, whereas other jurisdictions take out students who are doing a VET certificate rather than a more academic course of study. It is therefore hard, and not proper, to compare across jurisdictions until we analyse our data in the same way, if we come to that.

It is important to emphasise that the new authority will not dictate what is taught, but the authority can ask about pedagogy and what is taught. For example, the authority might prepare a report on the year 3 National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy. If the authority is concerned about or sees something interesting in the results, it can request information about pedagogy. However, it is not for the authority to say how things will be taught. The authority will determine what will be taught and when, but not how; it is for the provider to decide how lessons will be taught in schools.

I was really interested to hear the comments and generalisations about teachers. There was a note of despondency in some members' comments about the teachers in our schools. I agree totally with the member for Rockingham about teachers in rural, and particularly remote, communities and the work they do.

I have now undertaken just under 400 school visits since I became minister. I am amazed wherever I go with the quality of what is happening in our schools, such as the excitement of principals and staff when they talk about how they are using NAPLAN results to plan whole-school literacy approaches as well as approaches for individual students. They are the two particular benefits of the NAPLAN results, which also have been mentioned by others tonight.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.R. Mitchell): Member for Midland and member for Mandurah, I ask you to step outside if you wish to continue speaking.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I was talking about the two benefits of NAPLAN results. One is that they enable parents and teachers to see the progress or otherwise that children are making and whether any change of approach is needed to assist a child who might be having difficulties or a child who is performing really well and who might need to be extended. The second is the ability to look across a school to see a continuous whole-school approach to teaching, particularly of literacy and numeracy. The results are used for much more than that now—we can look at the My School website—but the essential focus of schools is the progress of individual students and a whole-school approach to improvement. We have seen improvements in our NAPLAN results over the past two or three years. There have been significant inroads in many schools, despite the despondency of some speakers tonight.

The member for Forrestfield covered many subjects, including his favourite of gifted children. He knows that I have a particular interest in that subject as well. I will not go into detail on things that really do not concern this bill, but I appreciate the member's continuing interest in that area. I would like to just let him know that although he is calling for more schools like Perth Modern to be established, at least nine schools have selective intakes. I think that is probably the way to go. I will not read out the names of those schools—I am sure the member is aware which schools they are—but they are part of a selective intake that provides opportunities right around the metropolitan area. In 2013, Bunbury will be the first regional centre to have a gifted and talented stream through the high school. I know what the member is interested in, but I think he might have to wait quite a while before any more Perth Mods are established. However, good things are happening in any number of schools for high school students who have particular needs due to their brightness. I agree with him, as he knows. We are looking at what can be done in primary schools as well. Again, when I visit primary schools, I see a lot of grouping within classes or year groups so that students can do extension work, and this goes way beyond what is offered through the primary extension and challenge program. Some of that is very good indeed.

The member for Forrestfield mentioned that the bill repeals section 10 of the Curriculum Council Act. I think he pointed out that the original Curriculum Council Act was passed in 1997 and that the School Education Act came into being after that, and there was a crossover between the two. Section 10 of the Curriculum Council Act, which is about the curriculum being taught in accordance with the curriculum framework, is being repealed. This

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is covered for public schools under section 67 of the School Education Act, and for non-government schools under section 159. That duplication has been attended to.

A question about administrative errors in the database was raised by, I think, the member for Forrestfield and one other speaker. I checked that today. The person I spoke to from the Curriculum Council cannot remember when there was an error in the Curriculum Council databases, so those members may have been thinking of other databases or data from individual schools that might not have been correct.

Under the Curriculum Council Act, students can request their results through freedom of information applications. Members need to bear in mind that the Curriculum Council Act deals with students from years 8 to 12. The bill covers students from kindergarten onwards. Records will be kept initially of NAPLAN results, but I am sure other results will be placed there over time. Of course, it would be a bit strange to leave the act as enabling just students to access the results through FOI. The bill will enable parents to do that as well, because it is much more appropriate for the parents of kindergarten and young children to be able to do that.

I have a lot of notes here. The member for Mandurah gave a very spirited speech. At one point, just for a moment, I thought Bill McNee was on his feet.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I am reading it now; it is a landmark speech.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Good. I will certainly go back and read it myself when I get the blue *Hansard* tomorrow.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Bill McNee was a very fine member of Parliament.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Yes. The member for Mandurah referred to him in his speech. He was very fine and very entertaining. The member for Mandurah's speech was also very entertaining.

Mr M. McGowan: Bill had more hair than the member for Mandurah has.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: He did, too.

One interesting thing in the debate was that several members referred to their own children. The member for Mandurah talked about children climbing trees during excursions and so on. I cannot resist telling members that my five-year-old granddaughter in Sydney went on an excursion to a farm a couple of weeks ago. Her class is doing a study of farm to lunchbox. She rang to tell me that she had just milked a cow all by herself. The member for Mandurah's speech reminded me of that. My husband grew up on a farm and he used to milk a cow every morning. He was delighted to know that his granddaughter had experienced that. In saying that, I think the member for Mandurah raised a number of really interesting issues about how children are brought up these days and the sorts of restrictions that are placed on them for a whole lot of reasons that were perhaps not present when he was a young lad. It is a great pity. Schools do have to find ways to give opportunities to students that perhaps came naturally in the past.

The portability of student records was raised by the member for Mandurah. Yes, those results are portable. If a student moves interstate, the results can certainly go with them from our database. The member for Mandurah talked about results going missing. I dealt with that. He covered a whole lot of issues that were very interesting but were not part of the bill.

Mr D.A. Templeman: That is very common.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Is it? I found the member's speech very entertaining and very interesting.

The member for Mandurah also spoke about attendance. He said that it was good we were having a general debate on education. I agree that it was quite invigorating to listen to members' comments.

The member for Armadale also covered a range of things, including the use of textbooks and resources. I think it is a good thing that a wide range of resources is now available to teachers. Computer banks of resources are available. That is one important aspect of the Australian curriculum. There has been a strong move away from textbooks, but then students also have access to the Internet. Learning and teaching has changed dramatically even in the last few years because of that.

Issues of teacher quality and so on were raised. Again, they were often very important points but were not really central to the bill before us. I have already commented on that. As members pointed out, this is a machinery bill in a way, although it has some important underpinning principles as part of that.

The member for Bassendean covered some points that others had covered. I think much of his speech was really about issues in education rather than about the bill itself.

Mr M.P. Whitely: A blueprint for the future.

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Dr E. CONSTABLE: A blueprint, certainly! He made some very interesting comments.

The member for Nollamara raised the issue of the board's composition and drew my attention to making sure there is someone on the board with knowledge of diversity. There are a range of points like that that are really important to be considered in choosing board members—not just the board, but also the two committees: the committee of five, the assessment committee, and the curriculum committee, which I think is 13. Certainly through that, I will make sure the issue of diversity is uppermost. In fact it is one of the things I was thinking about the other night when I was looking at this. The member for Nollamara made a very important point about that. It is important for our schools and for people to have that reassurance.

I found the member for Rockingham's speech very interesting because he gave some detailed background of the years leading up to this. I thank him for that. I gave figures on the numbers doing more than four courses in year 12. They have risen somewhat but there is still some way to go in the future.

I would like to conclude my remarks by acknowledging all the people who have contributed over the years on the Curriculum Council. Many members have represented their organisations on that council. They have put in a great deal of work. It is an amazing organisation because, as well as board members, there are large numbers of people from the profession who are involved in setting exams, including syllabus committees. The teaching profession voluntarily contributes thousands and thousands of hours a year to the good work of the Curriculum Council. I would like to acknowledge those people tonight.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Leave denied to proceed forthwith to third reading.