

WARREN-BLACKWOOD EDUCATION DISTRICT, EDUCATION FACILITIES

Grievance

MR OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood) [9.43 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Education and concerns capital works in the Warren-Blackwood education district and, in particular, the future of Manjimup Primary School and the provision of a science room at Pemberton District High School. I raise the matter because I consider it to be of great importance not only to me, but also the district and the people who live there. As I mentioned during my contribution to the budget debate, Manjimup Primary School is now many years old. It is a 1920s building and it is in dire need of renewal. This information has not come from the Manjimup district education office; my grapevine has told me that the project is on the minister's desk at the moment and the talk is that construction of a new school may be delayed until 2006. The previous Government made a commitment that a new school would be built by the beginning of 2004. The local community went through a thorough local area education planning process. It was a thorough consultation process, with people throughout the town receiving the options that were being considered. The feedback was channelled back through the Department of Education to the minister's office. I know that the minister has received a number of letters on this matter over a period. There is no doubt that there has been an increase in cooperation between all groups involved with the school over a long period. The teachers, parents and staff are all of one voice about the future of that school.

Why is a new school needed in Manjimup? Apart from its good paint job - it is a good-looking building - the interior of the building is not functional. Compared with a modern school, the classrooms are too small, the oval does not meet today's requirements, there are no specialist rooms, there is no on-site kindergarten - it is a couple of kilometres away - there are no withdrawal areas, the library is too small, and the size and layout of the administration area does not fit with modern ideas about what is needed in schools. The other reason a new school is needed in Manjimup is that the maintenance cost for the school is \$120 000 a year. Over the next five years, that will cost \$600 000. That is a good reason for the school to be put on the building program. It is on the top of the district list for capital works.

The \$10 000 allocation a year for the school for maintenance and ancillary matters is not sufficient. The school has a high number of faults. The veranda floorboards are down to about half an inch thick. I am concerned about public liability - about people getting hurt. For example, the wiring is old; there is black and white chequered wiring in the roof. Manjimup electricians are reluctant to respond to calls to fix faults, because they fear for their lives when they get into the roof cavity or onto the roof. That is a real concern. The other issue is that the student toilets are not appropriate. If the local shire health inspector visited that site on a regular basis, those toilet facilities would be condemned. If they were in a commercial property, they would be condemned. That is my first concern. The primary school in Manjimup must be placed on the building program. I note that it has not been identified in the current budget. The community needs some commitment from the minister that the planning funds will go into the next budget.

The other issue concerns the need for a science room at Pemberton District High School. As members will be aware, Carmen Lawrence opened that school about 10 years ago. I understand that the Minister for Education has received an invitation from the P&C association to attend the tenth anniversary of the opening of the school. It would be a good chance for him to make an announcement about the science building. I will provide a history of that school. The Government, in conjunction with the community, built the manual arts centre. There was a large amount of community input and fundraising, etc. It is a model manual arts centre. The community has also raised significant funds for the science room. A transportable building was recently removed from Pemberton District High School. That building is probably worth between \$60 000 and \$100 000 to the Department of Education. All the community is asking the Government for is \$60 000. It is not a big amount of money in this day and age. There has been tremendous community effort to get a whole range of people together to talk about the science room and about using the science room for ancillary purposes.

I have copies of letters from the shire council; the minister in response to Sharon McBride of the Pemberton District High School Parents and Citizens Association; Monica Radomiljac, the secretary of the P&C association; the Pemberton Wine Region; the Department of Agriculture; the Pemberton Telecentre; and me. All those letters express support for this wonderful project and state that it should be funded. The science room was included in the capital works program for 1998-99. Stage 1 was to begin in 1998. It was supposed to be in train by now. Stage 2 was to include the removal of the transportable classroom and the construction of a new science room. The minister is well and truly aware of this project.

This is less a grievance and more a plea for the minister to respond to these two very important local issues. The Government knows the trauma my community is going through and the uncertainty it faces. A positive response from the minister would be well received by the local community.

MR CARPENTER (Willagee - Minister for Education) [9.50 am]: I thank the member for Warren-Blackwood for bringing these matters to my attention today.

Mr Omodei: My spies tell me the science room is unlikely to be funded.

Mr CARPENTER: I will give the member my advice. The member has been consistent in his advocacy for his electorate, particularly regarding these two issues. Contrary to the last time I rose to my feet, I congratulate the member for his diligence in pursuing the best interests of his electorate. The member raised two issues: the possible replacement of the Manjimup Primary School, and the Pemberton District High School science room. As the member for the area said, I have received correspondence about these issues from various interested parties in the region. At the request of the member, I met with Monica Radomiljac, the secretary of the parents and citizens association, to discuss the science room. We had an interesting discussion and she put forward a good case. She is an excellent advocate for the school.

I understand it is generally agreed that a replacement is required for the Manjimup Primary School. It was built in 1923 and little, if any, significant work has been done on it over the past decade or so. I point out that I was away yesterday and got back late last night. I was advised about this grievance this morning. At that time, I was also advised that the former Minister for Education indicated to the Manjimup Primary School community in December last year that a new school would be built for the beginning of the 2004 school year. As a former minister, the member for Warren-Blackwood will understand my situation. I made a range of capital works commitments to various communities around the State during the election campaign. At that stage, I was not aware that any indication or commitment had been given to the people of Manjimup about the future of their primary school. The member was right when he said it has been suggested that an opening date of 2006 might be more realistic than an opening date of 2004. However, now that the Government's first budget is out of the way and it has nailed down its commitments for capital works programs, I will review the other commitments that may have been given by the former Government but were not specifically located in the budget papers. I am happy to look at those in the run-up to the next budget, which will be handed down in May next year to see whether a 2004 opening date could be realistically achieved.

I concur entirely with the local member's remarks about the uncertainty, and the last thing I want to do is send any signal that the Government has no confidence in the towns of Manjimup and Pemberton. Education facilities are central to the area. I am happy to pursue this issue in the run-up to the next budget and to see whether we can bring forward that opening time. My information - I received it only this morning - is that there is still some disagreement about the location. A local area education planning process was undertaken during which 1 000 information packs were delivered to the area. The department received 423 responses from 316 parents, 68 community members and 39 staff.

Mr Omodei: It was a very thorough process.

Mr CARPENTER: There was strong support for a complete change of the school facility. The location is the contentious issue. If we can get agreement on the preferred location of the school - I am hopeful that we can - I will pursue the start-up times to try to ensure that the new school is opened before 2006. I hasten to add that I cannot make any guarantees. As a former minister, I am sure the member for Warren-Blackwood will understand that. However, I appreciate his points about the need for that school to be redeveloped. Many other schools around the State are in a similar situation. I am sure everybody is aware of that.

I met with Monica Radomiljac, the P&C association secretary, to discuss the Pemberton District High School. I am expecting a briefing on that today. I have taken up that issue with the relevant people in the capital works area of the Department of Education, and I expect to be briefed this afternoon. As a result of my meeting with Monica, I contacted the department and explained the issue that had been brought to my attention. The preliminary information is that the school has a transportable science building which is identical to those in use at many secondary schools around the State and which is functional and acceptable. The department's response did not indicate any immediate plans to develop a new science facility. The amount of money required is not overwhelming. The P&C association and the local community have raised funds for the facility, and I am sympathetic to the issue. Hopefully, I will get a briefing on the Pemberton situation this afternoon. I will pursue the same budgetary processes for the science facility that I indicated would apply to Manjimup. I am happy to look for ways in which the next budget can provide a more permanent science facility in Pemberton, if the local community requires that.

I again thank the local member for bringing those two issues to my attention. I ask him to assure his constituents that I am sympathetic to their aims and that I will discuss those issues and their budgetary implications with the department.