

FREMANTLE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

721. Ms S.F. McGURK to the Premier:

Given that it has been over a year since the government flagged that it would close and amalgamate secondary schools in the Fremantle area, I ask —

- (1) When will the Premier decide on what the government plans to do with secondary schools in Fremantle?
- (2) Will the Premier ensure that any newly amalgamated school will have a gifted and talented education program to drive increased Australian tertiary admission rank subjects?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

- (1)–(2) The reason that I, along with the Minister for Education, Hon Peter Collier, became involved in secondary education in Fremantle is that members of the community were unhappy. They were unhappy with their choice, with the curriculum and with some of the standards in that area. I think that they raised a fair point. As a consequence of that, I met with a group of civic leaders—for want of a better word—and they restated that view. They talked about the lack of education, or particularly the concentration on academic studies and a lack of opportunities for entry into university education for students in the area. They also made the point that Fremantle was changing its character from a traditional—if members will excuse the term—blue-collar workforce to a very aspirational workforce with people enjoying the ambience and attractiveness of Fremantle. All of those things were happening. So, out of good faith, I and the Minister for Education organised a public forum in Fremantle. I think over 200 people attended, and they were constructive. There is no doubt about it. Members of the community of Fremantle were highly constructive.

Ms S.F. McGurk: It was a year ago, Premier.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am getting to the member's point. The member for Fremantle was the only person who asked a bit of a sneaky question. Everyone else was very constructive and very positive.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Premier!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is the truth from the forum.

The SPEAKER: Premier!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Everyone else was positive except for the member for Fremantle. However, I think during the course of the meeting, she realised that her constituents actually wanted to see some improvement and she joined in constructively.

Ms S.F. McGurk: I asked whether there was any plan —

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I know what the member for Fremantle asked and I am just explaining the importance for other members who also share an interest in Fremantle and its development.

We had that forum, there were discussions and indeed I visited the schools. I walked through schools and talked to parents, but mainly to teachers, principals and a few students. The Minister for Education has said that he expects he will be able to make a decision on the structure of secondary education in Fremantle by the end of this year. I hope that we can do that, and I hope that decision will be well received. I make the point, and I made it at the public meeting, that if it involves the amalgamation of schools, which it may well do, there will need to be public investment in raising the quality of those schools in both their physical environment and also in their teaching and the programs they offer. I hope this will see an improvement in education in Fremantle. It may take some time to achieve but it is in response to community concern. More recently, we started a similar process in Armadale, an area where no doubt teenagers do not have the opportunities in education that they deserve. Is it not ironic that throughout the Labor years, those two areas of secondary education were ignored?