

TEACHER SHORTAGE

472. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Minister for Education and Training:

Madam Deputy Speaker, firstly, I welcome to the Parliament students from Nannup District High School, a wonderful place, and students from the Ocean Forest Lutheran College in Dalyellup.

I refer to the minister's claim that the current teacher shortage in Western Australian public schools remains at around 60. Can the minister confirm that the teacher shortage is actually much higher than this number, and that the real figure has been artificially reduced by principals and deputy principals being forced back into the classroom and by existing teachers being forced to combine classes and teach unfamiliar subjects?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The advice I have from the Department of Education and Training is that the shortage of teachers is roughly 60 around the state. To put that in context, we have employed 1 300 additional teachers since we have been in office - 1 300 more than were there before this government took office. That has meant that we have been able to put in place class size reduction programs, behaviour management discipline programs, and a range of support mechanisms for teachers in public schools around the state, as well as 2 000 additional aides. The services and support available to children in public schools around Western Australia have never been better. That is the truth of the matter.

There is a shortage of teachers, and the advice I have is that the number is 60. It has been common practice throughout our education system for the past 175 years that, at times, people who are doing administrative tasks may well go back into the classroom, and that is good and sensible. At the moment the department is encouraging people who may well be undertaking administrative roles to go back into the classroom. Does the Leader of the Opposition oppose that?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Who runs the schools? Principals and deputy principals.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Principals and deputy principals in private and public schools around Western Australia often have been required to teach. That is the truth. Do members opposite think this is an amazing situation that has just developed? If I looked at the figures when the opposition was in government, I would find that principals and deputy principals had been in classrooms teaching. It is normal for people in administrative roles to go into the classroom. If that is required to make sure that our education system works well, I support it.