

EDUCATION - GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

79. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Education and Training:

Will the minister inform the house of the education priorities of the government, and is he aware of any other views?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Collie-Wellington for the question and for his obvious interest in education in his electorate. I visited Collie High School with the member for Collie-Wellington recently. There was his name on the dux board - dux of Collie Senior High School.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Is that right?

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure should not believe everything she hears.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, perhaps I have invited these interjections.

Our priorities for education are quite simple. They are about standards and ensuring we have excellence in our school system. This year we released the literacy and numeracy report which was prepared by Professor Bill Louden from the University of Western Australia. We will roll out a whole range of initiatives over time to improve literacy and numeracy in our schools. We have already started. During the Premier's time as Minister for Education and Training specific teachers were appointed who were dedicated to literacy and numeracy. We will address a range of other areas, including dedicating 50 per cent of time in primary schools to literacy and numeracy. On top of that, we have rolled out our reforms for senior schooling, increasing the number of students doing exams, making sure that we remove the problems faced with the whole marking issue with levelling, which was introduced in 1988, putting in place teacher juries to address the new courses of study, and making sure that students read books as part of English and that history subjects are a component of years 11 and 12.

I am aware of a different approach suggested by the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Julie Bishop. In January, shortly after I became the minister, she said that what we need to focus on in education is manners. The examples cited at the time were how to use cutlery and how to shake hands, making sure one looks another in the eye and squeezes at the appropriate level. They are the sorts of things, according to the federal minister, that our public schools should concentrate on. No doubt, being a good woman from Cottesloe, she would consider curtsying to the Queen to be an important skill. The manners between Julie Bishop and the member for Cottesloe are not quite there at this stage. That is her priority in education, whereas our priority is standards and the basics.