

**SCHOOL EDUCATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 16 October.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [4.02 pm]: I rise to lead the opposition's debate on the School Education Amendment Bill 2014. There is some degree of urgency with this bill because of the necessity of the year 7 fees, which is part of the bill. However, this bill warrants careful consideration and contributions by members on this side of the house. As we know, there have been major changes in education in the last two years. Of course, there is a new funding model and our schools are battling to cope with the stress that has been inflicted on them by the current government.

This bill seeks to amend six areas of the primary act, the School Education Act 1999. One of the areas is the voluntary contributions, which is dealt with in clause 29, and that is the reason for the bill's urgency. As we know, there is a system of voluntary contributions in secondary schools in the government sector, and next year there will be a compulsory transition of year 7s from primary school to secondary school. As a result, the government is seeking to ensure that high schools can levy a voluntary contribution on parents who have year 7 students in high school. At the moment, the maximum contribution that can be inflicted on a primary school student is \$60; for students in years 8 to 10, it is up to \$230. Clause 29 seeks to provide secondary schools that will have a cohort of year 7s arrive at their doorsteps next year with the ability to levy a voluntary contribution of up to \$230. I will say a bit more about that later because I want to give a brief overview of the six areas that will be amended and then talk a little more about each area, and I will also flag some amendments that we will seek to debate.

The second area is the registration, governance, establishment and inspection of, and notices to improve, non-government schools, which is dealt with in clauses 4 to 21 of the amending bill. These arrangements have been supported by the non-government sector, whether that be the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia or the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

The third area is proof of enrolment, which is dealt with in clause 24. The bill seeks to reverse the onus of proof of enrolment. At this stage, the onus is on the department to prove that a student is not enrolled. The bill seeks to reverse that onus of proof and place it on the parent to demonstrate that their child is enrolled or that they have sought to enrol the child. This relates to prosecutions if the department decided to prosecute the parent for not enrolling their child in a government school, and I will talk a bit about that shortly. There is a \$2 500 penalty if there is a successful prosecution.

The fourth area is chronic absenteeism from school, which is dealt with in clauses 26 to 28. In many respects, this is linked to the issue of enrolment. Basically, the bill seeks to streamline the process of recording students who are absent from school.

The next area is dealt with in clauses 30 to 33. The Minister for Education will be given the power to enter into joint arrangements for contracts to run child and parent centres on school sites and to allow the services provided by child and parent centres to be accessed by students who are not enrolled at the school at which the child and parent centre is located.

Finally, the other area is dealt with in clause 34, which seeks to allow the Department of Education Services to ensure that an employee who has been suspended from one school site is excluded from all government schools. If an employee such as a teacher has been disciplined and suspended from one school, they will be prevented from entering the premises of any school. They are the six areas in which the School Education Amendment Bill 2014 seeks to amend the primary act, the School Education Act 1999.

I had a very interesting read of the *Hansard* of the debate held in the other house; of course, this bill was introduced by the Minister for Education in the other house. The minister made the point that this is a voluntary contribution. Yes, it is a voluntary contribution; a parent cannot be forced to pay this contribution, but pressure is placed on parents and families to pay this contribution. Moreover, many schools rely on this funding, and it has become even more important since the disgraceful spending cuts in education were inflicted on the public education system by this government. The opposition education spokesperson, Hon Sue Ellery, moved an amendment in the other house in line with the recommendations of the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations that sought to phase in over a number of years this higher voluntary contribution for parents who have children entering year 7. That debate was lost and we will not seek to bring that amendment to this house. Let me make this clear: the take-up of this voluntary contribution is very closely linked to socioeconomic conditions. There is no doubt that the take-up of the voluntary contribution is at a much lower level in schools in lower socioeconomic areas than in many schools in more affluent areas. That only exaggerates the inequality in our education system. Some schools in my area have a take-up of 20 per cent to 30 per cent. That is in schools that can ill afford not to have every possible funding source delivered to them. The

principals can only do so much to encourage parents to pay this voluntary contribution and there is obviously a philosophical issue with voluntary contributions to public education. When the fact that we have had massive, massive funding cuts to education is added to that, we are in a crisis situation in our public schools. WACSSO sought feedback from its members and asked them to provide what it called a “storybook”. I am holding here a photocopy of a sheet of one such storybook. Schools were asked—basically parents, because as we know teachers would not be able to put their names to this sort of enterprise—to write about what the funding cuts had meant to their schools. The first storybook I will quote from is from Westfield Park Primary School in my electorate. It states —

The cuts to public education have affected our schools our school by ...  
cutting teacher/teachers’ assistants FTE hours for at risk children  
Funding lost despite Westfield Park doubling students In two years.  
Approx \$130,000 Lost in state funding and growing  
Freeze on hiring new staff despite having funding to replace Existing Staff — More School Money Lost!

The storybook from Huntingdale Primary School reads —

The cuts to public education have affected our school by

- Education Assistant time for year one and Literacy Support reduced.
- SPPRA Fund cut to Outdoor Play Behaviour Support cut.
- Learning Support Co-Ordinator Time reduced.
- Lost \$4000 out of Budget for the “Leave Tax”.

That is the leave loading liability tax —

- Lost Development and Training funds re Performance Management \$2500.
- Lost level III teacher time — 120 days or \$66,000 in salary funds.

The next page of Huntingdale Primary School’s storybook reads —

The cuts to public education have affected our school by

- SPPRA Cuts — Multi Literacy Program Reduced and ... Multi Sensory Program Cut.
- School Grant frozen for three years — while costs keep rising

Yule Brook College is out in the Maddington region and used to be Maddington Senior High School, I think. It used to be in the Minister for Planning’s electorate, but I think it is in the electorate of the member for Forrestfield now. Its storybook reads —

The cuts to public education have affected our school by

- funding will not be like the funding we would be getting under the present funding arrangements.
- which makes us not sure exactly what the impact will be on our programs and classes.
- the school will need to work harder to make savings in some areas, whilst minimising the effect on the students.

Albany Primary School’s storybook reads —

The cuts to public education have affected our school by

**EDUCATION ASSISTANTS REDUCED:**

Teachers having to spend more time with “high need” students to the detriment of the majority. Education assistants help all children be all that they can be.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Cutting teachers professional development, cuts students’ opportunities to access best practice teaching methods and information.

Professional development keeps teaching professionals interested and motivated.

Cutting PD will disenfranchise teachers and limit students from reaching their potential.

**FUNDING FOR CAPITAL WORKS:**

Much needed upgrades for playground equipment, building enhancement and fencing cannot be completed with the current budget. There is more pressure on fundraising from a community that already has substantial financial pressures.

Albany Primary School's storybook continues —

1. Less quality reading materials available for purchase/replacement.
  2. Almost no Professional Training due to budget restraints.
  3. Can't afford excursions because too high to pass costs onto parents due to insufficient in-school subsidy.
  4. Constraints placed on certain activities e.g. Camps due to staffing limitations (insufficient funds to release staff—teachers, EA's)
  5. Inflexibility of programming due to reduced funding ...
- Hence, the reduced ability to extend Gifted and Talented students.
6. Teachers increasingly using their own money to pay for teaching aids e.g. Stationery, art material ...
  7. The future possibility of only being able to afford graduate/inexperienced staff as Senior staff too expensive to employ.

East Butler Primary School's storybook reads —

The cuts to public education have affected our school by

“Less EA's means more disruptions in class, especially in the younger years when children need to focus.”

Here is a quote from a parent whose child attends that school —

“Having worked as a volunteer in my children's classes, particularly in Kindy and PrePrimary I witnessed the true value and necessity of paying the full time Teacher Assistant in each class to assist the teacher in delivering a proper holistic education to the students. Cutting back on Teacher Assistants can seriously damage a teacher's ability to deliver the appropriate level of education that is required for the students. I think it is time some government officials went back and spent a whole day in a Kindy classroom to see the reality of what is required and not just look at numbers on paper.”

I read another quote from a parent —

“Our children are not getting the duty of care they deserve because of the cuts. All children are missing out in some way. Children with behaviour issues are not being catered for as schools no longer have the extra teaching and support staff to provide them with one on one or small group care, these children usually struggle in the classroom and can be disruptive in the class therefore taking away precious teaching time from other students and make it stressful for teacher.”

Another parent comment reads —

Our amazing teachers were already using their own money to purchase extras for their class rooms, Now with the budget cuts the teachers are having to buy the basic like bandaids, handwash, sanitary items.

It is absolutely appalling that teachers have to dip into their own pockets for basic necessities. To hear this government coming into this house and the other house day in, day out justifying its spending cuts in education and telling us that there have been no spending cuts is absolutely appalling.

**Ms L.L. Baker:** It's a lie.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I would like to use that word, member for Maylands, but I know if I use that word, it will be considered unparliamentary; however, what the member for Maylands said is true.

**Ms L.L. Baker:** It's an untruth.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It is an untruth; it is absolutely appalling that the government continues to seek to justify its spending cuts. We had the spending cuts of last year. Then, we had the lauding of this new student-centred funding model, which on paper makes sense and sounds brilliant, with the Premier in this house saying it is basically our Gonski scheme. It ain't our Gonski and if it is our Gonski, it is a very bad form of Gonski because it does not put in the money that Gonski would have put in. I shake my head day after day when I go to a school like Cecil Andrews Senior High School, which is one of three public high schools in my electorate, and hear that it will lose over \$1 million over the next four to five years. We sit down at board meetings at the Cecil Andrews Senior High School and we just shake our heads because we just do not understand why a school in a low socioeconomic area with a high Indigenous population and many challenges—all the things that this so-called student-centred funding model is supposed to address—will lose over \$1 million in the next four to five years. Then there are other schools in more affluent areas that will actually have increases in funding. It just does not make sense. I think when the history is written on the Barnett government, besides the rising debt levels, another

issue that will be highlighted is the way it has made our public education system more inequitable. The divide between the poor and the rich in public education in Western Australia is appalling.

Some of us have been fortunate in having the means to send our children to private schools. Some of us have been fortunate in being able to send our children to public schools that are well resourced due to the socioeconomic conditions of the area. Those kids receive a fantastic education. Cecil Andrews Senior High School has fantastic staff. The member for Forrestfield was a very good teacher and a great deputy principal at Cecil Andrews Senior High School; it has great staff and a great new principal, but with limited resources it is trying to deal with many issues. It is trying to create new programs and it is trying to help students who need assistance, but it just does not have the resources. Thankfully, that school has very dedicated teachers but without appropriate funding they can only take a bandaid approach to the problems created by this government. I get incredibly annoyed when this government gets up day in, day out to boast that it is putting extra money into education. Based on absolute numbers, there is more money because there are more students and schools need to be built—bricks and mortar. It is important; of course we need to build public education institutions due to the increase in population, but where is the money to service them? It is okay to build a brand-new school. I think the physical form is very important but we need money to ensure that schools can operate properly. This student-centred funding model is a shame and an incredible black mark on this government. I am sure that when the history of this government is written, one of the main focuses will be how it made a public education system very inequitable. It is incredibly unjust. I do not know whether it is due to an ideological bent or plain stupidity. It is a combination of both, I imagine.

Another entry in the storybook is from Carine Senior High School and reads —

Carine Senior High School had a cut of \$537,000.

This cut affected our school by:

- Loss of 4 FTE staff.
- Loss of 4 fixed term contract staff.
- Loss of Teaching Time; in that the school had to drop permanent staff back to their permanent work fractions
- Some staff voluntarily took up the offer to drop back FTE to less than their permanent fraction.
- Lower school core curriculum classes run to capacity (32 students) — some were even 33/34 students
- Extra Literacy classes cut from 5 classes to 3 classes making the size of each class larger.
- Viability of some subject classes

I am glad the member for Moore has arrived because he understands the problems faced by the current education model that this government is pursuing and how it is affecting his electorate.

Many of these storybook entries are from regional Western Australia. The member for Albany will be interested in the situation in Albany. An entry from Broome Primary School reads —

The cuts to public education have affected our school by ...

- Increased class sizes. Class sizes have increased by approx. 30%. Also, possible restructuring of classes throughout the year.
- Number of employed AIEOs decreased from 5.6 FTE to 3.95. (2 people lost jobs and others asked to reduce hours)
- Number of employed teachers decreased from 28 to 24, 4 less teachers in 2014.

Federal funding has decreased under the Abbott government by approximately \$400 000. It continues —

- State funding decreased by approx. \$155,000
- Broome Primary School must pay approx. \$26,000 for Long Service Levy

I understand that the levy has now been abolished. If we combine the federal and state funding cuts to Broome Primary School, they amount to \$555 000. That is for a primary school. The entry for Borden Primary School reads —

The Borden Parents & Citizens Association Inc. is extremely concerned about the 2014 State Government's Funding Cuts and their impact on our Primary School.

The loss of funds, reduction in Principal, teacher and educational assistant hours are already having a significant effect on the education and wellbeing of our children and our community.

At present to maintain services that existed prior to 2014, our School will have to raise in excess of \$60,000 per annum.

We have to realise that last year massive cuts to the education budget were announced, which took effect this year. This new student-centred funding model will result in even more cuts next year. Borden Primary School's entry continues —

### **1. Principal Teaching Time**

Borden Primary School is a level 3 School with student numbers under 50 and now requires our Principal to teach, with no Deputy support, for three and a half days a week and to undertake additional teaching when no teacher relief is available.

Borden Primary School has fewer than 50 students and the P&C has to raise \$60 000 per annum. It continues —

This leaves the Principal with a maximum one and a half days a week to perform their administrative duties, including reporting requirements, parent meetings, attending to DoE affairs, ...

It is not possible to teach these hours, attend all the expected principal meetings, participate in personal Professional Learning and contribute to Network staff development courses and run the school effectively, including monitoring staff performance and supervising graduate inductions, without constant disruption to our student's education.

It goes on and on about the principal. The next heading is —

### **2. Early Childhood Education Assistants**

Our junior room currently comprises of 14 students, ranging in age from 4 years to 8 years and our Early Childhood Education Assistants' time has been reduced from 5.5 days to 2.2 days per week.

This is a significant reduction in teacher support; we are concerned about the duty of care for our children and the additional pressure placed on our teacher providing an effective educational experience without the support of Early Childhood Education Assistants.

It goes on and on about the disadvantage caused by the budget cuts to education systems. I think I will give the next entry to the member for Albany, who I am sure will be interested in presenting that to Parliament later.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** Disgraceful.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It is unbelievable.

I have entries here from Karrinyup Primary School, Tuart Hill Primary School, Newman Primary School, Dalyellup Primary School, Cable Beach Primary School in Broome and a number of schools that did not wish to be identified. Wickepin Primary School's entry reads —

*Wickepin Primary School is a small school with current numbers standing at 54.*

It goes on and on about what the cuts mean to it. Baldvis Secondary College's entry reads —

Recent funding constraints from the WA Government have had and will continue to have impacts on the college. Of particular note are the changes to the mechanism by which schools are allocated human resources ... The result is that schools have less human resources, mainly from the teaching sector. Whilst the student enrolment numbers remain static or increase we will have less notional salaries provided to the school to appoint a staffing level we would have had prior to the changes.

Additionally we are now required to make a payment of a long service leave levy ...

These changes will affect students immensely. There is a further note from Pemberton District High School, Palmyra Primary School, and Ocean Road Primary School in Dawesville. I think the member for Mandurah might like to have a look at that one and, as I said, there are entries from a number of unnamed schools.

The picture is very clear. The funding cuts this government has imposed for 2014 and next year under the new student-centred funding model are appalling. They are appalling in absolute terms and in the sense that they will increase the divide between the rich and the poor in our public education system. I have never known a public education system in which there has been such a divide between the rich and the poor. Surely the whole idea of a public education system is to provide uniform, quality education across the system, regardless of people's income levels. However, that is not the situation here.

We then have, added to that, the voluntary contribution. It is not the government's fault that parents may not make that voluntary contribution. However, the problem with inflicting a maximum fee of \$230 for year 7 students is that it may act as a disincentive—some parents may think that \$230 is too much, and therefore they will not contribute anything. It would be good if parents could find the means to make that contribution. However, some parents are so financially strapped that they cannot find that money. It could be argued that parents should be able to find \$60 a year to make this contribution. However, for many parents, \$230 a year is not easy to find. We understand the reason for the amendment in clause 29, because high schools are generally

more expensive to operate than primary schools, and the government is seeking to ensure that high schools will have the ability to seek from the parents of year 7 students—who will be in high school next year—the same voluntary contribution as is paid by students in years 8 to 10. However, we believe this is a missed opportunity to address the funding shortages in our education system, and they are massive. Nothing in this bill, and nothing that the government has brought before this house or the other house, is addressing the crisis and the stress points in our public education system, which are also massive.

Clauses 4 to 21 deal with non-government schools and the issues of registration, governance, establishment, inspection and notices to improve. There has been extensive consultation with peak bodies such as the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, and they are generally supportive of these amendments. Although non-government schools have some concern that they may be over-burdened with administrative duties, overall those changes are supported.

I should flag an issue that I will talk about later in my contribution. We will be seeking to move amendments with regard to the issue of corporal punishment. As we know, corporal punishment has been banned in state schools by legislative force. It is also banned in Catholic schools, from my understanding not by legislative force but by policy. We will be moving amendments to make it very difficult for corporal punishment to be administered in non-government, non-Catholic schools. I do not think that in 2014 in Western Australia, corporal punishment should be allowed in any school. I will be interested to know where the government sits on that issue.

Clause 24 deals with proof of enrolment. It is sad in one respect that we even need to consider this issue. We would hope that every child would be enrolled in a school. The current situation is that it is up to the Department of Education to prove that a child is not enrolled in a school. That should not be difficult to do, because all public schools are linked through the education department. However, it is very difficult for the non-government sector to prove that a child has not sought to be enrolled or is not enrolled in a school. This clause seeks to reverse the onus of proof so that parents will have to demonstrate, in the event of a prosecution, that their child is enrolled or they have sought to enrol their child in a school or to register their child for home schooling. From my understanding, there are only two or three cases a year in which parents are prosecuted for not seeking to enrol or not enrolling their child in a school. However, this clause provides for a financial penalty of \$2 500, and we believe that is a problem.

I should talk also about clauses 26 to 28, which also provide a financial penalty if a child is engaged in chronic absenteeism. The statistics indicate that the students who are not enrolled or are chronically absent from school are predominantly Indigenous children. There may be a number of reasons for this. The fact is that many Indigenous children, and other children from at-risk families, will not have the financial capacity to pay the penalty. Are we going to make criminals out of these people? A question was put to the Premier before we rose from the last sitting about people being imprisoned for not paying their fines—basically, fine defaulters. The argument may be that we need some sort of deterrent. We probably do need some sort of deterrent, but if people are not enrolling their kids in school, this will not make any difference at all. We need to look at why parents are not enrolling their children at school or why their children are continually absent from school. The government always seems to follow the conservative philosophy of, “Let’s impose a penalty”. This is a financial penalty that it is highly unlikely these families will be able to pay. It also will not make any difference to the children, because they still will not be enrolled in school and they still will not attend school. One of the schools in my electorate, Westfield Primary School, has an average transient student population of 40 per cent a year. The main reason is the difficulty that their parents have in respect to accommodation. Of course if children are moving from area to area and from school to school, there is a greater chance that they will miss out on going to school. But do we need to impose a financial penalty on those parents? The penalty will not be paid, and it will not help the situation.

I wonder whether this is even an education department issue. Surely this is an issue that needs to be addressed by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and other services. We need to take an integrated approach. Rather than take the simplistic approach of prosecuting the families and imposing a financial penalty, we should ask why these children are not enrolled at school, or why they are absent from school for a period of time. There is some debate that due to changes in the workplace and fly in, fly out workers et cetera, some parents are choosing to take their kids out of school during the school term to go on holidays. No doubt that is the case, and I am sure many people in this house have done that. We should not be encouraging that; we understand that. But if it happens once or twice over a cycle, I do not think that should be our main concern. What we should be concerned about is a continued pattern of absenteeism from the school system. It is ridiculous to impose a penalty. If families do not enrol their children at school, or if their children are missing from school for an extended period of time, the imposition of a financial penalty will be of little assistance. If anything, it will be detrimental, and it will not change the system. I repeat: this is not a Department of Education issue; it is a whole-of-government agency issue, although we do need to look at whether there is some

reason why the school is not inviting to children. We maybe need to look at how we can engage these children to attend school. For instance, the Clontarf program is based at Cecil Andrews Senior High School, and I believe it is proving to be successful. We need to realise—I think the government does realise—that being absent from school is very detrimental to educational attainment. I recently attended a school board meeting and the principal of the school had been to a professional development session on independent public schools where they were looking at National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy results. The overall NAPLAN results for one particular school were not good, but if the statistics for the kids who did not attend school on a regular basis were removed, its NAPLAN results were really good based on the results of kids whose school attendance was around 95 per cent to 97 per cent.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** That shows how you can read those in any way.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Exactly right. If we removed from the NAPLAN results the kids who were absent from school, that school was actually doing very well.

Of course the government realises that this is a problem, and that is why it has sought to bring the School Education Amendment Bill 2014 to this house, but imposing these financial penalties will have no beneficial effect; if anything, it will be detrimental. It is surprising to find out the number of students in Western Australia who do not attend school on a regular basis. I could not find the exact figure, which I am really annoyed about, but a principal told me that the Department for Child Protection and Family Support will not get involved unless a student is absent for two days out of five on a consistent basis. It is appalling for a student to be away from school for two days a week on a consistent basis; I think the government needs to go back to the drawing board on this issue. It is not an easy issue, it is a very difficult issue, and it will take a long time to try to overcome, but it will not be overcome by the simplistic legislative instrument of imposing a \$2 500 fine for non-enrolment or a \$1 000 fine for chronic absenteeism.

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** That would always only be a last resort, and all of the steps prior to that that you've mentioned certainly would be taken.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I understand that, minister, but the fact is that I think it is really just superfluous and detrimental, if anything, and it really hides the complexity of the issue. It would be better for the government to say, "This is incredibly complex and we need to approach it in a new way and do some investigation." This side of the house is more than happy, I am sure, to work on this issue in a bipartisan manner, because it is an issue that definitely needs to be addressed. As I said, the number of students who are regularly absent from school is quite alarming.

The Education and Health Standing Committee released a report in 2012 entitled, "A child who is healthy, attends school, and is able to read will have better educational outcomes". That is obvious; but did members listen to the full title of the report, "A child who is healthy, attends school, and is able to read will have better educational outcomes"? If the home environment is not stable, the chances of children coming to school are reduced. However, having said that, there will be some students who will want to come to school because their home environment is so deplorable that school is one of the only safe, stable environments in their life. The Save the Children organisation ran a Friday night program in the Armadale region. A survey was run of the attendees, and one of the questions was, "Why do you attend?" Something like 82 per cent said it was because of violence at home. They felt safer to be in this program on a Friday night than to be at home.

There was also a report commissioned by the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and carried out in 2013 by the University of Western Australia and the Telethon Institute of Child Health Research. The report was titled, "Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts". It states, in part —

The primary aims of the study were to assess patterns of attendance over time, how these patterns vary across schools and students with different characteristics, and how these patterns of attendance contribute to student outcomes.

...

We focussed our analyses on a set of key characteristics that describe schools and students. These included measures of geographic remoteness and the socio-economic status of the school, student factors such as gender, Aboriginal status and the number of times that students moved schools. We also included key characteristics of parents and caregivers, including their educational attainment and occupational status.

Not surprisingly, it was found that —

***Children have highly stable attendance throughout the primary years. Attendance rates fall in secondary school.***

There is no doubt that there is a correlation between socioeconomic status and school attendance. Further along, the report continues —

We found unequivocally that relative disadvantage was associated with poorer attendance, from the very beginning of formal schooling. Students in schools with a lower Socio-Economic Index (SEI), Aboriginal students, students who were highly mobile and those whose parents had lower levels of education and occupational status, all had lower levels of attendance, on average. These attendance gaps were established early (by at least Year 1), and are influenced by factors and events prior to school entry.

...

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

Of course attendance at school is incredibly important. With regard to attendance rates in Western Australian schools, it is my understanding that in 2012 the statewide student attendance rate was 91 per cent, which means that nine per cent of students across the system did not attend school on a regular basis. That is a high percentage. Members can imagine the sorts of social and economic problems that that generates. The attendance rate for Aboriginal students was only 76.9 per cent, which means that 23.1 per cent of Aboriginal students did not attend school regularly. For non-Aboriginal students, the attendance rate was 92.3 per cent as at 2013, which means that 7.7 per cent of non-Aboriginal students do not attend school regularly. That is a very high percentage. Therefore, 23.1 per cent of Aboriginal students do not attend school regularly, while the percentage for non-Aboriginal students is 7.7 per cent. If we bring those together, that is nine per cent overall. That is incredibly high. If we look at those percentages in absolute figures, there were roughly 257 000 public school students in the education system. If nine per cent of those students did not attend school on any one day, it means that 23 000 students were not attending school regularly. That is incredible. It is amazing to have 23 000 students not attending school regularly in Western Australia.

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** I'm sure you'll agree there's a degree of parental responsibility.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I totally agree, minister, and that is why I am trying to say that it is an incredibly complex issue. In the end, it is substantially about parental responsibility, but we have what we have and the facts are the facts, and we have to live with what we have. We have to try to address this issue, and all I am saying is that this bill will not address it. It is an incredibly difficult issue, and imposing a \$2 500 penalty for non-enrolment and \$1 000 penalty for non-regular attendance will not solve the problem at all and may disenfranchise those families from the education system even more. That is definitely not what we want. I understand that those penalties will be a last resort, but we do not want to make criminals out of parents who are prosecuted for not paying those fines in any case. I could go on and on about that matter, but there are other issues I need to address in my remaining 13 minutes.

Clauses 30 to 33 of this amending bill address the issue of child and parent centres. I acknowledge the work of Hon Linda Savage, a colleague of ours in the previous Parliament who did a lot of the early work to recognise the necessity for early childhood education. I congratulate the government for picking up and running with the policy of child and parent centres. My view is that the policy needs to go further, but I will leave that for another day. We can always do a lot more than we are doing, but of course resources are always an issue. Nevertheless, the government has announced the establishment of 16 child and parent centres, with one opening recently in my electorate at the Challis Primary School. Child and parent centres are generally run by non-government organisations, and that is why these clauses are being included in the bill. Basically clauses 30 to 33 provide for the Minister for Education to contract with non-government organisations to run child and parent centres, and also provide for students not enrolled on the site of child and parent centres to attend those services, which is very important. Child and parent centres will provide speech therapy, dental treatment et cetera, and will be very important centres, and the more services that can be provided the better. The minister needs the legislative ability to contract out those services otherwise there may be problems providing those services.

An Edith Cowan University report entitled "Child and Parent Centres on Public School Sites in Low Socioeconomic Communities in Western Australia: A Model of Integrated Service Delivery" states —

Five centres are being established between 2009 and 2014 through *Closing the Gap: Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership*. These offer a range of early learning and child care,

parenting, child and maternal health and wellbeing programs mostly to Aboriginal families with children ranging in age from birth to eight years. Services are managed and coordinated by non-government organisations.

As I said, the government is taking up this model and is going to build a number of centres. I should say that Challis Primary School had been operating its own system prior to the government opening its centre at Challis Primary School, which was lauded by the education community throughout Australia, and now we have this new centre located at the school.

Clause 34 provides for the exclusion of a disciplined teacher from any government school site in Western Australia and goes to the issue of protecting children from child abuse. I understand that a teacher who had been disciplined attended another school as a grandparent with their grandchild. I understand that under this amending clause such a person would be excluded from public schools throughout Western Australia and the clause should be supported.

In my remaining time—I will talk about this more in consideration in detail when I move the amendments—I want to address the issue of corporal punishment. It is interesting that Kevin Donnelly, who was appointed by federal Minister for Education Christopher Pyne to conduct a review of the national curriculum, has said that he thinks that if it is done properly corporal punishment should be allowed in schools. Thankfully, the federal minister has not agreed with that suggestion. However, the matter of corporal punishment is a real issue. As I stated, although legislation does not allow corporal punishment in state schools in Western Australia, and Catholic schools have banned the use of the cane, it is still possible for corporal punishment to take place in non-government, non-Catholic schools in Western Australia. A report in *The West Australian* of 28 June 2012, entitled “School still disciplines with a cane”, states —

More than 25 years after most WA schools stopped using corporal punishment, a Perth Hills private school still states in its parents’ handbook that students can be disciplined by up to six strokes of a bamboo cane.

A Department of Education Services spokesman said that in recent years three independent schools had corporal punishment in their discipline policies, with parental consent.

It states further —

Under registration standards, a non-government school that intends to use corporal punishment must inform prospective parents before enrolment, have documented procedures and keep records of all punishment administered.

The Bible Baptist Christian Academy in Mt Helena says parents must be involved in the corporal correction process.

“A reasonable number of firm strokes, not to exceed six, will be administered by a parent using a simple bamboo stick,” its website says.

This is an article from 2012 —

A staff member would “discuss biblical applications” and pray with the student before and afterwards.

Principal ... refused a request for comment ...

Nollamara Christian Academy is also understood to include corporal punishment in its discipline policy, but declined to comment.

Caning ceased in government and Catholic schools in 1986. It was banned from public schools under the School Education Act of 1999, but the ban did not extend to private schools.

Asked on radio 6PR yesterday whether he would ban the cane from independent schools, Premier Colin Barnett said he did not believe corporal punishment had any role in schools.

“Some of the lower fee Christian schools still do have it,” he said. “I think that’s probably the last of it and it will disappear because it won’t be long before parents as a group will withdraw consent for that.”

Education Minister Liz Constable said though she did not believe physical punishment was an effective method for controlling student behaviour, it was a matter for parental choice in independent schools.

What a load of rubbish! There are many things we do not allow at independent schools because as a government and society we have said that they are not appropriate. We as a society, as a Parliament and as a government have decided that there should be no corporal punishment in state schools because we believe it is not effective and that it is damaging, yet are we saying that if a parent consents to it in a private school, it is okay? How absolutely appalling! It is something that should be washed away forever. We should not allow corporal punishment at any time or in any school in Western Australia.

The matter of corporal punishment also came up recently. I think a school in Bunbury earlier this year, or last year, was mentioned in respect of corporal punishment. *The West Australian* article I read earlier was from 28 June 2012, and I have another article dated 17 July 2014 that refers to the same two schools, the Bible Baptist Christian Academy in Mt Helena and Nollamara Christian Academy, which have corporal punishment in their discipline procedures. Here in Western Australia the education minister said that he would consider taking steps to ban the cane from private schools if the community called for it. If the community called for it! If caning is allowed in only a few private schools, we probably would not get the community out in the streets marching and protesting about it. However, I am sure that if we did a survey, people would be appalled to learn that we still allow caning to take place in any school in Western Australia. It needs to be banned, and we will be moving amendments to the bill to that end. I can see no reason why the government should oppose sensible amendments seeking to remove the option for caning in any school in Western Australia. If it is good enough to ban caning in public schools, it is good enough to ban it in private schools.

I did some research on this matter. Caning is actually in violation of our human rights obligations. It is in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in violation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These are conventions that Australia has signed, and we have an obligation to comply with international obligations. It also does not work. I have with me an academic article on an assessment of caning in South Africa where there was a thought that caning should be allowed. The empirical analysis done in this study quite clearly shows that corporal punishment is ineffective. The potential detriment to children of caning is severe. The fact is we are saying that in some cases it is okay to use physical force, physical abuse and physical violence against children at the direction of an adult. I cannot believe that in 2014 we as a Parliament would say that it is okay to use physical force, violence or abuse against children in any school in Western Australia, and we will be moving amendments to the bill in respect of that. I urge the government to come on board, as the Premier has stated that he does not believe there is any place for it; the previous Minister for Education, Hon Liz Constable, believed it had no place in Western Australia; and the current minister is not supportive of corporal punishment. No-one is supportive of corporal punishment, so why are we still allowing it to happen in private schools? It is absurd. We must of course do everything we possibly can to ensure that it is banned in Western Australia. I have a few seconds left and I urge the government to reconsider some of the clauses of this bill.

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah)** [5.02 pm]: Before I commence my contribution to the School Education Amendment Bill 2014, I want to congratulate the member for Vasse on her election to this place and to say that we look forward to her inaugural speech in 30 minutes.

I always enjoy making a contribution to education bills because it is an area of interest to me professionally, both as a state school-educated member of the community and as a state school teacher previous to entering this place. I went to a very interesting seminar last Thursday in Mandurah presented by Maggie Dent. For those who do not know Maggie Dent, she is a great Western Australian educator, author and specialist particularly in the early years of childhood. She is a great Western Australian from farming stock; she was born in Wandering in the regional part of Western Australia. Much of her upbringing in country Western Australia has helped to shape the approach that she brings to the early years of childhood in the work that she does and she is an extensive worker in the field. I was particularly impressed by Maggie Dent's down-to-earth approach to how we are nurturing our children and young people in, as she describes it, a crazy, unreal world. For her presentation, which was presented by the Falcon Parents and Citizens Association, a very good crowd of people were there to listen to Maggie's wisdom. The thing that I like about Maggie Dent's passionate advocacy is that she is not only passionate about kids and young people, but also very much focused on the need to continue to nurture and encourage healthy relationships. She advocates a commonsense approach to raising children aimed at strengthening families and communities. This bill before us this evening is, of course, an amendment bill that seeks to do a number of things to allow a couple of programs and models of intervention, if members like, to be delivered to communities in Western Australia.

However, one thing that really struck me about what Maggie Dent is on about is the many aspects of bubble wrapping children in society and communities these days. Our children are bubble wrapped. They are wrapped in cottonwool, we do not want them getting dirty anymore, we do not want them climbing trees anymore because it is unsafe, we are afraid of putting them in situations where they might take some risks, we are reluctant to let them walk or ride to school and we are reluctant to allow them to explore their natural world for a variety of reasons. Of course these things are against all the things we know about kids as social animals. They are naturally inquisitive and curious, and naturally focused on inquiring about the world into which they were born. Maggie Dent's approach is based on modern research and practical experience. Interestingly enough, it is based also on a deep respect for heritage and indeed the great opportunities for learning from the first Australians about child rearing and how to nurture a child in the so-called village concept.

In talking about the School Education Amendment Bill before us, I believe we are at a very telling stage in education in Australia and in Western Australia. Some of the concerns about where things are at currently were raised by Maggie Dent on Thursday night, and also raised by people in my community for whom I have a lot of respect, such as Jane Field. Jane Field is now a councillor at the City of Mandurah, and I am pleased she is there as I am sure she will bring her experience in early childhood education to that role. When I was a councillor in the 1990s, Jane Field came to the council seeking to set up a childcare centre in Falcon. Interestingly enough, when she sought to set up the childcare centre, she was met with huge resistance from the community where she wanted to establish it. Luckily, I and other councillors of the day recognised that it is actually important to have children in communities, that children have a rightful place in neighbourhoods and streets, and that children are an absolute asset to any community or neighbourhood in which they live. In fact children can, and do, bring a wonderful sense of vibrancy to neighbourhoods and communities. The last thing we want is a segregated approach to where people live. Lots of seniors tell me that one of the things they like about continuing to live in neighbourhoods and communities is when they see the kids in the street, young or old, out and about. They like hearing their voices, their shouts, their screams and their utterances—kids being kids.

Maggie Dent and Jane Field share the same approach to how we should be bringing up children, with a particular focus on play and letting kids be kids and not forcing them to grow up earlier than they should. They also focus on the elements of positive role modelling and the emphasis on children's natural curiosity and exploration of the natural world, focused in and around letting them play, letting them build cubbyhouses, get dirty, climb trees and explore their natural surroundings. We know that in many communities in modern society, particularly in the Perth metropolitan area, we are seeing greater infill. Where will the children play? I think it is a very important question we need to ask. As density builds in the Perth metropolitan area, as we build urban infill, where will the children play? A question that every council and every community should ask whenever it looks at redevelopment approval or a greenfield development is: where will the children play? I am not against urban infill—I support it—but we should be asking where the children play, in that context.

Madam Acting Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker) might ask how this relates to this bill, because I can see her looking at me in that quizzical way she looks at me on occasion! The member for Armadale highlighted some very important aspects of what the School Education Amendment Bill seeks to do. In the case of the school attendance question, it seeks to use a big-stick approach. We have to realise that the big-stick approach is not working. I want to focus on one example. It is a relatively modern phenomenon. The Department of Education has already reacted to this phenomenon of students being taken out of school by parents to go on holidays or to take time out with parents, particularly given the nature of work and the changing nature of work. It is not just the fly in, fly out phenomenon that is influencing this but it is certainly a big part of it. The department has already created a new classification of absence in schools; I understand it is called the K classification. It relates to an unauthorised absence. The classification appears as a "K" on the attendance roll. This applies to when a parent or parents, or indeed extended family, take a child out of school, usually for a holiday, a trip to Bali or a trip to visit relatives. There have been a number of examples, on the school boards that I serve on, of people going back to the countries that they may have migrated from for significant periods of time. In one school, which I am a board member of, the principal requests the parents to attend an interview so he can explain to them the importance of children being at school. As the member for Armadale highlighted very clearly, research shows the effect that extended, even infrequent, absences can have on the child's educational progress. The reality is it is happening. It is happening more and more. The Department of Education will have to look at how it addresses this in the medium to long term because it will continue to happen. In one particular school last year, I think 192 students out of a population of just under 500 were away for extended periods under this classification of "unauthorised absence". It is a challenge for the education department to look at how it will adapt to this. It will grow. Whether we like to make a value judgement against other parents or not, parents will weigh up the situation.

When I was teaching in the 1980s and 1990s parents came to me—not regularly but a couple of parents came to me—to say, "We're going around Australia", or, "We're taking our kids out of school; we're planning a trip around Australia." My reaction was always, "Take them"—not because I thought I was a pretty hopeless teacher and they would probably learn more away than being in my class!—I actually saw the value of spending time with family in that intense environment of travelling in a caravan and going off somewhere. I used to encourage them. Some of them used to ask me for extra work; some did not. I used to give them tips. I would talk about keeping a journal and doing observational maths and that sort of stuff. Many of them did; many of them did not. The phenomenon of parents seeking to take children out for extended periods under this new classification "unauthorised absence" will grow. I do not think the department has an answer to it at all at this stage, and I think it needs to have an answer.

One thing that members of this place, particularly members on the government side, need to come to terms with is the fact that the cuts to public education experienced last year and now will continue under the new

student-centred funding model. They are real. The member for Armadale highlighted a couple of examples including one in my area, which is not in my electorate but it would be one that the member for Dawesville should be very concerned about. I think the member mentioned Ocean Road Primary School as an example. If members are really in touch with the schools in their area, they will know about funding cuts. I am saying this absolutely honestly; I am not trying to make it up: in every school in my area there have not only been real cuts but there have also been staffing and program cuts. I went to a board meeting only last week. Sometimes the education department, under the guise of year 7s transitioning into high school, says, “You can’t compare last year to next year because the year 7s are going.” If members drill down, they will find the reality is that huge numbers of schools will find it more difficult to provide next year the programs that that may have provided last year and the year before. At the school board meeting that I attended last week, we were told we lose education assistants and we lose time for specialist programs. The deputies, for example, will provide increased duties other than teaching time. The question is then asked: what pressure does the school have?

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker):** Members, please keep the conversations down. The member for Mandurah is struggling to be heard.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I do not know about that!

The reality for Liberal and National Party members is that cuts to education are real and they are being felt, and they will be felt next year. The government cannot hide behind this guise that it is the transition of year 7s into high schools or, “It’s the new student-centred funding model and you can’t compare apples with apples.” The reality is that next year many schools will have fewer teachers and education assistants and less program delivery, and that needs to be understood very, very clearly.

I want to go to some of the elements in this bill that I think are important.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The first element is the transition of year 7s. Let us be very clear about this; it is a major transitional change. In my experience, the schools in my electorate have been quite good at readying those students for the transition next year. I understand the minor amendment to section 97 of the act about levying year 7 students.

[Quorum formed.]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am always pleased to have an audience, Madam Acting Speaker!

As I was saying, the year 7 transition is an important one, and I acknowledge the transition issues associated with that.

The other element of the bill is the child and parent centres. I am very pleased that a child and parent centre at Dudley Park Primary School in Mandurah will be opened officially by the minister in the next week or so. These centres are a good model and I support them entirely. Certainly, as a board member of the Dudley Park Primary School, I will support the rollout of this model, particularly for the children and parents who will be assisted by the centre’s operation.

As was stated by the member for Armadale, we have to be very careful about what these centres will deliver. The aspect of value-adding to these centres will be crucial in the future, because if these centres are going to genuinely work, the genuineness of their early intervention potential must be realised. Indeed, I would expect that many of these centres will be rolled out by whichever party wins the next election in 2017. A Labor government will certainly look at value-adding to what that model has the potential to deliver. However, we need to remember and recognise that it will not be the be all and end all of early intervention, particularly in the early years, because there are a number of other aspects of education in communities that are important considerations to be addressed.

I am very glad that the member for Dawesville is in the chamber, because I want to raise very quickly the issue at South Halls Head Primary School. It relates to the model of independent schools, which I support. As the member for Dawesville will be aware, the reticulation system at that school was set up inappropriately; it was the wrong infrastructure when the school was constructed. The school has been left with a problem such that it does not have appropriate reticulation for the grounds and it faces a cost of \$150 000 plus for a particular water tank to allow shandyng of water so that the grounds can be kept green and safe for kids. I am very interested in what the member for Dawesville has been able to achieve in addressing this issue. As an independent public school, the chances are that an issue such as that will be left to the board and, indeed, to the school community to fund when it does not have the capacity to do that. I will be interested in following that up with the member for Dawesville in his role as the local member. I hope the government does not step away from its responsibility of funding schools and addressing issues for schools by saying that it is an independent school and it is the school’s job to find the funding or to budget for infrastructure such as that.

**Dr K.D. Hames** interjected.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am not attacking the member for Dawesville. I want him to do it. I thought he might have been unkind for a moment. He is not normally known to be an unkind man. I hope I have not upset him.

**Dr K.D. Hames:** I think I have sorted it.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Good. Can the member confirm that the school will get a new tank and he will pay for it?

**Dr K.D. Hames:** There is more than one way to skin a cat. I can show you.

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Mr Speaker, I need protection! This is one of my landmark speeches and I am being interrupted.

**The SPEAKER:** Yes, it is shocking! Minister for Health, please!

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** We are about to hear a landmark speech and I do not want to take any —

**The SPEAKER:** Interjections!

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I want the new member for Vasse to shine, so I am giving her an example of how not to shine! I have not had an audience like this since one of my shows at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre.

I was pleased that the member for Dawesville interjected. I will expect the school board to hear from him very soon about solving the reticulation problems at that school. The plumbing is kaput there and we need to fix it. I am looking forward to the member fixing it.

Can I conclude, as we move towards the inaugural speech of the member for Vasse, by highlighting the concerns raised by the member for Armadale, as the lead speaker for the opposition on this, particularly in his final comments about corporal punishment? Some people in our community of course believe that we should cane children and that we should go back to a system that existed up until, I think, the early 1980s. If people reached into the depths of their psyche, they would see that modern Australia and modern society does not and should not sanction that type of delivery of discipline. I think the comments that the member for Armadale made and the concerns he raised specifically about that particular aspect of the bill should be listened to very carefully by all members. I hope that when that amendment is moved in the consideration in detail stage, we will be able to convince the government of the merits of that amendment. It is a serious consideration that we need to be mindful of.

I mentioned Maggie Dent at the beginning of this contribution. I went to Maggie Dent's seminar on Thursday night. She is a humorous woman, and she talked about the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy. Her concern is that NAPLAN is becoming an all-consuming focus for schools. She calls it napalm and humorously refers to NAPLAN as napalming our schools. She said that we really have to ensure that we recognise that there are many kids in our communities who are square pegs who do not fit into round holes and that that is actually good. It is actually good that we have kids who are different, independent and creative and who do not necessarily do well sitting a test once a year that determines that they might be good at maths, spelling, English or whatever. It is actually good that we have diversity in our schools and sometimes we need to focus on not just one measurement of how a kid is going in their development and their future contribution to the community and to society. I think we need to revisit this gathering storm of focusing on one particular device for measuring our children's development, because if that happens, every school will simply teach to the test—that is all they will do. They will just say, "Well, we will just teach to the test."

**Dr A.D. Buti:** That is what they are doing now.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Absolutely. I think that that is a real concern that we should raise. If that is what we want, we might get some good NAPLAN results that might affect funding, but sometimes communities need square pegs that do not fit in round holes. I reckon that makes a diverse community and a community that we should be proud of.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr J.M. Francis**.