

**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION — PORTFOLIO FAILURES**

*Motion*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah)** [4.35 pm]: I move —

That the house condemns the Minister for Education for her failures in relation to the North Mandurah Primary School and its loss of 17 permanent teaching positions and calls on her to immediately address this issue and other failures in her education portfolio, including the downgrading of a number of regional/district offices.

This motion has been moved because of my grave concerns about the impact that the regional structure changes the minister announced officially in September 2010 is having on electorates and, indeed, regions such as mine. I am going to go into some detail of the North Mandurah Primary School experience later on in my address. One of the reasons for that is that a number of teachers from that school will be attending Parliament this afternoon in the public gallery. I will explain to the minister the impact of the changes on that school, particularly the impact on the teaching staff and concerns relating to the process that has led to the loss of teaching numbers from that school. I want to give time for those teachers to make it to the chamber tonight. There are a couple of teachers and supporters here already but I am expecting a number of them to attend. They left after school, and they are on the train coming up from Mandurah. Although I am outraged at the sneakiness of the Leader of the House, it has assisted me in not having to speak for some 40 minutes while they are on their way here.

Can I start by saying this: previous to the minister's announcement in September 2011 that there would be a restructure of the regions —

**Dr E. Constable:** September 2011?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** No, September 2010. I know I said 2010.

**Dr E. Constable:** It sounded like 2011.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Well, please listen carefully.

**Dr E. Constable:** I am.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The announcement was for a restructure of existing regional offices into new entities. I used the word “downgrading” of some of those then existing regional offices to education offices only. That constituted a loss of regional office status for areas —

**Dr E. Constable:** They are districts, not regions. That is a very important distinction.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Okay; they were district offices with a district director. That was seen in the Peel district, and it also affected the Albany district—the member for Albany may make a contribution later this afternoon or early this evening—and the creation of new regional offices in the following areas: Goldfields, where the regional office is located in Kalgoorlie–Boulder; the Kimberley regional office in Broome; the Mid West regional office in Geraldton; the creation of the north metropolitan region with the regional office in Stirling; the Pilbara regional office in Karratha; the south metropolitan region with the regional office in Fremantle; the south west region, with the regional office in Bunbury; and the Wheatbelt, with the regional office in Northam.

As outlined in the minister's ministerial statement on 9 September 2010, we would see local education officers in Beechboro, Mandurah, Cannington, Narrogin, Esperance, Albany and Manjimup. There were district education directors in a number of those now-called education offices until that time or until the official changes occurred in December last year. I wrote to the minister in May 2010 after the budget estimates and said that I was gravely concerned about what was then proposed Liberal Party policy to constrict the number of district officers from 16 to nine. I felt that Peel in particular was at great risk because it would be very easy for the minister of the day to allow it to simply be absorbed into a super south metropolitan region. My fears were confirmed in September 2010 when the minister confirmed what I believe was the downgrading of the Peel district office. Prior to this decision by this minister, we had an excellent district director. In fact, we have had a number of excellent district directors in the Peel over many years. The district directors have been of great calibre. The great thing about those district directors is that because they are resident in the region, they have understood the needs and challenges that face staff and the school community from which those schools draw their students. They understand and have understood the variables that operate within schools in regional areas. At that stage Peel took in those schools in Mandurah, some southern Rockingham schools and then schools in the Shire of Murray, including Dwellingup and down through to Waroona.

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The understanding, the corporate knowledge, the relationships and the communication skills that the district director had developed, which had been reinforced while we had a district director, were critical to the planning and, indeed, critical for our region to have a real voice in the executive of the department. I was always confident that when I was contacted by a parent, a staff member or a principal about a particular issue in a school, the district director who was resident in the region would be able to articulate any concern very, very well, particularly if it needed to go to a higher level, such as into the executive level of the department or, indeed, to the minister herself. We have had excellent district directors. Paul Meacock, the district director for the Peel office, was exemplary. He had a great knowledge and understanding of the schools.

As I have said to the minister in this place before, Mandurah, the Peel, has a continuum of schools in the socioeconomic indicator index. We have a number of schools that are low SEI. We have a number of schools that draw from low socioeconomic areas. Those students bring into the schools a range of challenges and demands that our teachers, principals and administrative support in those schools are expected to provide for. They have always known that when the crunch comes, when there is a critical incident or when a real major issue needs to be highlighted by being represented at the highest level, they have had a district director who has been able to stand beside them and assist them, respond to the concern and assist the staff. That has been critical, particularly in a region such as mine. That all changed in September 2010 with the announcement and the final change at the beginning of this year when Mr Terry Sandbrook was the last district director for our area. He had taken over from Mr Paul Meacock. In many respects, he was warming the chair for six months while the changes occurred.

Let us look at south metro, which is where Peel is now included. South metro has approximately 246 schools and spreads from as far south as Waroona and the catchment that I mentioned in the Peel, through into Rockingham, Kwinana, Fremantle, across to Canning and into Armadale–Gosnells, which the member for Armadale represents. It is a massive area and has a massive number of schools. In this structure we have a regional executive director, as per the minister's statement. I have no qualms about the individuals in all the regions, particularly in mine. Margaret Collins is an exemplary educator but she is ultimately responsible—the minister might want to correct me—for 246 schools. In areas such as the Peel in Mandurah, we no longer have that figure that people can go to—principals, staff et cetera and me as the local member—to get an immediate response. It took me three-odd weeks to get a meeting with Margaret. I do not criticise her for that. I do not know how someone such as that will be able to be across those schools to the level that will be expected, particularly specific issues related to socioeconomic indicators impact on schools in places such as Armadale, which has a number of low SEIs.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Warnbro.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Warnbro is another one, and then Mandurah. Then we have the specialist schools that operate in the region as well. One person has responsibility for those schools. The minister says that the government has built a structure around that person for support. I will not name the principals who have told me about their concerns; I do not want to put them on the chopping block. A number of them have highlighted to me their main concerns when there is a critical incident in a school. Previously—this has happened in our region on a number of occasions—when a critical incident occurred, the principal knew that they could get their district director on site right there and then, sometimes within half an hour or less. Why? It was because they were located in the region and they understood the school's machinations, challenges, catchment, students and staff. They know the schools such as North Mandurah Primary School, which has staff with absolutely unbelievable experience. Some of the people in North Mandurah Primary School have been teaching there from when it opened—so 30 years—and many have been at that school for more than 15 years. The district director knew this. The district director knew his or her schools, and they knew the challenges the staff in those schools faced on a day-to-day basis. They knew the parent catchment and the various intricacies, or variables, if members like, that affected the neighbourhoods in which the students who went to that school came from. In the case of Mandurah, the district director had excellent communication and partnerships with stakeholders like the local council, the Department for Child Protection, and the police service. In Mandurah we had a situation that was known as the “big four”—namely, the mayor, the superintendent of police, the district director of education, and the manager of child protection for the region—and they met regularly. They discussed a whole range of issues such as how policing is influenced by socioeconomic indicators in our region or neighbourhoods, how it is reflected in crime, how it is reflected in truancy, and how it is reflected in terms of issues regarding the challenges the schools faced. The minister has taken that away. That is what has gone.

The minister will say, “But we are putting all the resources back into schools.” I tell the minister what I reckon she is doing: I reckon she is actually diluting her responsibility and putting it onto principals and staff without these local structures in place to respond and provide support. Yes, there will be psychologists and support staff who have gone into schools, but the minister has taken away a very critical element of the structure, and it is

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affecting my region now and it is affecting the schools now. This was the concern I had when the minister made that decision in September last year.

I want to move on, because I think we have a number of staff from North Mandurah Primary School present. I will admit that I have an interest: I taught there from 1992 to 1997. I know the staff of this school particularly well, I know the school particularly well, and I do know the catchment of this school particularly well, and it has changed over the 30 years that this school has existed. But what has not changed is the quality and the reputation of that school, which can be directly attributed to the quality, dedication and commitment of the staff of that school. The staff of that school have made that a great school—a great Western Australian government school. Those people, some of whom are in the public gallery today, have been at that school, as I said, from the beginning, and many of them for a decade or more. Let us go through what happened, and why the teachers at North Mandurah Primary School are so aggrieved and why I have brought this to this Parliament today.

The Meadow Springs primary school was announced early last year, and I publicly congratulated the minister for coming down to Mandurah. I talked to the minister about the school and I got her to come down, and she came down; she did everything right in terms of coming down and recognising the growth in the northern corridor around the Lakelands–Meadow Springs area, and it was announced that the new school would open in 2012. The government is to be congratulated for that. The process, which was, in my view, very clearly influenced by the change from being a regional entity to a super region, has impacted directly on the process that sees us now with up to 17 full-time equivalent permanent teachers displaced from North Mandurah Primary School, without a back-up plan.

This is what happened. A new school was announced, and I know that the then district director, with the local knowledge and understanding of the staff, advocated very strongly, as did his replacement, that the new Meadow Springs primary school should be a simple relocation. That was the expectation; that was the argument put by the district director. With the opening of Meadow Springs primary school, North Mandurah Primary School, quite naturally, would lose half—if not more than half—of its students, which would have a direct impact on the staff. The advocacy of the then district director was then very strong, and it was that there should be a simple relocation. Emails I have received from staff members show that to have been their understanding. In September 2010, the new structure was announced, and in December it was implemented, and then, in my view—also, I believe, in the view of many of the staff—everything went silent. The communication that would have been there from the district director, advocating on behalf of the school, the children and the staff, went silent because there was no position anymore. It is my understanding that it was not until 29 June that the North Mandurah Primary School was officially told that the new school would not be a simple relocated school; it would be a merit select. That, of course, meant that 80 per cent of staff would be selected through the merit select process. Can members imagine the outrage and, in many ways, the kick in the guts that was? That announcement was the first kick in the guts for these teachers.

It was then left to the principal and his administration team at North Mandurah Primary School to do the dirty work of the department. I have the utmost respect for the principal of North Mandurah Primary School—I know him well—and this has been a gut-wrenching experience for him and his administration team. They have become the messenger when they can get the information from the department and when the decisions are made about whether Meadow Springs is going to be a relocation school and/or whether it is going to be a merit select, and/or whether it is going to be an independent public school—the minister might want to answer that question about IPS later; that has still not been answered. The principal and his administration staff have been placed in the position of being not only the messenger, but also the executor as well, because it is their responsibility, put on them by the department, to decide who stays and who goes, knowing that there is no certainty about where people will go. They know that it is not as simple as saying they are going to Meadow Springs primary school, and they know that of the 34 teachers they currently have on staff, only 17 are going to get a guernsey at North Mandurah Primary School; the rest have no certainty about where they are going.

It then gets more interesting because the department's response to the principal is, "Well, we'll give some support. You should make sure they know how to do a résumé. Give them some training on how to do a résumé." Some of these people have been teaching for 30 years! They have done their country service in country Western Australia. Many of that ilk did their years in country service on the understanding that they would always come back to a more desirable school when they came back to the city or the metropolitan area, or to another desirable country or rural or regional area. They have done the hard yards, and they then get that information. They were told, "We'll give you some training"—an hour—"to do a résumé." That is the second kick in the guts.

The third kick in the guts is that the principal had to deliver the letter. I do not know how the principal did that. I just do not know how; it must have been an agonising experience. The principal had to deliver the letter to the staff—to those who had won, who were staying, and to those who had not, who were going—with the

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knowledge that he could not of course give staff any firm surety about where they were going after 2012. The minister will stand and say, “But, this is the process.” Well if that is the process, that process is rubbish, if that is how teachers are treated—if that is how anyone is treated, but particularly experienced teachers. So, the teachers got a letter; it then took until last week for the teachers who were no longer continuing to get their official referred status letter. Look at how late in the process this has occurred. Until now, minister, no-one from the Department of Education had come to the school to explain the process.

**Dr E. Constable:** The principal is with the Department of Education.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** But, minister, in these particular and unique circumstances a principal should not be put in that position. He or she should be supported. It should be ensured that someone from the office of the Department of Education who works in staffing is down at the school. Does the minister know when the school had the staffing person down there? This week or I think it was last week. Why? Not only because I got involved, but also because we had to come and make this a big issue; this was going to be debated last Wednesday, as the minister knows. I also learnt that the regional director is now to visit the school, and she may have already done that. That should have happened months ago. I am not blaming her because she is juggling 240-odd schools, but that should have happened months ago. Someone from the department should have been at the school and said that they could see that this was going to be a big issue, because a very experienced team has been cut in half and there is no certainty about where they are going in 2012. That is where the process is so wrong. The minister may stand and say, “But, that’s the process”; I say the process is rubbish if that is what we allow to happen. No matter which electorate members represent, this could happen to a school in their area. When this happens in an area such as mine, a country town such as Albany or Bunbury or Geraldton or Mandurah, it affects the people who teach in those areas, and many have been teaching there for years. They usually live in the area and they are actually community members; they have contributed to the community, not only in education but also in a range of other ways, and they have been part of the culture of that particular town, neighbourhood or, in our case, regional city. The one-size-fits all process is not working, and it has been compounded by the changes that the minister has imposed upon my region in Mandurah by taking away our district director. The minister will say, “But the resources are there for the teachers; they can get contact.” I have to say that before the changes I had a wonderful relationship with all the district directors, we would do ministerials, and I also knew that when I met them in public forums—because they were always there; they were always at community events; they were an integral part of the community—I would be able to say, “Look, there is a problem over in that school,” or “We have got a bit of an issue over in this school.” Usually they would say, “Hey, I am onto it already”; they already knew about the issue. That is what the minister has taken away. In the case of North Mandurah Primary School, in my view the minister and her department have treated these people shabbily; they have treated the teachers shabbily. I want to tell the minister how much it hurts them. The minister wrote to me. Interestingly enough, I had a meeting on 19 September with the teachers at the school after hours, and letters addressing a couple of emails that I had sent to the minister a few weeks before quickly arrived in my office that day, and I was able to deliver them. I will not quote the whole letter, but the minister stated —

I acknowledge that staff may be concerned about their future employment, given that the opening of the new school at Meadow Springs will result in a reduction of students and staff positions at North Mandurah Primary School. I can assure you that all permanent teaching staff will retain their employment with the Department of Education.

What that does not say is where. That is because this minister and this department cannot guarantee where anyone who will no longer be teaching at North Mandurah Primary School in 2012 might be required to teach, if they want to stay teaching; there is no guarantee. There would have been one if there had been a relocation, but the decision was made for it not to happen. As soon as the decision was made that the new primary school at Meadow Springs was not to be a relocation primary school, the minister, the department and the regional district director should have taken up the cudgels on behalf of those people affected. It should not have been this week; that is too late. If the regional district director visits the school this week, or has already, it is too late; the letters have all gone out. This is not a criticism of the new principal of Meadow Springs primary school, because he is a great principal; he will be a great principal for that school. It is a criticism of the department, and ultimately of the minister, that this process has happened. I want to tell the minister about the impact this decision has had on some of the teachers. They have given me permission to read some of their emails out to the minister, and I will, because the minister needs to hear what impact this particular decision by her and by her department, and the lack of action by the department, have had. I will not be able to read them all, because I will run out of time and I want to minister to respond tonight to those people watching in the gallery who have taken the time and made the effort to come to this place tonight.

This email is from Deb. It is a late email, because she sent me a very short one on 19 September after our meeting. Her email states —

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 28 September 2011]

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I have been teaching for 35 years and now find myself ousted ... and having to write a seven page application to find a new position. I understand the situation of overstaffing yet believe we should have been automatically relocated to the new school without an application .I am quite happy to drop half my days and continue to tandem teach with my two partners as I have been doing yet this is not allowable —

I do not know why —

and they will have to teach with new tandem partners.

Is this how you get treated for 35 years of dedication and service ...

She then added on Wednesday, 28 September, which is today —

Thankyou so much for your support ...

I have already sent one e-mail but just wanted to do an up date.

We did at last have a visit from the person in charge of the referred teachers —

I wonder why. When the letters went out to the teachers, I heard that the key staff person was on leave. Well, again, the process is wrong. This is a major issue for these people's futures. Deb's email continues —

... This was informative but only caused more anxiety with the fairly grim outlook.

Everyday —

And this is happening in the school; I want to minister to believe this, because it is really happening in the school —

we seem to have someone deciding to either take leave next year or cut their hours for next year and everyday another person breaks down.

I have seen some very long-term friends of mine absolutely emotionally gutted by this experience —

I asked the person from referred teachers what would happen if we were offered a place not on our preference list —

This is a key issue —

that we did not want to take — could we say no and ask for another placement ? She replied ,in not so many words, you'll be sacked .....three warnings.....fair placement....I think not!!

We keep getting told "Its the system " Well we are a major part of the system and it needs to change.

How can they ruin so many lives ?? I'm sure if there was a redundancy package we would all take it !

Let me tell the minister about Karen. Karen is currently employed on a permanent part-time basis as an education assistant; she is an assistant. Her email states —

As you are well aware of, we are currently going through the halving of our school numbers hence the staffing at North Mandurah is under a cull at this time.

Let me give you a quick run down of my history —

That is her history —

at NMPS. My three children attended the school from 1995 through to 2007 being involved with the school on every level. As I have a Diploma in Child Care I was approached to do relief ... and in 2001 began work on a permanent basis. I have worked with the Year 1, 2 and 3's. I am primarily employed for Literacy and Numeracy support. Majority of the staff that taught and supported my children through each of their 8 years at the school are still employed there. My time as a parent at the school cannot be put into words. The loyalty of the staff as a whole has definitely moulded my now adult children into successful, balanced and well adjusted citizens. I am proud to say the two who have finished high school now attend university and my last is doing year 11 TEE. I have got to say their success has to be in part because of the great teaching staff at NMPS.

As an employee at the school I am fortunate enough to be involved with a staff who are professional, supportive of each other, students, parents and community, loyal, knowledgeable, and of course their greatest asset passionate about teaching!!

...

To describe how this is affecting our school community is near on impossible. It affects administration, teachers, support staff, parents, children and the wider community. The process and uncertainty we are forced to endure at this time has been upsetting. The last weeks of waiting to hear who stays and who goes with teaching staff has been completely unsettling and of course those not staying at NMPS are still living in uncertainty and doubt and having to endure an unexpected mid year application process.

Just on that point, because of the timing of this, they missed the transfer process. Even if someone had wanted to transfer out, they had missed the process—too late. As an assistant, Karen is waiting to see what will affect her fate.

I want to tell members about a teacher I have known for years and years and for whom I have the greatest respect. She is an experienced teacher and I think she puts her feelings beautifully into words. Her name is Janis and she writes —

Dear David,

When we were first informed that a new school would be built at Meadow Springs, and would take possibly more than 50% of our students, we knew that our staff numbers at North Mandurah would reduce significantly also. Although all of us wished to remain at North Mandurah School, we were under the impression that any displaced teacher would automatically go to Meadow Springs to open the new school. We were resigned to this and knew that at least the displaced teachers would be opening a new school with colleagues they had taught with for many years; children whom they knew and understood their special needs and families with whom they had interacted with as they had often taught older children from the same families.

Generations have gone through this school; it is amazing. If members go to this school, they will see kids whom I taught when I was there in the 1990s who are now young parents. Janis continues —

My feeling was what a great start for a new school, a group of very experienced, dedicated and passionate teachers. Surely this would have been “Best Practice”.

We were later informed that this was not the case and that Meadow Springs was going to be a “Merit Select” school and that teachers from all over Australia could apply. We were informed that any teacher not successful in retaining their position at North Mandurah would have to write their CV and become what is known as a “referred Teacher”. This was like a kick in the gut from the Education Department.

Teachers at our school have been under great stress and worry —

This is a key point —

and yet we carry on with the same dedication and commitment.

This is what amazes me about the resilience of the staff: despite all this internal, gut-wrenching stuff going on in their personal and professional lives, the kids at that school are getting exemplary education. Many of the students do not even know that their teachers are under huge stress because of the circumstances they are in. They are that professional and dedicated that those kids are getting absolutely exemplary education, because these teachers are experienced, hardworking and dedicated. They know their kids, their community and their neighbourhood. What value do we place on that? I think we have to place greater value on that sort of commitment. Janis continues —

We have received no acknowledgement from the department for the many years dedicated service that most of us have given to North Mandurah Primary School and which together, we have helped to become one of the most respected and successful schools in our area.

Absolutely. The reputation of North Mandurah Primary School is absolutely brilliant. Janis continues —

I feel we have been gravely let down by our Education Department.

I want to mention Ann. I will not go into great detail, but Ann went home that night after the meeting on the nineteenth and wrote me three emails because at 2.30 in the morning she had all these ideas about what she wanted to say. I want to paraphrase some of the things she said. This is an example of many of the teachers at the school. She talks about her roller-coaster ride with the education department since she chose music and dance. She could not believe how lucky she was to be involved in an area in which she could ignite the creative spirit of students. She has done that for thousands of students in the Mandurah area, not only at North Mandurah; she is very well known for it. In her email she goes through her experiences in the 1980s when a bloke called John Carr was principal. She goes through the jobs she has chased, if we like, at Glencoe, Halls Head, Falcon, and Ocean Road, but she has always been dedicated to the government system. Even though she went across to the private system for a short period, she has always been committed to the government system. She has been involved with

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kids who have won awards and she goes through all the things that she has been involved in. She has been a tremendous teacher. But then she says “You ask how do I feel!” after the process that she has been subjected to. She writes —

I feel dejected and undervalued and perhaps I am ready to begin a new career where my high energy and hard working qualities will be rewarded for what they are. My husband, who is an excellent art teacher, is feeling angry at the latest blow I have been dealt. Only he knows how much effort I put into my preparation for my job.

Annie, as she is affectionately known, is an amazing teacher.

I am going to finish with one more email, because members need to hear all these. I will mention Dianne. Dianne has had a tough year this year. She is a very experienced teacher. She has had major surgery on her face to remove a cancerous tumour and she has had some family issues. Again, all through this, she has been an amazing contributor to education and to the children whom she loves teaching and the parents who support her and acknowledge the work that she puts in. Despite all these awful things happening in her personal life, she talks about the effect this has had on her —

... now that I have been put in the position of having to grovel for a job next year —

This is a teacher who has been teaching for 30-plus years —

although I have understood the process my Principal has had to take —

None of them blame the principal; they respect their principal and know what a tough job he and his admin staff have had to do to work through this. Dianne writes —

I have completely lost confidence in my ability as a teacher. I am happy that I can't go to school this week because I am embarrassed, uncomfortable about facing people, worried about what people will think about me, and worried about what parents are saying.

This is real stuff. Imagine, after 30-odd years of teaching, getting a letter saying “You are not staying here anymore and we are not really sure about where you will be next year” because of the numbers being crunched. Dianne continues —

I have shown total loyalty to my employer, the Education Department, and have basically been told “We don't want you. If you want us to consider you for a job, you have to beg”. I can't write a CV outlining all of the things that I thought were achievements because now I have lost my ability to judge. Maybe they weren't so special. I don't know any more. This has also had a flow on effect, as I have to watch how it has also upset my friends and family. All I know is that although I love teaching, I am not sure if I want to work for an organisation that not only treats loyal teachers in this way, but has ... failed to take into consideration the needs of the children who are being uprooted and may have benefitted by having familiar teachers with them.

I did not write that. I did not write that or any of these. These are real people and many of them are sitting in the public gallery. Many of them are very experienced and all of them are dedicated and very committed, but this is what the Minister for Education's department has done to them.

A young woman wrote to me who does not teach at North Mandurah, but I think this is important. This has implications for the minister's independent public schools process, because as she creates more merit select schools and more independent public schools and a situation such as this occurs, the positions dry up. Here is a young woman, Carol-Anne, who lives in Dawesville in the member for Dawesville's electorate. He should be here listening to this. Most of the teachers live in the member for Dawesville's electorate. He should be spending more time down there, listening to his constituents and understanding what is happening. He does not. This young lady writes that she had been a primary teacher for 25 years. She left teaching after some 20 years for personal reasons, and she goes through the experiences she had. She writes —

On applying to return to teaching in 2006, it took WACOT and DET some 6 months to re register me. In the end, I had to go and manually find signed documents from individual schools —

That was to make sure she was acknowledged as an experienced teacher. She continues —

I live in Dawesville but DET sent me to Kalgoorlie! I had no problem in doing this as I was advised that if I did 2 years in the country, I would be given a permanent position with the DET —

Probably in a desirable place like Mandurah —

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It was hard to leave my home and I had to rent it out, which ended up costing me dearly ... I loved my time in Kalgoorlie and when offered a third year on the Country Teaching Program I grabbed it. However the rules started to change! Firstly I had to apply for a permanent placement after my third year or I would lose the clause of promised permanency. It was also the year when all the High School teachers were being displaced ... I wanted to stay in Kalgoorlie but was advised if I applied for that I would have little chance of getting back to Perth in the future. In true DET style they paid to move me back to Mandurah and they had to pay to move others up and to fill my position!

This person who lives in Dawesville, south of Mandurah, was offered and had to take a position at South Coogee. It was not on her list, but my guess is that if she did not take it, there would be no more offers. She travels the 150-kilometre return trip every day. It is a 60-minute drive each way. As she says, it is exhausting. She then talks about how other teachers are going to face the same predicament.

I am going to conclude now, because it is important that the minister has a chance to speak.

**Mr M.W. Sutherland:** Can I ask a question, member?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes.

**Mr M.W. Sutherland:** How many of the 17 who have been told that they are superfluous to needs have now got posts?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** None. Member, they have only just got their letter that says that they are referred teachers. None of them has got a spot. The minister will say, "But they are all guaranteed a spot." Where? I will tell members another thing about Mandurah schools: North Mandurah Primary School is not the only school that has a lot of teachers who have been there for a long time. North Mandurah Primary School is not the only school in town that has staff who have given great service and great dedication for many years.

The minister's process failed these teachers. It is only in the last few weeks that there has been a scrambling of response. The damage has been done to these people. Many of them feel that they have been totally devalued by the minister's department. Many of them feel that their particular circumstances—I agree with them—should have been treated with far greater care and involvement. I believe that that would have happened had we had a process or a structure like we had before, where there was a district director, at a high level of decision making, who was resident in Mandurah, rather than a director who is given an onerous and unbelievable job of trying to oversee 240-odd schools and is in Perth. That is what has let down these teachers. What is the minister going to do about it? I want the minister to tell the teachers what she is going to do about it.

The first thing I want the minister to do is to absolutely make sure that her department gives these teachers real priority and not just priority in words. The minister should have someone working closely with these teachers to make sure that their dedication and commitment and the value of the service they have given is recognised. The minister needs to do it now, because unfortunately the teachers have lost faith with the department.

As I say, it has been only in the last week or so that someone has come down and actually spoken to them. That is not good enough. Many of these people have mortgages. Many of these people may be contemplating retirement in many years to come, in a decade or in five years, but this is not how they should finish their career. If the minister is going to come into this place, as she does, and talk about the value of teachers, the devolution of responsibility and empowering teachers to deliver best practice—I reckon Janis got it right when she talked about best practice—she should start showing some consideration of best practice to the staff of this school and other schools in Western Australia.

What I want to hear from the minister today is an acknowledgement that the process did not work. I want to hear an acknowledgement that we have to tighten the system, because the minister has network principals who are supposed to be out there doing things. I have not heard what is happening with them. I do not know where that is at at the moment. That was part of the reforms. The minister's process, and the watering down of our region by no longer having a district director, has ended with the situation that we face in north Mandurah. Tonight I want the minister to answer the question of what she is going to do.

I want to make sure that she supports the principal and his administration team at North Mandurah Primary School. I certainly do not want the minister to pick on them. If I hear about any disciplinary action out of this, I will tell the minister what: it will come into this Parliament, because they do not deserve that. That principal has been exemplary in what he has done to support his staff, but he has been put in one of the worst positions he could ever be put in. He should not have been put in that position, and nor should his administrative staff and deputies.

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I am going to leave it there. I know some of the members want to speak. I am very anxious that we hear from the Minister for Education tonight before we finish at 7.00 pm.

**DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands — Minister for Education)** [5.26 pm]: I thank the member for Mandurah for bringing this matter to the Parliament's attention. It sounds to me awfully like an extended grievance. In fact, it is the extension of a grievance that he presented way back in May 2009, which he mentioned himself. In that grievance the member repeated his earlier appeal to me, which was made by letter in November 2008, to build a school at Meadow Springs. As a result of that grievance, I agreed to go down and spend some time with him in his electorate. We visited a number of schools. On that day, he will remember, we drove around north Mandurah, where Meadow Springs primary school is now situated. We went to at least two other schools in his electorate.

The were four main reasons that the member for Mandurah asked for a school to be built in Meadow Springs, and I think they are worth drawing to the house's attention tonight. One was the tremendous population growth in the area. That is a fact that I am sure we would all agree on. Another matter that he drew to my attention was that there was no primary school north of Gordon Road. He was very keen to make sure that a school would be built north of Gordon Road sooner rather than later. He made the point that North Mandurah Primary School was too far away for many people whose children were being sent there. A major concern that he and I looked at that day was the safety of children, because of the busy roads that they needed to cross to get to school. He urged me very strongly in that grievance and also when we visited to review the department's recommendations about the need for that new school. I took his comments seriously, and I took the visit very seriously. In fact, I did reverse that decision. Lo and behold, next year a new school will be opened, as the member has wanted for some time. It has been built at Meadow Springs and will open for the start of the school year next year. Thereby bringing us to the issue that has been created because, I believe, of that and not because of any changes to the regional or district structure. However, I will come to that later, because I believe the member has combined two things that are not at all related, and I think that I will be able to show that this afternoon.

His issue, and the main underlying issue he has raised today and one that is worth discussing, is with operational matters that result from opening a new school. A new school has been built and that has created new and other issues that need to be and that are being dealt with. However, one of the facts is that, as far as we can ascertain, around 500 students who are currently enrolled at North Mandurah Primary School live in the suburbs of Meadow Springs, Lakelands and San Remo. The member is absolutely right; there was and there is a need for a school in Meadow Springs to cater for the large number of students enrolled at North Mandurah but who live a long way away. That was one thing we looked at. We were worried about the safety risks and we needed a school north of Gordon Road. Is that right? Yes.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Plus the major growth that is occurring in Lakelands, which is the northern-most suburb of Mandurah.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Yes; I was about to come to that.

Those 500 children I mentioned enrolled at North Mandurah Primary School live in Meadow Springs, Lakelands and San Remo.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** And Madora Bay.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** And other places as well; the member knows the area better than I do. However, that is as I remember it.

Therefore, it makes sense that the families who live near Meadow Springs would choose the new Meadow Springs primary school for their children, making that difference. Parents want their children to be closer to home, just as we have always expected that children at primary schools in urban areas would not have to travel too far.

Changes in staffing profiles when a new school opens are not new. Year after year, staffing profiles have changed. Populations grow, change and develop and we go through demographic cycles in older areas. In my electorate, the numbers at the Wembley and West Leederville Primary Schools are skyrocketing at the moment, but that will go through a number of years of demographic cycle. We get changes in enrolments all the time at schools because of the dynamic situations that schools are placed in.

Populations grow. Clearly, children need to be educated, and schools need to be built—just like we are building in Meadow Springs. When new schools are built, boundaries are changed. This is not change. This is not new. It happened under the former Labor government and it happened under the previous coalition government. Boundaries have always changed. That has always been a factor. However, this case is about choice. It is about the member for Mandurah's constituents who live in Meadow Springs, Lakelands and San Remo choosing to send their children to the new school. Parents are making choices about where they will send their children. It is

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usual that when we open a new school, enrolments at an existing school will be affected. It is commonsense, but I think these things need to be said in light of this situation.

Let me provide members with three recent examples. In 2008, Clarkson Primary School had 820 students. In 2009, Somerly Primary School opened with 400 students—a huge impact on Clarkson. Clarkson was getting too big and there was a need for another school as the population grew and —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Have those teachers relocated?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Let me go on.

The impact on Clarkson was to reduce its student numbers by around 300 and consequently staff numbers by 15, and the process that was used is exactly the process that is in place now.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Yes, but was the new school a relocated school, merit select or IPS?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** I have been trying to get a definition of this term the member uses—“a relocated school”.

A member interjected.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** No. The member has described a relocated school, but I do not seem to be able to get a definition from the department. I think it might be a term that is the member’s interpretation of something.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** It is simple: to me it would be a DET decision that the new school would accommodate the surplus staff of the old school.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** I will come to that in some detail in a moment. The term “relocated school” is not a term that I have been able to get a definition for.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Transfer.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** No; it is not transfer either.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I do not really care about the definition. It is a simple process. As Janis said in her email, the assumption was that with the new school opening, the surplus staff would be transferred straight to that school.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** I listened very carefully to what the member was saying and I did not get from what he said where that notion or assumption of a relocated school came from. It is not a —

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It doesn’t matter: were they transferred or not?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** And if not, why wasn’t that considered?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Transfer is used in a different way as well. I think it fair that I speak to the member who raised this rather than take other interjections. I did not interject on the member for Mandurah because I wanted to hear exactly what he was saying.

I will come to the process in a moment. I know the member for Mandurah said that I would talk about the process, but he has invited me to talk about the process by —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You told me you were going to talk about the process.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** And I will talk about the process because I think that it needs to be clearly understood. I do not understand, from what the member was saying, where the notion came from that when another school is built and the existing school’s staff numbers are halved, half will go to the new school. That is not what occurs. I just do not understand where that assumption has come from. I think it might be the crux of an issue that we have that has caused a huge misunderstanding for the dedicated staff the member has described.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** But doesn’t that demonstrate that the communication from the department has not been clear?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Not necessarily.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I think that it does.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** It might have been an assumption in someone’s mind that led to people believing that. I do not know where it came from.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** With a district director, they would have sorted that out right at the beginning: “This school will be!” The former district director was arguing that that would be the natural process.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Well, that was a gross error on that person’s part.

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However, let me keep going. I do not think it is clear where that notion came from, but if it came from a previous district director, it was not correct—not correct at all.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Minister, what will happen to the old school?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** North Mandurah Primary School will continue, but a large number of the students enrolled there will be moving to Meadow Springs.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Will the school remain?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Yes. There will be two schools.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** So you can transfer the kids, but you can't transfer the staff.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Let me keep going.

When Madeley Primary School opened, Landsdale Primary School staff numbers were reduced by two full-time equivalents. When Aubin Grove Primary School opened, Harmony Primary School's staff numbers were reduced, this year, by three FTEs. It is estimated that the number of staff at North Mandurah Primary School will reduce by 17. I think that was the member's number and it is the number I have been given. That reduction will coincide with the opening of the new Meadow Springs school next year. I think that is reflective of the massive population growth and the matters that I raised before about parents making the sensible decision for their children to attend a school closer to where they live, thereby overcoming the issues the member raised with me previously.

I want to go through the processes because I think that it is important that I go through them. The member has made some assumptions—some of them correct; some of them I am not so sure about. I want to go through what happens. As the Premier said in here a little while ago, the process that I am going to describe is the process that has been in place for a long time. It was in place under the previous coalition government and the former Labor government.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Yes, but the new regime of independent public schools is a variable that —

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** It has not made any difference to this. It has not made any difference.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Yes, it does!

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It does.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** It does, because it impacts on the availability of places —

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** But there have been adjustments to all staffing based on what is happening in independent public schools.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** We have merit select and now we have IPS. They both impact on the number of places available for a normal transfer.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** But there are 200 or 300 schools that have the same ability as the IPS schools. It is not just IPS. We extended and changed the staffing processes as IPSs came into play because we knew that would be necessary.

Let me go on. I want to highlight these processes. I still have a big question mark over the term “relocation school”, and I will continue to follow that up. It is important to know, as I said a moment ago, that the same processes have been in place since at least the early 1990s—there is nothing at all new about this—and they have not changed in that time.

The school administration teams are led by school principals. I find it really interesting to listen to what the member for Mandurah had to say about the role of principals in this. Principals are the leaders in schools and have a key role in the circumstances described by the member. The member seems to think that they should not be doing that and that it should be a district director, a regional director or somebody else.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** No. If you had listened to what I said, I said that the principals should be able to rely on the support of people such as a district director to deliver the policy of the department. What has happened here is that the principal has not had a person in that position to give him that support.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** That is something that I will follow up for the member. I do not have that information. That is the member's interpretation and the information he has received. I need to get that followed up.

Putting that aside, the key person in these situations is the principal. There are a lot of people whose advice can be drawn on by a principal in a school, but the key leader is, and always has been, the principal, not a district director or a regional executive director. The principal has the carriage of these staff changes, and the principal

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of the new school has obviously been involved as well. I think there has been, in the member's mind—that is what I picked up from his comments—some exaggeration of that situation.

Let me continue. The administration team, led by a principal, is responsible for identifying the areas where there will be a surplus of teachers and for conducting a merit process in the context of their school. That is for principals. Principals are the leaders. I think the member diminished the role of the principal in some of the things he said.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Yes, but you're forgetting the fact that that process took place. We are talking about the next process, which is for those teachers who are displaced as part of that. That is where, again, there has been no ongoing support outside the school and the principal.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** I think the member's attempt to relate all this to changes in the district structure was a false argument and an error by him. As I said a moment ago, this has nothing to do with any district structure or regional structure.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I think it has everything to do with it.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Whether it was the district structure of the past from the 1990s onwards or the newer regional structure, the same process was in place.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** One of the critical things about the big four that I mentioned —

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** The big what?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I mentioned the big four in my speech. In Mandurah, we have the mayor and the police—the high-level representatives of those key services. Given the work that's required of Margaret Collins, there is no chance that she can be part of that. She can't, because she has to cover 240 schools. But if you had a district director, as we have had, they could play that role. This is what you've taken away.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Now the member is going off on a tangent. I am talking about what the member asked for—a new school. He must have known it would influence enrolments and staffing at North Mandurah Primary School when he said that a new school was needed.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Of course, but, as Janis said, there was always the view that the surplus teachers would go across to the new school.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** That is where the assumption was wrong.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You're saying that that's not the case and that I am using the term "relocated school". I don't care what the term is; the fact is that that was the view of the teachers: anyone who missed out at North Mandurah would go straight to the Meadow Springs primary school.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** With due respect, I listened in silence to what the member for Mandurah said. Can I just finish what I am saying? That is the crux of the problem. That assumption was incorrect. From what the member has said, I do not know where the assumption came from that that would happen as an automatic right, if you like, and that people would be transferred immediately across to a new school. That has not been the case since the early 1990s. I have no idea where that came from. I would like to know where it came from, because it was a false assumption from the beginning and, sadly, a false assumption for those people who are caught up in this situation. One of the main things that I picked up from what the member said was that from the beginning, there was that false assumption. Where did it come from? Does the member know, because I would like to be enlightened about that so that I can make sure that we deal with it?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Irrespective of whether it was a false assumption, it would have been addressed locally by a district director, who would have been able to articulate the policy of the department right from the beginning.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** That is the member's view.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** All he or she would have needed to do was say, "We're getting a new school. These are the arrangements that will happen with the staffing of that new school, this is what will happen to the future staffing at North Mandurah, and this is the process that will be put in place to address those who are displaced." In my view, that is the sort of role that a district director would have played, but you took it away.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** The member for Mandurah got his 50 minutes and now it looks as though he is getting another 50 minutes.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I will shut up now, because I do have to give you some courtesy.

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**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** If the member does not want me to explain this, he can keep going. But I would like the opportunity to explain it. I have said to the member that in my view there was a false assumption, and I would like to get to the bottom of that and to understand why. If we have had the same process in place for 20 years since the early 1990s, why did people assume on this occasion that that would be the case? That is a grave problem in the mix of this situation, and I would like to get to the bottom of it. It is very unfair to the staff at North Mandurah Primary School that that was the case. I listened with great intent to what the member said about the teachers. I have no doubt about what he said about the teachers, some of whom are in the public gallery today. They are great, longstanding teachers and are the absolute backbone of those school communities. I think it is very disappointing that that assumption has caused so much grief and other feelings.

I add one other point. The member made light of the offer to have someone help people write CVs and applications for positions. I think that is a really important thing. If someone has been in a position at a school for 15, 20, 25 or 30 years, they would not have had to write an application for a position. They are in that unfortunate situation because of the changes. I think the offer to provide assistance is a really important support to those people, even though the member made light of it. I was in the situation not all that long ago when we made the decision to close Padbury Senior High School. The number of students had gotten down to 296, I think. Adequate courses for young people simply cannot be run in a school of that size. So the decision was made to close it. I visited that school within a week of the decision to close the school being made. I sat and talked to people at that school who said to me, "I've worked here for the last 20 or 25 years and I'm really pleased that I've been given that opportunity to have someone help me now sit down and think about myself and present myself in writing, because I haven't had to think about this before." They saw it as a real plus that they were given that offer of assistance from the department. I encourage those people who are in the unfortunate position of having to apply for new positions to take up that offer of assistance to present themselves in writing. It is not an easy thing to do. People who have been busy teaching for all those years have not really had a chance to think about themselves and how they might present themselves in writing when applying for a position. I think that support is really important for those people and anyone in that situation. I encourage the member to encourage those people to take up that offer of assistance. It is not an easy thing to do. There is also assistance for interviewing. Often teachers have been so busy that they are not prepared to sell themselves for a job. I would like the member to encourage them in that regard.

I again make the comment that principals have the central role in working through these situations with teaching and non-teaching staff members. The member mentioned a non-teaching staff member a while ago. As I have said, and as the member has said, Meadow Springs school will open for students next year, with staff being selected in the ratio of 80 per cent on merit selection and 20 per cent for referred teachers. I know that the principal of Meadow Springs primary school has addressed the teaching staff at North Mandurah Primary School about the processes of selection, and he has given advice to teachers and non-teaching staff on how they might apply for the advertised vacancies at his school. The role of principal is the central role in this process—nobody else. We know that by empowering school principals and school communities in this way and giving them autonomy, they will make the best choices. They are closest to their school communities. They know what their communities need. For many years under both the member for Mandurah's government and former coalition governments, as I have said a couple of times, we looked to principals to be the focal point in these situations. They were the focal point for leadership and management of schools. Underlying the member for Mandurah's comments is the suggestion that somehow all of this should be imposed by the department; it should come in and do all of this. No; not at all.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** The department should be advising and should be there to assist.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** The department is there to advise. Throughout this process there has been advice when a principal has needed advice or assistance. But we have to recognise principals as leaders of their school communities. They are the leaders who are central to the management of their schools and their school staff, and they should be intimately involved in the selection of staff and the profiling of their school staff. I cannot stress those things enough.

As the member for Mandurah said, all permanent teaching staff are given priority as redeployees for placement in line with their requested work fraction—teaching and location preferences. I am sure that each one of these people will be looked at very carefully. All members of the permanent teaching workforce of North Mandurah Primary School are guaranteed placement next year; they are guaranteed jobs, as they should be.

Let me go through and summarise some of the things the member for Mandurah has said and what has happened to this point. I am told that in term 2 and early term 3, the North Mandurah Primary School received applications for enrolment for both itself and Meadow Springs. Bear in mind that schools cannot decide how many FTEs they need until they know what the enrolments will be in the school. That does not happen until the second half of the year. At the beginning of term 3, the principal of Meadow Springs primary school was appointed and

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applications for enrolment were forwarded to Meadow Springs. To start with, the applications came to North Mandurah, and when a new principal was appointed at Meadow Springs, the applications then went over there. At that stage, at the beginning of term 3, just nine weeks ago, the schools started to get an idea of what the enrolments will be for next year. In early August and again in September, the principal of North Mandurah entered enrolment data into the department's staffing calculator to determine the schools' teacher allocation. It is not until September that we know what the staffing allocation is likely to be in any school. I understand that in August there were two staff meetings run by the principal of North Mandurah Primary School, who informed the staff of the processes for the identification of teaching staff for retention at North Mandurah or relocation elsewhere in government schools.

On 1 September, an external consultant was provided to staff to help with what I think is very important—that is, application writing, if it was required. The principal completed the identification process required for teachers to relocate and advised them individually by letter in the middle of September. As I said, all members of the permanent teaching workforce of North Mandurah Primary School are guaranteed placement with the department in 2012. The member for Mandurah mentioned his meeting with staff last week, on 19 September. I understand that he was very keen on the notion that if the districts had not been changed, the situation would have been different. That is absolutely not true. That is where the member for Mandurah and I part company on this issue. If he accepts that principals have the key role here, not the old districts or regions, then he is wrong and he is connecting two things that are not related. I think he needs to think about that just a little bit more.

Just this week the principal invited the manager staffing and the staffing consultant responsible for the department's referred teacher process to attend the school to provide advice for the teachers identified for relocation. It has been a short period. It is only this month that the likely enrolments have been understood and therefore some notion of how many teachers will be required next year. Enrolments are not taken until third term and we are coming to the end of third term now. In an ideal world everyone would want to know this earlier, but, practically, it cannot happen because until the enrolments are known it is not possible to decide the staffing needs; that is not known until third term. That has been the case for a long time.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** If the teachers are guaranteed employment, why do they need to make an application?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Because they are giving their preferences for the schools they want to go to.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Preferences and applications are two different things. You are talking about a six-page application to fill certain criteria.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** No, no, no; the member for Mandurah said six pages. I did not say six pages.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** If they are guaranteed employment, why do they need an application?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** I did not say six pages. Everyone needs to put in an application for a position. The application is probably in a form that teachers would want —

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** They are guaranteed a position on application?

**Mr P.B. Watson:** Where?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** One thing ministers cannot do is decide where people are going to work; it is actually against the law.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** The department has a moral obligation.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** The process was the same when the member for Albany was in government.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** You're the minister now.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** It has been the same for 20 years.

An opposition member: We did not have independent schools when we were in government; it is stressing the system.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** It is departmental policy.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** It is all right in Perth where you can just go around the corner. When you're in Mandurah —

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Teachers cannot do that. That is one of the problems. Last year there were about 1 100 graduates looking for jobs. How many does the member for Albany think said they would go anywhere in the state?

**Mr P.B. Watson:** I don't know.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Take a guess. How many does the member for Mandurah think?

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**Mr D.A. Templeman:** In my day, all of them.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** How many does the member think said that last year? It is a very important question.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Probably fewer than 200.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** It was one person.

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Do you know why? Because they are no longer guaranteed a desirable school when they get back. In my day when you got back, you knew you'd get a desirable place. You fell into that one minister.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** The member has drawn the wrong conclusion.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah! Members, this is a very important issue to the member for Mandurah; it is very important to the people in the gallery to hear the response to this motion. When interjections across the chamber reach a noise level at which I cannot hear the person on their feet, it does not do justice to the people in the gallery or to the member's motion in the first place. I ask that you allow the minister to complete her comments in silence.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** She asked the question.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Armadale, I call you to order for the first time. The minister is well aware that interjections in this place are not parliamentary. However, she has been conducting some conversation across the chamber with the member for Mandurah, which I am allowing because he was the one who moved this motion, and it is to seek clarity so that we can get a proper answer for those people who are very concerned about this issue.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Thank you, Acting Speaker. There are a number of reasons, member for Mandurah, why people do not apply. Most people—new graduates and others—apply in very restricted ways for their positions for some of the reasons the member gave. In his day perhaps there was a greater sense of adventure among graduates when nearly everyone applied.

**Mr P.B. Watson** interjected.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** That is actually not true, member for Albany.

I want to say a few words about the regional structure because the member for Mandurah spent quite a lot of time on it earlier in his remarks, partly because he is interested in the subject but partly because he was filling in a little bit of time before his constituents arrived, and I can appreciate that that was the case. To link the situation of staffing at the school with the changes that were made by this government to districts, is a long bow to draw and not correct. I think I have made the point very clearly that staffing and the staffing changes are mainly in the hands of the principals as school leaders and as senior people in the education department. The job of a school principal involves not relying on someone out there in the department—not relying on anyone else. I think that is something that the member was not quite ready to accept, judging by his remarks.

This government came into power in 2008 with a commitment to make major changes to the district structure for all good reasons. In fact, the 14 districts in the original commitment were to become six regions. When I looked at that, I thought that that was not going to work, partly because it would have demanded that two regions—Pilbara and the Kimberley, for instance—collapse into one region. A regional director would have had to fly to Perth from Hedland to get to Kununurra. For a whole lot of practical reasons and, more importantly, educational reasons, I decided that we should have eight regions, not six. In the past, under the district structure, district directors were not part of any statewide executive of the department. We have given a lot more strength to non-metropolitan areas. All regional executive directors are now part of the state executive. They meet regularly with the director general and there is a very strong voice from regional and remote Western Australia as part of that. It is too easy to become city-centric in education, particularly in this state, and forget the importance of recognising all the needs right across the state. We are very different from every other jurisdiction in this regard, except perhaps the Northern Territory and Queensland, to which we are closer. Overall, we are very different in education and many other services that we provide.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** So Waroona and Dwellingup —

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** And North Dandalup.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** — and North Dandalup have a clear connection to Perth metropolitan. That is what you've done with your current structure.

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**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** We have given a strong voice to regional and remote Western Australia. There used to be one person on the state executive who represented the vast non-metropolitan areas of this state and now we have six people. There is a very strong educational voice coming from those —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You took away Albany and you took away Peel.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** Those directors did not have a voice on the state executive.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Why didn't you leave them there and give them a voice in the new structure?

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** As part of our two most important changes, the independent public schools have been given autonomy and we are empowering school communities through regionalisation and the networks, which the member vaguely mentioned, which are central to the changes. We have taken decision making and resources much closer to schools instead of having them removed and psychologists sitting in district offices. They are now closer to schools and in schools. That is where they belong. We probably have a philosophical difference but that is the direction we have taken. My main point is that there is no relationship—the member has tried to draw this relationship—between the changes in the district structure to regions and the situation with the staffing at North Mandurah Primary School. That is absolutely incorrect.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I disagree with you entirely.

**Dr E. CONSTABLE:** I know. We will have to agree to disagree. I put it to the member that there is no relationship between the two because it has been the role of principals for 20 years to handle these situations, not district offices or head offices. It has been the role of principals to handle the situation that the member has described and which I commented on this afternoon when talking about the member's electorate. It is not an unusual situation. I gave the member some other examples of change, Clarkson being the one that is closest to the situation that we are talking about this afternoon.

I thank the member for Mandurah for raising what I would call an extended grievance. He has raised very important issues and it is very important that we discuss them. I hope that the teachers at North Mandurah Primary School have every opportunity to continue to be part of the education department. I like to hear examples of what people have been writing to the member about, and which he read out. They are fantastically dedicated people. I value them and the member values them. I would hope that before too long the situation for them will be settled and they know where they are going. Change is very difficult. That is one reason why things such as support with applications is offered to people. Change is difficult for people after a long time; I recognise that and the member recognises it. But his electorate has changed and along with it the schools and the make-up of the schools has changed. It is something that happens. Schools are dynamic situations. Communities are dynamic situations and they need to be managed well. I offer the member my support. If he wants to raise issues about this situation with me in coming weeks, I ask him to please do so and I will do everything I can to support him and those people.

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [6.05 pm]:** I commend the member for Mandurah for bringing this issue to Parliament. It is an important issue. I also want to acknowledge those teachers, the constituents of the member for Mandurah and I think the member for Dawesville, who are here tonight. There is a link between the change from the district to the regional structure and the issues raised by the member for Mandurah. The member for Mandurah made it quite clear that many of the teachers who are impacted by the change going ahead at north Mandurah are due to the fact that they have been there a long time so the system that was in place that would have previously advised the principal and previously coordinated the school and the system is no longer there. That is the simple reality. We have had this change from a district structure to a regional structure. The problem is that the two main reforms carried out by this minister—namely, the independent public schools and the change from the district to the regional structure—mean that no method of assessment or success was arrived at before the reform took place. There is reform and then later we look at whether it has been a success. The member for Mandurah, in a very quick interjection on the Minister for Education, made the point that the reason fewer teachers are applying for jobs in regional locations is that the benefits of going to a less desirable location are no longer recognised. It is not just the member for Mandurah who made that point; the Auditor General made that point in August in his report entitled “Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools”. Page 21 of that report states —

DoE has not yet planned how to attract teachers to hard to staff schools without the incentives provided in the central placement process such as transfer points that give priority for placement in more desired areas.

That has been a big part of the incentive for members of my family who have taught in remote locations in days gone by. Teachers go to a hard-to-staff school in a remote location knowing full well that they will be able to come back to a more desired location. As I said, this is a case of reform and then assess. Do not set any standards

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of success. Do not work out what we want to achieve from reform. Reform, and then down the track we will look to see whether there has been any success in those reforms.

The minister referred to the Liberal Party election commitments. I want to quote from that document entitled “Empowering School Communities”. I will outline the rationale that the Liberal Party gave for the regional structure. The document stated —

... Twomey Report ... emphasised strong and consistent criticism of the Department ... with beliefs that it is:

“...too large, too remote and bureaucratic, often unresponsive and focused too much on issues of process and compliance ...

The problem we have had now, particularly in regional locations, which is why the member for Murray–Wellington is so concerned as well, is that the vast distances cannot simply be made up by the network process. I will give a rundown of the number of schools in each region. There are 52 schools in the Goldfields. That is the entire Goldfields; it is a big area of land. There are only 22 schools in the Kimberley but it is the Kimberley region. There are 51 schools in the Mid West, 74 schools in the Wheatbelt, 97 schools in the South West and 32 schools in the Pilbara. They are all small numbers of schools but those regions have vast tracts of land. However, the two city regions comprise north metro, with 228 schools, and south metro, with 246 schools. That is a fundamental change to the district structure. However, it is apparent—the member for Albany will reflect on this in a minute—when we travel to the Kimberley, to the Pilbara and to Albany, we find that there is a common theme. Principals do not expect to see their regional executive director; certainly they do not expect to see them anywhere close to the number of times they previously saw their district director. There was a term that one of the principals used when referring to some of the areas. He said that there were some places, such as Katanning and the Wheatbelt, where previously reliance by principals on the role of district director was actually very important. Having that support and that face time with the district director was very important, particularly at some of the schools in more challenging areas. I understand that education reform was one of the election commitments, but the minister must still work out what she wants to achieve from making these reforms before she goes about doing it; otherwise, how would she work out whether she has had any success?

I want to come back to the Auditor General’s report. The Auditor General highlighted the fact that it was very much reform considered later. The Auditor General’s report titled “Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools” looked at the devolution effectively of the selection process of staff. The Auditor General’s report in my view is quite damning of the processes that the minister has implemented in these reforms. The findings of the Auditor General at page 8 state —

DoE —

That is, the Department of Education —

has not undertaken a structured and comprehensive risk analysis of the implications of using a devolved model of recruitment. As a consequence the risks associated with changing these processes have not been fully identified or adequately considered.

The minister had not even worked out what the risks were before she went about making these reforms. As I said a minute ago, the Auditor General made that point. The minister did not even think about the impact on hard-to-staff schools when she rushed into this reform process. The second finding states —

DoE has not yet put in place strategies to address the key risks that it has identified. In the absence of risk management strategies, the needs of some teachers and schools may not be fully addressed.

I think North Mandurah Primary School is finding that. The Auditor General highlighted the problems of reform without a measure of success, without going through risk analysis and without going through the impact it would have on schools and on teachers who have spent a long time under the current structures. It is extraordinary that the department or the minister would not even ask these basic questions. The third finding states —

DoE will not know if the changes to staffing processes are delivering benefits until it establishes clear objectives and performance measures, in particular:

- The objectives for the new staffing processes have not been fully defined and linked to strategic and operational planning.
- DoE is not tracking key data to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its staffing processes.
- DoE has not estimated the costs of its new staffing processes, or its cost effectiveness compared to central placement.

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The minister has therefore implemented a significant reform very quickly without any form of operational planning, any form of risk analysis, any assessment of cost efficiencies and, importantly, any tracking of any data whatsoever to assess whether it has been effective—and the member for Murray–Wellington wonders why there are schools, mainly those in regional areas, from some of the complaints I am getting, with the regional structure.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Sometimes the efficiency is at the expense of effectiveness.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Thank you, member. That is correct. That is exactly right. Therein lies the problem. We are a big state.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** That happens in a lot of government departments.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The member is not talking about the Department of Education at the moment.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** I can think of another one that comes to mind.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** We are a big state. My electorate of Victoria Park is in the south metropolitan area and has 246 schools. However, the network structure will work in my electorate because the schools are close to each other. They do not have that fundamental problem of distance. So, the network principal at East Victoria Park Primary School, Neil Spence, gets his 0.2 full-time equivalent staff member and uses it effectively. However, it is a different kettle of fish for a principal in Albany who gets his 0.2 FTE but has to drive to Bunbury to see his RED, or to Perth maybe because his RED is there for a meeting. It has a different impact on a principal in the Kimberley or in the Pilbara. There is a direct link, contrary to what the minister says, between the regional structure and the problems that the member for Mandurah brought to the attention of the house tonight.

I want to come back to the points made by the Auditor General about independent public schools, because the same problem has arisen in the rollout of the abolition of the district structure and the implementation of the regional structure. I will ask the minister a question that the Auditor General highlighted about what the minister does before she implements an IPS. The specific question on notice 5971 was —

... who did the initial development of the Independent Public Schools ... Strategy and what was the total cost?

The answer was —

... The Department of Education at no external cost.

I then went on to ask —

... Was a report on the initial development of the IPS Strategy completed and delivered to the Department; ...

The answer was —

... No report was commissioned on the initial development of the ... (IPS) Strategy.

... The initial work on the IPS Strategy was undertaken by the Department and no report was generated from that work.

There was nothing—not a report; not a briefing —

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** The paperless office!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The paperless office. There was no briefing note. There was nothing! As the minister and the Premier said, and I agree, this was a strategy to implement this significant reform of our education system. But the Department of Education generated not one document. It is no wonder the Auditor General was so scathing of how that has been implemented. It is no wonder when we have a government that is not interested in following through and assessing whether this reform will actually benefit the education system.

I have made the point that if the government does not set its standards and does not work out what will be regarded as a success from the reform, how will it ever know whether the reform was a success? Now we have the government going through this process of seeking a tender document to work out whether the IPS strategy has worked and how it can go about doing this in the future. It is interesting to note the three key questions in the tender document about the IPS strategy. The first question in the document is —

**What are the effects of the Independent Public Schools initiative on participating schools?**

It then outlines some sub-questions. The second question is —

**Are there any issues that are hampering the efficiency or effectiveness of the Independent Public Schools initiative?**

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The third question is —

**What effect has the initiative had on the public school system overall?**

Interestingly, not one key question actually asks about the educational standards of those schools—not one! The tender document, therefore, will not even consider whether the IPS reform has provided any benefit whatsoever to the educational standards of our schools. Interestingly, the director general herself has raised this issue. She knows that this tender process and the answers to questions being asked are not good enough for what is regarded as a significant reform.

The beauty of the freedom of information process is that sometimes it does actually flush out some useful documents. I will quote from an email sent in June last year from Sharyn O’Neil, the Director General of the Department of Education, to Tony Rutherford, whose position is policy coordinator for the Minister for Education. It states —

I do believe it is important to have an independent evaluation of the Independent Public Schools initiative which would examine, among other things, the question of how the schools have used their increased autonomy to improve the educational standards of their school. This evaluation would need to be independent of the Minister and not undertaken by a department reporting to the Minister such as DOE or DES.

That is, the Department of Education and the Department of Education Services —

We have done some preparatory work on an evaluation brief that we would be happy to share with you.

The director general emails the minister’s office saying that she must also ask —

... the question of how the schools have used their increased autonomy to improve the educational standards of their school.

Yet, the key questions in the tender document are not at all relevant to the government. The minister seems to assume that she can give them autonomy and the results will come; that is, some form of trickle-down economics will take place in the implementation of this reform.

It just seems to me that the cart is very much before the horse in the way the government has gone about implementing this reform. The government is not asking the question up-front: what do we want to achieve from these reforms? It is actually implementing them and then going back to have a look to see whether they have been successful, although without terms having been set for measuring that success. I think the member for Mandurah has raised a very good issue, and it is an issue that will come back to this Parliament in the not-too-distant future for debate. Exactly how has the change from district to regional structure benefited, in particular, regional schools? I am curious to know. The minister said previously in this place, in response to the member for Mandurah’s grievance in June last year —

There are more than 600 positions in district offices, and all those resources will remain available to schools, but they will be closer to the schools.

Six hundred positions—that is just simply incorrect.

Anecdotally, anybody can go to a regional school and know that the support, the access to specialist staff and services that were previously there are not there now. The minister, I think, did not want this to be about the regional structure because, that way, she did not have to defend it and outline exactly how our school system is better off for the regional structure. The Auditor General has given the independent public school rollout a scathing assessment. It is too late now; the government cannot run after the reform machine and try to patch it up as it goes along. Ultimately we are never going to know because the tender for the review being called by this government is just not good enough. The government is not measuring educational success and standards, which, ultimately, is what this is all about.

Unfortunately, I stood after the minister had spoken, but, having said those few words, I am very keen to hear in the future how we go about assessing this regional structure. I am not convinced it is delivering a similar standard of service to regional Western Australia, in particular, as the old structure delivered. If the minister is going about this in the same way she is going about measuring her IPS initiative, we are pursuing reform for all the wrong reasons.

**MR P.B. WATSON (Albany)** [6.21 pm]: I would like to congratulate the member for Mandurah on his speech tonight. I think that losing district offices is a huge issue, and I think that decision has had side effects.

Since I became a member of Parliament, some tremendous people, such as Steve Baxter and Neil Darby, have run the Albany district education office. When they came to town, the first thing they did was ring me up and

come and have a cup of coffee. We sat down and created a relationship, and we worked very closely over a long period. I do not even know who the new guy from Bunbury is; he has not contacted anyone in Albany and I have not seen him in Albany. When the shadow Minister for Education came down with me just recently, no-one in Albany had seen him. We used to have someone who was there, with his finger on the pulse of what was happening. If someone came to me with an issue, I would get on to Neil Darby or Steve Baxter, and we would nip it in the bud. If there was a problem, such as a child needing a carer for extra hours, we would go out to the school, I would get the district director and the parent in there, and we would sit down as a group and work it out. Now, our district education officer is four hours away, although the minister says she is trying to bring things closer. If our principals want to have a meeting, they have to travel for four hours. When they leave Albany for Bunbury, because of the travelling time there and back, they have to stay overnight, which means that those principals are out of their schools for a whole day; that puts more pressure on the rest of the school. When I and the shadow minister went around, not one of the principals, teachers or parents we spoke to were in favour of the district education office going. Where was the consultation with the people of Albany when this was going to happen? It just happened overnight. We read the rumours in the paper, or heard rumours at the schools, but we did not hear anything from the education department. It was done by stealth.

We now have psychologists in schools, which is great, but the feedback I have had from the psychologists in Albany is that they are inundated with paperwork. At most schools they are in a very small room because the schools do not have a proper room for them. When they were based in the district education office, the psychologists had someone to do their notes. They are saying that they are now spending most of their time doing notes, so they are cutting down on contact with children. I think that in this current climate we should be making facilities better for the psychologists, instead of making them harder. There are so many issues in schools with young people at the moment that the psychologists are not able to get to them all, and I think it is a real problem.

We talked about new teachers not wanting to go to the country. I know quite a few of the young teachers in Albany, and they are really disillusioned. On commencing employment, it took half of them ages to get a number so that they could get paid. I know that what happened to some of my constituents who work part time was that there was a system change up on the hill there—what do they call it, the palace?—and they were actually working for two or three weeks, or a month, without a number for them to be paid. It was only when I followed it up with the director that something was done. But if I had not done it and someone had not approached me, these young people would have started their career in the education system being disillusioned. We wonder why these young people are going up north and working in the mines when they have a university education that they and the government have spent money on; it is because they are just disillusioned.

We talk about bringing all these facilities into the different regions. Maybe that is good in the city, where everyone is very close, but when we have to travel four hours to our district education chief, it is just not good enough. Formerly, when we had an issue the district education manager would be there, and we would go and talk to him or go and have a coffee with him. He understood what was happening in the community, and he was also involved with the police and juvenile justice. All these things are not there anymore, so we have lost the contact between the education department and the community of Albany. I cannot understand why principals have to go to Bunbury. I can understand that it was done for cost-cutting reasons, but when a headmaster has to be away for a full day because they have to travel for eight or nine hours, someone has to replace them in the school. I think, in the long run, the government will lose money.

Other members want to talk on this today. I do not know whether the minister has been out to regional areas and discussed it with the staff, but I know that she has not been down to Albany and discussed it, because everywhere I went with the shadow minister, people said that no-one had contacted them.

Finally, I know this is something a little different, but it is something I would have worked on with the district education officer if I knew his name and if he ever came to Albany—it is the Facebook problem. Teachers and parents have come to me about the Facebook issue. I know it is something that will not be sorted out overnight, but, minister, I would like to see mobile phones banned in schools. Children should hand their phones in when they come into the school precinct, like they do in America, and they will be there to pick up at the end of the day. If parents want to contact them, they can contact the school. After school, if there are any messages, they can get them, but they should not have the phone at any time during the day. Parents with traumatised children have come in to see me because the children have been sitting in their classroom and their phone has gone off, and it has been someone else in another part of the school saying that this person so and so has done something. This is happening in primary school; we are not talking about high school. I know that children aged 13 and under are not allowed to use Facebook, but it is very easy to go into Facebook and change a person's date of birth. There was something on the front page of *The West Australian* yesterday, and that probably jogged my mind a bit. It is a huge problem; we have these young children in vulnerable situations at school, and as someone

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said who rang up the radio station this morning, they used to get bullied at school. I used to get bullied at school because I was a skinny little loudmouth.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** You're still a loudmouth, you're still skinny, and you barrack for Collingwood. You bring yourself into it!

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Thank you, I am still skinny.

Several members interjected.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Thank you. See, I am still being bullied!

The fact is that in the past people got bullied at school, but they went home and they were in a safe environment. What happens now is that these kids get bullied 24 hours a day. The bullying is on the phone; it is there the whole time. I do not know what the answer is; I just think that if we banned mobile phones at school, it would be a start. I know that we are doing things at school that the parents should do at home. I hear parents ringing up and saying this should not be happening, but parents have the responsibility for the child having the mobile phone at a young age and being able to access it. The parents are not checking on that themselves. I think it is something we should look at. Minister, I know this is a bit of a different issue from what we are talking about tonight. I fully support the motion, but the district education officer was a vital part of our education community and to have the main part of the role transferred to over 400 kilometres away is to the detriment to the education of the young people of my community.

**MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker) [6.31 pm]:** I rise to say a few words on this issue and note that the member for Mandurah has moved a motion condemning the Minister for Education for not only her alleged failures in relation to the North Mandurah Primary School, but also other failures in her education portfolio. I must say that I find the government schools in my area to be very buoyant, happy places to be, with happy staff in those schools. I have been very lucky that in the seat of Mount Lawley about \$10 million-plus of state money has been spent on the government schools—the state schools—which has allowed them to raise their standards. When I was elected in 2008, I found the standard of the buildings at the schools very poor indeed. Over the period of three years there has been a constant upgrade of the facilities of the state schools. The next thing I would like to see is that some money be allocated towards a new music centre for Mount Lawley Senior High School, which is a very prominent high school in Perth and which is in need of an extension of its music centre. It is amazing what the state schools do with the facilities that they have at their disposal.

Apart from the schools, I must say that when I meet with the teachers from the schools, including members of the union who come and see me from time to time, they tell me that they are the best paid in Australia and that they are generally happy and contented. Although from time to time there are rumblings from the union that all is not well, I am sure that in the next few months things will settle and we will find that many people will receive a further increase in their pay, which at this point in time is being held back due to the unions not wanting to agree to the terms that have been put forward by the government.

**Mr P.C. Tinley:** Or does the government not want to agree to the terms of the union; which way do you want to take it?

**Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND:** The member for Willagee can make his contribution to the debate afterwards.

Apart from that, we have many prominent teachers. The deputy principal of Mount Lawley Senior High School, Mr Ian Johnston, was awarded a leadership award, and another deputy principal, Beverly Burnside, was awarded the 2011 Women of Achievement Award. As I say, the school buildings are good, the staff are good, and when I visit the schools I do not pick up any negative vibes. There are now 207 schools that have applied for independent public school status and I must say that the principals of schools in my electorate drove me insane to ensure that I put a good word in to try to see that they got independent public school status. Unfortunately, not all of them have received that status as yet, but I am sure that in the years to come they will be applying and hoping to get their schools into the system.

We have heard the member for Victoria Park telling us how bad the independent public school system is because there is no measure of how good the students of these schools will do. I think we should realise that the independent public school system only came into operation in 2009, when 34 schools were awarded independent public school status. Sixty-four were awarded that status in 2010 and another 109 schools were awarded the status in 2011. The independent public schools program is good for not only the students, but also the teachers and the principals, who are able to push resources to areas in which they believe the money should be spent and who are also able to employ the staff that they wish to fill vacancies in schools. I am sure that as the IPS system is rolled out, we will see that the results from these schools will be as good, if not better, than the other schools. My personal belief is that in time to come, most, if not all, schools will become independent public schools. In

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the United Kingdom after the change of the last government, there has been a plan to roll out independent public schools, and that has also been a great success, with more applicant schools than schools that were awarded the status.

We have heard a lot about the regions and the networks and that a change in the way the whole thing hangs together has been to the detriment of various areas. I have not had one complaint and I go to the schools all the time. I am interested in education; I am on the council of Mount Lawley Senior High School and I have had no-one come up to me and say to me that the new system is in any way worse than the old system. Therefore, I must say that I cannot accept the arguments that have been put forward in this place tonight. Generally speaking, we are doing well. The 2011 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy tests show that between 2008 and 2011, the mean scores have improved in all 16 comparable assessments across years 3, 5, 7 and 9. There have been gains in other areas and I do not think there is anyone in this place in 2011 who can say that the education portfolio and the education system is in any way worse than it was in 2008, and as I have pointed out, in many ways, to my mind and to the minds of the teachers and parents, education is a lot better than it was then. I must say I was surprised at the motion castigating the Minister for Education for failures in her education portfolio. I must say that the minister has been very supportive of me, and I know she has been to other members, and I look forward to working with her in the future.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [6.37 pm]: I rise to support the motion put forward by the member for Mandurah, and also the contributions made by the members for Victoria Park and Albany. The motion, I think, affects many of us in the city and the country, but it probably has greater importance to regional members. I also thank the Minister for Education for responding while some of the constituents of the member for Mandurah were in the public gallery. I know that we did interject, but it is a very passionate issue for many of us. One comment to the member for Mount Lawley: the history in regard to Mount Lawley is probably that no member for Mount Lawley has ever had a complaint made to them about education, because generally one could say that the schools in the Mount Lawley region always perform well, regardless of which government is in power. Therefore, I do not think we can take the fact that the member has never received a complaint in the electorate of Mount Lawley to mean that there are no problems with education.

Much has been made tonight about the effect on teachers, and I will get onto that in a minute, but the downgrading of the district education offices to these larger regional offices has also had an effect on parents, and I want to relay a personal story that came to my office in the last month. I was contacted by a parent who has a child in an education support centre of a local school in my electorate. Their child goes to the school, obviously, because they have special needs. They are outside the catchment area of the primary school, but because the child has special needs they are entitled to go to the education support centre. However, the parents of the child have two other children who they also wanted enrolled in the school, because they feel that the special needs child needs the support of her siblings. However, because they live outside the school's catchment area and the school strictly enforced its catchment policy, their application for enrolment was refused. The school has every right to do that. I do not criticise the school at all; it is a very good school. The parents sought to ring the district office. Not so long ago, they would have called Cannington. I had cause to ring the Cannington district office in the early 2000s. I was instantly put through and received support from the district office. Of course, because the number of district offices has decreased significantly, and moved into larger regional offices, the parent was told to contact the south metropolitan regional office in Fremantle. Remember, this office has to deal with people in Mandurah—as the member for Mandurah said—Pinjarra, Dwellingup and also people in Armadale. Do the member for Mount Lawley and the minister know what the people at the south metropolitan regional office said? They said, “Look, we just can't cope. We have so much to do; we would not be able to address your concerns.” Therefore, that parent who normally would have just telephoned Cannington, which is about 12 kilometres down the track, and been able to get some instant communication and hopefully relief, was told to contact the south metropolitan regional office in Fremantle, which said, “We're just overloaded and we can't help you”. That is one of the problems that we now have because we do not have these district offices. The problem must be magnified for people who live in Albany. People who live in Albany have to deal with the regional office in Bunbury. I would love the minister to have a chance to respond and tell me how she can convince this house that the residents of Albany or, for instance, Kojonup will benefit from having the district education office in Albany abolished or downgraded and to have a regional education office in Bunbury. It would be nearly impossible, I am sure, for the minister to convince this house that that has been a good move.

Of course, part of the devolution of the district offices into large regional offices is that there has been a move, which is outlined in the document “Progressing Classroom First”, by this government to devolve power to the schools, to the principals. If one reads that document, they will see that for this system to be successful, it is basically dependent on the goodwill of teachers and principals. There is nothing wrong with relying on the

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goodwill of teachers and principals, but that will take the government only so far. In order for this system to be properly functional and progressive, and to progress the education system, there must be an increase in resources. Page 2 of this document states —

Classroom First describes a comprehensive set of actions by staff at all levels to support high quality classroom teaching. It also recognises the role of central and regional offices to create the best possible environment for schools to operate.

I have a couple of questions about that. From my understanding, the central office is engaged in policy formation, not in providing support to individual schools, and I am not sure how the regional offices will provide the best possible environment for schools when we have these large regional offices that are overworked. The Fremantle office, which now has responsibility for Armadale, is unable to cope with the demands that are placed upon it. As I said, the personal story that was relayed to me is that the parent sought assistance from the regional office in Fremantle and was told that it was unable to assist them because the office has too much work. Therefore, one has to ask: What quality of support will be provided by these regional offices? How will the central office supply support? How is having a larger regional office better than having the smaller, closer-knit district offices that we had previously?

The last paragraph on page 3 of “Progressing Classroom First” states, in part —

There is an enormous amount of professional capacity and goodwill in our schools: the challenge for the system is how to ensure this resource is applied fully for the betterment of our schools and students.

As I stated previously, that is reliant on the goodwill of teachers and principals. They are a dedicated professional group of people, but goodwill will get the government only so far. That goodwill has to be supported by resources and by people external to the schools. As I read through this document, and from the conversations that I have had with teachers—unlike the member for Mount Lawley, I have had many teachers and parents come to me with concerns about the education system—I saw that this is a complex issue; there is no doubt about it. Part of this new Classroom First system seems to be trying to empower schools through the devolution of professional learning and curriculum support to schools. This largely is dependent on a network of sharing expertise. But my questions are: In the current climate in which there is competition between schools, which is public as a result of the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy and the My School website, what sort of cooperation will be achieved between schools? What motivation is there for a principal to allow a specialist teacher at their school to have time off work to provide expert help at another school? I doubt that a principal would be motivated to allow that. I doubt that specialist teachers will have the capacity to provide the support that this document alludes to because specialist teachers will not get any time off and specialist teachers will not receive any additional remuneration. It will not even lead to a fast-tracking to level 3. There is the professional motivation to help the educational achievements of students, but teachers, specialist teachers and principals can only do so much on the basis of goodwill; they need increased resources. There is nothing in this “Progressing Classroom First” document that alludes to increased resource assistance for teachers and principals. It is saying that it will empower schools through the devolution of professional learning and curriculum support to the schools without sufficient support coming from the central office. Of course, that support cannot come from the district offices anymore because they are basically obsolete and the larger regional offices just do not have the capacity. The larger regional offices do not have the capacity in the city area and they particularly do not have the capacity in rural areas. Therefore, I am not sure how the minister can prosecute the case that the devolution of power to the schools and principals and the abolition of district education offices will improve education.

Decentralisation can work and it does have benefits, but for decentralisation to work increased support has to come from a central body. That has not been forthcoming under this minister’s period as education minister. There is no evidence that the government has provided the increased resources to schools for them to now take on that additional responsibility. What we seem to be having is increased responsibility being sheeted home to principals and teachers at the same time that the minister seeks to reduce her responsibility by saying that the responsibility is with principals and teachers. If the responsibility is to be with the teachers and principals, they need greater resources and greater support from the central education office and from district offices. If the government is going to continue with the abolition of district offices and have these larger regional education offices, they need to be supported and the number of people working in them needs to be increased and that is no more so than in the country. Therefore, decentralisation, minister, can work only with increased support and resources.

**MR P. ABETZ (Southern River)** [6.50 pm]: I certainly appreciate the challenges that face schools on suburban fringes or where rapid development is taking place. I certainly empathise with the member for Mandurah who back in 2009 made an impassioned plea to the Minister for Education—he had done so earlier in November

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2008—to build a school at Meadow Springs because so many young families with children lived there. His reasons for wanting a school there were the tremendous growth in population in the area; the fact there was no primary school north of Gordon Road; the North Mandurah Primary School was too far away; and the safety of children was at risk from the busy roads. The member for Mandurah urged the minister to review the department's recommendations about the need for a new school. Lo and behold, the member for Mandurah got exactly what he had wanted for so long—a school in Meadow Springs. Of course, when a new school is built, the effect is that families who have to travel a long distance to get their kids to school will opt to put their kids into the new school because it is closer to home. Some choose not to because they like the continuity of their children going to the school to which they have already been going. I will face that in my electorate at the beginning of next year when Bletchley Park Primary School, which is bulging at the seams, will have a very significant drop-off in enrolments because a new school will be built at Piara Waters. That will certainly have an impact. Some teachers will have to leave Bletchley Park Primary School; that is unavoidable.

Five hundred students who go to North Mandurah Primary School live in the suburbs of Meadow Springs, Lakelands and San Remo. It makes sense for those families to enrol their kids at the new school when it opens in 2012. Changing the staff profiles is inevitable; it cannot be helped. Although I am certainly sympathetic to staff who have enjoyed working at a particular school, there comes a time when change is necessary and when some of the staff need to be moved on and be found other places at which to teach. Of course, nobody wants to move if they are happy at a particular school and if the school has a great atmosphere. I am sure that none of the teachers at Bletchley Park Primary School want to move. The teachers love being at that school; it has a great principal and a fantastic ethos. The parents are very involved in that school and it is a great school at which to teach. Who wants to leave? Nobody does. But, unfortunately, some teachers will need to move on. The reality is that as populations grow and the need for children to be educated continues, schools are built. But when schools are built, the boundaries change; that has always been happening. In a way, it is about choice. When a new school opens, parents are entitled to make a choice.

Obviously, schools need to be staffed according to the student enrolments. That happens repeatedly. For example, Clarkson Primary School in the northern suburbs had 820 students in 2008. When Somerly Primary School opened in 2009, 400 students enrolled there and, as a result, the number of students at Clarkson Primary School dropped by some 300 students. Therefore, that school lost 15 full-time equivalent positions. When Madeley Primary School opened, Lansdale Primary School's staff numbers were reduced by only two full-time equivalent positions. When Aubin Grove Primary School opened, Harmony Primary School staff numbers were reduced by three full-time equivalent positions. As the member for Mandurah points out, staff numbers at North Mandurah Primary School will reduce by a significant number; there is no question about that. However, that is partly reflective of the massive population growth in the area and the need for that new school.

The member has certainly highlighted that some of these staff will need to move and a process has been gone through for those staff; they were notified that they will need to move on and assistance is being given to help them find other positions. Obviously, those who are permanent staff are relocated. That is an automatic process through head office. By the same token, I am sure that the other teachers—I do not know any of them personally—are competent teachers who should be able to find work in another school. That work may not be in Mandurah, which may be difficult for them because of where they live and the travel that could be involved. Nonetheless, I believe that competent teachers do not have too much difficulty in finding new positions.

In any school that needs to shed staff, the principal has the opportunity to decide which teachers need to move on and the requirements for the overall staffing of the school. It is important that we recognise this as one of those difficult things that come with growth in an area. It is happening every year when new schools open. My understanding is that one teacher from the school that the member for Mandurah has raised is a permanent teacher, and he will be placed through the school staffing services. That whole process continues. I am sure that every effort will be made to assist those 17 teachers who, I understand, are affected by the opening of the new school.

From what I understand, at two separate meetings the principal of North Mandurah Primary School informed the staff of the processes for identification of teaching staff for retention at the school or those relocating through the Department of Education employer-initiated placement process. The principal completed that identification process for teachers required to relocate and advised them individually by letter. By arrangement with staff, letters were placed in pigeonholes after school on 14 September and those not collected were posted to their home addresses to arrive on 15 September. It seems to me that the principal certainly did the right thing by the teachers. Of course, it is never nice to be told that it is time to move on, but it is good to note that the principal engaged an external consultant to provide staff with application-writing training. Assistance has been given in that regard.

**Extract from *Hansard***

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p7926b-7949a

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When Meadow Springs primary school opens for students at the beginning of 2012, it will also need staff. The staff from North Mandurah Primary School will certainly be able to apply for those positions. Apparently, 20 per cent will be referred teachers and 80 per cent will be based on merit selection. If these teachers are competent teachers—I have no reason to doubt that they are—they certainly should have every opportunity to apply for those new positions. It is expected that Meadow Springs primary school will also attract students from the Mandurah area who are currently enrolled in other schools. Students move into a school outside their official boundaries all the time. I think it is important that we recognise that this whole process is part of what goes on in the Department of Education and goes on with schools.

I want to take the opportunity to briefly mention independent public schools, because in my electorate every single state primary school is now an independent public school.

**Mr A.P. Jacob** interjected.

**Mr P. ABETZ:** It is an indication of success. Bletchley Park Primary School and Campbell Primary School, I think it was, became independent public schools in the first lot. They so much appreciated being independent public schools that the parents and citizens associations of the other schools got on board.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.