

**SCHOOL EDUCATION AMENDMENT BILL 2012**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 17 October.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro)** [12.09 pm]: I am the lead speaker for the opposition on the School Education Amendment Bill 2012, and at the outset I indicate to the minister representing the Minister for Education that the opposition will support the bill, and that we endorse the objective of including in the compulsory years of education an additional year of preprimary schooling, so that in effect this state will have 13 years of compulsory education.

I also indicate to the minister that there will be a number of speakers on this bill, because obviously education is vitally important, and a number of members on this side wish to contribute to this debate. I understand that the member for Alfred Cove may wish to contribute as well. I also indicate to the minister that I would like to go into consideration in detail on this bill, not because we are in any way objecting to the bill, but in order to elicit some information, and I will be giving the minister an indication of the sort of information that I am hoping to garner from the advisers that the minister will have with him in the chamber.

I will say at the outset that there is a line in the second reading speech that indicates where I intend to go in this debate. That is the statement that the intention to extend compulsory education by an additional year was announced by the Premier on 8 December last year. What was also announced on 8 December last year was the shift of year 7 students into high school. The point I want to make is that there was very little consultation about that announcement. There was also no transparency with regard to the planning for that move. Subsequently, there has been very little advice to the house or to the public of Western Australia on how well prepared, or otherwise, the Department of Education is for accepting year 7s into high school in 2015. Therefore, I am interested to find out how much additional planning been put in place to prepare for this move to an additional year of compulsory education—which will come in advance of the move of year 7s to high school, because it will occur next year—and how much resourcing has been allocated to it. We know that for the move of year 7s to high school, the resourcing is completely inadequate. We know that the funding for high schools to accept year 7s has been given to only 29, or about one-third, of the high schools around the state. We know that there is a great deal of consternation in the community about the move to constrain the schools that did not receive funding by requiring them to take in only students in their local catchment area. That undermines a number of specialist programs that have been built up over the years by dedicated community, family and teacher groups in those schools. We know that there has been very little, if any, transparency about what workforce planning has been done to prepare for that significant shift of year 7s to high school in 2015. So I will be interested to know from the minister's advisers what the consequences of this amending bill will be, because it will be enacted in a much closer time frame—that is, next year. I will also be interested to know whether there has been adequate workforce planning and adequate resourcing, and whether any modelling has been done to determine whether the education department is prepared for this move.

As we go through the second reading speech, we are alerted to the fact that the Australian curriculum will come into force next year. That is part of the reason that it is proposed to make the preprimary year part of the compulsory years of education, because that is the age at which the Australian curriculum will become applicable. But there are questions about how well prepared the Department of Education is for the introduction of that curriculum.

The Barnett government has slashed the education budget. In 2009, it cut the education budget by \$41 million. In the May budget, it cut the education budget by another \$30 million. The Treasurer recently—in September—slashed another \$6 million from the education budget. We know that that \$6 million cut—that final straw on the camel's back—has had a significant impact on the professional development of teachers. It has had a significant impact on the ability of particularly regional and country teachers to travel to the city for professional development training. It has also imposed restrictions on the ability of central office staff responsible for preparing the state for the national curriculum to travel around the state. So I am interested to find out whether those cuts have had an impact on the preparation for this move. The government has not been at all forthcoming with information about those cuts and the impact of those cuts. The government continues to claim that the cuts are not hurting front-line services. But we know that they are. We know that there are significant impacts now on front-line services in education in Western Australia as a result of the harsh budget cuts made by the Barnett government in recent times; and the most recent cut is having the greatest impact.

We also know, because the Treasurer has told us, that the cuts are having an impact on the ability of the education department to recruit people. So it will be interesting to learn whether a proper workforce plan has been developed to support the move proposed in this legislation, and also to know whether the departure of

people from the current workforce will impact on the ability of the education department to enact that plan and provide the services that are proposed.

Another area that I am interested in, and that I would certainly like to investigate during consideration in detail, is the planning and preparation for the challenge of improving education services for Indigenous children in regional and remote communities. Indigenous students are still significantly behind non-Indigenous students, particularly in literacy, but also numeracy. I will ask the minister's advisers a question about this matter, and I hope that the advisers that the minister has here will be capable of answering this question, because it goes to the heart of a significant statement in the second reading speech. That statement is that messages are being developed specifically for parents of children with special needs, and parents of children from diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal families. I do not know what that means. I do not know what the messages are. I want to know what they are.

I also want some more information about some of the claims made by the government this year. I understand that the federal government gave the state a significant amount of reward money for improvement in literacy rates for, I believe, Indigenous students in years 5 and 7. I will be interested to know what that \$27 million, I think it was, of reward money was given for, what was successful, and where it was successful. I am also interested to know exactly what our system is for analysing that success, and for conveying the message about what we did right to the entire system, because that will go to the heart of whether this will be successful. We will not be successful in communicating with the Indigenous families of Western Australia and getting them to get their preprimary kids into school if we cannot tell our own system what we have done right in Indigenous literacy improvement that resulted in this state getting a \$27 million reward. I have to say, as a forewarning for the minister's advisers, that I go around the schools and I talk to principals, and I talk to representative organisations of teachers and principals, and no-one has been able to tell me what we did right to get that money. I am concerned that we do not have a systematic response to good things, let alone the bad things.

I am also concerned about the superficiality, perhaps, of the process that results in that reward money being given. I say that because it does not take too much delving into the results from our National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy testing to raise quite a few questions about Indigenous literacy levels in this state. For instance, the Centre for Independent Studies has put out a media release saying that Western Australia is second only to Queensland in improving Indigenous education. That is, I understand, why we were given that reward money. But it does not really highlight some of the negatives. Those negatives are pretty significant. One negative that I think will be very important to the effectiveness of this move to make preprimary compulsory is the statement in the Centre for Independent Studies' 2012 report on Indigenous education that Western Australia has a large absentee problem and seems to have great difficulty retaining Indigenous students to year 9. But, also, we have the lowest participation rates in NAPLAN testing in the country.

I understand that the reward money that we receive is given for NAPLAN results; I assume that NAPLAN is a component of that literacy analysis. I wonder whether our outcomes are because we are getting better or because fewer Indigenous kids are sitting the test. We know that the number of students whose whereabouts are unknown to the Western Australian education system has tripled over the course of the Barnett government. It has gone from 400 under the previous WA Labor government to well over 1 200 this year; it was 1 500 last year. There has been an outrageous increase in the number of students whose whereabouts is unknown. There is no effort to tackle truancy. There is no effort to bring a complete, whole-of-government response to find out where these students are and why they are not in school and to develop some sort of response. Sending coppers to the local shopping centre in between responding to burglaries and violent assaults is not a response to truancy. It is a ridiculous, absolutely pointless and superficial response that was intended to achieve nothing other than a front page in the local newspapers, which it achieved on the day that it was announced. There were a couple of follow-ups and the odd reference to it by the Director General of Education and the Commissioner of Police every now and again when they are asked about it—but that is not a response. That sort of ridiculous, superficial response will not get these children into preprimary.

These are the sorts of things I want to know. When the people of Western Australia are told, as they were in the second reading speech, that messages will be developed specifically for parents of Aboriginal families, I want to know what the government is talking about. I want to know that it is not silly, fluffy rabbit commercials that cost \$240 000, which could have been spent more effectively on doing something about education, rather than advertising on television during the Olympic Games when advertising is really expensive to tell us that public education is a good thing. I want to know that it is more than that. I want to know that we will get something that is real and backed by bodies on the ground to do the job of going out to these Aboriginal families, particularly in remote communities, particularly in damaged communities where there is a serious issue that needs to be tackled from the very beginning through education, using education as the tool for identifying and isolating the problem and developing a response, and bringing all agencies of government to bear in breaking down some of the siloing that bedevils the response to this challenge. I want to hear about that. That should be part of the planning for this

legislation. Yes, this is only a small bill and a small amendment, but it is a significant change. There should be resources, planning and a comprehensive response attached to this move.

I am disturbed by the second last paragraph of the second reading speech, which reads —

It is anticipated that the implementation of the compulsory preprimary year of school education in 2013 will not incur an additional cost to government.

When I was in the military working with the Army, the special forces guys used a term that is used right throughout the Army, not just in special forces. They referred to “situating the appreciation”. They had a process for determining a way ahead and developing a plan. It is a very structured, good process that enables anyone from the most junior ranks up to generals to develop a comprehensive plan and to avoid overlooking significant points. They call that an “appreciation”. They start by analysing the situation comprehensively—your side, the enemy’s, geography; all sorts of different factors—and they work through the appreciation and, as a consequence of working through the structured process, they come to a conclusion. They used to say is that if you situate the appreciation, you decide what conclusion you want, and then you go in front. You lift that right over the top and put that in front of the situation part of the appreciation and say, “This is what we will find; therefore, we have to change our situation to reflect our conclusion.” The second last paragraph in the second reading speech states —

It is anticipated that the implementation of the compulsory preprimary year of school education in 2013 will not incur an additional cost to government.

I fear that this is an example of the Barnett government situating the appreciation. The Barnett government is saying, “We have blown the budget. We have destroyed the state’s debt situation.” This government has gone from debt of \$3.6 billion when we handed over from the excellent management by the member for Belmont as the Treasurer of the state during those two terms of the Labor government. The Barnett government has blown debt out to over \$18 billion now. It is on its way. It is soaring northwards—that phrase that the Treasurer likes to use, “north of \$1 billion”—and this is north of about \$20 billion, it is north of \$22 billion. It is on its way. It has destroyed the budget; therefore, the government has no money to spend on important things such as education. It is too busy spending it on Elizabeth Quay. It is too busy destroying the traffic flow along the foreshore of the Esplanade and annoying everyone in the western suburbs. It is too busy building the “Emperor’s Palace”. It is too busy building monuments to the ego of Premier Barnett in the centre of the city to worry about funding essential processes such as educating the children around this state. That is a stark example of where the government’s priorities lie. Look at where the government is spending money, and then look at what it says.

This legislation is not as big a change as moving year 7s to high school in 2015, but it is a pretty significant move. We will make preprimary schooling compulsory. We will make compulsory education 13 years rather than 12 years. A whole cohort of children will be caught up in this. A whole generation will either benefit or suffer as a consequence of our preparation or lack thereof. When I say “our”, I am being very generous—it is actually the Barnett government’s preparation or lack thereof.

I am interested to see during a short consideration in detail stage what preparation has been made and whether the Barnett government is getting its solution, stating that it will not cost anything, and then working through and making everything comply. That is the method employed for managing the budget elsewhere. The government states that it will not grow the workforce and will achieve a certain efficiency dividend, which is just a cut. It will cut the budget but it will not impact on front-line services. We have seen it in policing, we know about it in education, although the government is refusing to acknowledge it, and we know about it in health and other services that have already taken the cuts in 2009. In 2009, the education department said that it cannot cut any more. It was supposed to make cuts of \$71 million. It said it had only made cuts of \$41 million but it could not make the rest. It was cut some slack. The government acknowledged that it could not make those sorts of cuts in education and continue to provide a standard of front-line services that the people of Western Australia expect. How are we to believe that now in 2012, after education made those \$41 million of cuts in 2009, it is all okay? We could not make any more cuts in 2009, but now we can make cuts of an additional \$36 million and it will not impact front-line services, it will not impact professional development of teachers, safety standards in high school, essential travel required for preparing the schools for the Australian curriculum next year, and our planning for the biggest change to education probably in the last decade in the shift of year 7s to high school. It will not impact any of those things. We are expected to believe that view, but we are not given any evidence to support that argument. I will ask for that information. Those are the areas of interest. Those are the reasons I would like to go to the consideration in detail stage. It is not because we do not support this bill; we do. It is a good move, but I want to know more and I believe other members on this side of the house will have other questions to ask about education that their constituents have raised with them. This is an opportunity for them to air their concerns and the concerns of their constituents. The implementation of this move will cost the

Department of Education time, effort and resources, and we have to wonder what impacts it will have elsewhere, because there is no extra money coming in for it.

Those are the things I will be very interested to talk to the advisers about. With that, I will sit and allow some of our other speakers to make their contributions, because I think there are quite a few.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [12.30 pm]: I rise to contribute to the second reading debate on the School Education Amendment Bill 2012. As mentioned by the member for Warnbro—the opposition’s lead speaker in this debate—it is in many respects a very simple bill that seeks to make preprimary schooling compulsory in Western Australia. Most preprimary-aged children are already in school, so in some respects there may not be a significant increase in numbers, but there will of course be some changes in numbers. I will be interested to find out from the government what arrangements there are for children in alternative education such as Montessori and Steiner, whose parents may not wish them to start school at preprimary level. We have received indications that the minister is prepared to consider requests from parents who send their children to Montessori and other alternative education schools to have their children’s entry to school delayed. We will be interested to hear from the government about that.

There will always be debate about when children should start school, and for a number of years the trend has been to start at an earlier age. In 2001, the school entry age was raised by six months, which meant that most children were older when they started school, so in many respects it makes sense for us to have a legislative mechanism in place to make preprimary schooling compulsory. That, of course, has raised issues at the other end of primary schooling, and the government has indicated that it will make year 7 at high school compulsory from 2014, I think.

**Mr P. Papalia:** It is 2015.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** There will be some leeway in country areas.

The government’s way of operating is to introduce legislation, which of course is what governments do in Parliament, to change things. But this government seems to have the mindset that legislation on its own will solve all problems or be the solution to pressing political issues, and never more so than in the area of law and order. I will be interested to know what resources will be attached to the changes proposed in this legislation. As I said, there may not be an enormous need for an increase in resources because many children are already in the preprimary education system, but it would be interesting to know what the percentage increase of children going into the preprimary system will be as a result of the compulsory element of this bill.

Resource allocation becomes very, very important. I have been incredibly disappointed by the government’s lack of resource allocation to education in general. In my electorate a number of schools have pressing issues that require extra specialist staffing, and it is my understanding that very little extra money has been put into education, especially in the more needy areas of society where there perhaps needs to be a greater involvement of specialists to cater for potential problems at the home environment level. Increasing preprimary resources is also important—not just because there will be more students attending preprimary, but because it is a fundamentally important area of the education cycle. Recently I was speaking to the principal of one of the schools in my electorate and I said, “Look, if you were made education minister, what would be your number one priority?” Without hesitation he said early childhood education. The government has gone missing on the issue of early childhood education. It would have been great if, in conjunction with this relatively simple bill that will make preprimary schooling compulsory, we had a complementary bill for early childhood education. It is often too late by the time a child gets to school at the age of five or six; there is a need for early intervention, and for that early intervention to work we need to pump significant additional resources into the education system.

We also have to educate many of the parents. As some members of this house will be aware a school in the Armadale electorate, Challis Primary School, has a fantastic early childhood program that was initiated by the principal. She basically had to work outside the Department of Education in many respects to make significant gains. She has involved the parents in the education of their children and also educated them to be good parents. If a child starts school at four years of age and is unable to read, write, count or even hold a basic conversation, and there has been major trauma at home, teachers have a very difficult time making any significant change. As this principal was telling me, the area of early childhood education is where governments need to focus a considerable amount of resources in the education budget. Yes, there is logic in making preprimary schooling compulsory, particularly since the school age was changed in 2001, resulting in most kids starting school six months later than before; but we have to go beyond that and look at how we are going to increase the allocation of resources to the area of early childhood education.

The member for Warnbro made reference to the issue of the education of Indigenous children. I will be interested to know what policies, strategies and resources the government has put in place to ensure Indigenous children and other groups in society with a generally bad track record in school attendance comply with the legal requirement of compulsory preprimary schooling. It is no good making preprimary education compulsory if we do not have any strategies in place to ensure that people who have historically had trouble attending school on a regular basis will conform with the legislation. What strategies does the government have in place to ensure Indigenous children and other groups with a poor record in school attendance will comply with the legal requirement to attend preprimary? I will be interested to hear the government's response to that.

I was shocked also to find out how long it takes for the Department for Child Protection to intervene if children do not attend school. My understanding—please correct me if I am wrong, minister—is that the child has to be absent for a considerable amount of time before the Department for Child Protection will become involved. Of course we want to learn from history; we do not want governments to intervene and take children away from their families if that can be avoided. I am not arguing that kids should be taken away from their families; I am arguing that the Department for Child Protection and other agencies need to intervene when children do not attend school. A child can be away from school for two days in a fortnight, or even two days in a week I think, without the Department for Child Protection intervening. I may not have that completely correct; it might be two days in a fortnight. But even two days away in a fortnight over a year or two, or even three or four, is a considerable amount of time for a child to be away from school. As we know, there is a direct link between absence from school and antisocial behaviour, criminal activity, possibly bullying and other negative developmental factors that affect a child's ability to grow up and make a significant contribution to society. Governments and oppositions have to change their mindset about education. The Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration, Robert Reich, who is an economist and now an academic at the University of California at Berkeley, wrote a brilliant book that I read a few years ago, the title of which escapes me at the moment.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** *Locked in the Cabinet.*

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** That is it—*Locked in the Cabinet*. Thank you, member for Girrawheen. It is an excellent book. He referred to the need to change our mindset when we look at the budgetary calculation for education. He was quite radical in his view. He argued that education needs to be taken out of the budgetary process because it should be seen not as an expense per se but as an investment that will be recouped later. By investing a dollar, the nation will become wealthier by \$3, for instance. But because we are stuck in this mindset of education being seen just as an expense not an investment, the ability of government in the political process to invest in education is severely limited. It is well known that the more educated a society is, the more productive it becomes, the greater its economic progress, the better the health outcomes, the better the community cohesion et cetera. Although Robert Reich made a radical proposal, he is not a radical economist in any respect; he is a Rhodes scholar who had a senior portfolio during the eight years of the Clinton administration in a period when even the Republicans would agree the economy was well run. Hopefully, in a few hours, there will be another four years of Democratic rule.

**Mr P. Papalia:** He's won.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** He has won? I believe that President Obama has been re-elected. That is fantastic news.

Robert Reich, who was well respected by both sides of the aisle in Washington and is now a leading academic and commentator in America, has stated that we need to look at the budget allocation of resources for education in a different manner from that which we have previously. We are hamstrung if we look at it as purely an accounting expense rather than an investment. If the government also made announcements when it introduced this bill about significant resource allocations for early childhood education, it would have gone a long way to improving the future economic benefits to society. Rather than worrying about introducing a future fund, which has very limited benefit in the current and future economic cycle, greater expenditure should be put into education. I am sure that no member of the government or the opposition would disagree that we should be putting more money into education, but because of the need to balance resources and so forth, decisions are made.

**Mr P. Papalia:** To build palaces and foreshores.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** That is right. It is an issue of priorities. As the member for Warnbro mentioned, one wonders what wealth will be generated and what future benefit there will be for Western Australian society from Elizabeth Quay vis-a-vis increasing the resource allocation to preprimary education. That is a question that can be answered only one way.

**Mr P. Papalia:** There's \$440 million or whatever for Elizabeth Quay, but \$36 million is being cut out of the education budget.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Yes; it makes no sense whatsoever. I urge the government to rethink its priorities. It has many priorities wrong. One of the major priorities it has wrong is not elevating the need to have a properly funded education system. Many, many children are leaving the government education system for the private education system. I think they are.

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** It's actually levelled off for the first time in 15 years.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Rubbish! Absolute rot!

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** The trend has been —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Armadale, you have the call in this debate and I do not want anybody from either side interjecting on you.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Thank you for your protection, Mr Speaker.

Whatever the actual figures, there is no doubt that the trend has been movement away from the government system to the private system. We always will and should have the ability to choose the system we want, but if there has been that movement over a period of years, one has to be concerned about the resource allocation in the public education system.

**Mr P. Papalia:** There are 470 fewer year 8 enrolments this year than there were 10 years ago. In that time, the population of the state has grown by 25 per cent. So anyone suggesting that somehow there has been a plateauing of enrolments is completely engaged in spin and nothing else.

[Member's time extended.]

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** In addition, there is a need for greater emphasis on, and a greater resource allocation to be granted to, early childhood education. While I am on my feet, I recognise the great work done in policy development in this area by Hon Linda Savage from the other house. She has produced substantial work in this area. I think it is very important for that issue to be looked at. The experts are telling us that early childhood education is fundamental to the future success of a child and the future success of the education system, because if we get that right, there will be less dysfunctional behaviour as we move up the chain of the education system and therefore maybe we will not need to allocate as many resources to try to correct that dysfunctional behaviour at the upper primary school and high school levels. As we know, year 7 children are moving from primary school to high school. There are two main reasons that the government has made that decision. The first is the national curriculum. The way that the science curriculum is designed makes it very hard for it to be complied with in the current primary school science curriculum in Western Australia. That was one reason the government had to agree to year 7 students going to high school. The other reason was that private schools had decided that year 7 students would be in high school. Over the past few years many children left state schools at year 6 and went into private high schools in year 7, so the government had to look at that. The jury is still out on whether year 7 students should be in high school. But, as a couple of teachers have told me, with that change in 2001 in which children start on average six months later, many children in year 7 are ready for high school; so there is a maturity aspect. I still have concerns about year 7s being in high school from a social perspective, but basically that argument is over; the decision has been made. I do not think the government had any choice.

**Dr M.D. Nahan:** You taught, didn't you? Did you have year 7s?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** No; that was a long time ago. I do have a concern, but the horse has bolted there. In some schools that have years 1 to 10 the transition is not so great; but if a student goes from one school into another school, it can be quite stressful. However, over time that will become the norm and that stress will be removed.

As the member for Warnbro said, the opposition supports this bill, which in many respects is a minor bill but in one respect is significant as we are making something compulsory. Even though most people already send their children to preprimary school, it will now become compulsory. We have to look at how we will ensure that children who come from sections in society that do not send their children to school on a regular basis will comply with the mandatory provision of this legislation.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan)** [12.52 pm]: I rise to talk briefly on the School Education Amendment Bill and make some comments on what the member for Armadale said about children at risk, in particular. The Labor Party supports compulsory attendance in the preprimary year. However, the more I have looked at what is happening in our community and talked to people, the more I realise we need a fundamental shift in how we deal with our children. Some issues are emerging, such as children not attending school or children being unable to

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Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Rita Saffioti; Dr Janet Woollard; Acting Speaker; Mr Andrew Waddell

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read and write after going through the compulsory years of education. These are fundamental problems in our education system. I do not think we have the answer to those problems yet.

The way we deliver services in the community through our departmental structures is a bit out of date. I have been thinking about this over the past number of weeks after talking to more and more school principals, more presidents and members of parents and citizens and parents and friends associations, and more parents. We are not doing as good as we should be doing. I know we use this line quite a bit, but in a state as rich as WA we should be doing better. We should not have children not being able to read and write after going through the education system. That is an absolute disgrace. I do not think we have the structure of government or service delivery that will achieve what we need to achieve. We need to fundamentally reassess how we deliver services in the community. Again, to use another very common term, we often talk about the silo mentality, which is one issue; but there is also the issue of how we deal with people in the community. There needs to be a lot more outreach and a more proactive approach to how we deal with our children in the community, so that that we are not responding in eight years' time when the problems are so significant that we cannot fix them.

Let me look at some of the issues that we see when we are driving or walking around our streets. We see young kids walking the streets with absolutely no care or responsibility about going to school. We see the tragic outcomes of high-speed chases in which young people are driving cars and, basically, killing not only themselves but innocent people. That should not be happening.

It is a question of resources and how we go about our business. The opposition supports making another year of schooling compulsory, but that is not enough. The work done by Hon Linda Savage highlighted the importance of focusing on the zero to three years age group in particular. But we need to ensure that children over three years of age do not miss out because their parents are not in a position to assist them or, in the situation that I encountered recently, because even though the parents are diligent and caring they cannot seem to get the services their children require because our system is a bit too rigid.

We need to rethink how we do business. We cannot have a situation in Western Australia in which we see things like the Perth Waterfront development and the "Premier's Palace" going ahead while the government is not delivering a fundamental and key service like education. If we do not get our children's education right, they will lag years behind or will be lost to education forever. In WA I think we are increasingly seeing some disparity between those who do not have opportunities and those who do. That is increasingly becoming an aspect in our community. I do not want Western Australia to go down the path some other states have taken, in which there is a big difference between the well off and the not so well off. I do not want to be like other nations that write off a person, a group, a cohort or a suburb because we have not structured our system in such a way that will deliver those key services.

As I said, those are some fundamental problems, but I want to talk briefly about the issue of resourcing. I know that resourcing and funding are not the answer to everything, but one issue that needs to go hand in hand with this bill is an insurance act. All schools must have the ability and resources to deliver the education that children require in these early years. One of the examples put to me was that although schools were doing more and more in the early childhood learning area, they do not have the resources; they are not buying the books. There is no program that will ensure that schools have the resources to teach the children. I was given an example of a school in my electorate that does not have the resources to teach its five-year-olds and six-year-olds; I am not sure exactly why.

I also want to talk about the lack of flexibility in the way the Department of Education operates. A situation arose at the beginning of this year with a family that was living across the road from a school that the two older siblings attended. This family also has a four-year-old. Its aim was that the four-year-old would go to the school across the road. I am not exactly sure why, but because of the rules that four-year-old child was not able to attend that school with their siblings. That four-year-old lives across the road from the school that their brother and sister attend but, even after significant lobbying of the Department of Education on the parents' behalf, there was no flexibility to allow that four-year-old to attend that school. I know that we need rules and I know that we need some regulations, but at the end of the day is it not about looking at the circumstances of an individual child on any given day and what is best for that child? I have not got up to date on what happened with this four-year-old. However, do we not want to create incentives and do we not want to ensure that those children go to the school they had planned to go to? I was therefore very disappointed in that situation in that, because of the bureaucracy, what was best for the child did not eventuate.

As I said, I also have recently been looking more and more at the debate on the method of teaching language. I understand that there are different names for the method, but let us call it "explicit instruction" or "direct instruction". One of the reasons I am interested in this debate is that I have very young children who will be entering the three-year-old and four-year-old programs. I have therefore been trying to acquaint myself very significantly with these types of teaching. Another key reason that I am very interested is that one of the

principals in my electorate who I have talked to quite a bit is a great proponent of explicit instruction. Like I said, there are different names for it—explicit instruction and direct instruction. I understand it is all about teachers teaching children how to read. It is slightly in contrast to the whole-language approach, which I understand is all about children immersing themselves in the language, knowing a word and therefore being able to read the word. It is therefore seeing a word and knowing what that word sounds like. As I understand it, explicit instruction is more about teaching the components of the word; therefore, back to the whole idea of phonics as well.

I have one principal in my electorate who is very, very keen on this method of teaching and who has shown me some results that are happening within their primary school. I must say that I have been, I suppose, taken aback at the results that are being achieved; and, moreover, what is being done more generally to assess this type of situation. As I said, I am acquainting myself at the moment with this whole sort of theory between whole language versus explicit instruction. I do not even pretend to be anywhere near an expert on this issue, but I do raise those questions again about how children can go through our education system and not be able to read and write at the end of it.

I understand another aspect of explicit instruction is that it helps in teaching some children with learning difficulties. Again, I am not an expert, but I intend to inform myself more and more about this way of education because I think that it does seem to bring a lot of benefits to children—that is, all children including children at risk and children with learning difficulties.

The opposition therefore supports this bill but believes that making another school year compulsory will not create better outcomes. There is a lot more that we need to do to ensure that our children get the education they so richly deserve.

**DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove)** [1.03 pm]: I am pleased to support the School Education Amendment Bill 2012, which will introduce compulsory preschool attendance. I acknowledge Jenny Day who is in the Speaker's gallery and who, with Barry Cable and some others, several years ago founded the Community Development Foundation, which later commenced a school passport program and which I will discuss later.

I also acknowledge the support that has been given by the Liberal–National government over the past few years into early childhood development. I congratulate both the Minister for Health for the funding that he has put into child development services and the previous Minister for Education who has lobbied hard for the funding of early childhood centres at schools—I believe in the next few years there will be 20 of these.

Some of the debate on this bill today has been about general education issues. As you know, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P.B. Watson), our committee—the Education and Health Standing Committee—will be presenting next week, hopefully, our report into education outcomes for all ages. I therefore will not address some of the issues that have arisen today that the committee also looked at but will address those next week when we present our report.

In relation to this bill, I guess it is important to acknowledge that the Council of Australian Governments in its National Partnership Agreement on Communities Making a Difference said basically that all children benefit from schooling, which promotes social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, and in particular Indigenous children. That is why for many years now we have had funding to try to close the gap between Indigenous children and non-Indigenous children. But there is still a long way to go. Again, as we mentioned in some of our earlier reports, some simple things can be done to help close that gap, such as the Minister for Health in this place funding a mobile surgical unit and facilitating child health nurses to do ear checks to try to prevent ear infections. But back to this bill.

**Dr K.D. Hames:** We are going to do that—ear checks. There is a big program for ear health.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I am so pleased. I am hoping that Hansard got that on the record. Thank you, minister.

We are aware that high-performing schools are often able to engage with families and that through that engagement there are obviously benefits to children's education outcomes. We know that the earlier we get parents involved with a child's education, the more positive will be the outcomes for that child; therefore, earlier contact with parents and families has to be supported in all schools. We particularly need to focus on that earlier contact with parents and families when there are children at risk. We know from the Australian Early Development Index the various domains in which children are at risk and are failing. We know that there are Aboriginal students in remote areas who are failing and we know that there are children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are currently failing to achieve education outcomes.

I would like to discuss something that is very relevant to this bill, which is how parental involvement can be fostered in our schools. That is where the Community Development Foundation comes in, because it has developed a school passport program that we know has led to significant impacts on the way parents

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 7 November 2012]

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Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Rita Saffioti; Dr Janet Woollard; Acting Speaker; Mr Andrew Waddell

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and families are involved in local schools. This has been acknowledged not just in WA, but also in other states across Australia, and other countries are now starting to look at this. The Australian Trust Company has recently given money to Social Ventures Australia to prepare a strategic framework for the Community Development Foundation to roll out the WA passport program nationally. We could say that WA is leading the way with this program, which has resulted in parents and families throughout WA becoming involved in their local schools. I will name some of the schools later. Results show that this has led to less school absenteeism. Absenteeism is a serious issue in WA. The program has led to less school absenteeism and better educational outcomes.

I would like to initially show members this map and chart, which shows the schools that are currently participating in the program and new requests from schools wishing to become involved. As we can see, the numbers have grown from four schools participating in 2009 to 44 schools participating in 2012. Now, in 2012, an additional 49 schools want to sign up to become involved in this program, but they need some funding from the government to do so.

This chart shows the family involvement for just 23 primary schools in 2012. This chart shows that 1 222 families participated in the program in just 23 schools. I do not know whether members can read the names of all the schools. Mr Acting Speaker, am I able to ask whether these charts, which have been provided to me by the Community Development Foundation, could be incorporated into *Hansard* along with my speech?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson):** I will look and make a decision.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Could we look at them?

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Yes. Obviously it does not need to be that size; we can reduce them. This chart shows that 271 families are involved in the passport program in just five district high schools. About 40 schools are currently involved in the program in WA and many, many more—up to about 70—would like to be involved in the program. I will hand over this chart to you, Mr Acting Speaker.

The passport program actively involves parents or guardians with the schools as early as possible. The passport program makes the school a gathering hub for the parents. Only the other week the Premier came along to a ceremony upstairs at which nine people involved in this program were given awards for the wonderful work that they have been doing. I thank the Premier for coming along and acknowledging their contribution to education and welcoming them and congratulating them. Through this program the school becomes a gathering hub. The program has been found to unite teachers; encourage parents to become involved in the school; and assist students by not only encouraging them to attend school, but improving their educational outcomes through increasing attendance. This program also caters for the cultural and linguistic diversity of students in schools. I will now show members this chart, which demonstrates that there are now 150 culturally and linguistically diverse families in just 14 of the 40 participating schools. This program is getting to children who need that assistance.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** How many charts do you have there?

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** There are only 10; they are very important.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Are they related to the bill?

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Very much so, because this bill is all about compulsory education. Compulsory education ensures equity in education. This program helps provide that equity because it is particularly being used in schools identified as schools in need by the principals, the Department of Education and others.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, it is a very, very long bow.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Maybe we can look at them together, Mr Acting Speaker. They are very important. Mr Acting Speaker, I am sure you listened to what the other members were talking about. They were talking about the need to give more assistance to Aboriginal students and culturally and linguistically diverse students and families, and that is what this program does. I now show members this chart, which shows that 381 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are involved in 25 of the 40 schools participating in the passport program in WA. It shows that the program is getting to those in need. I will hand up this one to you, Mr Acting Speaker.

When I spoke to some of the principals the other week, I learned that the program involves parents and businesses from the local community. At one school several students' parents are in custody. The principal went to the prisons and organised for those fathers to do work at the prisons that then went towards earning dollars as

part of the passport program to assist students at school. Not only could the children see the benefits and that their fathers were trying to help them, but the prisons reported that the behaviour of those fathers within the prisons improved.

The advantages of the program include increase in school attendance and the breakdown of barriers between parents and government services. Breaking down these barriers is important because it helps not only the children currently at school, but also other children in the family. As parents become more active within the school community, they learn more about early childhood development. They might learn more about the need to take their younger children along to the child health nurse for those early assessments. They might learn more about immunisations for their children, including younger children in the family.

Through the program parents receive school dollar credits as a reward. The dollar credits assist parents to pay for school fees, lunches, school excursions and school uniforms. The money is used to benefit the students and the families. As I said previously, the program also encourages outside organisations such as local businesses to become involved and to contribute to local schools. That is because the program has an online program attached to it that identifies the type of activities that parents are involved in in the local schools and how the passport dollars are redeemed by parents. This chart shows that 124 community members are involved in 14 of the schools. The schools on this chart include Gosnells Primary School and Halls Creek District High School.

[Member's time extended.]

*Ruling by Acting Speaker*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson):** Member, I will make a ruling on your request. Standing order 86(1) states —

Following the request of the member speaking, the Speaker may direct the incorporation into *Hansard* of material such as statistical tables, graphs and charts, to which a member has referred in debate but which are not suitable for presentation in the ordinary course of a speech.

We will accept these graphs. Does the member have them on a thumb drive to make it easier for Hansard?

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I will give them to Hansard on a thumb drive immediately after my speech.

As I was saying, the program also involves community members. This chart shows that there are 124 community members from 14 of the 40 schools, including Gosnells, Halls Creek, Katanning, Redcliffe, Roseworth, Tranby and Wirrabirra. The program not only involves the parents, but also brings the community together and gets the community to contribute towards early childhood education. I mentioned that there are 124 community members.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** You described what is on the graphs so you do not need to incorporate that one. That is what the standing orders say. You have described it, so you do not need to put a graph in *Hansard*.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I did not say how many people were at each school. I could go through that again.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** If every member asked to incorporate these types of graphs, Hansard would be flat out for 12 months of the year. There is a bit of leeway going on here, but if you are going to read them out, we will not accept them.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I accept your ruling. The previous graph showed that there are 124 community members in 14 schools. These community members give thousands of hours to the schools in which they participate, as shown by this graph. This program has been constantly monitored and evaluated since it commenced. This pie graph shows members how the dollars that are earned by the parents assist students at the school.

I will go through the next chart because it relates to just one high school. It shows the type of activities that parents can be involved in. The parents at Halls Creek District High School help out at P&C fundraising events, they help out in the classroom, they help out with the passport program and they help out with reading in the classroom and working one on one with the students. They might stay with children and do puzzles and read stories. They attend school assemblies. They help by making classroom resources and they also go on excursions and assist with carnivals.

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 7 November 2012]

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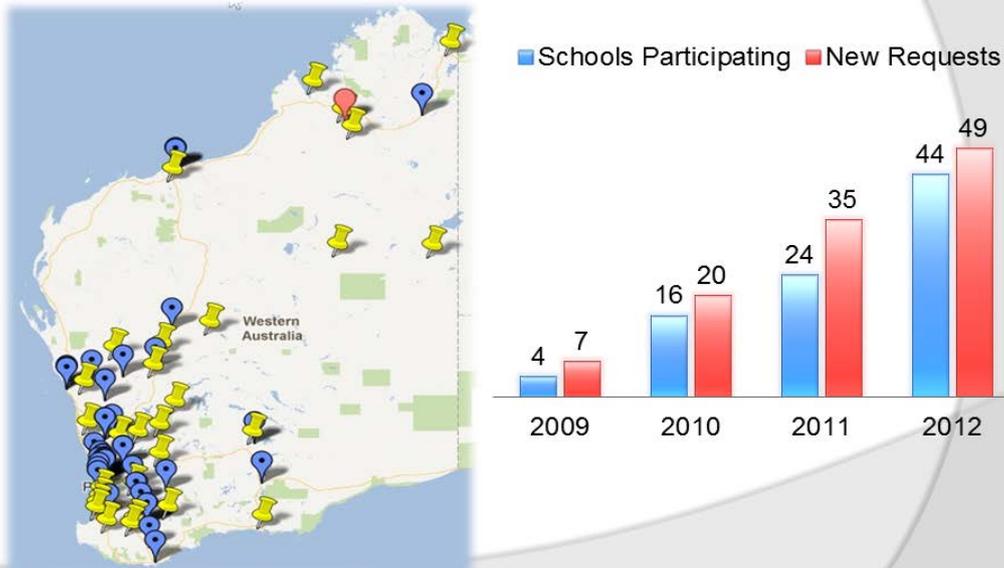
Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Rita Saffioti; Dr Janet Woollard; Acting Speaker; Mr Andrew Waddell

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**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, there are three graphs here that I do not think qualify. If you want to read from those and get them into *Hansard*, you can, but these ones could quite easily be read out. They do not qualify under the conditions of the standing orders.

The following material was incorporated —

### WA SCHOOL SNAPSHOT –PARTICIPATING VS NEW REQUESTS

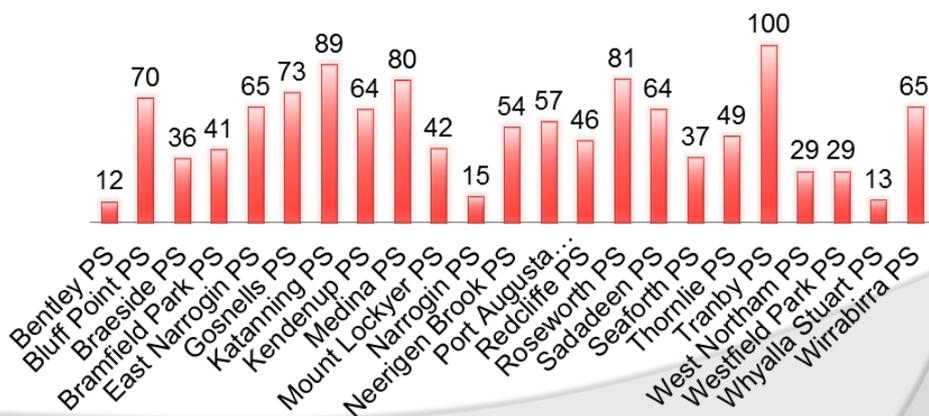


### Family Involvement in the Passport Program in 23 Primary Schools. Term 4, 2012

**1222 Families in 23 Schools**

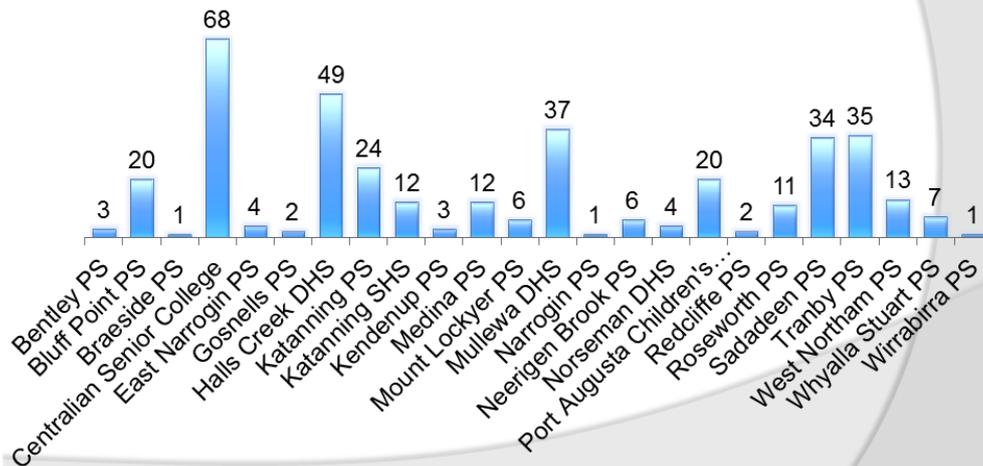
Number of Families involved in the program in each school

■ Number of Families



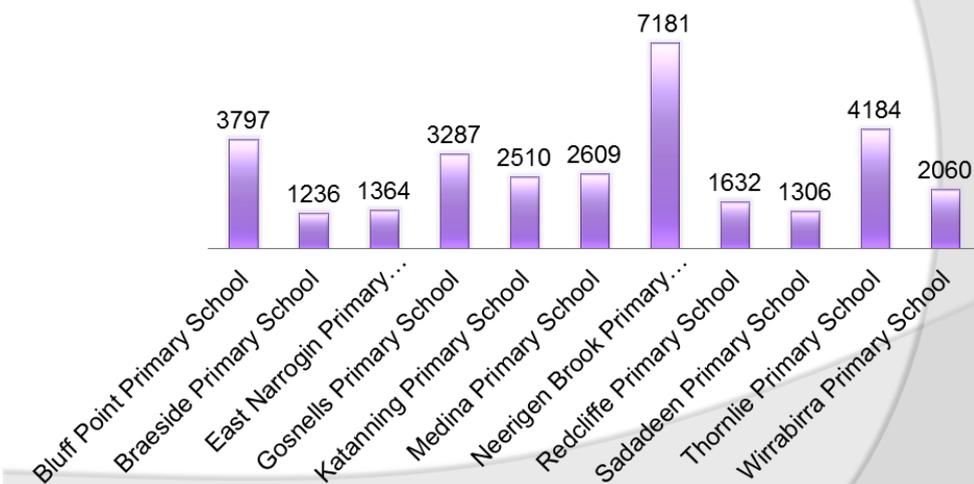
### Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families in the Passport Program

**381 Aboriginal Families in 25 Schools**



### Total Number of Hours Volunteered in 28 Schools 2012

**39,593 Volunteer Hours in 28 Schools**



**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will carry on and then come back to those.

The final pie chart shows how the program has assisted children at Roseworth Primary School in Girrawheen. It shows that 62 per cent of the dollars earned have been spent in the canteen, 28 per cent of the dollars earned have been spent on swimming lessons and school fees and 10 per cent of the dollars earned by the parents have gone

on excursions for the children. It really is helping children whose families may not be able to fund things that are being funded through this passport program.

The bill that is on the table will mean that there is compulsory schooling in the early years. Through these graphs I have shown how this program is currently working in primary schools and high schools. Next year the passport system will be extended to three-year-olds. As you know, Mr Acting Speaker, through the work that we have done on the committee, those first three years are very important in influencing a child to be ready and able to start school and later succeed in school. Hopefully when this trial is extended to those three-year-old children, it will raise the awareness of the parents to that early contact with children, as it has done in primary schools. It will make parents more aware of other programs for children of that age, such as the universal child health checks and the immunisation programs. Where implemented, it will start to provide a tracking system on those children. The government met with the Child and Adolescent Health Service but it does not yet have all the data at the level that it wants to ensure that all children are followed through. This will be one way of trying to help those children.

One school that the passport program is being introduced to is East Narrogin Primary School. Prior to the passport program, there were no Nyoongah parents participating at the school and now there are 20 Nyoongah parents with 50 children using the program. There has been a 30 per cent increase in attendance at that school as a result of the program.

At Medina Primary School the school passport program has increased Aboriginal parent participation from 10 parents to 40, and I believe I was told that was on a weekly basis. That is a big number of parents becoming involved. The parents there are involved in breakfast clubs, lunches, literacy, reading and assemblies.

Tranby Primary School has also taken up this program. Previously it had only one to two parents involved in the school; it now has 77. Wirrabirra School now has 50 parents—initially there were only 15. Avonvale Primary School is very interesting because at the recent awards Pat Davis, who is an elder in the Northam Nyoongah community, a languages other than English teacher and an Aboriginal and Islander education officer, and who came along for an award, referred to the Making up Lost Time in Literacy—MULTILIT—program and said, according to my notes —

If we had this program which uses the Passport Program as incentives, our kids who are now in year 9, but still can't read would have been different, it would have been different for these kids because they would have gone high school knowing how to read and write.... alot of them dropped out.

From the evaluation done on this program, we know it is actually helping children throughout their school years. Engaging parents with the school community as early as possible is helping children to attend school and improve their performance.

We were talking earlier about absenteeism: in 2009, 12 per cent of students at Avonvale Primary School fell into the severe risk category for attendance, which means they were missing the equivalent of about five years' schooling. After targeting those children and their families through the passport program, that figure decreased to two per cent. It made a big difference on the rate of absenteeism. I have been told that one of the female Nyoongah students targeted for the passport program at Avonvale improved her reading by four years in 18 months—a vast improvement in her reading skills.

As I said previously, compulsory preprimary schooling will help to ensure that more children start off on an equal footing. The passport program, particularly if it is applied to the zero to three years age group, will get parents involved very early on, and so will help those children. Western Australia is leading the way with this program, and it has already been adopted by South Australia in schools in Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Port Broughton and Maitland. The Community Development Foundation has heard that the South Australian education department is hoping to roll it out across their region and is currently looking at that. The program is also running in the Northern Territory, and four schools in Alice Springs have embarked on this program because they have seen how beneficial it has been for students and families. I believe that the foundation has recently been contacted by, I think, education authorities in China because, again, they had heard how well this program is running in WA and would like the benefits of this type of program to be applied to children in that country.

I look forward to discussing the School Education Amendment Bill 2012 further during consideration in detail. I again congratulate the government for introducing compulsory preschool to try to ensure that all children start off on an equal footing, and I commend the passport program to the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson):** We incorporated those papers, member, into *Hansard*, but if you could provide the thumb drive, that would be great.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker; I will get that now.

**MR A.J. WADDELL (Forrestfield)** [1.36 pm]: I think the research is in, and it is fairly incontrovertible that the early years are some of the most important in our children's lives, and that every dollar we invest in their education and health as early as possible pays off in many, many ways later in life. It pays off not only in the health of the child and the child's ability to learn and to actually enjoy their schooling years, but also in their ability to contribute to the greater society as they move through into their working years.

It is also a very useful tool to identify problems that might be present in a child at an early stage in their life. Hon Linda Savage has done a lot of work in this area, and I think she has drawn the attention of many in this place to the fact that if we can identify the learning disabilities and other health disabilities of children at a very early stage in their lives, often remedial action and treatment courses can be delivered to those children that will enable them to overcome whatever minor or major disability they might face, which will enable them to lead full and productive educational and, later on, working lives.

I do not think we can underestimate the value of that to our society. A small investment at three or four years of age can actually result in a saving of millions and millions of dollars to greater society later in life. Yet we seem to often lose sight of that fact when we divvy up the budget to educational facilities and services such as child health nurses, and subject them to extreme cuts and tight budgets to achieve other objectives such as, as the member for Wambro indicated, things like Elizabeth Quay, where we will be able to get coffee on the waterfront—rather than worrying about whether or not our children are healthy.

**Mr J.H.D. Day**: That was a project that was enthusiastically supported when you were in government.

**The ACTING SPEAKER**: Minister, you will have a chance to speak.

**Mr A.J. WADDELL**: I was not in government, minister.

**Mr P. Papalia**: It was not our project.

**Mr A.J. WADDELL**: It was not my project, and I might remind the minister that it was projects like that that turned the electorate against this party at the 2008 election, and I think the government is in severe danger of re-running the 2008 election in reverse. I look forward to seeing the same result. This debate is about making the preprimary year of school compulsory, and I will not sully it with cheap political discussions.

**Mr J.H.D. Day**: Oh, as you just did!

**The ACTING SPEAKER**: Minister for Planning, I call you to order for the first time today.

**Mr A.J. WADDELL**: Thank you; I appreciate the protection, Mr Acting Speaker.

The early years are very important. Of course, when our children attend school during those early years, they are really very much an unmoulded lump of clay. We have not yet determined what their capabilities are and we do not have any real sense of where they will fit within the general educational spectrum that exists. Therefore, it is appropriate that at the preschool level we have a one-size-fits-all approach, simply because we have no knowledge to differentiate the type of service delivery that we should give those students.

Research has demonstrated that we can begin to identify those differences very quickly in the early years. We can identify children who not only find themselves somewhere on the autistic scale, are dyslexic or might have some other form of learning disability, but also have some form of giftedness that would enable them to prosper quite well within the education system. Unfortunately, within the Western Australian state education system, we are very poor at identifying those students and we continue to subject them to this one-size-fits-all approach all the way through their primary school learning. The Primary Extension and Challenge program and the junior PEAC program kicks in at year 4. But, as members can appreciate, when we introduce a compulsory preprimary age, a student could be in the education system for five or even more years before they are given the opportunity to have the kind of intellectual extension that might benefit them. I think it is a severe problem within our system that we are failing to identify those gifted children at an early age. If members were to speak to any parent of a gifted child, they would very quickly learn that gifted children are known as chameleons; they have the ability to blend in with their classmates and disguise their capabilities. As most of us learnt in the rough-and-tumble world of the childhood playground, if members remember back to their own school-age days, it can be quite a hostile and scary environment and differences are often drawn out, made fun of and not encouraged. Therefore, these children learn very quickly not to identify their differentness and to mask it. I had personal experience of this when I saw a child who has a significant reading ability pretend that they were virtually unable to read in order to fit in with their peers. We have to say that it is an absolute shame that that happens, but that is the consequence of a system that fails to properly identify those children. Unfortunately, some of those children continue to mask their abilities for many years and to such a sufficient level that they can be identified as having a learning disability, although, in fact, they are just incredibly good actors. These children later in life are put into programs for students who might have learning difficulties when, really, they require the exact opposite.

I have spoken in this place many times about our one-size-fits-all approach to primary education and the need to develop greater streams to approach gifted education. I am aware of several programs, one of which is the primary academic class program being run at the moment at Wattle Grove in my electorate. A specific class has been set up for a group of students who are identified as having significant educational gifts. I can tell members that it has been an overwhelming success. It is still going through its teething stage—there are still certain problems with it—as it tries to integrate itself into the greater educational facility out there, but it certainly gives those children the opportunity to extend themselves in ways that they could not in a normal classroom setting. I think that is the way forward for a lot of this, rather than the one-size-fits-all approach.

At this point, I echo the comments made by the member for Alfred Cove, who spoke about the passport program. The passport program has been implemented in my electorate at a Maddington school. Although it is a very new program, it shows a great deal of promise. In travelling through all the different schools within my electorate, it has been my experience that those schools with the greatest participation of parents have the greatest educational outcomes. There is no doubt that parental involvement really has a direct correlation with children's educational outcomes. Those schools with the most active parents and citizens associations seem to also have some of the best educational outcomes. Hopefully, this passport program will go some way to encourage greater parental involvement in schools. Of course, it is a shame that we have to approach it with a reward process in which we give parents dollars to volunteer rather than them doing it for the good of their own children.

I think that within our system there has been growing alienation of parents from the educational facility. In fact, quite recently I hit what I knew would come at some time in my own life, but I was surprised it happened so quickly, which I dreaded: my daughter, who is in grade 6, brought home some homework and when I looked at it, for the first time I was not able to just say the answer! She had finally hit the point at which I could not remember how to do the homework. I had to give her a lecture about how certain things in life that we learn do not necessarily ever get used again after the educational time is over. In this case, she was doing some geometry and I really could not remember the difference between the various interior and exterior congruent angles and so forth. I said to her, "Not a problem; this was always going to happen at some point. Now, it's going to be a joint learning exercise." I was going to relearn these things that I had not used in my life and work together with my daughter through the problem. I asked her, "Can you give me your textbook so we can work through it?" That is where we hit the wall; she has no textbook. Primary schools do not give textbooks to kids anymore, so they are not bringing textbooks home. Parents, who may not be familiar with the curriculum as it stands today, do not have the opportunity to read the book and work through with their child any problem that they might have difficulty with. Therefore, we are actually locking parents out of helping children do their homework. I do not think that that is a good idea at any level whatsoever. In that case, we had to revert to the old task of hitting Google and seeing whether it could help us out. My daughter quickly pointed out to me, "We're not supposed to google everything; we're supposed to use proper references." I said, "We can only use proper references when they give you a book in the first place." Thanks to the Maths is Fun website, I now know the difference between an interior and an exterior congruent angle. However, no doubt there will be many, many hours of googling in front of me as I try to learn other maths terms! The point is that I think we are failing our children by not allowing them to have these textbooks and bring them home. We are locking parents out of the process, so we should not be surprised when they do not get involved in their child's education.

Making the preprimary year compulsory, which I understand is largely being done by most parents on a voluntary basis right now, will not have a massive impact on the requirement for school buildings or accommodation for those children within existing schools. However, I am interested to know whether the preprimary year is available at all primary schools, given that it has not been compulsory until this point. Presumably, it would be possible for some schools to not, in fact, offer that year. That takes me to another problem that I have grieved in this place about previously—namely, the idea of having access to the full gamut of years of education.

I have a particular problem in the Maddington–Orange Grove area in that, unfortunately, the local intake school, Yule Brook College, goes only to year 10. Those children who would be taken into that high school as part of their normal local intake are forced to change schools at year 11, which has caused a lot of upset among the parents in that area. They feel that their children should be able to access a continuous year 8–12 education or, by 2015, a continuous year 7–12 education. I understand that in the past they have done that by attending Lesmurdie Senior High School, but that is not available to them because the government has decided to enforce its local intake policy in order to accommodate year 7 entry into high schools. I am led to believe that Lesmurdie Senior High School does not necessarily have enough resources to accommodate all the children who want to go to that high school and so there are winners and losers. Those people on the wrong side of the line are told they must attend Yule Brook College, which means they go to year 10 only and then must move to another school. I think that worries a lot of the parents.

Recently I was at an event at Yule Brook. It was doing fabulous stuff with the new science block that was opened under the Building the Education Revolution program and a whole bunch of awards were given to its students for their attendance, to encourage them to attend. There were statistics about how many kids were turning up to school. That was a good program and the college was trying to create peer pressure to make sure that the kids turned up to school. However, standing from the outside, a lot of parents were saying they wanted to send their kids to a school that had objectives greater than the number of times the children turn up to school. They want to see other outcomes for their children. I am not for a moment suggesting that is Yule Brook's only focus; I am suggesting that there is a real sense in the community that there are not enough resources to enable a full year 8–12 education or to develop some of the academic programs that the children of aspirational families would want their children to attend.

Likewise, at East Kenwick Primary School I recently dealt with a woman whose child was diagnosed on the autistic scale and was trying to get a teacher's aide to assist her son. The child was diagnosed relatively early, which I hope we will see a lot more of once this bill is passed. The difficulty was that the son was a borderline autistic person on that scale and therefore did not qualify for the appropriate support that was necessary at the time. Since then he has developed some other issues and there is a need for a reassessment, but because of his earlier assessment he is not eligible to be assessed again until he reaches year 7. The system is suggesting to his parents that he will just have to suck it and see over the next four years, as he works his way through an uncaring educational system, because it cannot provide the resources to properly assess him to give him the support that he needs.

It has been my experience that there is a real struggle in the education system to provide the support that the kids need because of a simple lack of resources. I challenge anyone in this place to tell me that we are adequately funding our education system. It is like the health system; it is a monster and will continue to consume more and more. However, unlike the health system, society will benefit greatly the more we pour into the school system. We need to take a long-term view of that and ask ourselves whether there is an advantage in moving some of society's resources back to the education sector to enable our children to get what they need and to send the message to young children that the state actually cares.

[Member's time extended]

**Mr A.J. WADDELL:** If their first experience is a cut-price black-and-gold service, or a generic brand of education, there is no doubt that they will take away the message that that is what government is about and they will be cynical and contemptuous of everything we do. That contemptuousness of systems and of the state itself is what we see play out in the streets. People talk about out-of-control youths and people who do not have respect for society anymore. A lot of that can be drawn back to the education system. There is no doubt that we often send a message to our kids that there are no consequences for their actions or that the worst consequences they will face is excluding them from school whereby they get a holiday. We are then surprised when adolescents thumb their nose at authority and the rules we pass and behave in the most outrageous of ways.

We need to address the discipline and truancy issues. Not a month goes by when I am not told about kids who are wandering the streets. We do not know what school they are supposed to be at because they are not wearing their uniform. I talk to the local schools, which do their best to account for their students but who do not have officers to roam through the shopping centres to determine whether or not it is their wards who are out there. I talk to the local police, and we know how stretched they are. There is a multitude of different government agencies involved, such as the Department for Child Protection, police and whichever other department might be involved, trying to get kids to attend school. There seems to be an ongoing merry-go-round that we cannot do anything about. All the while we ask ourselves, "If these kids are not learning basic literacy to survive, will they be on the welfare state forever and will they fill up our prisons?" If we could provide the appropriate resources to our schools to ensure that the kids were there, and create a framework and put in place a reasonable discipline model within our schools in which there were consequences for children's actions, we would go a long way towards fixing some of these problems. We will not see the answer to that tomorrow, next month or next year; it is the sort of thing that will play out over the next 20 years.

Another thing I would like to finally talk about is gifted and talented testing. GAT is something that I have experienced recently. I have been critical of it because it seems to be an entirely backwards form of assessment. We have long abandoned assessing our university entrants based on a single test. We now look at their entire educational career, and tests are part of it, but the use of GAT in this state identifies our gifted students purely based on their ability to perform one test on one day, and that test is not even open and accountable. We cannot see the results or how a child rates compared with other children. It is run by the private sector and is shrouded in secrecy and has copyright issues. Parents are extremely frustrated by that process. That brings into question our entire GAT program in our high school system. I think that is partly why we are seeing a movement away from the public school system into the private school system. Certainly in the gifted and talented areas that I have

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Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Rita Saffioti; Dr Janet Woollard; Acting Speaker; Mr Andrew Waddell

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been involved in a lot of parents are simply so frustrated with the way the state is dealing with gifted children that they are choosing to vote with their feet and wallets by moving their children to private schools. The consequence is that some of our brightest children end up in the private school system. The private school system continues to dominate the league tables. We are really starting to develop a two-tier system. We are sending a message to the community that if people want their children to have the best education, they should penny up and send them to the private school sector. A lot of that can be brought home to the way we do the gifted and talented education testing. We need to review that quickly. We need to bring that in at an earlier age. We need to think about it at years 2 and 3 so that we can start streaming our children at an appropriate time.

I am about to conclude my comments, but I am very mindful of the clock. I would not want to create a problem by sitting down right now.

**The SPEAKER:** I am glad the member for Forrestfield is very mindful, because I do bring the house's attention to the fact that it is two o'clock.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.