

ESPERANCE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Grievance

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [9.38 am]: My grievance today is in relation to Esperance Senior High School. I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education for taking my grievance. It is in relation to the failure of the Cook Labor government to address significant issues at Esperance Senior High School, therefore compromising the ability to deliver learning capability that is comparable to contemporary schools in the metropolitan area. As the parliamentary secretary knows, I read another petition—one of many—in today with 173 signatures.

Esperance is a remote town situated 700 kilometres from Perth. Although the town was established in the 1890s as a port to serve the goldfields, the town rapidly increased in size as a result of large-scale agriculture being introduced to the Esperance sand plain by an American syndicate in partnership with the state government in the 1960s. Because of this growth, much of the town's public infrastructure, including Esperance Senior High School, was constructed in the 1960s, based on its then population of approximately 2 000 to 3 000 people. The population of Esperance is now five times greater, with approximately 14 000 people. Within the town, there are three government primary schools, a senior high school, a secondary education support centre and also private facilities. Esperance Residential College sits alongside the secondary school campus and provides a home to as many as 100 students from within the local shire and beyond, including the northern goldfields, the Pilbara and the Kimberley. The nearest government senior high schools for students in years 7 to 12 are in Kalgoorlie, 400 kilometres away, and Albany, 500 kilometres away, which makes Esperance Senior High School the only realistic choice of government secondary school for young people in Esperance.

Esperance Senior High School was founded in 1966 and was built for 400 students. Over time, ad hoc additions were made to the school to provide capacity for up to 1 000 students. Currently, the constant student population sits at 800 students. Early in my first term as member for Roe, I was contacted by the Esperance Senior High School board and the parents and citizens association seeking support in their efforts to secure improved learning conditions for both staff and students at Esperance Senior High School. Representations to me outlined very significant issues of compromised structural integrity, degraded concrete, leaking windows and roofs, poor sanitary conditions in dilapidated ablutions, a plethora of trip hazards, non-existent coverage from the elements, poor student and staff amenity and, most importantly, a school design not equipped to deliver contemporary education outcomes. In fact, back in 2001, a building condition assessment report clearly stated that the school's south wing was slated for demolition. This section of the school continues to be in use, with small classrooms, stairwells suffering from concrete cancer, railings compromised by rust, windows that cannot safely or easily open, and poor natural lighting, grimy with years of wear and tear. The situation is so dire at the school that the south wing, which has been slated for demolition, even houses a designated education support room on the upper floor, which is only accessible via stairs.

Another example of the condition of the school is its performing arts centre, which is currently housed in the school's original library building. Students rehearse in the thoroughfare and on wet days are surrounded by buckets to catch water from the leaking roof. These students can only dream of the facilities that students in the metropolitan area take for granted. The inequity for Esperance students is stark. It should not be a surprise to anyone that the disgraceful condition of the school brings with it serious work health and safety issues and a physical environment that is not fit for contemporary inclusive education purposes. It certainly falls well short of the stimulating place to unlock learning potential so keenly espoused in the department's teaching for impact strategy. All credit must be given to the staff who endure these dilapidated, antiquated facilities and who must make do every single day to deliver their high quality teaching and learning programs. According to local information provided by the State School Teachers' Union of WA, some staff make the choice to leave, stating that the substandard facilities is a contributing factor to their departure from the school.

After I instigated a bipartisan community Esperance Senior High School upgrade committee, the Shire of Esperance identified ESHS as its number one priority of government infrastructure in the town requiring upgrades. It must be said that much of the town's infrastructure, such as the hospital, Esperance Primary School, the TAFE facilities, residential college and indoor sporting facility have been addressed during the previous Liberal–National Party's eight years of government, with Esperance Senior High School next on the list. I subsequently met with the director general of Education and members of the Department of Finance and presented the case to both the previous and current education ministers on behalf of the Esperance community. The Esperance community has waited patiently in good faith for the review to be completed and for some news that Esperance Senior High School has been prioritised for funding. Members can imagine, given the extensive engagement with government ministers, Department of Education and Department of Finance officials and Labor state members of Parliament, as well as the dire circumstances of the school, how the Esperance community felt when the 2023–24 state budget announcement was made, and Esperance Senior High School again failed to attract funding for a serious refurbishment, while other

1970s schools did. I personally fielded phone calls from distraught members of the Esperance community asking how Esperance Senior High School had once again been overlooked. I understand that a small delegation from the upgrade community have met with Minister Buti online and was requested to subsequently prepare a submission to outline the significance of the school's infrastructure to the whole Esperance community and the region's economy, which it has done.

As a community, Esperance is relying on this minister to deliver its young people a twenty-first century school—a school that will provide an inspiring amenity for students and staff that will bring the school to contemporary standards. I look forward to a positive response.

MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.45 am]: I thank the member for his grievance today and for presenting that to the Minister for Education. I have been informed that the minister is, unfortunately, not available, so he has asked me to respond on his behalf.

The Cook government is investing heavily in upgrading schools to ensure they are fit for purpose and can deliver a modern curriculum. As the member knows, there are more than 800 public schools across Western Australia that range in age, and, as we all know, ageing school infrastructure is a challenge for any government that requires a concerted effort over time to progressively tackle. That is why our government has been investing heavily in infrastructure upgrades to schools across the state, with a \$1.5 billion capital works program to deliver new and improved public education facilities across WA, including new spending in several regional schools. That includes an additional \$20.4 million to progress the redevelopment of Roebourne District High School, bringing that to a total of \$72.4 million, with a contract recently awarded. We are investing \$9 million for new school education support facilities in Waggrakine Primary School in Geraldton, and \$6.8 million on maintenance works in agricultural colleges.

The Cook government's asset investment program for 2023–24 is the largest investment of its kind in over a decade. This government is committed to regional education and will continue to invest in schools throughout the state. Regional primary and secondary schools across WA will benefit from the 2023–24 budget, with \$333 million being delivered over the next four financial years for refurbishments, upgrades and new builds.

The maintenance blitz program was announced in September 2019. It invested \$200 million for the benefit of all public schools and was largely delivered within 18 months. From that program, almost \$2 million was provided to Esperance Senior High School for upgrades that were delivered to the school.

Under the Barnett government, approximately \$10 million was spent at Esperance from the start of 2008 through to the end of 2017 on maintenance and capital works. That figure also includes capital works relating to the federal Labor government's Building the Education Revolution program, which the member might recall. Compare that with the previous state Labor government, under which more than \$13 million was spent on delivering upgrades and maintenance to buildings across Esperance Senior High School. This includes design and technology upgrades, installation of solar panels and new shade structures and playgrounds, as well as general maintenance. As part of our government's election commitments, Esperance Senior High School is also receiving \$1.5 million for a science, technology, engineering and mathematics upgrade, with four classrooms to be upgraded as part of this STEM project, in addition to the almost \$2 million already mentioned as part of the maintenance blitz program.

The minister can report that the construction of the STEM classroom upgrades commenced in August this year and is anticipated to be completed by early next year. This will deliver for the school community an upgrade to four classrooms. These facilities will become a well-utilised addition to motivate and inspire local students to pursue STEM careers.

The Cook Labor government is providing upgrades to the school, but we share an understanding that Esperance Senior High School, like some other schools in Western Australia, has ageing facilities that would benefit from refurbishment and upgrades. The minister has committed to advocating for funding for Esperance Senior High School through the budget and has met with the school and prominent members of the community. In August this year, the minister met with the president of the Shire of Esperance, the chair of the Esperance Senior High School board, as well as the president of the Esperance Senior High School P&C, to discuss the situation. He has also recently written to them to provide an update, along with several community members that the school had organised to advocate to the minister, including the local chamber of commerce. In his letter, the minister advised that the building condition assessment for Esperance Senior High School has been completed by the department, with infrastructure considerations currently being assessed. The minister also advised that the three highest priority defects were remediated at the minister's request as a matter of priority. These identified defects were loose ceilings and roof fixtures within the media computing laboratory, science laboratory and sports hall, and other maintenance requirements.

Additional planning for potential upgrades are to be considered when the department puts programs together and as funding becomes available. Resolution of the next lot of priority defects will be addressed through the department's usual maintenance processes and planning to determine costs and time frames are processing accordingly. Representatives from the department also visited the school this month to discuss the concerns, maintenance issues and potential requirements with the school. Along with competing priorities at other secondary schools, improving

functionality by replacing or improving assets at the high school and the education support centre is to be considered as part of the government's ongoing planning process for ageing infrastructure.

In addition to the department's existing planning for refurbishment or upgrades across all Western Australian public schools, the minister has recently drawn the school's attention to the Australian government schools upgrade fund, for which round 2 applications recently opened. We encourage Esperance Senior High School, along with other schools looking for upgrades across the state, to consider the eligibility criteria and other information that is available on the department's intranet. More information can also be found about the school upgrade fund on the Australian government website. I assure the member that the minister recognises and appreciates his passion and advocacy for Esperance Senior High School. He thanks the member for this grievance and I reiterate that the Cook government will continue to strongly invest in our schools and assist schools and staff to provide the resources and facilities that they need to deliver exceptional education to our kids. Thank you for the grievance.