

SCHOOL EDUCATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [2.43 pm]: I am happy to have the opportunity to finish my contribution to the School Education Amendment Bill 2014 because it is an opportunity to talk about what a disgraceful job the government is doing in relation to high schools in my electorate. It is absolutely disgraceful. An announcement was made in August last year about amalgamating Fremantle high schools, but since then there has been no leadership whatsoever by this government. All the government has succeeded in doing is undermining the efforts of high schools —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I have two people speaking to me now. I do not want any more interjections. The member for Fremantle has the call. I want to hear the member for Fremantle.

Ms S.F. McGURK: All this government has achieved since the Premier made that announcement last August is to undermine the efforts of high schools in and around my electorate that are trying to do their very best to provide the best education possible. The government has instilled lack of confidence in the system and uncertainty when it should have been providing leadership, direction and parameters around which meaningful debate and consultation could have occurred.

Before question time I was speaking about the deliberations of the South Fremantle Senior High School council and its school community around what it wants in an amalgamated school. It wants an investment in the amalgamated school. It does not just want two schools put together and the government says, “That’s enough; we’ve done our bit; let’s move on to the next project.” The Fremantle community, as has been articulated by the South Fremantle Senior High School community, has laid out a program that they believe means that Fremantle would have the best possible high school that can be produced. Of course, John Curtin College of the Arts has been a very successful school, but it has an up to 95 per cent selective intake into the performing arts. The Fremantle area needs a general intake school. The reality is that most of the surrounding community is not eligible for intake into John Curtin College of the Arts. One thing that is crucial in the amalgamated school is a decisive policy to increase the number of university entrance subjects for students. Hamilton and South Fremantle Senior High Schools are in a vicious circle. Each has low numbers, so the selection of on-campus subjects is limited. There is a rider on subject selection on campus—students may have to go to other schools to undertake some of those subjects. That could be achieved by a gifted and talented program being installed in the amalgamated school. That would ensure an academic cohort comes into the school every year and starts to build a critical mass of students who would undertake academic subjects. I think that is crucial.

We need to capitalise on specialist programs that are already offered at South Fremantle and Hamilton Senior High Schools, including music, baseball, information technology, marine studies, and sustainability credentials. To date, South Fremantle Senior High School is still the only school nationally that has achieved carbon-neutral status. It has been very innovative in the sustainability area. If it was linked up with specialist programs and academic programs relating to science, that would be a natural fit to its marine studies work and, of course, the engineering trade training centre there. It is an incredibly impressive trade training centre. It could be utilised at the South Fremantle campus, if that is what is going to occur. We do not know for certain whether South Fremantle Senior High School will be the campus for the amalgamated school.

Not only is there a lot of passion, but also a lot of detailed work is being done by the South Fremantle Senior High School community and the High School Options for Fremantle group. Those two groups have done a lot of detailed work. One thing they have in common is they want to see the best possible quality government high school that the state has to offer. They want to see that installed in the Fremantle community. They want to see that provided by leadership by this government not only as an investment in the school, but also a specific outline of programs, which was spelt out in the Grattan Institute’s research in February this year.

I am glad that the Premier is in the chamber today as I resume my contribution to the bill, because I was reminding the house earlier that when he spoke at the public meeting in June last year, he admitted that the government had made no specific resource allocation in the budget for school amalgamations in Fremantle, but that an amalgamated school, if an existing campus were utilised, would require input of about \$30 million to \$40 million from the state government and a new school would require about \$70 million to \$80 million. That has significantly raised expectations in the community about the dollar input that would be made by this government to amalgamated schools. People know that it will take not just dollars, but other resources as well. They want leadership by this government about how it will ensure that we get the best possible high schools on offer in Fremantle, they want to see resources and they want a specific program for change. If the government

could provide that leadership, albeit late in the piece, we would see rewards in spades for the Fremantle community.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean) [2.51 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the School Education Amendment Bill 2014. This bill will make a number of amendments to the legislation governing our schools in Western Australia. It is impossible to talk about the specific amendments that have been proposed without first talking about the climate in our schools and the context in which these amendments will be made. Unfortunately, the current environment in which our schools are working is not good. Our public schools in particular are under siege from this government, which is doing its best to demoralise and cut the budgets of our public schools. The \$185 million that the government took out of Western Australian public schools in the first round of budget cuts has severely impacted upon Western Australian government schools. I know that from firsthand experience because I have been speaking extensively to schools in my electorate. The government has proposed amendments to the legislation at the same time as it is taking significant amounts of money out of our schools. Given that very difficult environment that our public schools currently operate in, I wanted to make mention today of the role that the parents and citizens associations play in trying to build that good environment so that kids can have the best possible education we can offer them. P&Cs play an extremely important part in building up the school community and enhancing that educational environment.

At Lockridge Senior High School, Yvonne Caldwell and Donna Morgan put in an enormous number of hours through the P&C to build up that school. They have worked particularly hard given that recently the government made a decision to build a disability justice centre on the boundary of Lockridge high school. That decision, apart from taking the school by surprise, was a kick in the guts to the whole school community, but in particular to the many parents who have worked so hard to build up Lockridge high school.

At Lockridge Primary School, just down the road, Rae Koha and Lisa Hill do an enormous amount of work for that school through the P&C. They, too, have been grappling with the government's decision to build a second disability justice centre on Lord Street, some 400 metres from Lockridge Primary School. The primary school and the P&C have put in an enormous amount of work to try to build up the educational offering for students at Lockridge Primary School, which is a rebuilt primary school. The government spent over \$10 million, I think, to rebuild that school, and to make the decision to build a disability justice centre some 400 metres down the road has been, as I said, a kick in the guts. I pay tribute to Rae and Lisa and the other parents for the amount of work they have put into fighting that particular decision and into the school in general. They are currently working on a family fun day, which I look forward to attending in a few weeks. Those are the sorts of voluntary hours that they put in on a regular basis.

At Bassendean Primary School, Tamsin Woodward and her team do an incredible amount of work. It is a great little school that is very well regarded by the community in general. It is suffering like the rest of them from budget cuts, but the P&C works particularly hard to add to what that school has to offer. I went to one of its sausage sizzles at Bunnings in Morley on the weekend. The volunteers would not let me anywhere near the cooking; they were not going to hand over the sausage tongs, so I was condemned to the main entrance of Bunnings, where I spruiked for an hour trying to urge customers to buy a sausage from the P&C on their way through. It is a great P&C.

Down the road from Bassendean Primary School are Ria Trevor and her team at Ashfield Primary School. It is a small community school that really struggles, but the P&C, led by Ria and her team, is trying to re-establish that primary school. It is currently working on raising enough funds to reopen the canteen, which has been closed for a number of years due to a lack of funds, and it is currently trying to refurbish a room so that the P&C has an area it can work from. Again, that school is suffering significant cuts under this government, and without the support of parents such as Ria and her team, the school would be much the worse for it.

At Eden Hill Primary School, Andrew Hayes is doing a fantastic amount of work. He and his team are working on the Eden Hill centenary next year. That is a huge event for the school. One hundred years should be celebrated. Unfortunately, the school has not been given any significant additional funds by the Department of Education to mark that event, so the P&C largely has to celebrate that event with the resources it can muster itself.

One of the three public high schools in my electorate, Hampton Senior High School, has a fantastic parent leader, Jacqui Otago, leading the P&C. It is a great school with a great specialist dance and drama program, but the school has struggled with poor facilities for many years. It is to the credit of Jacqui and the rest of the P&C that, working with the federal member, Alannah MacTiernan, they were able to highlight the poor state of some of the facilities, especially for those students who will be part of the first cohort of year 7s. She now has agreement from the government that it will spend, I think, \$900 000 on upgrading some of those facilities. I was speaking to one of the P&C representatives from Hampton last week and she went to the school as a student. She is now there as a parent of a daughter who attends. When her daughter enrolled, she had a look around the school

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Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Peter Watson; Ms Janine Freeman

and was shocked to see that some of the rooms had not changed since she was there as a student. That just highlights how desperately in need of new facilities that school is. Jacqui's hard work, along with that of the rest of the P&C, has produced a result.

West Beechboro Primary School is also a great little school that is very well regarded in the community. Tanya Greenslade and her P&C have done an awful amount of work there to improve it. The school has a very passionate principal and together they have done wonders to improve the standards in that school. The school had a reputation for being pretty tough, but because of the hard work that Tanya and the rest of the P&C and the staff put into it, it is now well regarded by the community.

Not far from West Beechboro Primary School is East Beechboro Primary School. Rose Elliot is the president of the P&C at East Beechboro. That school organised its first family fun day in many years, which took place on the weekend. An enormous amount of work was put into that event. They were a bit unfortunate that they copped at 38 degree day, but it was a great day. I was there for most of it and the support the school got from the local community was really tremendous. Students from other schools performed but the one group that stuck out was the Locko Dreamers, a group of Indigenous students from Lockridge Senior High School who performed a traditional dance. I know Rose was worried about whether the day would be a success, but everything I saw on that day showed that it was. It was a great community-building event for that primary school, not just amongst immediate parents, but the whole community. The decision was made to advertise that event quite widely and I think that was an excellent idea and it paid off. Again, that P&C led by Rose is doing a fantastic job.

Janet Udinga is a fantastic leader of the Anzac Terrace Primary School P&C. I have been to a number of that P&C's meetings since I have been elected. It is a good school with a good principal. Again, the P&C is doing everything it can to improve the facilities at that school, but, in my view, it is simply not being supported by this government. It is a shame that, again, it works in an environment in which it is asked to constantly put in more but is not supported by this government.

Finally, Michelle Hunt is another tremendous contributor and leader of the Beechboro Primary School P&C. I have spent a few mornings outside the school with her asking parents to sign various letters in respect of the education cuts at their school. It is a very multicultural school that I know has suffered with the loss of staff numbers. Again, Michelle Hunt is a fine example of a parent prepared to put in her own time for no pay simply because she believes that our public schools should really offer a first-class education to our students.

I wanted to mention those P&C leaders because on the one hand they are doing everything they can to build up our public schools and on the other hand we could be forgiven for believing that this government is doing everything it can to undermine confidence in our public schools, and that is absolutely a great shame.

I want to mention a couple of individual issues at some of the primary schools in my electorate. Firstly, I want to raise an issue currently playing out at Bassendean Primary School. Under the national school chaplaincy and student welfare program funded by the previous Labor government, that school made a deliberate decision to have a welfare officer, not a chaplain, because of the particular skill set that the school believed it required. That decision was made after consultation with parents. The student welfare officer has been employed by the school for, I think, three years, and it is extremely happy with the performance of that student welfare officer and what she has brought to the school community. The federal Abbott government has announced that it will change the national school chaplaincy and student welfare program in such a way that from next year only chaplains will be funded, not student welfare officers. That is an appalling decision. Here is a school that has decided to employ a welfare officer because of the skill set it wants. It is more than happy with the work that the officer has done in her school, but she will lose her job at the end of this year because she is not a religious chaplain. I find that absolutely extraordinary in the twenty-first century.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.J. KELLY: Here is an employee of the Western Australian education department employed as a student welfare officer at Bassendean Primary School who is doing her job and who the school believes is providing a vital and necessary role there caring for the welfare of the students, and she will lose her job at the end of the year because she is not a religious chaplain. That is appalling. How can that happen?

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: I don't think that is right.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for Belmont says that she does not think that is right. I hope when she finds out that this is in fact correct, she comes into this chamber and corrects herself. The Abbott federal government has changed the national chaplaincy and student welfare program to be a program that will fund only religious chaplains. That is a fact.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Excuse me, member, does that include Islamic clerics?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Provided a person is a religious chaplain, they can sweep through the door; they cannot be a welfare officer or someone who does not have a religious qualification. An education department employee is,

effectively, being sacked because of their lack of religious belief. The Western Australian state government has done nothing whatsoever about that issue. We are constantly hearing the Premier say that he likes to stand up to Canberra but on this decision he has simply allowed Tony Abbott to dictate what will happen in our schools. Imagine if the boot were on the other foot and an employee was dismissed because they held a religious belief. Imagine if we on this side of the house or any other party brought in a program that excluded people who held a religious belief. There would be an outcry, and rightly so. However, a school in my electorate is losing its student welfare officer because she is not a religious chaplain. That is an absolute disgrace. I encourage the member for Belmont to look into this decision because that is precisely what the federal Liberal government has done. By its silence and acquiescence, the state Liberal government has shown that it has fallen in behind on this issue. Parents of children in that school have come to me to ask what can be done. It is simply not acceptable.

One of the funny things I have discovered is that the principals in my electorate are very concerned about what is going on but they do not want to be named because they fear there will be reprisals. I will not name the school involved, but one principal told me recently that over the last two years his primary school has lost \$300 000 from the budget that school would have expected to receive had the round of funding cuts not been introduced. Because of that, the school has lost two teachers who were employed to assist students who had literacy problems. Like most schools in my electorate, it is a strongly multilingual school with lots of students for whom English is not their first language. I find it incredible that that school could lose two teachers, not education assistants, whom the school had employed specifically to assist students who had difficulty with English as their second language and literacy in general. It is incredible that this government can put in place a system of funding that will allow this to happen. If the government can say, “The schools in my electorate get the money they deserve”, as the minister has said on a number of occasions, I challenge any member of the government to come to my schools and tell me that those schools were overfunded.

One of the other primary schools in my electorate has had to discontinue what it calls its “literacy army”, which involved parents voluntarily assisting kids in kindergarten up to, I think, grade 1. In the very early years, when we know that sort of assistance can make a difference, parents would read to the children on a voluntary basis. People might ask: why, if parents are giving voluntary assistance, can they not continue? A program like that needs to be coordinated. It was coordinated by one of the senior teachers, who got, I think, 0.3 of an FTE in a working week for duties other than teaching. That was the resource that that school chose to put towards what it called the literacy army. The program had been run for years in that primary school. I do not want the Minister for Education to go back through *Hansard* and identify which school it was, but the principal told me that staff had come to his office in tears because they could not see how, with the withdrawal of funding, they could continue this program, a program they know has helped students greatly over many years.

I will talk specifically about Lockridge and Hampton Senior High Schools, two schools that will lose \$250 000 next year as part of the government’s redirecting \$45 million from high schools to primary schools. What an appalling decision. It is appalling for the government to cut \$45 million from public high schools in an attempt to make up funding in primary schools. I challenge any government member to come out to either Hampton or Lockridge Senior High School and tell me, the parents and staff that those schools are overfunded. They both do an incredible job with the money they are given, but to say that under the old system they were overfunded is just ludicrous. In ripping \$45 million out of high schools and putting it into primary schools, one of the conditions the government talked about in relation to schools being supposedly protected was that no school would lose more than \$250 000. That is an enormous amount but even that measure unfairly impacted upon schools such as Hampton and Lockridge Senior High Schools because it unfairly impacts on schools with smaller student numbers. Both schools have budgets of around \$5 million. A school like Shenton College has a budget of, I understand, about \$15 million. Therefore, \$250 000 out of Shenton College’s budget is a much smaller percentage cut than the same \$250 000 out of Hampton or Lockridge high school’s funding. Even by that measure the government is unfairly targeting those small schools.

As I said, the farm that operates as part of Lockridge high school is a great asset to the community. That sort of farm arrangement at a metropolitan school is somewhat unusual. Many primary schools come to Lockridge high school for a farming experience, and for the children at those primary schools it is an incredible experience. Lockridge high school is not just a petting zoo; it regularly wins ribbons against all comers at the Royal Show. The other day I heard that for Lockridge high school kids who participate in the agricultural program, the Royal Show is their grand final. They go there regularly and win; they beat all comers in many of the livestock categories. It is not just a novelty; it is actually an educational facility that gives students in my electorate another option. I hope that the education department can finalise discussions with the planning department. I am glad that the Minister for Planning is in the chamber. The school still does not have security of tenure over the land used by the farm school. The government is still playing hardball. The school needs long-term secure tenure

of that land. I urge the minister to give the land to the school instead of making it available only on another short-term lease that does nothing to put the long-term future of that school in a good place.

A lot is happening in schools in my electorate. Much of what the government is trying to do through this bill is dubious but by far the biggest changes it is making are to educational funding in my schools, and it is universally negative.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [3.21 pm]: It is not with great joy that I speak on the School Education Amendment Bill 2014. Before I start, I must do something—that is, thank all the teachers, school boards and P&Cs that work extremely hard to make up the shortfalls that this government has caused. It is no secret that when we go to a school, the first person to come out and say, “We are doing it tough” is generally the president of the school board. That is the person who knows what can and should be provided to their particular school. I thank those people for their endurance and ask them to remember where to put their tick at the next election because education will be one of the crucial issues at the next election.

It is estimated that the Collie–Preston area will lose around \$2.3 million of funding as a result of these cuts. That is an absolutely huge amount when we talk about our children’s future. That is what we are talking about—the future of our kids to be educated to a quality that is acceptable to Australians, not to a quality that suits just some people. In the future, the children of those people who have money will be able to go on to universities and become some of the leaders in our society while, unfortunately, many children with a far greater ability to think logically and wider and to move on in society will be excluded because their parents will not have the money to go forward. That goes right through the system under this government, whether it be a school system, an education system or a trades or training system. We have got to the stage that it is becoming a case of user pays. We know what happens when it is a user-pays system: the rich get on and the poor get poorer because they cannot afford the education to go forward. I have already seen that happen with one of my constituents who applied for assistance for the so-called voluntary education fund for the schools. The money that my constituent would have had would have assisted her children to study higher courses within the curriculum that would have enabled them to go forward, but it was paid into the voluntary fund. I found it very confusing that moneys that were available to assist a child were paid to the school. The school made a decision to put that money towards the school’s funding and not towards the child’s education so that they could have a higher level of education and be able to pick the classes they wanted to attend. I think they were talking about science and mathematics, which I would have thought were part of the base curriculum and which parents should not have to pay for. The classes for these two subjects were at a higher level. It made it very difficult for that child to achieve their desired outcomes as their parents could not afford the fees. It was not a huge amount of money, but that parent was doing it tough. The so-called “help money” went to the school, not to the child. I think that is something that has to be adjusted and looked at through legislation. I believe the minister could make a determination and make changes through regulations because the word “voluntary” is not really true. It may be voluntary if a parent is not stuck, but if a child wants to go on to higher education and needs to do extra classes that have to be paid for, the fees still come out of the parents’ own pockets. If they cannot afford the first classes, how can they afford the second?

I know that this woman stuck to her guns. She is really passionate, not only for her family, but also for other families in the future who find themselves in the same position that she did. She said that she could have been bullied and put into a pay-off system, but the policy is wrong. If the word “voluntary” is there, it should remain so. If funding has been made available for these people who are in a spot of bother at that time, that money should be allocated to the child’s education, not to the school fund. I think there is a big difference there and people should look at it and ensure it does not happen to anyone else. This woman has gone through a lot of trauma worrying about how she will get her three children through higher education—not just be educated, but be able to go on to university or whatever when they are in a position to fund themselves. It is really disappointing that I have to stand here and say this because the minister has refused to do anything and has said it is the school’s prerogative. I do not think it is. I think it is the minister’s job to ensure that every kid who wants to go on to higher education and who demonstrates that they cannot afford it is provided with money to fund their education, not the whole school program.

At the other end of the scale, I also see kids with disabilities being disadvantaged in schools as a result of education assistants being taken away and the schools cutting programs that were in place for these children. I have already given assistance to two young students so that they can travel on a bus to Bunbury to get special needs help down there. Their results and their improvement have been remarkable. It is a very good program. But then the school says that those two have gone and they ask about the next two at the bottom of the chain. Those kids come under pressure and the pressure goes down the line, with parents asking if I can assist by sending their kids to Bunbury. These young primary school children with disabilities are forced to go to a special school in Bunbury, travelling 60 kilometres each way. The word “forced” is probably language that is a little

strong to use in this place, but there are not many other options to take up. That is certainly the other side of what I am talking about. The system itself is failing those people.

I have said in this place before—I really mean this—that we are heading towards the stolen education generation. If people cannot afford an education or they have a disability and there is no assistance within the classroom, what happens when they get out of the school system? Where do they go at 17? They may not have been brought up to an acceptable standard to get a job which some would call demeaning but which others would say they are happy to have because of the system that we have. It is very hard to say to a parent that we cannot help them, especially when it comes to education.

It is my belief that if the budget had to be cut and tightened up, a ring should have been put around existing funding and it should have been left at that. They should have been told to work within that funding over the next three years because then they would know how much they were getting. At the moment it is cuts, cuts and more cuts, and they are starting to hurt all our children from the top to the bottom end.

The other issue is the pay-as-you-go system—the American system. Every Liberal member on the government side of the house should be absolutely ashamed that we are going down this road, especially when only a fortnight ago we farewelled one of the great Prime Ministers of our time who, despite the many other faults he may have had, could see that if every Australian had a chance of getting an education, we were increasing the value of society. Unfortunately in today's world we are now saying, "What is happening with the kids of today? Why are they out on the streets? Why are they playing up and turning to drugs?" A lot of it is because some of them cannot read or write. What chance have they got in life? Who do they turn to? The system has failed them and we will see more of that in the next 10 years if we do not correct the wrongs that have been done.

In my electorate a huge amount of cuts are coming through, let alone the tax of \$600 per teacher and \$400 for other employees under the superannuation scheme. That is a tax on the schools that the schools will now have to pay. I will read out a list of all the schools—to be fair—in my electorate that have had cuts: Allanson Primary School has 127 primary students and it has had a cut of \$39 000; Amaroo Primary School has 447 primary students and has had a \$136 000 cut; Australind Senior High School has 974 secondary students and has had \$445 605 cut from that school; Boyanup Primary School has 129 primary students and has had a cut of \$39 000; Capel Primary School has 374 primary students and a \$114 000 cut; Collie Senior High School has 473 secondary students and it had a cut of \$216 000; Dalzellup College has 632 secondary students and a cut of \$289 000; Dalzellup Primary School has 817 primary students and a cut of \$249 000; Dardanup Primary School has 205 primary students and a \$63 000 cut; Eaton Community College has 425 secondary students and a \$194 000 cut; Eaton Primary School has 416 primary students and a \$127 000 cut; Fairview Primary School has 267 primary students and a \$81 000 cut; Glen Huon Primary School has 487 primary students and a \$149 000 cut; River Valley Primary School has 89 primary students and a \$27 000 cut; Tuart Forest Primary School has 229 primary students and a \$70 000 cut; and Wilson Park Primary School has 124 primary students and it has had a cut of \$38 000. When we add that up, we find that a huge amount of money has been removed from education in just one electorate. Education is a must if we want to be a leading light by world standards in the future.

Sometime ago the Prime Minister talked about the Closing the Gap program, but he seems to have forgotten about that very quickly. Closing the Gap was about providing extra funding to help advance Indigenous students, yet this government today is forcing some of these students into major towns where their education will go out the door because the facilities will not be available. The bright lights and the alternate lifestyles that they are not currently living, which is why they live in some of those communities, will certainly distract them from pursuing an education. The Prime Minister says one thing and this Premier and Liberal government say another. It is an absolute disgrace that this government has even gone down that line. Some of the individuals from the desert communities have decided to take their children away from the crime, the drugs and the alcohol found in some of the major towns in the north west. They have taken them away from that environment and will now be forced back into it. This is a rewrite of history, albeit slightly different, and of what has happened to Aboriginal people over time. We give them land rights and then we take away their right to learn their own way in some of those remote communities. It beggars belief that this is happening in this place.

I return to education in my electorate. In the run-up to the election, \$7 million was promised to upgrade Collie Senior High School. It was in the budget but it has now been removed from the budget. I remember that great election photo that the government had out the front promising \$7 million from the Liberal Party. I thought, "Gee, that is going to be tough to match", but it was not really because it was a false promise, like many other promises that this government has made over time. The school board and the headmaster of the school are now very disappointed with that promise. They were cock-a-hoop about it at the time, but now the people are saying to me, "Well, we did believe them, but we will not believe them into the future." That school urgently needs that \$7 million. It has problems with asbestos and drainage, and also with the classrooms. Some of the rooms are that old—I think my name is still scratched on the wall in some of them—and small and in disrepair, that the school

really needed that \$7 million. What can we believe about this government when we talk about education? The one thing we know is that we can put up the price of education for every family. That is what it will come down to. The smaller items that were previously covered under the school budget will now become paid-for items. Before a child can be in any class that has extra studies or excursions, their parents will have to pay. If they cannot pay, the child will sit in the corner and be treated like a leper because his parents could not afford the money for him to go on the excursion. Is that the way we want our schools to go into the future? I do not think so. We have to again look at our Australian policy, not an individual state government or federal government policy, and the issue that all Australians should get a fair go. Under this government, I do not see that happening. As a member of the opposition, I am pleading with the government to please put some money back into education in the next budget, especially for education assistants. Kids that are highly vulnerable are being left to their own devices in a class or put into rooms. We are going back to the old style of teaching. We brought them into mainstream education and now we are letting them down because they are being treated differently at the schools. It is appalling that any government or Australian would accept that.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [3.38 pm]: I thank members for the opportunity to talk on the School Education Amendment Bill 2014. I have been a member in this place for 14 years and I have never seen an education system damaged as much as this one has been damaged in probably the last six years.

Mr J.H.D. Day: You have a short memory.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Have I? Could I have protection from these vicious people trying to attack me? If they want to say something, they should stand up. They are here for one term and then they will be gone, so they should not worry about it. I have been here for four terms. Going by what has happened in my community, the government is trying to dumb down our education system. It is taking away staff and money, and it is increasing fees. If a person wants to go to TAFE or university, they have to pay more. How are we encouraging our young people to further their education? We have an extremely good TAFE in Albany but a lot of people in Albany cannot send their children to TAFE because they cannot afford it. A lot of people are sending their kids up to the mines, but they do not get an education, and the mining boom will not go on forever.

So they will go up to the mines and earn money, and all of sudden the mining boom will finish and they will come back down here and they will have nothing to do, and although they may have a bit of money for a while, after a while it will all go away.

We have the situation in Albany at the moment where the year 7s will be going to high school. That is putting a heck of a lot of pressure on one of our schools, Albany Senior High School. Albany Senior High School is probably considered to be the better school, with better facilities, and North Albany High School has always been the poor neighbour. However, because Albany Senior High School is such a large school, what will happen next year is that all the main subjects for the tertiary entrance examination will be held at Albany Senior High School. That means that students who live on one side of the road in Albany and who go to North Albany Senior High School will have the option of about 10 or 12 subjects, but students who live on the other side of the road and who go to Albany Senior High School will have the option of 30 or 40 subjects. This is supposed to be an equalised education system. However, students who live on the other side of the road will definitely not be able to go to Albany Senior High School because of the year 7s coming up. There are people who are renting a house near Albany Senior High School and getting all their bills sent there, when they are actually living on the other side of town, just so that their child can go to Albany Senior High school and have the option of doing all the subjects that they need to form their career. I would probably do the same thing. If I wanted my child to get the best education, I would do everything I could to achieve that. If students who live in the area of North Albany Senior High School want to do a certain subject that is not available at that school, they have to go to a private school. A lot of parents have said to me: What is the government trying to do? Is it trying to get us out of the system so that it will not have to spend so much money? We have excellent private schools in Albany. We have Great Southern Grammar. We have St Joseph's College. But those schools are becoming full very quickly. That means that some people in Albany will not have the option for their children to go to those schools. What will they do? They will shift out of Albany and go to Perth, and that will put pressure on the Perth schools. The roll-on effect is just horrendous for people in my electorate.

I will go through how some of the schools in my electorate will be affected. I will read a letter to the state government from concerned parents at Albany Primary School —

As a parent of two children at a WA Government Primary School, we applaud the professionalism and dedication of our school's educators. We have observed teachers working in difficult circumstances in several classrooms, dealing with children who rely on the support of our hard working and invaluable team of education assistants to get through the school day.

Some students with special needs depend on the WA state government for extra support through the provision of an education assistant in the classroom. That support goes some way to keep the classroom

safe and helps to facilitate a calm and structured environment for all students in the class to develop and learn, not just the student with special needs. Given the lack of access to psychological and other allied health services in the school setting, the education assistant is often the only resource consistently available to support these vulnerable students.

We have seen at first hand, that, in some situations, children can become unsettled, disruptive or even violent. Without the input of our skilled education assistants, we believe the stress on our teachers and students would be too much to bear and would lead to burn out, a drop in school attendance and poorer learning outcomes.

Even within the current level of funding, teachers, assistants and senior staff at our primary school are under constant pressure trying to manage the special needs and behaviours of a number of students. These support services need to be boosted and we believe that to cut them shows how out of touch political leadership is with classroom reality.

Thankyou for considering these points,

At Albany Primary School, the number of education assistants will be reduced. That means that teachers will have to spend more time with high-needs students, to the detriment of the majority. That will mean that the children who want to do really well will not have the opportunity to do that, because without the education assistants, the special needs children will become disruptive in the class. I do not think that has ever been taken into account by this government. Education assistants help all children to be all that they can be. If we take away those education assistants, it will affect every student.

There will also be cuts to teachers' professional development. This will particularly affect country areas. It is all right for teachers in Perth—if they want to do professional development, they can get a bit of time off during the day, or half a day, and go to a course. But when teachers live in the country, it is not that easy. Our district office is in Bunbury, which is probably two and half hours' drive away. If principals want to go to a meeting, they have to go all the way to Bunbury, because there is only one person in charge there who can do all that. They cannot go to Perth anymore, because there is not the money to do that. Teachers in regional areas now cannot get their professional development, because of all the cuts. Professional development keeps teaching professionals interested and motivated. Cutting professional development will disenfranchise teachers and limit students from reaching their potential.

Much-needed upgrades to playground equipment, building enhancement and fencing cannot be completed within the current budget. That places more pressure on fundraising from a community that already has substantial financial pressures. Every school in my electorate needs to undertake fundraising. I know of teachers who have to buy paper and pencils and art materials for their students. This is not recognised. They are spending extra hours every day on doing these things. There are fewer quality reading materials available for purchase or replacement. There is almost no professional training due to budget restraints. Schools cannot afford excursions, because the cost is too high to pass on to parents due to insufficient in-school subsidies. Constraints are placed on certain activities—for example, camps—due to staffing limitations, with insufficient funds to release staff, teachers and education assistants. There is inflexibility of programing due to reduced funding, with the jettisoning of “extraneous” courses such as robotics, and hence a reduced ability to extend gifted and talented students. Teachers are increasingly using their own money to pay for teaching aids—for example, stationery and art material. There is also the future possibility of being able to afford only graduate inexperienced staff, as senior staff are too expensive to employ.

Spencer Park Primary is another one of my schools. The cuts to public education have affected Spencer Park Primary School schools by a reduction in the base staffing allocation from 1.5 to 1.2 full-time equivalents, at a cost of \$33 330; eliminating the junior primary education assistant role, 0.4 FTE, at a cost of \$21 008; reduction in the student support program resource allocation, at a cost of \$34 000; and long service leave liability commitment, at a cost of \$18 070—total cost, \$106 400. I know Spencer Park Primary School very well and it does a tremendous job in its education support and in all the work that it does, on a limited budget from what it had before. I have just been appointed to the special education unit at Spencer Park. This school cannot cover this cut in funding. The member for Collie–Preston talked about how special education provides the opportunity to give young people a future. Spencer Park Primary School has a lot of Indigenous young people. I am on the board of Mount Lockyer Primary School, and I know all the problems we have out there. We need these education assistants and these Indigenous people to come into the schools and help our young people. The Premier said today that we have a situation up north in our —

Mr M. McGowan: Outback communities.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, our outback communities. However, it is not only our outback communities, but also regional areas such as Albany. We have a very large Noongar community, and they face some of the issues that they face up north, such as health issues, violence issues, children coming to school without food, and parents

who are absent so the grandparents are looking after the children. All these things add up if we do not provide the money. We had a behaviour program at Mount Lockyer Primary School that was extremely successful, and it has now been cut; there is no money for it. There were also reading programs at Lockyer; at every meeting they would show us the progress of these young Indigenous people and the confidence they were building. Their parents would come into the school and be involved in the school; it was just amazing, but now it has all been cut. It is not only disappointing for the children; it is disappointing for the educators. These people have spent a lot of time doing a lot of work and, bang, overnight the money is gone so the support has also gone. The children then lose interest and become more of a problem for the school, and the whole thing escalates from there. It is extremely disappointing.

The cuts to public education have also affected Albany Senior High School. It has had to cut spending across all budget areas by 25 per cent and curb expenditure on purchasing equipment, classroom furniture, resources and maintenance of buildings and grounds. A portion of the lost FTE was traditionally placed into the school salary pool and spent on teacher relief while staff were away, and on taking students on excursions or camps; the school now has to fund this cost. I remember a front-page article in *The West Australian* in which the Minister for Education was quoted as saying that all these schools had money in the bank; well, I would have thought it was a good thing for a school to be clever enough to look after its money. A lot of the time they are using those funds to buy, for example, buses for the school so that they can get extra students in and increase the reach of education, or to send students on camp as a reward for good work; but instead, the Premier and the Minister for Education are saying that these schools have all this money. They have that money because they want to use it on their school and their staff because there is no money coming in for maintenance. Albany Senior High School has been there for a long time, and it is crumbling around the students. Unless some money is put into it in the near future, it is going to cost them a lot more in the long term. The loss of FTE at Albany Senior High School has also resulted in all lower classes having a minimum 32 students; historically, classes were run with approximately 28 to 30 students. The loss of FTE to level 3 teachers also puts extra duty and time obligations on staff. These extra duties covered things such as assisting with the year 7 transition, information technology and the School of Instrumental Music. Provision of district-wide maths has also ceased.

I turn now to the examples of Mount Manypeaks Primary School at Manypeaks, which is probably 50 kilometres from Albany, and Wellstead Primary School at Wellstead, which is 100 kilometres from Albany. These children do not get into town very much. We used to have a brilliant music teacher there, a former Scotch College student, who came down south for the lifestyle; I think he still lives in Manypeaks. Since I have been in this job, he has managed to get every student in every class in Manypeaks, Wellstead and South Stirling Primary School, which is also in my electorate, playing a musical instrument. He begged, borrowed or stole to get instruments from Scotch and many other schools. I always looked forward to going to the end-of-year assemblies at those schools, because every one of the children, from kindergarten through to year 7 formerly and now year 6, could play an instrument. He has now gone; they cut the funding, and he has gone. In regional areas, the people who do this work in schools are the heart and soul of the community.

I return to Albany Senior High School and the way in which the cuts to public education have affected that school. In 2013, it had \$196 841 for school support programs; in 2014, the amount is \$138 655, so the cost to the school is \$58 185. There is now only \$48 000 for long service leave and \$12 000 for postage and communication. Loss of staffing and changes to teaching have resulted in a total cost to the school of \$100 000. These are schools that used to run on a shoestring. I have been involved with the schools and their boards; they used to run on a shoestring, but now everybody is walking around in thongs because they cannot afford shoes.

I might just seek your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are talking about schoolchildren, so I would like to talk about the schoolchildren who performed in the Anzac commemorations in Albany. I was very proud to stand there, 10 rows back, during the Anzac commemorations to watch the march.

Mr M. McGowan: I could see you back there!

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, I was sitting with the Leader of the Opposition, 10 rows back!

I was very proud to see young people marching in the parade, the cadets from Great Southern Grammar who actually led the pipe bands, and to see the pride in their faces. There were cadets from all the other schools there also; it was a tremendous atmosphere, and I was tremendously proud to be an Albanian! I know that everybody in Albany was very proud of that weekend, and I cannot thank enough people; there were more than 400 volunteers. The people of the City of Albany were absolutely fantastic in setting it up. All the dignitaries were there, and there was marching. We did not have the horses but there was everything else. The Royal Australian Navy Ceremonial Sunset on the Friday night was a sunset you could not buy. I know that everyone who attended was very proud and I congratulate the state government, the federal government, the local government and everyone involved. As I say, I could not have been more proud; everywhere I walked around Albany on that day and the day after, everyone said, "Gee, it's good to live in Albany. I'm proud to be an

Albanian.” We were very, very lucky to have had great weather and I would like to congratulate everyone involved especially, as I said earlier, the young people and cadets who marched in the parade and volunteered all weekend. It was a great occasion and, as I say, I was very proud to be an Albanian.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka) [3.57 pm]: I also rise to contribute to debate on the School Education Amendment Bill 2014. Like other speakers, I want to highlight the great work of teachers and staff at schools in the Mirrabooka electorate. Strangely enough, neither Mirrabooka Senior High School nor Mirrabooka Primary School are in the Mirrabooka electorate, but I include them in the broader area because the children of many of the constituents I represent go to school there. I get many opportunities to go along there when they showcase their students and their activities, so I want to acknowledge the good work they do, particularly in this difficult time of change. One of the principals, when talking about leading into 2015, said that she felt as though she was heading into the perfect storm, because losing year 6s and 7s at the same time as the loss of the national partnerships funding, the massive debate on the changes to the curriculum and the cuts to schools that have occurred under this government have been very difficult for that principal to manage without feeling quite stressed. From that principal’s point of view, there is no fat, no support programs and no English as a second language teacher. The Mirrabooka electorate has a diverse community with multiple languages spoken in many schools; some can specify 70 different languages other than English spoken in their school.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.