

WILSON PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL — REBUILDING

Grievance

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston) [9.24 am]: I rise today to grieve to the Minister for Education. Before I start, I would like to thank the minister for her attendance at Wilson Park Primary School, three-quarters of which burned down on Sunday, 30 August. The community certainly appreciated the chance to talk to the minister and it was very good to see the number of people who turned out from that side of town. There are some further concerns, and of course probably the first question asked is: when will the school be rebuilt? That question has been asked many, many times within the community by people including the parents and citizens association and the parents. The shire council has also questioned me about where things are headed.

Wilson Park Primary School had 110 students and 30 staff right across the board from the gardeners to the teachers. Some special issues have arisen from that. We know that every fire is devastating and the school lost books, jigsaw puzzles and those sorts of things that had been accumulated over many, many years. It is my understanding that there has been an offer of only \$150 for reimbursement. As everyone knows, even an average Wilbur Smith book costs about \$35—buy four of those books and the school is out of the game. I believe that teacher aides have not been offered any reimbursement, yet they put a lot of their own money into the welfare of the children. If there were no reimbursement for that, I think that would be a slap in the face to people who give their heart and soul to the children and especially that school, which is a hugely multicultural school. Students come predominantly from the south side of town and the staff work very hard to ensure that those kids do not slip through the cracks. In some ways, the school is a refuge for some of the children; it is a godsend for them to be able to come to school in a safe place and to be able to pick up breakfast. Therefore, I ask in this grievance that the minister take into consideration the compensation that will be paid to the teachers and teacher aides. I think we need to ensure that the grounds staff and those people who work in and around the school have some comfort about the future of their jobs. The school will need that sort maintenance and I hate to think that these people will lose their jobs or be put off on a temporary basis because of some act of vandalism.

As I say, people come into my office on a daily basis to ask what is happening. The school is a major part of the town. It is a small school but it has been there for 50-odd years and has a niche within the town. It was really pleasing to see last year that both the head girl and deputy head girl were of Aboriginal origin, and to see them in those roles, I suppose, was certainly heart-warming for me.

The burning question I suppose is: when will rebuilding commence? I believe the site has been cleaned up but that is different from actual rebuilding of the school. In the meantime, does the minister intend to leave the students at Amaroo Primary School until Wilson Park Primary School is rebuilt? Will the school be built to accommodate the same number of students as it previously had? There are some rumours around that it will take only up to year 4 students.

Dr E. Constable: That's news to me.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is why I grieve to the minister; to try to allay those fears in the community. It is a concern.

Another area of concern is about the planning of the school itself. It has been requested that a community consultation committee be formed so that the community can have some input into the school and the type of school that it will be in the future. The school was very basic, and as I say, 51 years old so this is a great opportunity to bring it into the modern world. We must remember that already there was an election promise of \$500 000, so the department will not have to chase that sort of money.

Dr E. Constable: Whose promise was that?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It was promised by me and shadowed by Mr Steve Thomas and backed up by the Premier. Also, I believe there is some federal money of about \$800 000. Therefore, with that sort of money available, I think it would be quite easy to start the process almost immediately to get things moving. I am talking about the planning at this stage. However, there is a very, very strong request from the community that it has a say in the planning because it is scared that it will end up with a row of demountables or transportables, whichever way we want to put it, that will not carry that side of town into the future.

The other issue concerns the teachers who have been relocated and where they sit within the platform of the Amaroo Primary School. Do they have a say or do they remain a separate entity while they are at that school? I see that into the future there may be some cross-over by which a decision that benefits the Amaroo school will not suit the teachers from Wilson Park Primary School and could cause some conflict. Overall, my grievance is about rebuilding the school and when that will start and how the community can assist. There have been many offers of assistance from the community, from the earth works right the way through. I thank Worsley Alumina for its instant reaction to the disaster with offers of assistance with computers through to desks, including

\$20 000 cash. It just shows that the community is behind this rebuilding. My plea is that we get the rebuilding started as soon as possible.

DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands — Minister for Education) [9.30 am]: I thank the member for Collie-Preston for his comments on Wilson Park Primary School. As the member said, he and I visited the site together on 2 September, just a couple of days after the wanton destruction of what has been a very successful small school. Also with us on that day was James Thom, the executive director of infrastructure and planning in the Department of Education and Training. It was important for us to have James there with us, especially for me, so that in ongoing discussions we were both reading from the same page about the school. Of course, the district director and other people were with us as well.

As the member knows, probably better than I do, the main classroom block was destroyed in the fire. That caused enormous disruption to students and staff. As the member has pointed out quite properly, we must not forget the staff. Teachers who have been there a long time have lost years and years of their work in that fire. It is not just a matter of upping stakes and moving somewhere else. The teachers, as well the parents and students, have experienced a great loss, which relates to the point that the member has raised about compensation. I am not sure of the answer to that, but I will certainly look into that, as \$150 seems a ridiculous amount of money, if that is all that has been made available. Maybe that is something to get things started, but I will check that out for the member and get back to him on that particular point.

One of the things that struck me in what the member for Collie-Preston has said was the response of the town. On that day—the member did not turn on the best weather on the day that I came down—a large number of parents was at the school and it was very useful for me to meet with those parents. They are passionate and very supportive of the school. It is commonplace for community consultation groups to be set up when schools are being built or rebuilt. I expect that will be the case in Collie-Preston, but again I will check that out for the member. I cannot see why not because it is not the department's school; it is the community's school and community members should be involved in the planning because they have ownership of those new buildings and will move with the school.

I have not been able to speak with James Thom about the timing, because he is away, but it is my understanding that the initial planning stage and clearing of the site and all those sorts of things are underway. I would be surprised if the rebuilding is not well on the way next year, but I do not have a finishing date for the member. Time will not be wasted.

Funding is covered by the commonwealth's Building the Education Revolution program, which is there and which will add to what we can do, and insurance money is there. There is no question about the dollars being there to rebuild the school as soon as they can get moving. The only thing that might hold that up is the enormous number of capital works that are in progress in the state at the moment, but I do not anticipate there would be any great delay in moving on planning and starting to build. The people can rest easy about that aspect of it.

What was amazing, as the member said, were the contributions of local businesses, particularly Worsley Alumina. The fire was on the early hours of Sunday morning and by Monday the students were being bussed and housed at Collie Senior High School for the day, and then at Amaroo Primary School. Teachers at Amaroo vacated particular rooms to make space for and made people from Wilson Park welcome. I understand that four demountables are going to Amaroo as extra space. Amaroo has facilities for 600 students, and with the current student numbers at Amaroo plus Wilson Park, there will be fewer than 600 students. There are plenty of facilities at Amaroo for them all to be comfortable. It was early days when the member and I were there on 2 September, but there was a great collegial atmosphere of teachers working together, and I anticipate there would not be too many issues. It is part of the community spirit in Collie that they would do that, and every effort will be made for that to happen.

I know nothing about classes only going to year 4. That is not what I have discussed in my meetings. The only thing that I have discussed is that the school will be rebuilt. There are always rumours around these things, and that issue can be put down to rumour as it is not what I have discussed. If there is any change to that, I will certainly be discussing it with the member, but it is not on the radar.

There will be a community consultation committee. That is standard practice. Especially in that town and under those circumstances, we would want that to happen and for parents to be involved.

The member questioned whether there might be some conflict between the teachers with two schools on the one site.

Mr M.P. Murray: It relates to identity, really.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I think they have got that. On the day we were there, there was a real identity in the school uniforms they were wearing. I am sure that is part of a strong identity for kids and they will be able to continue with that with the expectation that they will move back to the site. It is a small school, and small schools are a concern. It is not always possible to offer as much in a small school, but in that particular instance it is important to maintain the integrity of that school for the reasons we have discussed. It may be in reviewing what is offered to the kids, such as PEAC programs, which can be offered to children in a bigger setting where there are other facilities

The school will be rebuilt. I will check on a couple of other items for the member for Collie-Preston as well.