

SCHOOLS — CLASS SIZES

373. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Education:

I refer to renewed calls for a reduction in classroom sizes, particularly from the State School Teachers' Union of WA, which has highlighted that WA's maximum student number in classrooms is the highest in the country.

- (1) Is the minister's director general correct in saying that the average class size is well within the maximum limit?
- (2) Noting that it was also suggested there are a number above the maximum limit, can the minister provide the exact number of classes that are grappling with above maximum student numbers?

Dr A.D. BUTI replied:

- (1)–(2) If the member for Roe could give me some notice, I might be able to provide the exact number. I might have a bit of knowledge of education, but I do not have encyclopedic knowledge of every single thing. If he gives me some warning, we will be able to work out how many classes.

In answer to the general question, it is interesting that the member mentioned the State School Teachers' Union. This is a person who hates unions. He is anti-union, but he wants to use it for this purpose. Anyway, I will get to the class sizes. We have an incredibly good relationship with —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It has never been an affiliate. Do not speak if you do not know what you are talking about! Rip Van Winkle!

The SPEAKER: Order, please. Can we just go back to answering the question that was asked.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member for Cottesloe is the Rip Van Winkle of WA politics; he fell asleep in about 1972.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe, I am asking you to desist. You did not ask this question and your contribution is not helpful.

Dr A.D. BUTI: He fell asleep in the early 1970s when the Liberal government —

The SPEAKER: Minister for Education, this is not an opportunity to respond to the member for Cottesloe. Please respond to the member for Roe.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The average class sizes in our public schools in Western Australia continue to be well below the specified maximum class sizes across all reported levels. In public schools, they remained reasonably stable over the past six years and were the same or smaller across all year levels in 2022 compared with the previous three years. The agreed class sizes negotiated with the union ranges from 20 students in kindergarten to 32 students in years 4 to 10. However, the average number of students in our classes is between 18 and 27, so that is well within the limit that was negotiated with the union. If some class sizes are outside those limits—they are very few in number—they were negotiated and agreed to by the teachers taking those classes. Some schools may run slightly larger classes for reasons such as running single-year-level classes as a preference to split classes, which they are permitted to do. This is done in negotiation with the teacher. Consideration is given to additional supports such as duties other than teaching, additional education assistants and Aboriginal and Islander education officers. Unlike the previous government, which cut the number of teachers, education assistants and AIEOs, this government has been increasing the numbers.

Looking back to the height of the previous government's lack of concern for our public schools, members may recall that from the period 2013 to 2015, after the conservatives were re-elected, we saw over \$200 million cut directly from public school budgets in 2014, a further \$45 million cut from secondary school budgets in 2015 and over 800 teaching positions cut in 2014–15.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What was that, Rip Van Winkle?

Dr D.J. Honey: Unlike you.

The SPEAKER: Order, please.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Over 1 000 education assistants were cut in 2014–15, 150 central and regional office positions were cut, there were 200 redundancies across the sector in 2015, 110 Aboriginal and Islander education officers were cut in 2014 and there was an average reduction in expenditure per student of \$714 a year. In comparison with

the dismal effort by the conservatives when they were in power, this Labor government has increased the number of EAs by over 1 400 since 2017 and employed an additional 90 psychologists over the same period. At the 2021 election, we committed an additional \$42.2 million to employ more than 100 additional FTE school psychologists over the next four years in Western Australian schools. This commitment is for an incremental increase in the number of school psychologists for public schools, commencing with an additional 40 FTEs in 2022 and rising to an additional 100 FTEs in 2025.

As the education minister, I am proud to stand here to let the member for Roe know that in the budget that was just handed down, for the first time the total annual funding for education in this state exceeded \$6 billion. As I stated before, I have a very good relationship with the State School Teachers' Union of WA. We have met a number of times and we continue to have a good working relationship. I will not be pre-empting the bargaining period. We will see what happens as time goes on. Are you glad you asked that question?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!