

FREMANTLE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Grievance

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [9.40 am]: My grievance is to the Premier, but he is nowhere to be seen. I have raised this with the Whip.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The Whip is chasing him, so —

Ms S.F. McGURK: I hope this is not indicative of what the Premier thinks about the issue.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The grievance can continue, because I presume you have given notice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not prepared to continue with the grievance. I do not know whether there is a provision in the standing orders for the Premier to be put in the stocks for the day.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I have been advised that there is no standing order requirement for the minister being grieved to —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Member for Warnbro, I call you to order. It is unacceptable, when I am giving instructions about what is going on, for you to interrupt. I call you for the first time.

I am advised that there is no formal requirement in the standing orders for the person or minister being grieved to be present, so the grievance continues.

Point of Order

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have put up a grievance on this issue before to the Minister for Planning, who is representing the Minister for Education in this house, so he has responded to this issue before. We made a request for the Premier so that I could address the issues that the Premier raised to the people of Fremantle at the Fremantle Town Hall. The Premier raised this issue initially in budget estimates in August last year. The Premier made the initial announcement; that is why this grievance today is to the Premier. We were given no indication that the Premier would not be available. I made it clear to his staff yesterday afternoon that my grievance was to the Premier.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Member for Fremantle, I do not believe it is a point of order.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As you said, Mr Acting Speaker, essentially, there is no point of order. I understand, but just by way of explanation, the Premier is on his way here. If he is here in time he will take the grievance, but otherwise I will respond. He is not here because he has had a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, I understand. He is trying to get here. If he is not here in time, I will respond.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Just noticing the clock, I assume that its figures do not show the remaining time for this grievance.

Ms S.F. McGURK: My grievance is to the Premier, so it is not acceptable to me that I grieve to another member of his cabinet—to another person on the other side of the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER: We can proceed, but if you do not wish to proceed with your grievance, we can proceed to the orders of the day.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I have an indication from the Leader of the House how long the Premier is expected to be?

Mr J.H.D. Day: I was just told that he is on his way here. I do not have any more information than that, I am afraid.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It appears that I have no alternative, considering this is the last grievance this morning, but it is disgraceful.

Ms L.L. Baker: I hope you appreciate the Premier's treatment of the people of Fremantle.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I really hope that it is not an indication of how this government is treating this issue. The way it has treated this issue so far is certainly of concern. It does not bode well for the people of Fremantle to have the Premier agree to receive this grievance and then not be here this morning.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The member for Armadale.

Ms Simone McGurk; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Tinley; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Colin Barnett

Dr A.D. BUTI: My point of order is a request for direction from you, Mr Acting Speaker, about what the Chair will be doing in disciplining the Premier for not attending for this grievance. The member for Fremantle has given forewarning, along with a number of questions on notice, and we have heard a ridiculous interjection from the member for Balcatta. This is number one priority. It is not about the Deputy Premier of Malaysia.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Member for Armadale, I am on my feet. That is not a point of order.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: As a further point of order, the government has shown no indication —

The ACTING SPEAKER: That is not a point of order; will the member please resume his seat.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The point of order is relevant to the issue.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Willagee, would you please resume your seat. That is not a point of order. I have explained that there is no requirement in the standing orders for the minister who is being grieved to be present in the house. That is the standing order, so there is no point of order. I will not accept any further points of order on that matter.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Mr Acting Speaker, just a clarification: could you please explain what the rules are around grievances then? It was my understanding that the grievance was directed to the minister identified, and that the minister must be in the chamber to respond. Can you just go through the ruling for the house, please?

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have made the standing orders clear—I think I have, at least. If the member has any further questions about that issue I suggest she speak to the Clerk of the house and get clarification. If the member for Fremantle does not wish to proceed with her grievance—that is her prerogative—and to hold it over to next week, she can arrange it with her side of the house. That is certainly her prerogative —

Mr P.C. Tinley interjected.

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

Mr P.C. Tinley interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call you for the second time. When I am on my feet, you do not interrupt.

Mr P.C. Tinley interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call you for the third time, member for Willagee.

Ms S.F. McGURK: This is a point of order. I understand from the Leader of the House that he is now saying that the Premier is here, so why do I not start my grievance. The question was asked by the member for Armadale what action can be taken against the Premier, who gave an indication that he would be here today. It is a little difficult for me to begin my grievance to the Premier with any meaning, when he is not sitting in front of me. What is the point of me outlining my grievance, when he cannot hear what I am saying?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle, you can either proceed with your grievance or you can leave it, and then I will move on to orders of the day, but I will not entertain this debate about the pros and cons of the Premier being here or not. That is not what is to be debated at this point in time. The Premier is here now, so it is up to the member for Fremantle whether she wishes to proceed or not.

Mr P. Papalia: Are you going to sit down?

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have asked a question of the member for Fremantle. The member for Warnbro can sit down for the moment. I have asked the member for Fremantle whether she wishes to proceed with her grievance.

Mr P. Papalia: The minister is here.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am asking her the question.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will proceed.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Mr Acting Speaker, I am seeking a little clarification. Noting that the Leader of the House has indicated that the Premier has arrived in the building, it might be politic and reasonable to wait until he has sat down before the member for Fremantle commences. I note that the Premier has finally arrived. It is disappointing that he was not here at the start.

The ACTING SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, will you please resume your seat.

Debate Resumed

[Quorum formed.]

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 13 November 2014]

p8095b-8099a

Ms Simone McGurk; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Tinley; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Colin Barnett

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is good to see so many members come along to the house to hear this grievance, which not only is important to the people of Fremantle, but also signals how seriously this government takes the issue of education and schooling reform in various areas throughout the state. As we know, my grievance this morning is to the Premier and it is about the unresolved issue of the amalgamation of high schools in the wider Fremantle area.

The history of this issue is well known, not least to the people in the public gallery today. Yesterday, in my response to the second reading speech on the School Education Amendment Bill, I had the opportunity to outline the frustration of the broader Fremantle community at the lack of leadership, decisiveness and a clear program of change that will result in the amalgamated high school being the best this state has to offer. To recap, in August 2013 the Premier revealed in the budget estimates hearings that the government was looking at amalgamating two high schools in the Fremantle area. The schools were not identified, which led to ongoing conjecture and uncertainty about what would occur. It particularly undermines the work that the two schools most likely to be in the government's sights—South Fremantle Senior High School and Hamilton Senior High School—are undertaking to enrol students. As required under section 56 of the School Education Act, which outlines the minister's powers to amalgamate and close schools, consultation with the community began. I have previously outlined concerns about the consultation that has taken place. My main objection is that without parameters or options, a lot of the consultation lacked form and direction.

The online survey, for instance, contained numerous motherhood statements, and some input was closed off for some respondents. For instance, parents of primary school students—that is, parents of prospective students for the amalgamated school—were not given the same opportunity to answer all questions as parents of existing high school students in the area were given. Another criticism is that despite lengthy presentations on the survey methodology and outcomes of the public meeting held in Fremantle on this issue, the comments section has not been made public. It would not be necessary to identify the people who made comments, but the content would be useful in informing this debate about what the community wants from this process. The form of consultation is in sharp contrast with other models used in other states—namely, an inner-city exercise in Sydney, which was a lot more extensive. I think if a similar process had been employed, it would have instilled a lot more community confidence in the process.

As I mentioned, a well-attended public meeting was held in June this year in Fremantle Town Hall. The Premier came to that meeting, as did the Minister for Education and senior departmental representatives. It would be fair to say that people were underwhelmed by that meeting, but the Premier made two clear points. When asked about resources to be allocated to the amalgamated school, he said that if an existing site were used, the exercise would cost about \$30 million to \$40 million. If a new school were built, about \$70 million to \$80 million would be required. Talking about these amounts raised significant expectations amongst the community about the additional resources that would be coming their way for the amalgamated high school. The second point the Premier made was that the decision on the amalgamated school would be made by the end of 2014. Since creating those expectations about the resources and the timing of the decision, we have not heard another word from government on this issue.

This grievance is about the need for the government to act decisively on this issue and not leave the community languishing. The government should make a sizeable investment in the amalgamated school to deliver the best possible school the state has to offer. The amalgamated school must guarantee a full selection of university entrance subjects on campus. What elements of the newly amalgamated school would give the Fremantle community confidence that the government is serious about this issue? We need a clear direction for change to ensure that the amalgamated school is not simply a matter of bringing two schools together—that is, as I have said in the past, it is crucial that the amalgamated school is greater than the sum of its parts. Yesterday when I spoke in the house, I referred to the Grattan Institute's February report this year by Dr Ben Jensen, "Turning around schools: it can be done". In talking about Fremantle schools, I make the very clear point that I do not think, on any measure, that we can describe our schools as underperforming. However, some of the literature on this issue is useful to look at so that we see some of the elements that can be contained within the amalgamated school. A key issue identified by Dr Jensen in his report is that it is crucial that policymakers embark on a method to commit all parties to reforming the school. Leadership is required on this issue, Premier. A clear plan for reform is crucial if the amalgamation is to succeed. So far, this has not been apparent, but it is not too late. The community I represent will reward the government's efforts and the school in spades by not only sending their children to the school, but being engaged and adding their contribution to the school community.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [9.56 am]: I apologise that I was not here earlier, but I was at a meeting with the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister about the search for MH370. However, I was able to get here to hear the member's grievance. This state government and I, as a Minister for Education during the

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 13 November 2014]

p8095b-8099a

Ms Simone McGurk; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Tinley; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Colin Barnett

Liberal government of the 1990s, have had a fair bit to do with the issues of school closures, new schools, school amalgamations and the like. It is not easy; it can be a very emotional issue in communities. Every parent is thinking about where their son or daughter might be in the schooling system.

The issue with Fremantle schools really came to my attention probably about 18 months ago when I attended a quite informal gathering in Fremantle involving the City of Fremantle, the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce, interested individuals and the like. It was really about having an open discussion on the future of Fremantle. The issue that came through most strongly at that meeting was secondary education. That is not what I necessarily anticipated, but virtually everyone there said that they thought one of the greatest issues facing Fremantle was that the results and opportunities and performance of secondary education were not where they needed to be. People also talked about a demographic change in Fremantle. Its population base is changing and people have increasingly higher expectations of opportunities, as they should. In particular, a lack of a strong academic program was discussed, and people pointed to the success of John Curtin College of the Arts and asked: why does the same not seem to apply at South Fremantle Senior High School or Hamilton Senior High School? They had a valid point, so I took that on board. As a government, we identified two areas—not to single them out, as other areas of Perth also need attention; however, we picked out two areas, Fremantle and the south-east corridor and the Armadale area, which generally do not have the level of opportunity or achievement that we would hope would be available in secondary school schooling. That is not a criticism of the teachers or the communities; it is just a reality. Also, a lot of the facilities are old and unsuitable and are not commensurate with what we would see at a new high school in a new suburban area. Our new high schools are absolutely magnificent, but that is not the case for older schools. That is where the issue came from.

To place the data on the record, in 2009 Hamilton Senior High School had 711 students; today it has only 441. There is a significant decline in enrolments. In 2009 South Fremantle Senior High School had only 474 students, so it was already small at that stage; this year it has 301. The decline in enrolments is a serious matter. In comparison, in 2009 John Curtin College of the Arts had 1 007 students and today has 1 106. Basically, its enrolments are stable, and it is clearly a leading school in Western Australia. There is clearly a need to improve strong academic programs. Every child, no matter where they live, should have a good opportunity and be encouraged, if they have the capacity, to go on to university study and to achieve their highest level of potential. People in Fremantle think that does not necessarily apply for their children; we need to correct that. Some of the schools have excellent facilities and excellent programs in the vocational area and they will not be lost if the schools are amalgamated. These are some of the issues.

As to consultation, the issue followed the meeting that I attended, so I think we picked up the ball pretty quickly. The department examined it, did a survey of parents and that information was collated and made available. In June this year a community meeting was held in Fremantle, organised by the education department, and attended by me, the Minister for Education and more than 200 community members. I do not agree with the member for Fremantle's assessment of that meeting. People got up and asked questions, as they properly should have, and some expressed views, and that was, I guess, really the start of the government looking more seriously and more closely at education in the area. A number of people came up to me after and said that it was great that we came to Fremantle, as we should have, and listened to public views. That was a good thing. I was pleased about that. I make the point that parts of Fremantle and North Fremantle are in my electorate of Cottesloe. Students in my electorate attend John Curtin College of the Arts and other schools, so I have an interest also as a local member. I therefore think that response was pretty prompt.

We gave a commitment that a decision would be made before the end of this year, and a decision will be made before the end of this year. It has not been made yet and the timing of it has not yet been determined. However, there are obviously a number of options. We can leave the status quo. To me, the status quo is not acceptable and not good enough. I think the people of Fremantle, the teaching fraternity in those schools and probably many of the students, realise that the status quo is not acceptable. We could combine the schools on the Hamilton Hill site or on the South Fremantle site, or we could get rid of both of those and build a new school. However, the numbers enrolled are simply not great enough to offer a strong academic program, to offer strong sports and arts programs and to offer strong vocational choices to a high level because, typically, a high school needs an enrolment of over 1 000 and probably somewhere in the range of 1 200 and maybe 1 400 or 1 500. That number also depends on the demographic and socioeconomic mix of the students. For example, a lot of students are immigrants and English as a second language for them is a factor; a high proportion of Aboriginal students is a factor; and so on. All those factors play a role, but I guess the rule of thumb is that the school needs an enrolment of about 1 200 students.

Time is running short. As a former education minister, I was involved in a reorganisation of secondary education. On one day the reorganisation took place of Shenton College in the western suburbs; Belmont City College in the south east corridor; Yule Brook College; Cannington Community College, formerly

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 13 November 2014]

p8095b-8099a

Ms Simone McGurk; Acting Speaker; Mr John Day; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Tinley; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Colin Barnett

Cannington Senior High School; John Tonkin College, I think it is called, in Mandurah; and Halls Head Community College. All of that happened in one day, so I reject the notion that the government is going slowly or that we will not act; we will. As I have said, the decision will be made this year, and I stand by what I say. Simply bringing the schools together is not enough; it also needs significant investment in both the facilities and the academic and vocational programs.