

SCHOOL EDUCATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014

Second Reading

Resumed from 11 November.

MR P.C. TINLEY (Willagee) [12.10 pm]: I am making a contribution today to the debate on the School Education Amendment Bill 2014, which was led yesterday by the member for Armadale, in a very comprehensive fashion. He described the amendment bill to the house in very interesting terms, explaining its potential impacts and consequences for Western Australia's education system. I am particularly concerned, though, because, from my perspective, the education space generally has been subjected to a significant amount of change and uncertainty as a result of some of the decisions pending for the department. In the term of this government, we have seen a significant transition to independent public schools, so much so that 70 per cent of schools in the south metropolitan area are now IPS. What used to be special is now special for everyone, and we have moved to a decentralised model, under which we have now all but got rid of regional directors. In the south metropolitan area, for example, one regional director is now responsible for 273 schools, which is obviously unworkable using a model of a walk-around management style, by which the director visits schools and understands intimately their issues. The director now does not have enough staff and resources to do that. This is one of the challenges confronting the education system, and certainly in the south metropolitan area it is worth looking at to determine whether there is any merit to further change, or whether it is time to steady up, put the changes in place and see them wash through. There are a number of challenges at both primary and secondary level, each of which has its own unique circumstances, as I am sure all members in the house will be aware. The IPS reform has created, in my view, more questions than answers. There is every chance that a competent, entrepreneurial principal will thrive with the freedoms provided under the IPS system. However, IPS should not be seen as abrogating the responsibility of the government to ensure that enough resources and opportunities are provided for those schools to not only survive, but thrive, and to support a public education system.

I am now speaking specifically to this bill, which is basically a machinery bill that makes some adjustments to allow year 7s to be migrated to the secondary system, and to have the fee structure for those students aligned with the secondary school system. Parents who were going to pay up to \$60 a year as a voluntary payment in primary schools for a year 7 child will now pay up to \$235. Unfortunately, we are in term 4 of the school year prior to the adoption of the change of year 7s to the secondary system. Members will be racing off to various primary school graduations or assemblies to mark the end of the primary school days for year 7s, and will be acutely aware that only now are we providing the legislative oversight to cover what has been known about for years. That is a very poor reflection on the capacity of the government to manage and administer such an essential part of our economy and our society.

Dr A.D. Buti: Asleep at the wheel.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: It is a real concern.

As we look more broadly at the points I make about greater flexibility at the school level, we see that the government has created the circumstances under which the IPS system can exist. It has now introduced the student-centred funding model that was meant to flow on and allow greater flexibility to the one-line budgeting. In fact, there are some inherent flaws in that model that require stronger decisions and leadership from the government and stronger approaches to reform than the government is currently exhibiting. The government has been far too timid in addressing the need for reform in the public school system, particularly in the secondary system.

I make the distinction of the secondary system because a small primary school in a small community can thrive on the basis of parental involvement. It is a well-known fact that far more parents, particularly mothers, are involved in local primary schools, and provide the energy and effort. The value of the voluntary hours put in by mothers typically, and some fathers when they are able, but principally women, is incalculable. That does not translate to the secondary school level, for a range of reasons. Women re-enter the workforce and are quite happy to pick up their careers or professional ambitions where they left off, or pursue other things that they want to do. High schools are typically further away—the school gate is far further from the front door for most people in high schools—whereas for the majority of primary schools, most of the catchment is within walking or bicycle distance, which creates a sense of community. That is why I will always be an advocate for primary schools in the local area, and not forcing them to benefit from economies of scale. A high school is geographically further from the front door, as I have said. The principal volunteers in the school system, in the primary sector, have been mothers, who resume their professional ambitions. Children in secondary schools are far more capable of operating by themselves, in getting to and from participation. The system of IPS has allowed greater flexibility in the secondary sector. It almost corporatises it, in a certain way. To talk about it in cultural terms, we have empowered the chief executive officer of a particular business unit, being the local high school,

to undertake a greater entrepreneurial role in the conduct of the business of the secondary school. The primary schools are seen as far more socially cohesive, and socially important.

This morning I was at a great little school called Hilton Primary School, which is quite small, with about 160 kids, but its involvement as a community centre in the suburb of Hilton is absolutely outstanding. It shares the same suburban block as the local police and community youth centre and the Hilton Harvest community garden. It also has in this precinct the Koolunga Aboriginal Kindergarten. It has been an Aboriginal kindergarten for 50 years. Unfortunately, it could not get enough enrolments this year and is in abeyance until next year, when we hope it will restart. We have a community garden, a PCYC and the primary school on the same lot. Sure, the numbers are small, but its impact on the community is growing really well because of its connectedness with the social fabric of the suburb of Hilton.

I turn now to the broader issue of a school which has recently become an IPS and of which I am interim board chair—that is, Hamilton Senior High School. I am very proud to hold that position, particularly in this time of change, moving from being a standard public school to an independent public school. Some of these issues really play out at Hamilton Senior High School. The school is now developing in quite a good fashion under the leadership of the principal, Donna McDonald, and the deputy principal, Phil Cassis, who is thoroughly immersed and loves his numbers, and identified where the school is missing out in pure dollar terms but is gaining in flexibility. Student-centred funding has shifted funding to the primary school sector, as opposed to putting additional funds into the education system, which is what it needs. We have, in large part met the substantive aspects of what the industry has been calling for, and any number of views that primary school education has been a poor cousin in the system, and that has now been redressed in large part.

But what that did was simply shift funding away from secondary schools. None of those reviews said take money off the secondary school system and give it to primary schools. None of those reviews said shift the amount of money away or around. They all called for additional resources to be delivered and aggregated. They all called for an increase in gross terms in the resources that are required to deliver a proper, functional education system.

Many of the secondary schools in the inner urban areas within the 13-kay rim would now be in the 50 to 60-year-old age group. Many of those schools are now celebrating their 50-year anniversary. Hamilton Senior High School did it, and Melville Senior High School did it, and I am sure other schools around the metropolitan area in that belt are also going through those hopefully happy times of having a significant birthday.

Ms S.F. McGurk: And a few centenaries.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes; and a few centenaries no less. Of course as we move into the ancient areas of Fremantle, schools will be pulling up some artefacts and celebrating the convict education.

The issue is that student-centred funding actually rewards scale. Student-centred funding actually rewards or works best for those schools that have scale, and although they have done okay under a threshold system, they will now do even better under a student-centred per capita system, which is essentially what we have got. Under the previous funding model, funding was delivered on the basis of the number of students in a certain category or a certain subject area, to achieve a certain outcome. We have now gone to a per-child funding model. But there has not been an increase in the amount of funding. There has not been an increase in the pool of money that is available to do that. Previously, some schools had a scale that enabled them to absorb a particular student who would not ordinarily have met the threshold, and they were able to meet the requirements of that student inside the school curriculum and achieve the outcome that they wanted; and those schools that did meet the threshold obviously attracted the majority of the funding. A good example—it is a federal scheme, I know—is the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme. That is a federal-funded program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to receive assistance. Previously, that scheme worked on a threshold model, where if a school had five or more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students—I stand corrected by interjection if anybody knows—it would meet the threshold for funding under that scheme and would achieve the additional dough that it needed. Under the student-centred model, schools that have one or two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will get access to those funds. But there are no additional funds. Previously, those under-threshold kids would have been absorbed into those schools and been adopted. I am not making a commentary about the merits of that. I think that if schools have that category of students, they should be catered for and funded. There is an obvious need for that funding, because they would not have that scheme otherwise.

I will give members some examples. Hilton Primary School, which is 47 per cent Indigenous, and Hamilton Senior High School, which has obviously a knock-on effect of Indigenous kids from the catchment—I cannot tell members the exact percentage—are potentially, and I use that word advisedly, going to suffer, because under the student-centred funding model, there will be a drain from the total pool of funds away from their needs. Hamilton Senior High School, which has over 600 enrolments, still does not have enough scale to deliver and absorb the cuts that have been applied to the funding for these schools. In comparison, Melville High School,

which has over 1 100 kids, has enough staffing to be able to absorb the requirements of the particular specialist courses that it might need to offer to deal with a learning disability of some kind. However, Hamilton Senior High School cannot do that in the same way.

As I have said, student-centred funding rewards schools that have scale, and that is fine. We have now determined that if schools can get enough scale, they will have enough full-time equivalents spare to enable them to do the additional things. But what has the government done to facilitate the development of scale in our inner urban areas? I do not see any particular decisions yet that will facilitate the scale that is required in those public schools. The magic number—as I have said when on my feet before—from my understanding from talking to all the professionals in this space, seems to be about 1 100. The reason is because they can then offer an A and B stream, or a first and second stream, in each of the Australian tertiary admission rank subjects that are required to achieve tertiary qualifications. Right now in the Fremantle area, five schools have had to join together to deliver the ATAR subjects. So, because of that partnership, a kid may go to school on a Wednesday at Hamilton but will then go to Applecross, Melville or South Fremantle to do a particular ATAR subject that is not covered at Hamilton. That is a great innovation. It is a great way of band-aiding and papering over the cracks in our secondary education system, which really do need attention.

We have had now for nearly five years from this government a discussion, an oscillation and a prevarication around school amalgamations and/or a revamping of the school arrangements in the Fremantle area. The government has discounted North Lake Senior Campus, the other high school in the area, because of its specialist nature, attending to year 11 and 12 students as a senior college, and it does a fantastic job. It has excluded Melville Senior High School because of scale. It has excluded, from what I can tell, any desire to expand the boundaries of John Curtin Senior High School. So it has now left it to South Fremantle Senior High School and Hamilton Senior High School. I was at Hamilton Senior High School this very day, and I had year 5 parents come to me and ask me what is happening. South Fremantle Senior High School has about 240 students, and Hamilton Senior High School has about 600, or a bit more, but they are still sub-optimal numbers, both of them, even though one is a bit larger. Yet we have no decision from this government. It is having consultation, or faux consultation, in relation to this, and it is having community meetings, but it is not presenting anything to the community and telling them what the options are. We know very well that the Department of Education has worked through the options in relation to Fremantle schools. Any good public sector executive would have worked through this—and probably would have worked through it, in fairness, long before this government came to power, too. Therefore, we are letting down the people in the seat of Willagee and the seat of Fremantle, and in the south metropolitan area generally, if we do not attend to the underlying problem of scale.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I would have thought a better method of community consultation would have been to present to the community the two or three most likely options that the government could embrace, and seek commentary on those options—and, goodness knows, we might get some other ideas as well that might be worthwhile for the government to hear—and from that make a very clear decision. The parents of students in year 5 are coming to me and asking whether there is going to be a Hamilton Senior High School and a South Fremantle Senior High School. The low-fee-paying high school, Seton Catholic College, does a great job. But it is bursting at the seams, because parents have marched with their feet. They have spoken with their feet. They have marched off to fill in a low-fee-paying Catholic high school, and a very good school it is. But it is an indictment on our public education system that we cannot provide a competitor—I use that word “competitor”—to the independent or non-public schools. It is unconscionable, because it strikes at the heart of two things. Firstly, it strikes at the education required for our kids to achieve the skills to participate in the future economy of Western Australia; and, secondly, it smashes at the social mobility opportunities for our kids. Whilst those who can afford it are going to private schools, those who cannot afford it are going to sub-optimal schools such as Hamilton Senior High School and South Fremantle Senior High School, and despite the entrepreneurial nature of those executives, they are not getting the education they deserve in this day and age. It is unbelievable. If they want to do chemistry, they have to get on a bus; if they want to do physics, they have to get on a bus. They have to go to two or three different schools to do the Australian tertiary admission rank subjects. This is a situation that does not value a skilled services sector and does not value the knowledge economy that we are trying to continue to build in Western Australia. The muscle jobs are gone; as we have said time and again, the days of traditional smokestack industries are finished. We will never again compete on price in that sector with South-East Asian industry. We can compete only on knowledge, entrepreneurship, ingenuity and effort. We are not showing the sort of respect for the people of Western Australia that is required to deliver a better outcome, purely in economic terms let alone in terms of the social disadvantage that is created by not providing the right sort of education.

I also note that there is reference in the School Education Amendment Bill 2014 to financial adjustments, particularly looking at levying a penalty on people who do not enrol their children in school or whose children are prone to chronic absenteeism. I completely support the idea that we need to attend to truancy and non-attendance issues in a comprehensive way, but the stick alone is not enough; we need also to attend to this issue on the basis of what resources we are providing to assist families that might be financially challenged or dysfunctional and are having trouble getting their kids to school. Not least amongst the matters that we need to attend to is the need to look at the underlying problems behind the rise of breakfast clubs. Why are so many breakfast clubs turning up? It never happened when I was at primary or high school, but it is now happening at all schools. When I have talked to the chaplains who typically drive those programs, they have revealed that not every kid who turns up at a breakfast club is from a dysfunctional family or a family in difficult economic circumstances. I ask them why, then, we are putting resources into these programs, and they are very quick to reply that we have destigmatised the program by making it available to all kids and not just some of them, so that kids from dysfunctional families or in straitened circumstances do not at all feel stigmatised by the fact that they are going there to get assistance; they are doing it with their mates and it becomes part of a social scene. It is a very sad phenomenon that has been created.

[Quorum formed.]

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I was feeling lonely in here with just the Leader of the House!

Dr A.D. Buti: They're all going out again! Shows how interested they are!

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I am particularly concerned that the idea of penalising parents for absenteeism does not have a corresponding support network for families that need help. We have removed absenteeism officers from schools—truant officers, as they used to be called; I remember the days of trying to avoid them at the pinball parlours, which is where they typically lurked!—and I think we have missed the point on that issue.

In respect of fines, we could end up in the same situation as other jurisdictions. Victoria in 2006 instituted a fine of about \$140 for anyone who had a child who was absent for more than five days, and there has been a mixed response to that initiative and to the principals who are enforcing the fine. Typically, people who take their kids out of school for a few days here and there to make sure they get an off-peak fare to Bali are not the target of the fine; but, by the same token, the system has not been broadly implemented and has not been supported. The majority of principals who have applied the fine have seen little impact on absenteeism and truancy.

Further afield, a similar system was some time ago implemented in the UK—what is referred to as the “holiday allowance”. Under that system, 10 days’ grace was given to students absent from school outside the normal school holiday period, as long as they had made an arrangement with the principal. A survey was conducted of more than 800 primary schools in the UK and, again, the response was patchy. More than half the primary school principals who responded to the survey said that applications for additional term-time holidays had risen in recent years, compared with just one-third of secondary school principals. These new regulations in the UK allow schools to fine each parent £60 for each child’s unauthorised absence, rising to £120 if not paid within seven days. Again, the results varied by area. School principals in the East Midlands took the toughest stance, with 44 per cent imposing fines on parents compared with only five per cent of their counterparts in London. What are the results? Some principals said that the new rules were having little to no effect on the behaviour of parents, and 63 per cent said that they did not expect requests for term-time holidays to fall, despite the new rules limiting applications to exceptional circumstances. This strategy has not worked in either the UK or Victoria, and the government should carefully consider both those models when determining the “stick” side of tackling absenteeism so that it can better understand these strategies and the impacts that they have.

The other point I want to canvass is the idea of voluntary payments. The bill makes reference to taking voluntary payments for year 7s transitioning from primary to high school up to \$235. I question the voluntary payments system; it needs further thought. I say that for the reason that quite often in the school system there is a downside to the idea of free and universally accessible education, and that is that people do not value what they do not pay for. I understand that the uptake of voluntary payments is a very difficult area, but it is something that is worthy of attention. I also wonder whether we should not be looking at some of the more affluent public schools—for example, those in the western suburbs—and asking why they need universal free access to public education. Why should there not be a greater obligation on those who can afford to deliver education to free up those all-important resources for areas that need it? One thing we could consider is to uncap voluntary payments at the discretion of the school leadership. I do not think there has been a change to the voluntary formula for about 10 years, and the rate has stayed the same, so I am not quite sure what it is actually meant to deliver. We have had varying reports of uptake; if members were to ask their schools, they would find out what percentage of parents are actually paying it, and what percentage of parents are having it recovered through a gentle ask. I think we need to move past that now; we need to value what we deliver, because our public education system is as good as any in the world.

New South Wales schools have voluntary payments. In Mosman High School the payment is now \$700 per year per child. It is achieving that payment—one would hope in the suburb of Mosman in Sydney it would—but

schools across the state are achieving only a 50 per cent compliance rate of voluntary payments. For us, if we were to apply a 50 per cent recovery rate, it would equate to about \$10 million a year that we are missing out on. I wonder whether it is now time to shift from that and talk about further reform in due course once we have bedded this lot down. I thank members for their time.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [12.40 pm]: I rise to speak to this School Education Amendment Bill 2014 and to make a brief contribution to put forward the views that come from the Gosnells electorate. I note that one of the key points of justification for this legislation is around ensuring that the year 7 charges can be brought into line with the secondary school charges that are required, given that year 7s will be in secondary school from the beginning of 2015.

I have a great concern about the capacity of people in my electorate to pay these so-called voluntary charges. The evidence is quite clear that people in my electorate struggle to pay these charges. For some it may be a philosophical concern that they should not have to pay a voluntary charge when they have chosen to endorse a quality public education system. However, I think for many it is a reality that they suffer from such hardship that finding the money for the voluntary fee is difficult for them, and they wonder as well that if they are paying it, what about the next person who is perhaps not paying it? There are all sorts of ambiguities about the voluntary contribution.

I would like to read a letter from the principal of Gosnells Primary School. He expresses some concerns about the level of voluntary fee payment at Gosnells Primary School. This letter came about because I was aware of the very low payment rate and so suggested to the school that if I were to provide some sort of prize or incentive, that could be used as an encouragement to people to pay their voluntary school contribution. I will quote from the principal, Mr Craig Anderson. He said —

Dear Chris

In 2014, you kindly donated a Jets Cycle voucher to the school to use as an incentive to our families to pay their voluntary school contributions before the end of first term.

Dr A.D. Buti: You are a great local member!

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Thank you, member for Armadale. The letter continues —

We did have an increase in payments compared to the previous year which we believe was directly due to the voucher incentive.

So, it is pleasing that there was that increase. However, he says —

I am writing to you again today to request the same support for our 2015 efforts. Unfortunately, we get very few voluntary contributions (approximately 33% of families pay the \$35 as set by School Council) and as we are moving to a new world of one line budgets and as a new Independent Public School in 2015, we need to find ways to increase the funding coming into our school.

We look forward to your support again for 2015 in our attempt to increase our voluntary contribution collection rates.

It is a real problem when the principal of one of the primary schools in my electorate refers to achieving a payment rate of around 33 per cent.

Mr I.C. Blayney: Mine is only 10 per cent.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Member for Geraldton, I think that is terrible as well. However, it only supports my argument about how a principal can do serious budgeting when there is such a high degree of variability in the revenue that their school may receive. It is very difficult for school principals to accommodate this when they will have one-line budgets—if not already—in the near future. It makes it extremely difficult for them.

I asked the Minister for Education about this issue, and I think it is part of the reason why we have this legislation before us. In a question on notice to the minister, I asked —

Bearing in mind that the Acting Deputy Director General Finance and Administration's advice to schools that Year 7 contributions will rise from \$60 to \$235 in 2015, will this require amendment to the *Schools Education Act 1999* or can this be achieved through regulatory change?

The Leader of the House, on behalf of the Minister for Education, replied —

Amendments to the *School Education Act 1999* will be required.

I presume therefore that the answer refers to the bill we have before us. It is a further indication, though, of the scale of the price hike people will face. They will go from a maximum year 7 contribution of \$60 up to \$235 in 2015. I have heard from other members about how the student-centred funding mechanism is already taking funding away from high schools and giving it to primary schools but without any increase in the amount of

funding going to those high schools. That is a further indication of the level of variability that high schools will have to face.

Like many members, I am on the board of a number of schools in my electorate. Whether I am at the school council meeting of Thornlie Senior High School or Southern River College, the discussion is always the same: “There is not enough money going around. We don’t have the capacity to run the programs that we know our students desperately need and that we know our students are anxious, enthusiastic and hungry for. The education system is failing to deliver the range of courses that our students require.” That is a real shame.

I know that methods and ideas have already been trialled on making students travel to other schools so that they can attend a particular course. I am concerned about that. I worry about young people getting on a bus in the middle of the day to go to another school so that they can attend, let us say, a chemistry or physics lesson or perhaps a manual arts-type course. I am worried that the transit time will be time lost. At the same time there is every possibility that the student involved might get waylaid and be tempted to not bother to turn up. I think that places an extra burden on a system that is already suffering from a high degree of absenteeism. I am concerned that very little is being done about absenteeism in general and tackling the really grave problem of truancy. The school system does not quite work for those students who, through no fault of their own, start to show an inability to fit into the student system. They start falling behind, they start getting bored in class and then they start on that slippery slope of truancy which, in turn, puts them even further and further behind. I am very concerned about this issue of truancy. We know that it is the root of a lot of petty crime in our electorates. We know that a student who starts missing out on education starts falling behind and is likely to find that they do not have the capacity to go on to other training to receive the skills training that is required. They fall behind and eventually, it seems, the only pathway open to them is that of a criminal path. That is a problem for our society. It is an economic and a social loss. It is a moral problem for us all when young people commit crime because that is all they know how to do. That is a reality. I have to face the fact that in my electorate there is a small cohort of students in each school that could possibly fall into that category.

That is the bleak side of things. On the positive side, there is great enthusiasm amongst the school teaching and non-teaching staff to deliver the very best. They really try to provide a well-rounded education for all students, recognising that it is not a one-size-fits-all system. It should not be. I think the direction of the government is to try to force students to fit into some general streams and then bad luck if they do not. That will cause more students to be left behind. The provision of facilities is essential to ensure schools have the capacity to deliver things like metalwork classes, automotive classes, and classes that can help students develop skills in the hospitality sector so they can get a basic grounding that can lead to higher education. We must have the facilities for that. I know that running those courses can be costly. I suppose that is why there is this upping of the year 7 contribution fee from \$60 to potentially \$235. That will be a cost burden on families. When families have a number of young kids going through school at the same time, it becomes particularly onerous for them.

I refer to a question that I asked of the Minister for Education last year about the percentage of voluntary contributions that are paid in various schools in my electorate. When I saw the figures, I thought they were a little on the high side because they do not quite add up. I previously used the example of Gosnells Primary School. According to the minister, Gosnells Primary School had a 46.1 per cent payment rate of voluntary contributions in 2012. As I said earlier, when I looked at the letter from the principal of Gosnells Primary School, he referred to a 33 per cent payment rate. I see these figures; they are not good. Only a couple of schools in my electorate have received over the 50 per cent mark when it comes to the percentage paying the voluntary contribution fee. I think they might even be a little on the optimistic side, using Gosnells Primary School as an example.

We have seen the 2014 budget cuts to schools. They are really quite dramatic for a number of schools in my area. South Thornlie Primary School’s cuts total \$170 000 and Thornlie Senior High School’s figure is \$435 000. They are dramatic cuts to schools that are really in need of major refurbishments. I have spoken at length about that in the past. The Barnett government committed to refurbish schools that were over 40 years of age, yet there has been no sign of that at all. Thornlie Senior High School is well and truly in need of a major refurbishment. People who went to the polls in March 2013 understood that the Barnett government was aware of the need for a major refurbishment at Thornlie Senior High School, but we have seen nothing of that. When I visit the school on a rainy day, gutters are overflowing and students are getting wet as they move from one classroom area to the next. There is a general sense of a school that is in need of major investment to improve its facilities. Toilet areas have become highly unpleasant because they are so dated. That is another major concern of mine.

There are some very positive things going on, but they are all things that come from the school community’s own energy. This is a good thing. I know other members have mentioned how schools are very much the hub of our community. The community garden that has been created at Southern River College is absolutely outstanding; it is a fantastic achievement. People who neighbour that school, who previously had perhaps little connection with it, are now aware that the school is a valued neighbour and they can be a part of that school

Mr Peter Tinley; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Acting Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk

community by participating in activities at the community garden. I commend the school's principal, Mrs Everal Pearse, and also a garden guru, Mr Trevor Cochrane from *The Garden Gurus* television program, for their participation in the creation of the Southern River College community garden. It is absolutely outstanding.

Another school in my electorate, Wirrabirra Primary School, has a tremendous history of running an event called the Moonlight Markets. That comes up on Friday of this week. That is another example of how a school can be a hub of the community and an actual social event for people who may have very little connection with the school. It becomes a social event for them to come along to.

I wonder where the Liberal Party gets some of its advice from when it comes to education. We have seen various reports, including academic reports, on matters such as the student-centred funding model, but I am particularly concerned about one of the people to be appointed to the national curriculum review.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Professor Barry Spurr was appointed to that review by the federal Liberal government. That government saw fit to appoint Mr Barry Spurr to the national curriculum review. I do not think his language is fit for *Hansard* so I will not repeat in this house what he said. Suffice to say, his language was of an offensive and racist nature. I cannot believe that once he was found out, he tried to dismiss it as "poetic whimsy". It was just offensive. If that is the calibre of person that the Liberal Party gets education advice from, we have serious problems. I am sure there are people in the Liberal Party who were greatly offended by his comments. Professor Spurr directed his insults to the current Prime Minister. I am sure there is now no fondness for Professor Barry Spurr, but why was he appointed anyway? Surely the federal government had an inkling of his views prior to appointing him to something as important as the national curriculum review.

It strikes me that our schools are extremely well staffed. There is no doubt about it. Whether looking at teaching staff or non-teaching staff, there is a very high level of commitment. However, I notice in primary schools especially that we are talking about a workforce that is at least 80 per cent female—an 80 per cent feminised workforce. That is a given. But the curious thing is that almost without fail the principals in my area tend to be males who are over 50 years of age. How can it be that in a workforce dominated by women, who do fantastic jobs, the principals nearly always end up being male? I am not criticising any of those male principals, who all do a fantastic job, but this matter deserves greater investigation and not the glib response I get when I raise it with various people in the Department of Education of, "Oh well, women go off and have children." I do not think that is good enough. I think something really needs to be investigated here and, surely, there should be equal weighting between males and females who hold school principal positions. The current ratio, the current imbalance, is extraordinary, and something should be done about it, especially in the primary school area where it is most noticeable.

I am concerned about how voluntary fees are imposed on families of students and about what that will do to the bottom line of schools. As schools go towards single-line budgeting and there are more and more independent public schools, the degree of uncertainty about school budgets is worrying. I know that our schools really do want to deliver the best in academic education, culture and the arts education, and also the sporting activities that give kids the opportunity to develop a taste for the thrill of various sports. That is all commendable. Perhaps most importantly, though, is the opportunity to ensure that students develop good social skills, and that socialisation aspect of primary school is often enhanced by programs delivered through school excursions, school camps and those sorts of opportunities—but they cost more. They are not the occasions and opportunities that kids can enjoy necessarily in the classroom for which a standard level of funding is required. Beyond that standard level of funding is where the hard, quality work is done to help students develop their social skills. I am very worried that due to the problems with voluntary school contributions there will be a drop in the number of extracurricular activities such as school camps. If school budgets are ever-tightened, school principals will have to choose between the core work of maths, English, social science and science classes and school camps. It will be a real shame to lose school camps and, as a result, lose an educational opportunity the delivery of which cannot necessarily be quantified. The benefits of socialisation opportunities cannot be quantified. The National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy can be used to rate those other aspects of a school education, but that cannot be done for what is probably one of the most important aspects of a child's education—that is, how they interact with their peers.

I would like to conclude on that note. School education is about so much more than just making sure students pass their exams and that the school presents well in NAPLAN; it is about providing well-rounded individuals, ensuring that students, regardless of their academic inclinations and their personality traits, get a good-quality public education. I have grave concerns about how our funding structure is going to ensure that. I look forward to hearing from the Minister for Planning to see how my concerns, especially about the low percentage payment rate of voluntary contributions, will be dealt with.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [1.06 pm]: I rise to address the School Education Amendment Bill 2014 and focus on a couple of areas that will be affected by the bill. I understand that the opposition is moving two

amendments specifically relating to corporal punishment, and I will talk about that in a little while. Unfortunately, I was not present during the second reading speech, but I have read it. I will address some of the issues in the order of the second reading speech for ease of progressing through the things that I am concerned about in the bill. The first is the changes to year 7, and that is timely because this morning I was in the electorate of Warnbro, firstly, at Comet Bay College and, secondly, at Warnbro Community High School, attending the official opening of the year 7 buildings in those two locations. I must say that they are magnificent and very well designed buildings, and it was clear from speaking with the school staff that there was a great deal of consultation. The architects and the building team have to be commended. I must even commend Building Management and Works, which I am loath to do because of some of the other failures it has overseen in the education world, specifically its involvement with subcontractors. That aside, however, BMW has done a good job in this case—I hope all the contractors were paid—and the buildings are wonderful and will be a magnificent addition to those schools.

However, one thing I am concerned about—I echo the concerns expressed by the member for Gosnells—is voluntary payments. The bill will amend the legislation so that year 7s can pay high schools fees and voluntary payments can be made by their parents. I would like to raise my concerns about the impact on households of increasing costs not only in education, but also right across the state, and explain how the increasing costs in education will have an impact on every household. I think significantly more households will suffer more economic stress as a direct result of a large number of very large increases in costs that they cannot avoid, many directly attributable to the Barnett government's policies and practices. One of the biggest costs is electricity prices, which have gone up 72 per cent since the Barnett government came to office, and we cannot avoid them. All households, including households with children, must pay their electricity bills. People have to have power and that is a cost that people cannot avoid, particularly in households where people are on low fixed incomes or pensions; they do not have a 72 per cent increase in their revenue. They have to find extra to pay the increases that are a consequence of government policies and decisions. An enormous amount has to be found for the waste levy, which I think was a 300 per cent increase, and water rates, which have gone up significantly. There have been massive increases across the board in household costs which are unavoidable and which will impact most disproportionately on the households that can least afford them, and I venture to say that impact will be greatest on those households who have children who suffer inadequate education.

The likelihood of the children being vulnerable to, firstly, not attending and, secondly, even if they do attend, failing to achieve the outcomes that would be expected will be greatest disproportionately in the same households that have been impacted on most significantly by the state government's increased imposts. That is a concern. I note in the policies the child and parent centres initiative. We are fully supportive of it. Labor's policy at the last election was to roll out the centres in a much bigger way across the state. It is good to see that the government is passing the legislation as an enabler, but I note that there has not been much in the way of real activity in this field of endeavour beyond the things that existed when it came to office.

Dr A.D. Buti: You will remember that our former colleague Hon Linda Savage did a lot of work in this area.

Mr P. PAPALIA: She did, and she promoted early childhood education in particular as a focus. There was a great deal of effort on her behalf to elevate the importance of that field of endeavour, and she did well.

Mr J.H.D. Day: It is a great pity that she did not get re-endorsed by the Labor Party.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Shall we talk about endorsements or the willingness to be endorsed? Perhaps we should talk about whether parties and leaders are so unpopular that sitting members are considering abandoning the party. Perhaps we should talk about that if the minister wants to digress. I am not sure that I would if I were him. I think I will stay on this subject.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Linda Savage was a very good member and a very decent person.

Mr P. PAPALIA: She was. There have been many decent members of Parliament over the years and many people who deserved re-endorsement but perhaps did not get it. I would not argue with the minister there.

I want to push on because the next subject in the second reading speech is one I am concerned about. This illustrates that the government—I do not think it is solely this government that does this—has suffered significantly from an inability to work across portfolios and identify the impact of policies and initiatives in one portfolio on other portfolios and on the people of Western Australia as a consequence. There is a magnified effect; if something is bad in one portfolio and a bad thing in another portfolio impacts on the same people, there is a concentration of that impact and there is potentially a very significant negative consequence. In this case, there is a move to increase penalties for people whose children fail to attend school. As part of that, there is a move to impose a fine of \$2 500 for the failure to provide, when requested, proof of enrolment in school. I am focusing on the penalty of \$2 500. The specific details of why the government is imposing it and on whom it is imposing it are not that important.

Until recently, after it has been pounded into the government's consciousness through months and months of questions on notice to several ministers and years of questions on notice to a series of ministers, this government has been unaware of the impact it has had on Western Australians who are too poor to pay their fines. As a direct consequence of the government's ineptitude in monitoring the impact of legislation and enforcing changes to the supervision of people serving community service orders, there has been a massive increase in the number of Western Australians thrown into prison solely because they were incapable of paying their fines—they were too poor. The government came to office in September 2008, and in that year 194 individuals were locked up because of their inability to pay fines. When this government came to office, a piece of legislation had been passed by the previous government in March. Parliament was prorogued on 22 July 2008 and subsequently that government lost office and was incapable of observing the impact of that legislation. I believe that ministers are not there just to ride around in the white cars and cut ribbons. It is my view that ministers have a role in providing oversight of legislation that is passed to ensure that it does what it was intended to do and, if it does not, to stop it and introduce change. It is not as though a piece of legislation that was passed in March 2008 cannot be altered by the current government; in fact, it is the responsibility of the current government to act if that legislation is having a negative impact. But that is not the reason for the massive increase in the number of fine defaulters going to prison; that is only a partial contributor.

The other prime cause of the huge increase in the number of people who are too poor to pay their fines going to prison is a conscious decision by the Barnett government in early 2009 to change the regulations governing the supervision of people on community service orders, specifically fine defaulters serving a community service order because they have been unable to pay the fine in the first place, have been incapable of entering into a managed payment plan and have then been given, as a last alternative to prison, the opportunity to serve a community service order. At the start of 2009, the then Attorney General, Hon Christian Porter, introduced a change, which he crowed about in this place in June that year. Those fine defaulters, who had already proven to be pretty unreliable—evidence provided in independent studies in Western Australia shows that 53 per cent of people on community service orders are drug addicted or have an alcohol problem—were confronted with a new regime whereby if they missed two days of their community service order, which did not have to be consecutive, they would be back in court to be sentenced; and, if they missed three days, they were automatically breached. The consequence in the following year was that the number of fine defaulters going to prison tripled. In the year after that, the number exceeded 1 300 and from then until 2013 the number of people in Western Australia who are too poor to pay their fines and who have gone to prison has never dropped below 1 100. I guarantee that it will be the same this year. I do not yet have that figure because the year has not concluded; in fact, I would not be surprised if the number had already exceeded 1 100 this year, but that is by the bye.

The point is that that is in a completely different field of endeavour; that is in a whole different portfolio. This government decided that the tool used to enforce participation and adherence to community service orders was enhanced consequences if people breached on two occasions, but a breach on three occasions meant that they would go to prison. At the same time as the government has done that, there have been massive increases in household costs and there has also been a tendency to determine that the only way to enforce compliance with new laws—or attendance at school—is to increase the penalty. It is stupidity. It is rank stupidity to assume that a deterrent alone will result in the outcome that is desired. It will not work; it has been proven not to work. In fact, the very opposite is the case. By imposing increased penalties in an effort to make people comply and to deter them from doing the wrong thing, the government captures the same people who are vulnerable to not being educated and to being thrown into prison in the long run. All it does is magnify the problem.

There is an ongoing study by Curtin University—I think Jocelyn Jones is one of the authors and they are about halfway through or will complete the study at the end of the year—into the impact of Aboriginal mothers going to prison in Western Australia. They had a forum in the middle of the year and they had already determined at that stage that there was a massive negative societal impact of throwing Aboriginal mothers—I do not think it is just Aboriginal mothers, but obviously they are disproportionately represented in Western Australia—into prison. Obviously, when a mother is thrown into prison, the children are left without that mother and the consequence is that the children become vulnerable. If the household is held together by a mother who may be the only functioning adult in a family and it loses that person, then the children become vulnerable. They become vulnerable to sexual and physical assaults, and falling in with the wrong type of people and becoming involved in crime. In this state, the consequences of that are undeniable and obvious—40 per cent of the adult prison population is Aboriginal, although only 3.5 per cent of the state's population is Aboriginal. We are the worst in the nation for locking up Aboriginal people proportionate to population. Partly, that is because we keep ramping up penalties in an effort to get them to comply with things. It does not work; we capture the wrong people. It is not like these parents are all flying their kids off to Bali. I find it laughable that every time there is discussion about truancy in Western Australia, the Western Australian Department of Education comes out and talks about fly in, fly out parents flying their kids to Bali for the weekend. I have to tell members, they are not the ones I am

worried about. I am worried about the children in the regions who do not even go to school. If their parents cared enough and had the capacity to fly them to Bali for the weekend, things would be a lot better.

Quorum

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

[Bells rung.]

Mr P. PAPALIA: I think that is a furphy. Obviously, it is a problem, and I understand all of the statistics about the number of days —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Member, just wait while the quorum is being called.

Mr P. Papalia: I was getting a few extra words in, mate!

[Quorum formed.]

Debate Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do not believe that a certain number of parents taking their kids out of school during term and taking them off on holidays is not a problem. It is true; that is a problem, but we need to prioritise our effort with respect to this challenge. The real problem lies in the fact that at least two years ago—I do not think it has changed—Western Australia had the worst Aboriginal attendance and participation in the country for the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy testing. We have the worst statistics in the country for that. In particular, the drop between students' participation in the first NAPLAN test and the year 9 test was easily the worst in the country. That is more of a concern because it will produce more of a negative impact on the fabric of Western Australian society in the long run, than some people being irresponsible and taking their kids to Bali for holidays. Those people who take their kids to Bali for holidays have the wherewithal to do that and at least enough interest in their kids to take them along with them on the holiday. Those kids have two factors in their favour that kids who live in a dysfunctional household, in a remote locality riddled with drugs, alcohol and violence, and who are unlikely to attend school do not have. They have two things that kids in remote regions or communities in the city do not have. That is more of a concern, and I would like to see a lot more effort put into that. At the last state election the opposition proposed a policy for attendance and behaviour officers to be provided to schools across the state with the greatest attendance and behaviour challenges.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P. PAPALIA: It was frustrating because we had costed and funded that policy, but at the time the Minister for Education decried that it was unnecessary. At the time he said "What on Earth would a few people wandering around the state do for attendance? What a waste of time and effort." Subsequently, the federal Liberal government introduced an almost identical, but not as good, policy. It is not as good because the federal government is using FIFO attendance officers, and I do not think that will work. I think, to be effective, people need to be on the ground with the resources to go to the homes of the individuals concerned and find out what is wrong and bring all government agencies to bear on that dysfunctional home with problems. I do not think the federal government is doing that, but at least it is having a crack. It is laughable that the Minister for Education is nowhere to be seen on this policy; he has not made a comment. The federal government is coming to the state and effectively telling the state government that it is incapable of tackling this problem so it will take it off the state government's hands. The federal government is going over the top of the state government to provide a policy that mirrors the policy proposed by the WA Labor Party at the last state election. The Minister for Education has not commented on that; he is invisible. That is very frustrating, because that is the issue. Attendance is a significant issue. I am most concerned about the attendance of the most at-risk children, the ones who as a consequence contribute disproportionately to our crime problem, which we all suffer from, and the problem of our ever-expanding prison population. Undeniably, if those children attend school and learn to read and write in their first four years of primary school, their chances of not falling into crime are dramatically elevated. Conversely, if they do not learn those skills by then, they are confronted with a few options. Firstly, they can become deep and silent, sit at the back of the room, not do anything, not create problems for the teacher, but never learn anything. At least they will go through the system without getting into trouble. Secondly, they can become the class ratbag, because that is always cooler than being stupid. Finally, they stop going to school, which is the option that they will increasingly take as they get older. That is the problem, because those individuals are very disproportionately from our Aboriginal communities. It is not all Aboriginal people, but it is disproportionately students from that community. Those students need a focused and targeted effort. We need to acknowledge that we will get the greatest gains if we start there and lift those students up, rather than talking about people flying their kids to Bali for holidays. I do not think having a crack at those parents achieves much anyway. I do not think that a \$2 500 penalty imposed on people who do not comply with Department of Education legislation will necessarily achieve the intended objective. It will potentially add another hurdle for

the same people to trip over. They are tripping over them all the time. The same people who may be just holding their families together are the ones most vulnerable to getting caught up in this web.

I will tell a brief story that is unrelated to education about what is happening with fines in this state. A woman came to my office—she was not Aboriginal—a mother of a young child of nine years, I think, and an older child of 17 or 18 years. She is suffering from cancer. She had a \$68 parking fine that she had not paid. She claimed that she was not responsible or something and she did not pay it. She missed court three times, and every time the council had sent lawyers to the court to represent its interests. When she did show up, they moved to provide some sort of payment plan, but she then missed another couple of occasions in court. By the time she came to see me, she was confronted with a \$3 500 fine that she was incapable of paying because all her income, which is a pension, went solely towards her life—she rented, sublet from a brother, and had to feed the kids on her pension, and was in between getting cancer treatment. She was incapable of paying that fine. In my view, she would have failed to comply with a community service order for the same reasons that she failed to attend court or pay the fine in the first place. For the sake of a \$68 fine there would have been another person in prison. To what end? We have penalties that are focused on notionally deterring offenders and compelling compliance that are escalated all the time, as they appear to be here, which do not work. They do work for people who will comply anyway, but they do not work on those who end up being amongst the 1 100 people a year for the last four years in our prison system because they are just too poor to pay fines. It is silly. Part of the problem is that different departments, all pursuing this same agenda of ramping up deterrents, do not talk to each other and do not consider the consequences of a conflagration—I am having trouble pronouncing that; it is a bit late today!—of different penalties from different agencies. It might be found, for instance, that the same person who failed to pay the electricity bill gets a bit of a penalty, then gets a speeding fine and then their kids do not show up at school and they miss meetings and fail to provide evidence. I am not suggesting that this is the penalty that causes the problem, but it could be the one that tips them over the edge. It could be the final imposition that results in them being unable to cope. Then, what is not accounted for is the unintended consequence. When these families are disrupted in this fashion, they become more vulnerable. The children in particular become more vulnerable and another cycle is commenced. That has been observed by the Curtin University study and I am sure it will be in its findings when it is completed in the year. It effectively states that there is multigenerational crime and subsequent multigenerational incarceration, and it just does not make sense.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I know what the word is; I am just having trouble pronouncing it! My tongue is not working in that particular configuration!

I know I have gone off on a bit of tangent with respect to the fine increase in this bill and that is not intended to be a slight on the education department or on the advisers to the minister or anything like that. However, I want to use this opportunity to try to focus the government's attention a little on the need to have cross-departmental consideration of the consequences of the legislation that it introduces. There is legislation waiting to be reintroduced to this Parliament, which has been second-read, that will have significant consequences for the number of juveniles and adults going into the prison system even above and beyond the massive increase we have had this year, which has exceeded the previous two years combined. The numbers that the legislation is predicted to add to that total will be significant. The government has to concern itself with not only how things look on the front page of *The Sunday Times* when it says how tough it is, but also the consequences of that and whether they will be positive or negative. If it is pretty clear that the government is ramping up deterrents over time without assessing whether they work—ramping up the consequences for the most vulnerable and disproportionately represented in our justice system—the government has to determine whether it should keep doing that. That is just a responsible thing to do. That is what a minister's role should be. Developing policy and then driving it is one role of the minister; the other thing is to watch what happens and see whether it works, and if it does not work, stop doing it. Do not just keep doing it in a senseless fashion because there is a cheap populist vote in it. I think the community is getting wise to it. Right around the western world right now the community is getting wise to it. In California they are moving motions to get people out of prison because they got wise to it. Right around the world people are starting to say to governments, "Hang on a minute, you were saying how tough you are and how effective that was and now you are cutting budgets to our education services, our health services and our policing services. You are cutting those budgets because you have to pay for people to go to prison who are not effectively being dealt with in prison." People are starting to ask the government questions and they will ask questions. They are not stupid. The public will not continue to buy the dumb lines that have been delivered by successive governments in relation to law and order. Crime is going down over time, which the government claims and which statistics demonstrate, but there are still breakouts of violent behaviour—there is a clear problem with methamphetamine that the government has done nothing about, not even talked about. If all that is happening and we know education is the key tool and weapon to fight it, people want to know why 350 education assistants are being cut because the government needs to get its budget back in

order. One of the stupid things going on is a massive increase in the number of people going to prison, 30 per cent of whom are there for minor offences and another 15 per cent because they just cannot pay their fines—a total of 45 per cent. According to the Minister for Corrective Services' own answer to a question on notice, since he took office 45 per cent of the increase in the prison population has been due to putting people in prison for nothing more than minor offences and the incapacity to pay fines. That is 45 per cent of the increase.

Mr J.M. Francis interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The minister can have a debate in the bar if he wants a good, long debate, but right now I have only two minutes left.

Mr J.M. Francis: Tell the truth.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am telling the truth. I refer only to statistics that are provided by the government. They are undeniable. The minister cannot deny his own statistics.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Can I ask you a question briefly?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, quickly though.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Are you able to commit to your side not engaging in a law and order auction in the lead-up to the next election?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Catch me, member for Fremantle, I am going to fall over! I am recalling the last leaders' debate during the last election campaign. Which side threw out the challenge with respect to the stupid law we may see—I do not know that we will, actually—come into this place, the bill having been second-read, regarding aggravated burglary? Who did that? It was the Premier. Which party paid millions of dollars and ran wall-to-wall radio ads on every commercial radio station for two weeks, even though that was denied, with respect to that law? Which party was that, minister? I do know which one of us should be demanding that. I welcome the minister asking the question. Why does he not try that? Why does he not try us on? Why does he not give us an opportunity?

Dr A.D. Buti: He should be the leader.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I wish he were leader; he would be a reasonable individual to deal with. I think the minister should try it on. If he was willing to do that, and he knows it makes sense, he should give it a go.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [1.37 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the School Education Amendment Bill 2014. In particular, I would like to take the opportunity to speak about some of the issues affecting school communities in my electorate. They are issues that were hotly debated well before the last election and certainly during the last election campaign. Since I have been the member representing the seat of Fremantle, the government has provided no action on a burning issue—that is, the state of high schools in the electorate. I just want to take the opportunity to speak about that while we are on the matter of schools and education in our state. It is not quite true to say that the government has done nothing in relation to high schools, because last August in the post-budget process the Premier made an utterance that there may be some high school amalgamations in the wider Fremantle and Armadale areas. He just said that as a throwaway line in the post-budget period and when pressed about it confirmed that, yes, there were high schools in my electorate and the wider Fremantle area—so just outside my electorate—and in the Armadale area that had lower enrolments and so the government was looking at amalgamations. It seemed to be an offhand comment and it appears that the Premier is prone to them. What then happened, however, is that the minister had to mop up some of that work and confirm that the government is looking at some of the high schools, but that the process is just in its early days, the government is not quite sure what it will do yet and it is still looking at the process. Having made that announcement, although still not specifying exactly which schools he was talking about, the Premier would have been aware that under section 56 of the School Education Act 1999, when the government is considering closing or amalgamating schools, it is required to consult the community, and a process needs to be undertaken. The government would have been aware of that so it needed to begin the process by embarking on some discussion with the community. There is a lot of criticism in my electorate about how that process has been undertaken by the government. An online survey was eventually undertaken, but a number of people were frustrated by it. One did not have to be a parent or a prospective parent to undertake that survey. As a member of Parliament and as a community member who participated in that survey, it appeared to me to contain a number of motherhood statements. That was the suspicion of a number of parents in the community I spoke to who had participated in the survey; nonetheless, people were able to participate in that online survey.

That culminated in a public forum at the Fremantle Town Hall in June this year, which was quite well attended. Let us remember the time frame. We are talking about the late budget in August 2013 when the Premier announced that the government was looking at school amalgamations. Then there was an online survey, but still

no direction or identification of the schools being considered in the amalgamation process. There were no parameters around what it might mean or what would be looked at for those amalgamated schools. In June, eight months later, a public meeting was held. To his credit, the Premier came to that quite well attended public meeting in the Fremantle Town Hall, as I said. The minister attended also, as did regional departmental people as well as the company that undertook the survey. The public meeting was a pretty lacklustre affair. People were frustrated by the lion's share of the meeting's time being taken up by the company that undertook the online survey, which, in itself, was fairly underwhelming. The company went through the methodology employed to arrive at the outcomes et cetera. As I said, the survey contained a number of motherhood statements so that it was difficult to argue with some of the propositions put up as alternatives for the parents in the community. It would be fair to say that most members of the community were a little stunned at how the meeting proceeded. Notwithstanding that, I believe that two things were achieved by that consultation. The first was that the Premier made clear in that consultation that a decision would be made about exactly what schools were being considered. In his contribution to this debate earlier this morning, the member for Willagee indicated that we are talking about South Fremantle Senior High School in my electorate and Hamilton Senior High School in his electorate. We have determined by a process of elimination that it was pretty obvious they were, effectively, the two schools we were talking about. They have sub-optimal enrolment numbers, hence there is consideration of their amalgamation.

At the meeting, when the Premier was asked from the floor when an announcement would be made on the school amalgamation, he made it clear that an announcement would be made by the end of the year. This was in June. I must say that I was surprised by that at the time because I did not see why an announcement could not be made in a month or so after the public meeting. In August 2013, when the Premier announced that consideration was being given to amalgamating high schools in the wider Fremantle area, one would think that a plan had been prepared. Yes, the government would consult with the community as it should and as it is required to do under the act. As a matter of good governance, it should consult with the community about what it wants, although if members have been paying attention to this issue when I have discussed it in this house, there has been quite a bit of debate about it. A specific lobby group called High School Options for Fremantle has been set up, although not just that group, and there has been a lot of wide debate in Fremantle about this issue.

The Premier said that there would be an announcement by the end of the year. The Premier was asked what sorts of resources were being considered for the amalgamated school, given that no specific budget allocation had been made for this process in the state budget. The question I put to the Premier at the public meeting was: if the government considered that it would need extra resources, where was he going to get them from? He said that it was true that it was not a cost-neutral exercise. He was very clear about that. He also said, "If you're amalgamating schools, I expect you would need \$30 million to \$40 million." I was a little surprised by that amount, but if that is on offer, I am sure the Fremantle community will take it. He said, "If you're looking at a new build, it will cost \$70 million to \$80 million." In confirming, rightly, that an amalgamated school would take some allocation of funds, the Premier acknowledged that there was no budget allocation for this exercise, even though the low numbers and the debate in the community have been pretty obvious to the regional education office and to the government for some time. The Premier immediately then raised expectations in that large public meeting that the government would allocate significant resources to the project. By talking about those dollars, that is what the Premier did. I saw people around the room raise their eyebrows and say, "Great, if it's an amalgamated school, we will get millions of dollars to make this work and if there is consideration of a new school, all the better. Who would say no to a new school?" That was in June and it is now November. Schools are in the winding-down period, but still there has been no announcement. When will this government make an announcement about high school amalgamations in the Fremantle area? All that has been achieved since the Premier's announcement last August is an undermining of the schools in the Fremantle area by injecting significant uncertainty while they are trying to do their work. Now they have a black cloud hanging over them of potential high school amalgamations while they are trying to do their best to encourage enrolments and maintain morale in doing what they do well. From everything I can see, the school staff are doing everything they can possibly do to make their schools work, but are being pulled back by this government. The Premier made an announcement last August with no plan whatsoever. He undertakes perfunctory consultation, goes to a public meeting and pads out the public meeting with survey results that, at the end of the day, were, frankly, quite meaningless. There were a few headline figures but, on the whole, they did not tell people anything that they did not already know. The Premier then raised expectations about dollars that would be allocated, all the while having no clear parameters around which people could have some meaningful consultation. By that I mean the government is saying that it is looking at amalgamating high schools in the wider Fremantle area and that these are the two schools. It is the elephant in the room. It is pretty obvious; we now know the two schools that are being looked at. We did not hear him say, "Here are some options; these are the sorts of alternatives we could look at; let us have some constructive debate around what those alternatives could be." I mentioned the lobby group High School Options for Fremantle. It was particularly concerned about the poor process of consultation with the community when it has been such a hotly debated issue in the wider Fremantle area. If there is one thing

we can say about the Fremantle community, it is engaged. Believe me, it is very engaged over this issue and a number of issues. One process was pointed out, and it is not just a theoretical or broad, unsubstantiated criticism of the government's consultation on this issue. High School Options for Fremantle forwarded me some details about the New South Wales consultation on Sydney's inner-city high school issue. It was in stark contrast with what the government undertook. For instance, as part of that process, it set up the inner-Sydney schools working group. Its consultation consisted of a principals' briefing, a principals' workshop, stakeholder and interest group one-to-one meetings, councils' workshop, free teachers' workshops, invited P&C group workshops, community workshops, an Aboriginal education consultative group, focus groups targeting particular areas, an online forum and self-directed kitchen table discussion groups. People really felt that there had been some engagement around the options—a far cry from the process that this government undertook. Just quickly, the other criticism of the consultation was around narrowing some of the options. In that online survey, people who had high school kids were given different options from those given to people who had primary school children but who had an expectation that their children would want to go to high school. High School Options for Fremantle was frustrated about that as well. As I said, there was very poor consultation. Coming towards the end of the school year, no decision has been made by this government. I think it is appalling that all the government has really managed to do is undermine the efforts of those high schools in the wider Fremantle area, particularly South Fremantle Senior High School and Hamilton Senior High School, to do their job and to do it well. All this government is doing is holding them back.

The question that has been debated quite a bit is: what can be done to ensure that the amalgamated school is, as I have said before, greater than the sum of its parts and that it actually meets the needs of the community? The objects of the School Education Act—the act that the bill before us this afternoon is amending—include the following —

(a) to recognize the right of every child in the State to receive a school education; and

...

(c) to provide for government schools that meet the educational needs of all children;

People in the Fremantle community have the right to have the best public high school that this state has to offer. I believe that if the government provided some leadership in providing that school, it would be rewarded in spades by the participation of parents and the school community in Fremantle. I certainly see that in the primary schools in my electorate; all of my primary school communities are incredibly engaged, and I imagine a lot of other members have experienced this in their electorates. It has been a fantastic process for me to get to know those school communities a little better.

I want to refer to the elements required when we are looking at the ingredients for a successful school turnaround or, in this case, amalgamation. I use the word “turnaround” advisedly because a lot of the research on this issue is on underperforming and the ingredients that are put in place to increase overall test results in numeracy and literacy, behavioural issues, reputational issues and the like.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Since I have been a member of this place, I have noticed some elements wanting in the community's perception of existing high schools, but what are the ingredients that would lead to a better outcome? I want to focus on the ingredients that make a good, healthy school and what we can do. It is not the first time that a state government in Australia has looked at this issue. In February this year Dr Ben Jensen from the Grattan Institute published a report titled “Turning around schools: it can be done”. As I said, it is not completely relevant to the amalgamation issue that we are looking at in the wider Fremantle area, but there are a few relevant points to draw on. This report states that the transformation of the schools that it examined were improved by consistently implementing the same five steps: strong leadership that raises expectations; effective teaching with teachers learning from each other; development and measurement of effective learning; development of a positive school culture; and engagement of parents and the community. It refers to those five elements, stating that change is not simple, and it draws on a number of examples, including a Western Australian example and a number of examples from around the country. In this case, underperforming schools were able to make a change. Again, I make the qualification that I am not at all conceding that any of the Fremantle schools are underperforming. I do not believe they are but, clearly, we need to do something to make the amalgamated school excel.

The point that I wanted to make is that the Grattan Institute report makes it clear that the first ingredient of transforming a school is the requirement of a method to commit all parties to reform those schools. For instance, it draws on an overseas example from Shanghai and refers to the lessons for policymakers. It states —

Many policymakers will not be surprised by the five steps for school turnaround discussed in this report.

They were the ones I just listed. It continues —

Many policies already focus on them. The real challenge is to trigger change in schools: to target *behavioural and organisational change* in the five steps. This requires: —

I repeat —

- A method to commit all parties—government, system leaders, and schools—to reform —

In this case —

low-performing schools.

- Capacity building and evaluation and accountability mechanisms that continually develop and reinforce change in the five steps for school turnaround.

The point I am making is that leadership is required. When it comes to the question of amalgamating schools—in this case, Fremantle amalgamating two schools—we need leadership from government so that the amalgamated school is not a matter of just putting two schools together and hoping things will work out for the best. I have a real concern and I think the community has a real concern. It wants to ensure that its voice is heard in this Parliament and by the government when it says that it will not accept simply amalgamating two schools and no further action being taken. In fact, the South Fremantle Senior High School council has done quite a bit of policy work in this area. I think the government would be well advised to look at the work that both the South Fremantle Senior High School council and High School Options for Fremantle have done on what people are looking for in an amalgamated school. For instance, the work that South Fremantle Senior High School community participants have done—I understand it has communicated this to the minister—is quite sophisticated and I think merits a lot of close examination to ensure that Fremantle gets a quality high school. As I said, I believe that the community will reward that effort by participating and doing its best to ensure that that school is all that it can be. Central to that ingredient is to make sure that there is an investment in the new school so that there is, for instance, a distinct and decisive strategy to increase the university entrance subjects on offer on the campus. I stress that South Fremantle students have the option to take subjects, but that is done in concert with other schools. Clearly, the community wants those subjects offered on campus. Most people agree that a gifted and talented program that will bring in a cohort of academically gifted students is central to the success of an amalgamated school, and it is the bare minimum that people will expect in the amalgamated school.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 8039.]