



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

THIRTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION
1998

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday, 12 March 1998

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 12 March 1998

THE SPEAKER (Mr Strickland) took the Chair at 10.00 am, and read prayers.

NURSING HOME CARE - PETITION

Dr Gallop presented the following petition bearing the signatures of 34 persons -

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled.

We, the undersigned petitioners believe that nursing home care should be equally available to all Australians on the basis of clinical need, irrespective of a person's capacity to pay for that care. Accordingly we call on the Federal Government to abolish the entry fee and the extra daily fees for those needing a nursing home bed.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that you will give this matter earnest consideration and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[See petition No 141.]

JET SKIS - PETITION

Mr Pandal presented the following petition bearing the signatures of 16 persons -

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled.

We, the undersigned citizens from the Electoral District of South Perth request that the State Government abandon plans to gazette part of the Swan River between the Narrows Bridge and the Milyu Nature Reserve for use by jet skis on the grounds that the fragile nature of Milyu would be seriously put at risk.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that you will give this matter earnest consideration and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[See petition No 142.]

SCHOOL EDUCATION BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 11 March.

MR TUBBY (Roleystone - Parliamentary Secretary) [10.05 am]: In making my short contribution to this debate I will be answering some issues raised by various members and the Minister will follow up later with his summing up of all the issues; hopefully he will be able to handle them within his three-quarters of an hour if I address a few of them at this point.

I thank all members for the contributions they have made to this debate so far; they have been very valuable. A number of issues have been raised but I am very pleased that in the main members have accepted the Bill. They have concerns with some issues and I must say that these concerns were raised by the public and many of them were discussed at great length within our reference group.

I would like to deflect some of the kind remarks made by members to me on this piece of legislation to the people who actually did all the work but who are, unfortunately, not here right now. In his absence I thank Ken Booth who has been on the project team from its inception at the end of 1994. For the first year of the project he was the principal policy officer. We had quite a large team in the first 12 months because we undertook a lot of consultation and we needed people to do that work. Ken came on board at the beginning, and once Dr Ken Evans, who was the original project director, moved on after about 12 months, Ken took over as the director. I appreciated his intellect, his experience, and the way he was able to handle very difficult issues with some groups who had very confined perspectives in some of the ways they were looking at educational issues. Ken handled them very well, for which I am deeply grateful.

I commend Wayne McGowan who came on board during the last 12 months to handle the consultation process and organisation. Wayne has done a tremendous job and both he and Ken will stay on with the project team at least for this year so that the regulations can be developed. I am hopeful they will continue into next year to oversee the

implementation of the new Act and its regulations because there will have to be some professional development at least among the administrators of our state schools.

I also thank this Minister for Education and the previous Minister for giving me the opportunity to chair this rewrite. It is the first time in 70 years that we have had a complete rewrite of the School Education Act and its regulations. It has been tackled on many occasions over the last 10 or 15 years and put into the too hard basket; so it was a real honour that I was asked to chair the group and it was a great privilege to undertake that task.

I thank Narelle Cant from the Minister's office for all the liaison work that she has undertaken in the past 12 months. As we were getting towards the Green Bill, there were some issues that required the Government to make decisions and sometimes it is difficult to get to the Minister quickly. Narelle managed to get us in to see the Minister and to ensure that decisions were made. I thank her for her liaison work and the ongoing support.

I would like to thank the members of the reference group. They have done a tremendous job over the past three years. We have debated at length and in great depth all the issues connected with this legislation. Many matters were controversial. Members of the reference group came from the far left as well as the far right of politics. Originally we set out to put together a piece of legislation which would be accepted, if not loved, by everyone in the State as a good, workable piece of legislation that could oversee our education system into the future. That was our aim. I thank all members of the group for, first, expressing their opinions in confidence and, second, for accepting the final consensus and the direction given to the draftsmen. It was a difficult time.

Brian Lindberg served on the committee, although not representing the State School Teachers Union, of which he was the president. He played a significant role in the workings of the committee and offered some good ideas and arguments. During the development of the School Education Bill a state election was held. I have a great deal of respect for Brian Lindberg and the way he managed to keep in-house the discussions and wide-ranging points of view discussed by the committee. He could have undermined what we were trying to achieve at any time. He did not get his own way all the time, but he was heard. We respected his point of view and his ultimately respecting the resolutions made by the reference group.

Another person to thank is Professor Ralph Simmonds. He is a professor of law at Murdoch University. Each member of the reference group accepted that Professor Simmonds had a great deal of expertise to offer. We appreciated his intellect. I found it most unusual for a lawyer to take complex situations, after long debate, and distill them to a couple of very simple drafting instructions. He was also able to consider simple comments made during the committee's debates and some simple resolutions, and expand those into complex legal situations which would have certain ramifications if we took those paths. His expertise was greatly appreciated.

The other members of the reference group also deserve mention and thanks. Mrs Audrey Jackson is a past principal of St Mary's Independent School. She went on to become the executive director of the Association of Independent Schools. Neil Jarvis represented the Education Department. Neil came on board after the retirement of Gerry Skivinis. Dr Noelene Reeves is a former superintendent and director in the Education Department. Lyndon Rowe, the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, also served on the committee. I thank him for his time and the contribution he made. Garry Rutherford, another lawyer, served on the committee as a parent of primary school children, and as a member and president of a P & C association and school council representative. He provided expertise from those areas. I also thank Therese Temby, the Director of the Catholic Education Office, for her effort and time. As well as working with our reference group, Therese was the chairperson of the reference group for the Curriculum Council Bill which was established during the life of our reference group. She was able to liaise between the two groups, and I thank her for playing that role. Finally, we appreciated the input of Mrs Judy Williams, a school teacher from the Kelmscott Senior High School, who joined the group towards the end of the process. I offer my thanks to all those people for their contribution.

I do not think these people have been mentioned before, because if a great deal of flak had been aimed at this legislation I was willing to wear it. However, as a lot of credit has been given to the formulation of this legislation, we should share that with the reference group.

We set out to produce a piece of legislation which would be widely accepted. We also set out to achieve a piece of legislation that people could read and understand, because there was no point in developing a complex, legalistic piece of legislation that could be interpreted only by lawyers and the courts. Many parents want to home school their children and they want to know their legal rights and responsibilities. They need legislation that they can read so that they can obey the law of the land. School principals must work closely with legislation, and many of them are not experienced when they first take up their positions. Therefore, it is a new ball game for them; they must come to terms quickly with many issues, including the legal ramifications involved in running schools, and their responsibilities and authority under the laws of the land.

We must legislate for P & C associations and school councils. The people involved in those organisations must be aware of their legal responsibilities and understand the boundaries of their roles. Such legislation is read by a wide audience. Ultimately, the legislation could finish up in the courts. Therefore, it must also be a watertight legal document. That was not easy to achieve, and I compliment the parliamentary draftsmen for their work during the three years we spent putting this legislation together.

At the beginning of the project our aim was to achieve a minimalist piece of legislation. The Bill contains 235 clauses and runs to 169 pages. Many people have commented on the consultation process which took place over the past 12 months. That process began on day one in 1995. The project team consulted all the stakeholders in the education arena - the Catholic education system, the Association of Independent Schools, professional associations of teachers and principals, the WA State School Teachers Union and the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations. They were told about the rewrite of the Education Act and were asked to provide their thoughts on the key issues to be addressed and the directions to be taken. We received tremendous feedback. The reference group debated the issues at length and arrived at directions for drafting. As the drafting progressed, the project team liaised with the stakeholders, discussing the various issues and conclusions to be embraced by the legislation. This consultation process began on the first day. That fact is important for members to consider when we turn to the clauses and debate at length some of the principles, objectives and issues contained in the legislation. The Bill has involved a great deal of consultation, over more than the past 12 months.

I turn now to some of the tests to which we put the legislation. First, we considered each issue because our aim was for the Bill to be as small as possible and the main question was whether a certain issue needed to be included in the legislation. If that was necessary, we should include it but, if not, perhaps we could place it in a policy document, regulations, or an administrative instruction - if a matter involved the Education Department. Therefore, the first test was: Did an issue need to be covered by this legislation? Once we had resolved the issues and provided the committee with draft legislation to discuss, we applied the second test. Will what we have determined to be in the legislation work?

The final test was whether it would be enduring. If it would not be enduring, we did not want it in the legislation. We do not want to keep coming back every few years to amend the legislation. That is what has happened to the 1928 Act, and after 70 years it is unrecognisable as a consistent piece of legislation.

I now refer to some of the issues that have been raised and will outline the background and how we arrived at what appears in the legislation. The first issue, which attracted the most comment from the Opposition, relates to the objectives and principles in the legislation. We discussed these objectives and issues at great length. We looked at other legislation from around the world and Australia to try to determine what we would like to see in legislation dealing with school education in this State.

Given the broad divergence of views within the reference group, we had a very large and differing wish list of issues, philosophies, ideologies, values and principles. It was obvious very early that we would not arrive at a consensus on what should be included. Where should we draw the line? What do we include and what do we leave out? Should we include Aboriginal reconciliation and, if so, what about the other ethnic groups in the community that have made such a valuable contribution over the years? We finally distilled them to four fundamental objectives that permeate the legislation. I will not refer to them in great detail because the Minister covered them in his second reading speech and he will probably refer to them again in his response.

The first objective relates to whether will we have a compulsory education system. Yes, we will. What are the Minister's responsibilities to ensure that that objective is achieved?

Mr Marlborough: Funding it would have been an important aspect.

Mr TUBBY: That is a temporal issue. Governments come and go and other Governments have different priorities. At various times we can allocate more funding. We cannot dictate what level of funding will be allocated in the legislation and have it apply for the next 50 years.

The second objective relates to choice for parents. That is a fundamental right in our State. Parents want a viable choice of education for their children.

The third objective is to provide government schools that meet the educational needs of all children. If that is an objective of the Bill, then what the member for Peel is suggesting is covered without our saying we must spend 25 per cent of the state Budget on education and pinning it down in legislation.

Mr Marlborough: Many of the principles in the Bill simply cannot be met as is intended because you have not funded them accordingly.

Mr TUBBY: I beg to differ.

The third objective is all-encompassing and not subjective. The member for Peel is asking us to include subjective, value judgments in the legislation, and we have tried to avoid that.

The fourth objective is to acknowledge the importance of the involvement and participation of parents in a child's education. That is reflected throughout the legislation, although some members would debate that.

The Government could have included the many issues that members of the Opposition have raised that they consider should be part of the principles and objectives of the Bill. I could have included all the red-neck, right wing philosophies, ideologies and values because members on this side have the numbers. However, the Opposition would not have supported that, nor would three-quarters of the population of Western Australia. That would have defeated one of the original intentions of the legislation; that is, to present something that everyone could accept.

All of the values, judgments, principles and ideologies that the Opposition has raised are policy issues, and they will be included in the Government's policy directions. When members opposite finally form a Government, I have no doubt that they will have a policy document and that they will want to implement it immediately. They will not want to go to a piece of legislation and spend 12 months amending it to put their policies into practice.

Mr Barnett: After a 30 year wait they would be keen.

Mr TUBBY: That is the reason we did not do it. People have said that education policy should be ongoing and that we should not be changing direction with every change in Government. That is why people change Governments - to get a change of policy direction. This legislative framework allows that to happen without incoming Governments having to amend the legislation.

The second issue raised related to penalties. It was a difficult issue and one on which the media focused when the Government released the Green Paper. Under the 1928 Act, the ultimate penalty was that the State took the child away from the parents. The Government did not consider that that was appropriate in modern legislation. If we remove this penalty and still insist that education is compulsory during certain years, at the end of the day we must have some means of getting recalcitrant parents who are refusing to provide their children with adequate education into the court and holding them accountable. The only way to do that is to include penalties in the legislation. If we do not intend to remove the children, sending the parents to gaol is probably a little extreme, so we reverted to a system of fines. The fines in the Green Paper were a little excessive, but at least that attracted public attention. We now have a reasonable set of penalties that will allow us, at the end of a long process, to get parents and children into the courts if the Education Department and the Government consider that is necessary.

Another issue discussed at some length was fees and charges. This has been a hardy annual and a very difficult issue for schools. In 1972, the Tonkin Government introduced the free textbook scheme. I was a deputy principal in 1973 and 1974 at a very large mining community primary school and the Government provided everything. We all know that when people get something for nothing they do not have a great appreciation for it.

Mr Marlborough: That is mythical nonsense.

Mr TUBBY: It is not, as experience in the field would show. We found it very difficult to maintain that free provision of equipment to all children. It was also very difficult to upgrade textbooks. Writing them in the first place is relatively simple, but it is very difficult when they all arrive and the school has not been extended to accommodate them. Years down the track, values change and textbooks need rewriting and updating. That is a very expensive process. From the initial flush in 1972, that system has gradually died away for valid reasons.

In 1972, primary schools were allowed to levy a voluntary contribution of \$9 per child. That has not been changed, and 25 years later we still require that contribution. The \$9 was reasonable in 1972, but in 1998 it does not hold the same value. Therefore, it had to be upgraded -

Mr Marlborough: Or removed altogether.

Mr TUBBY: - or removed. That option was debated at length. Frankly, we had the choice of either abolishing school fees or making them compulsory. We debated this point at length. We never reached total agreement with views from the extreme left and right. Finally, it was accepted that the Government wanted this matter resolved and that it was willing to pursue this direction that compulsory fees be put in the legislation.

We have included a couple of safeguards: The school community, through the school council, will approve the school fees and the school budget. Another safeguard in the legislation is that the regulation will cap the school fees which can be charged.

Finally, a safety net is already established in secondary schools for families that cannot afford to pay their fees, and that same safety net can be extended into primary schools. The Government will decide the matter as a policy

decision, but the legislation will allow it to happen. That is fair to all, and it resolves this hardy annual once and for all. I look forward to Committee debate and I hope compulsory fees will stay in the legislation.

Another issue raised was school closures. Governments have been closing schools ever since they have provided schools. I do not have a problem with that. When I started school aged five years, I attended a school for only six months before it was closed. I had to travel for the next 10 years on a school bus for 32 kilometres each way every day. Times were changing. Roads were better and transport was more accessible and viable. Therefore, we were able to rationalise some of the small, one teacher schools and provide better opportunities in bigger schools in more centralised location. That process has been ongoing for the last 70 years, at least, and probably before our first school education legislation was passed in 1871.

Mr Barnett: There are more schools now than there were four years ago when we came into government.

Mr TUBBY: I thank the Minister for that comment. Schools can be closed in differing ways: First, a community can make a decision; second, the Minister can close in an emergency situation for health and safety reasons; and third - this is the way most schools will be closed - it will occur with 12 months' notice following consultation with the community. Some people say we should write the level of consultation into the legislation, but this is not the place to outline consultation processes. Regulation will cover that easily.

I find it a little strange that the Opposition attacks this Government for having to close schools. I remember back in 1991, when I was shadow Minister for Education, the decision was made to close Carmel primary school, which was just outside my electorate. The Carmel community opposed the decision and took the Government to the Supreme Court. I supported the then Government's decision to close the school, and I lost a few friends in Carmel at the time. However, I thought it was the right decision. That community, which is now in my electorate, spent a tremendous amount of a money pursuing the matter in the Supreme Court.

Within weeks of the students moving to their new school they had fallen in love with their teachers, made new friends, and realised the opportunities they had been missing at the former school. Frankly, when the children are happy, so are the parents and the community. People feel strongly about their local schools, but we need to look at the big picture and take more responsibility in the way we handle these issues. It is easy to stir up the community against a decision which should be made. We need to be more responsible.

I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for his support of the home schooling clause of the Bill. This was probably the most difficult part of the legislation for us to handle. One thousand children undertake home schooling in this State, and a wide range of parents and their ideologies are involved in home schooling. In the main, I find that the home schoolers provide excellent education for their children; that is unquestionable. However, some parents do not provide the level of educational opportunities for their children that those children deserve under a compulsory education system. Those children's rights are being neglected by their parents.

The Minister is responsible for ensuring that compulsory education takes place in this State, so he must have the power and authority to satisfy himself that all the children are receiving an education. To do that, we need a process. The Minister needs the power to get children out of an unsatisfactory situation and into a situation in which the children's rights are protected. This involves spelling it out in black and white in legislation. Some home schoolers cannot accept that the Minister has a responsibility to ensure that all children in the State receive a good education.

I thank all members for their contribution to the debate. I look forward to playing some part in the Committee stage.

MR MARLBOROUGH (Peel) [10.37 am]: In supporting the Government's effort in the School Education Bill, my concern is not in its approach, but that its attempts to implement high ideals will fall short because of the Government's present practices. I refer now to some of these practices which concern parents in my electorate, and I shall put the microscope on the Government and question whether it is committed to education in this State, particularly to education provided by government facilities.

I have seen a reduction in services in the electorate of Peel, between Kwinana and Rockingham, in all the essential areas which presently underpin education in the State; namely, the essential areas over and above the three Rs. We know that children in the 1990s are under amazing pressure in the community. Facts tell us that law and order is out of control, drugs are used and dealt in our schools throughout the metropolitan area, an increasing number of pregnancies occur in school communities, and an increasing number of social concerns are moving into the community from schools. This puts massive pressures on teachers, students, parents and, therefore, the community.

The Government is diminishing all the services in schools which try to alleviate these pressures. In the last two years, I have seen a diminution in the number of social workers allocated to, and time spent in, the 27 schools, including 19 state schools, in my electorate. Psychiatric services have also diminished. Principals tell me - I spoke to them only yesterday - that they have trouble getting psychiatric services to talk once a month to children with learning

difficulties. The availability of welfare officers in schools has reduced, and the number of Aboriginal liaison officers has been cut.

A request by the Kwinana Senior High School for an additional Aboriginal education officer has been denied. When I contrast the fine words in this Bill with what is going on in the education system at the moment I see that the Bill does nothing to improve the situation.

Mr Barnett: It is not about that; it is about the framework for education.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: With the greatest respect, it is about that issue. Many of the high ideals espoused in this Bill cannot be achieved without those essential elements. Most parents and I believe they are the essential elements required in the education process. They are no longer luxuries but essential elements of any school. The boundaries of a high school of 1 000 students encompasses all of the social problems in the community, only they are occurring among children between the ages of 12 and 17. The Government is not providing the services to deal adequately with those social problems. When the Government undervalues the need for those services it does not allow for a proper social ethic to evolve in the school. The teachers are too busy fighting the social problems brought in through the school gate to spend the appropriate time on education priorities.

Many of the values in the Bill simply cannot be met. Although the Minister has pointed out that is not the purpose of the Bill, it will be a fairly hollow vehicle without those things in place; it simply becomes words.

Although the Government refers to community based decision making processes, the Bill places the key elements of education in the hands of teachers and principals.

Mr Barnett: I expect principals to run their schools educationally and, increasingly, administratively. More than anything else that will see improvements in the delivery of education.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I know what the Minister expects; that is evident from his Bill. I can see a lot of the Minister in this Bill. We have seen how the Minister runs this House. The reality is that the Bill does not go far enough in emphasising the role of the community. WACSSO recommends changes to clause 123, which narrowly defines the role of a school council as being not much more than a P and C association. WACSSO states that the Bill makes it clear that the school council is outside of the mainstream of decision making. The Bill states that the council will take part in the establishment and review of the school's objectives, priorities and general policy directions. All of those things are affected by the lack of funding for key elements like social workers and psychiatric workers. All of those things are missing or underfunded in the Minister's system.

WACSSO refers to parents' involvement in the planning of financial arrangements necessary to fund objectives, priorities and directions and in the evaluation of the school's performance in achieving them. WACSSO's requests are reasonable. The Minister has bent over backwards to meet the concerns of home educators, yet in a key element of parents' involvement in the education of their children he cannot accommodate WACSSO. WACSSO has recommended that the functions of school councils should include those objectives under clause 63(1)(e) of the Bill, "Functions of principal". That clause is at the heart of increasing the role of parents in education. Paragraph (e) states that a function of the principal is to establish a plan for the school setting out its objectives and how the objectives and priorities will be achieved.

The parents want to be part of that process. I would have thought that was a reasonable request. If, as the Minister claims, he is handing responsibilities to school communities, that would be a reasonable request. The Minister has met requests from home educators that many people would think were unreasonable. Yet when WACSSO, a representative school body, requests that parents be part of that process, the Minister locks that process away with the principal. The Minister has platitudes for parents but he gives them nothing. They do not play an effective role other than as a glorified P & C association. They have been raised above the level of running the annual school fete and have some input, but not where it may impinge on the principal's role. We have heard the Minister's statement that education is all about community. However, that is not reflected in the Bill. The community input relates to only certain areas of the education system. I did not think that WACSSO's request was unreasonable.

Mr Barnett: Over the past two years I have visited over 300 schools. A parent group has yet to come up to me and say it wants to run the school. This Bill will allow increasing devolvement of responsibility. If one visits schools outside one's electorate and broadly across the community, one sees there is not a ground swell of parents at a local school level wanting to take over administrative, financing and other responsibilities in their schools. I think it will progressively happen but there is no great demand for that. Parents are concerned about more important things.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: Including a role for parents in the Bill will not mean that it will happen either, but it will give an indication to parents that the Minister will head in that direction. It will encourage those parents with ability and foresight to do it earlier rather than later.

Mr Barnett: Over the next year or two the member will be surprised to see the way in which some of those trends develop. It will not be in the so-called wealthy schools, as he might assume, but rather interesting things may happen at the other end of the spectrum.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: There are no wealthy government schools in my electorate; that is the problem. The WACSSO request is responsible and reasonable, and the Minister should accommodate it. If the Minister believes, as he has said, that education will head in that direction, he should include in the Bill not only some encouragement to parents but also some direction to principals.

Regardless of what is in the Bill, we move at different speeds. We have our own views on education, parental participation and the students' role in education. Those various views are reflected throughout our schools. Different principals will move at different paces. However, if the Bill says clearly they should be heading in the direction of letting parents be involved in those crucial decision making processes, it will be a message to principals and an encouragement to parents; and, more importantly, it will improve the education system in this State.

Mr Tubby: Have you read clause 123(a)?

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I have read clause 123. That supports my position of putting the WACSSO request into the Bill.

Mr Tubby: Have a look at clause 123(a).

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I do not want to go back; I would prefer to move on. I have only seven minutes.

Mr Barnett: Are you aware that at all new schools, wherever they are, parents and the community have a role in the selection of the principal?

Mr MARLBOROUGH: The Minister and I may not be here by the time we get around to all of them.

Mr Barnett: I think you will not be.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I do not know about that.

I will touch on the opportunities for Aboriginal children in the school system. This is my view and not necessarily one I share with my colleagues, but it has become firmly entrenched in my mind over the past 12 years as I have seen matters evolving, particularly in my electorate in the Kwinana Senior High School. I have no doubt that the whole area of Aboriginal education and the specific roles and procedures for Aboriginal children in schools are totally inadequate. They do not come anywhere near meeting the needs of that section of the community and they comprise a big part of the reason that those youngsters do not attend school. The youngsters who do not attend school will drop out by year 12. We have some 75 children of Aboriginal descent at Kwinana Senior High School this year. If the track record this year is anything like that for the past five years, not one will go on to year 12.

Mr Thomas: That is an absolute disgrace.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: It is a disgrace. I want to suggest a solution at which Governments should be looking. It is time to have a radical rethink about Aboriginal education in this State. We should be looking at what I would call facilities of excellence for Aboriginal education; that is, the establishment of schools predominately for Aboriginal education. Parents should be able to decide, as they can now, to send their children across boundaries. If people of non-Aboriginal descent want to send their children to those schools, that is fine.

Mr Barnett: You support the policy that we had at the last election for establishing essentially Aboriginal schools within the government system.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I am suggesting what I would call areas of academic excellence for Aboriginal children.

Last year when I had a complaint against a private school in my electorate, I was amazed to find that when the complaint was investigated by the Education Department the matters brought to me indicated people with no teaching qualifications whatsoever - one as young as 18 years of age - were teaching subjects such as English. Firstly, I was amazed at the accusation by parents that this was happening and, secondly, when the department had a look at it I was told that it was not that inappropriate; it could be done under the Act covering private schools. As long as people were working under or being observed by a licensed teacher, they could be in a classroom doing those sorts of things. I do not want to attack that as something negative but use it as an example of what should be happening in the school system with Aboriginal people.

If we stand and wait for people of Aboriginal background to go through the educational system and obtain teaching degrees, we will wait a long time before we put in place those people who would be a great asset to Aboriginal education in schools. We should not necessarily be looking at qualified people. If it is appropriate in the private

school system for unqualified people to fulfil an educational role under the supervision of a licensed teacher, it should be appropriate for a public school.

Mr Tubby: We have Aboriginal aides.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I know. They are a bit like police aides. Aboriginal people can be police aides but not fully qualified police officers. Therefore we categorise them according to the work that they can do.

Aboriginal education in our school system is in a disastrous state. By any measure it is not working. We cannot keep Aboriginal children at school and we cannot get them to school. One of the matters I have to deal with on a daily basis when I meet with the principal, teachers, children and parents at Kwinana Senior High School is being told that there is nothing there. The teachers find it too difficult. They look after 95 per cent of the school population and lose interest in the other 5 per cent. Of course, some very dedicated teachers do not, but the bulk have to get on with educating the 95 per cent. Additionally, the children can see they are not wanted and that they are viewed as a pain in the backside; accordingly they get treated differently with a different discipline regime. They are put through a different process or processed more quickly.

Not so long ago in Kwinana we had an alternative Aboriginal education process at the Medina Aboriginal Cultural Centre. If an Aboriginal child played up at the Kwinana Senior High School, the first thing that would be said to him by the teacher was, "What are you doing here? Why don't you go across the road?" The teachers saw a way out of their predicament when they saw that young person as being unruly in the class. The best way to fix the problem in the classroom was to get him over the road. Those attitudes still exist. We cannot get these youngsters into the school system. We must broaden our view of how we provide appropriate opportunities for young Aboriginal people in schools. At federal and state levels we develop all sorts of initiatives to create job opportunities for Aboriginal people; we give employers inducements through finance or support mechanisms to employ Aboriginal people and the long term unemployed. Those initiatives vary depending on the Government. Why can that sort of thinking not be brought into the school system? Let us not hold our breath waiting for every smart Aboriginal person to go through the system and obtain a teaching degree from a teachers' college. Let us look at bringing those people with lifetime skills, who know Aboriginal culture and who are respected in their community, into the school process and pay them to do a job. If it is good enough for a private school to have a unqualified teaching person giving English lessons supervised by a licensed teacher, it is good enough for a special need group in the state school system.

Mr Tubby: I do not have any problem with that and I am sure that the Minister would not. It is not precluded by this legislation; in fact, it could easily be addressed. This has happened in the Northern Territory, where Aboriginal communities are allowed to run their own schools. When the department was running them the programs were inappropriate, the teachers were as you suggested and the children were not turning up at school. When the Aborigines ran their own school, although their teachers were not as well qualified and the programs were not what the department expected, those teachers and programs encouraged the children to attend school. Therefore, the Aboriginal children learnt something, which they had not in the past when they were not at school.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: The education spokesperson, the member for Roleystone, has indicated that the ability to do what I suggest is contained in the Bill. I am using this opportunity to flag with the Minister that I have been 12 years as the local member for Kwinana, as a result of which I am firmly of the view that we must do something like it. Nothing has worked, and I am now aware of why it has not worked.

Mr Trenorden: I have some sympathy with your comments, but 10 years ago I made a similar speech and was called a racist by other people on your side of the House. My community and the community of the member sitting to your right went through the same problems many years ago, and we have been trying to work through those issues.

Mr MARLBOROUGH: I cannot recall the member's speech 10 years ago and I do not know whether my speech is the same as that. However, education facilities of excellence are needed for indigenous people. I would not preclude non-indigenous children and if their parents wished to send their children to those classes, they should be encouraged to do so. This Government should be looking at the facilities that have not worked to date and should assess the educational needs of these children. It should not be necessary to use only academically qualified people to teach these children, but rather the teachers should have standing and skills that can be used in the system. In other walks of life this Government is encouraging all kinds of people to participate; for example, one of the principles of this Government is to allow charitable organisations to deal with community needs. Very few of the people in those organisations have the qualifications to do the jobs they are asked to do, but that does not bother this Government. It gives them the dollars and hopes that their commitment and their life skills will be good enough to make the process work.

In this case I am suggesting something better than that. I am suggesting that people with skills and with an Aboriginal background should work with and under a teacher, but should be above the level of the Aboriginal aides used in some

schools currently. These people should be part of the teaching process. I am sure that if such people were employed in these positions, there would be a dramatic change in the attitude of some children. A great deal of pressure would be taken off the system because the Aboriginal people would have access to people with whom they could identify. It is a good proposal and it could provide a means whereby these children would obtain educational qualifications. This type of program is working in other industries and there is no reason it should not work in the education system.

The member for Willagee when speaking in this debate referred to the age to which school attendance should be compulsory. I am very much of the view that the age for compulsory education should be increased, particularly as the Federal Government has now removed 18 year olds from the statistics on the unemployed who are receiving benefits. The least the Government and we, as politicians, can do is provide another opportunity for these children to continue to improve their skills. One of those opportunities is to raise the age to which children are required to attend school to 17 years. The national average for year 12 retention rates is approximately 70 per cent, but that should be improved and built on. The 15 year age limit has been in existence since the time of Methuselah, and science and technology are changing so rapidly that many people cannot keep up with it now. What is the situation for a 15 year old who leaves school and must work the rest of his life in that changing environment? The opportunities for further education should be reviewed with a view to increasing the age to which school attendance is compulsory from 15 years to 17 years.

I refer now to the issue of fees. I absolutely oppose any proposal to increase the fees at primary schools. Any member who wants to know how difficult it is for a family to pay the school fees for their children should live in my electorate for a month. For many families in my electorate it is almost impossible. It is unwarranted and cruel for this Government to impose a penalty on those families for the education of their children. Many families have children at high school as well as children at primary school. The member for Roleystone referred to a safety net system. I will give an example of how that system works.

At Rockingham Senior High School a 16 year old girl, whose mother had been in prison for drug offences, was unable to pay her school fees. A week before the year 10 school dance this girl was told by the principal that she could not attend the dance because she had not paid her school fees. That is how the safety net works when it is left in the hands of the principal. There may well be a committee in place, as the Minister said, but the truth of the committee process is that most committees are ruled by the school principal. I was informed of this situation as the local member, I contacted the district office, and it took a week to sort out the problem because the school principal stood his ground. He said that he had had the same problem when the mother was in prison and she could not pay the school fees for her 17 year old child. The mother had received a nine year sentence for the drug offences, but was in prison for only four years. That is how the safety net work, regardless of the legislation.

It is unnecessary to impose these fees on primary school education. The Government is neglecting its obligation to society. It has an obligation to educate. If members opposite do nothing else during their time in government, they should make sure that education is available at a high level to as many people as possible. It is totally inappropriate and cruel to impose penalties and to allow a process whereby children can be victimised because their parents cannot afford to pay for school uniforms, books and the like.

DR TURNBULL (Collie) [11.08 am]: This Bill has been through a lengthy consultation process, as other speakers have said, and I commend the Minister for ensuring the process was extensive, and the Parliamentary Secretary and member for Roleystone for the activities in which he took part in the early development of this Bill.

The Bill tries to cover a number of issues. It addresses the philosophy of the education system as well as some of the basic nuts and bolts for enforcing the education system. It also contains many high and laudable objectives in laying out the principles for the way education should be conducted and the outcomes hoped for. Today I will go through some of those objectives, pointing out some of the visions and the evidence indicating how these new directions will benefit the children who attend state and private schools in Western Australia. I will also point out some of the areas in which these wonderful objectives could be debased if the system is not carefully monitored. Many other speakers in this debate have also pointed out some of the areas that will need to be watched closely.

I will commence with the role of parents and the community in school councils and in many of the committees. School councils and boards have had quite an influence on the focus of their schools. It is well known that many principals are able to stamp their imprimatur on schools, often by the sheer power of their presence and ability, and often because of a lack of involvement and interest from parents and other groups. It is a good move to ensure that the parent body and school board play a role in many of the decision making processes.

In country areas in particular, only a small number of parents are available to be involved in the school community. This can create a real problem when it comes to the appointment of staff. The panel for the selection of a principal, a senior teacher or even the most lowly teacher straight out of college must have local representation. This process is currently being trialled. One of the schools in my electorate that has the unfortunate experience of being a pilot

school has been finding it extraordinarily difficult because the rules with regard to what the local members of a committee can take into account in selecting a teacher are horrific. That school of less than 150 children is now up to the third panel for the appointment of one senior teacher.

The major reason that this is happening is that the results are being challenged partly on the basis that the local members of that committee happen to know a number of the teachers who have applied for that position; therefore, they are not allowed to consider many aspects of the selection. As a result, the very laudable and extremely good principle that there should be some local input into the selection of a teacher is being totally distorted by the fact that because it is a small community, some of the candidates are known to the people from that community who are on the selection panel. The situation has now become even worse, because each new panel has had to replace some of the local people who were on the previous panel, and that community is now running out of local people to go on the panel.

I heard this morning that this problem has arisen in quite a large school in Perth. I do not know why the problem has arisen in that school, but it is now seven weeks into the first term and it still has not made a number of the appointments for the year because it has not been able to set up the selection panels for those appointments. I am not saying that we should totally desert the idea of having local input into the selection process, because that is a good principle, but we need to ensure that that principle is not so distorted because of local conditions that it becomes ineffective. Equity in a system does not mean that exactly the same rules should be applied across the whole of the State. Local area planning has some very good principles, and it would be good if it could be used to modify some of the rules that were in place. Unfortunately, the State School Teachers Union might challenge what happened in a local school on the basis that it was against an overall equity provision because variations had been made to accommodate local conditions.

Some members opposite have referred to how some of these very good principles in the Bill might not work in their areas. The member for Peel spoke about low income families. I have spoken about the local selection board. However, if there were local variations to deal with those distortions to allow moneys to be allocated to schools in low income areas to enable them to pick up a percentage of low income children and their families, or to allow some of the requirements for local input to be changed, unfortunately that might be challenged by the union, the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, or a parent body from one of the richer suburbs on the basis that it was not equitable across the State. We need to address this matter so that local area planning will accommodate local variations within a school system that is trying to provide education from the highest density suburb of Perth to the backblocks of rural and remote Western Australia. Those are just some examples of what I believe this Bill must take into account.

Before I leave that point, the Federal Government's priority school funding program was extremely effective in my area and fulfilled its objectives. One of the factors of that program, which did not cost a lot of money and which I request the Minister for Education to consider carefully, was that teachers were carefully selected for those priority schools, and the calibre of the teachers in those schools greatly assisted the education process there. However, the Education Department can no longer direct teachers to attend certain schools, and that situation may negate my request. The direction of extremely good teachers to schools with a high level of social problems and where parents have a low economic status was very important.

I am pleased that the special requirements of children with disabilities have been addressed by this legislation.

Religious instruction is also important, and this Bill has made a feature of that aspect and addressed it in a special division. That recognises the importance of the issue and reflects the Curriculum Council guidelines. It also recognises a need for ethics and the need for a spiritual basis in our education system.

I commend the Minister for the final outcome for home schooling in this legislation. The Green Paper was an insult to home schoolers. They are fine people, and the vast majority of them have done an excellent job. The failures in home schooling are but a small percentage of the whole. I am very pleased that the Bill recognises that home schoolers have a right to run their own program of learning, which will be assessed for compatibility with the objectives of the Curriculum Council.

Mr Barnett: That is fair comment, but the real concern about home schooling is that probably around 1 000 students - some of whom probably are in the member's electorate - simply are not being educated, and many of them may be subject to abuse. That is a welfare issue; and it is a serious problem that exists everywhere, but particularly in the south west.

Dr TURNBULL: I assure the Minister that I know nearly all the home schoolers in my electorate, and I know that abuse would occur in only minute numbers -

Mr Barnett: It involves 1 000 children, and that is not a minute number. It is a significant issue.

Dr TURNBULL: I agree that it is a welfare issue, and it must be dealt with in that arena. The Minister has done a very good job in ensuring that the Bill recognises that the vast majority of home schoolers are extremely responsible parents.

Mr Barnett: I agree.

Dr TURNBULL: These parents take their responsibility far more seriously than the bulk of parents whose children attend state school.

Progress can be made by schools' widening their activities and being allowed more independent decision making. I refer now to a number of such schools in my electorate. About 10 years ago the Collie Senior High School formed strong links with TAFE and industry in the area. Although this legislation has yet to be passed, under some new programs and directions which are being implemented, links with industry have increased even more. Year 11 classes are undertaking pre-apprenticeship and trade training, and alternative education programs are now highly sought by students - particularly the boys in my area, because they know the programs will provide an opportunity to enter industry. They will learn what employers want, and they recognise this very good program at the school. This is a very innovative process, and I commend the Collie Senior High School and the principal who first started the program, John Mumme, for the implementation of the program about 10 years ago. The fact that the new Act will allow this to happen will be an advantage.

Members have spoken about children leaving one school to go to another because certain programs are available. This process gives schools the opportunity to work together. If the Collie Senior High School can provide an extremely good trades program, it may attract students to travel by bus from another area to take advantage of that program. Children may elect to board in our area to undertake a program. I am aware of one student who is considering that at the moment in order to undertake a year 11 program. In many areas this initiative would need to be considered in the provision of resources to schools in order to attract such students. I see a trades school at Collie being run rather like the agricultural college in Narrogin where children from all over the State attend year 11 and 12 programs. I see that as a possibility at the Gnowangerup District High School where a special program has been introduced. Such programs, and the proposal put by the member for Roe, will be very important and could be accommodated under the new curriculum guidelines and principles.

I turn now to the problem of children who refuse to go to school or truant. For about 10 years in Collie I have been trying to develop programs that focus on such children, and on those with severe learning disabilities which add to their difficulty in attending school. About five years ago, we ran a program which allowed children to withdraw from most classes at high school and attend a separate site, returning to high school for core subjects and activities. Unfortunately the program was not very successful, and attracted children to the alternative site rather than to the high school. Part of the problem was that most teachers did not have any sympathy with the program that we were trying to implement.

The very good alternative site program was funded last year by the juvenile justice program, and its interaction with the school was very good. Unfortunately, the process of developing that program took a lot of time to work through, and only six or eight children benefited very much from that program. The funding for the alternative site has now gone. The teachers within the school who were helping to develop that program and using it now realise how valuable it was. I suggest to the Minister for Education that we should try to implement that program again. I am asking the high schools to write this up as a pilot program and present it to the Education Department. I know that the department draws boundaries on what it can fund, but the School Education Bill lays out clearly that the school, and the education system generally, has a responsibility for children who become truants and present discipline problems at school. We fund other programs within schools, such as the extremely good literacy programs which are carefully targeted to address great needs, principally, of young boys and teenage boys. However, the alternative site is another method and program in that area which the Education Department must look at funding.

In conclusion, I will be looking closely at local area planning in the country. This policy has some wonderful possibilities. With smaller numbers of students attending schools in country areas, the temptation will arise to use local area planning to adjust years 11 and 12 programs, and not necessarily to the benefit of children. I refer to schools like Manjimup and Collie High Schools. We must use the opportunities springing up so that perhaps Collie can be a priority school and attract the year 11 and 12 students to our area. This can be a tool we can use to our advantage.

I strongly support the School Education Bill. I know that parents, friends and school boards of all schools in my electorate took seriously their participation in the development of this program. We will watch its progress closely. The people implementing the Bill should recognise that equity of access for people in rural and remote areas requires the addition of some local variation.

MR THOMAS (Cockburn) [11.34 am]: I am happy to contribute to the second reading debate on the School

Education Bill. I repeat the comments made earlier praising the process which led to the Bill's introduction in the House. I praise particularly the role of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education in the community consultation.

Mr Osborne: What about the Whip who paired him?

Mr THOMAS: I praise others who played a role, major and minor, in that process. My feedback from people involved in the process was that it was good. Obviously, that is reflected in the content of the Bill. Various interests who sought to make representations were able to have their consideration reflected in the Bill. That is a good approach to the formulation of legislation, especially on major Bills which impact on the most important responsibilities of Parliament. Although controversies and areas of differences will arise between us and community interest groups, it is a good thing if many of those differences can be sorted out before the introduction of legislation.

This process reflects a theory I have had since the Labor Party was in Government and in the time of the current Government; namely, that not enough use is made of non-Ministers in the administration of government. The appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries was designed to provide the opportunity for non-Minister members to make a contribution to government. It was never used when the Labor Party was in government in a practical sense as Ministers wanted to hold everything for themselves and not delegate; from what I hear from members opposite, that quality is also reflected in this Government.

Several tasks can be assigned to members of Parliament who are not Ministers. The way the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education has been given responsibility to work on this Bill is desirable. The Bill before the House reflects credit on his endeavours and on the process of his appointment to that task. Ministers generally should look at giving non-Ministers an opportunity to use their talents and have input to the process of Executive Government.

A number of people have commented that this is very boring legislation. That is true. It deals with the most important area of government in this State, perhaps competing with health. The State Government and State Parliament have responsibility for a number of areas, but health and education take the largest proportion of the state Budget and most affect the quality of life of the people for whom we have responsibility.

The State is responsible for administering school education, so this legislation must be seen as one of the most important pieces of legislation to come before Parliament. Therefore, one would expect that the legislation would be full of high principle, philosophy and aims behind discharging this very important constitutional function of Parliament. The Bill is as dry as dust and almost devoid of the exciting principles and considerations that one would hope would be in legislation such as this. The Minister's second reading speech is also as dry as dust.

Mr Barnett: It is dull and effective rather than flamboyant and useless.

Mr THOMAS: We will come in a moment to how effective the Minister is and how effective he could be with this legislation if he considered a few principles that should be encompassed in school education in this State. One aspect about which I particularly wish to talk is the encouragement of innovation. Anyone who wants to be innovative or try out new ideas will get no encouragement or inspiration from this legislation; indeed, people in the education system who wanted to be innovative and who went to this legislation would feel that the Parliament was not encouraging them.

Mr Tubby: The legislation provides the framework for initiatives, which the 1928 Act did not do.

Mr THOMAS: I do not deny that the Bill is a vast improvement on the 1928 Act. The member was not in the Chamber at the time but I paid credit to his role in the formulation of the Bill. The 1928 Act was probably a vast improvement over the Act of 1871, which in turn was a vast improvement over nothing which preceded it, but that does not mean that this Bill is as good as it could be. I will make some suggestions about how it could be much better than it is.

Everyone who has spoken in this debate has said that education is important. It has become almost a trite statement. I do not want simply to say that but we need to reflect on the fact that the quality of our education will determine our standard of living in this State. It is as important as that. Of all our State's resources, the most important resources are the skills and the quality of the work force. Industries which will exist or come to this State and prosper will be largely but not totally dependent on the quality of our work force because we have natural resources. Our ability to be internationally competitive is largely dependent on the skill of our work force. The school education system has a primary role in preparing people for the work force and, of course, for other aspects of life.

Mr Osborne: You would be very keen to see science encouraged.

Mr THOMAS: Yes, indeed. I do not want appear as a complete philistine, because there are aspects of life other

than the economy, but education affects the capacity of people to enjoy them. One needs to be able to earn a living in order to pay for those other aspects of life. For that reason I emphasise the economic aspect.

The shipbuilding industry is somewhat controversial in my electorate at the moment. It is a glamour industry which is most often cited to international and interstate visitors as being an innovative industry of which we should be very proud, which should be encouraged to expand and which should encourage other industries to exist. One of the reasons for that is the industry is located in one place and we can take people there to see it. Other industries such as electronic and manufacturing industries are not quite so visible. The shipbuilding industry exists in this State mainly because of the enterprise of the people who established it and the quality of the work force. A similar shipbuilding industry could be established in any area with a coastline in the world. Basically all people need for a shipbuilding industry is access to materials, which come from anywhere in the world, and a coastline where ships can be put into the water.

Why is it that in some aspects Western Australia has the leading shipbuilding industry in the world? In part it is because of the enterprise and innovation of the people who set up the industry, for which they deserve credit. It is also attributable to some extent to the policies of successive Governments which have encouraged this industry. It is also necessary to have a very good work force. In order to do that we must have an education system to provide it. We need to recognise that very few aspects of government in this State are more important than the school education system.

In the period before most of us were involved in schools, schooling was very rigid, uniform and drab. It did not encourage people to learn. Fortunately most of us were educated after that very austere period, but by looking at some of the remnants of that system, such as the architecture, furniture, text books and so on, we can see they were pretty drab and did not encourage children to learn and enjoy school. The Parliamentary Secretary referred to the 1928 Act. At that time throughout the world the education system was uniform and almost paramilitary. One anecdote has it that the Minister for Education in France - the same could be said about Ministers in most parts of the world - was able to look at his watch at any time during the week and say that all of a particular age group of school children in France would be studying a particular subject. He would know exactly where they would be in the curriculum because everything was prescribed and uniform. The system was unable to be responsive to an individual student or community's need. I do not know that our education system in the English speaking world was ever quite that regimented and austere. Nevertheless, compared to the present system it was fairly austere and did not encourage people to enjoy and look forward to learning.

When we look at early education the principal innovation came from Madame Montessori. The Montessori system of learning is now reflected throughout the world through Montessori schools. I have sent my children to Montessori schools and have had some marginal involvement with the schools. When Madame Montessori evolved her system it caused a revolution. She said that children should enjoy learning and that enjoyable games should be devised which at the same time educated children. She said that educational materials should be bright and attractive and the sorts of things that children would want to play with. In short, she said that learning should be fun and attractive rather than something that children had to do and that if they did not do what they were told they would get the cane, which was the orthodox approach. Most of what she devised has become commonplace. If members went into any state or private preschool they would be very hard put to find anything different from that which they would find in a Montessori school because, for the most part, the principles Madame Montessori devised have been accepted as orthodox. The environments for preschools and the early grades of primary school are bright and attractive. We can see that somebody is making a deliberate effort to encourage children to want to go there and enjoy the experience. When Madame Montessori first devised that it was a revolution. It has now become commonplace.

I make that point because it is very important to encourage innovation in education. We cannot say that we have the last word or the most effective system in primary or secondary education or tertiary education, which is beyond the scope of this Bill. Opportunities are always available for change and improvement and for finding situations which are perhaps not necessarily better in general but which are appropriate to certain circumstances and able to improve education for a community or class of students.

I am reminded of the Whitlam Government which set up the Schools Commission in 1973 in seeking to transform the school education system in Australia, essentially by making commonwealth money available to the States with varying degrees of strings attached but with the aim of making schools in Australia equal to the best in the world. In his books, particularly his major work on his Government, Gough Whitlam indicated that he wanted to do for schools in Australia what Menzies had done for universities.

One of the Schools Commission's most interesting programs was called innovations in education. I do not know whether anyone here was involved in education at the time or subsequently and has read about it or noted some of its consequences, but it provided money specifically for people who wanted to be innovative and to set up different programs. If they could convince the body within the Schools Commission that was allocating money they were

provided with funds for their program. No doubt some of the establishments for which the money was allocated have not survived the test of time, but some have.

One of which I am particularly conscious in my electorate is the Spearwood Alternative School. It uses the buildings of the old Spearwood Primary School. Spearwood is traditionally an agricultural area. The school is housed in a two-room weatherboard building in the archetypal 1920s or earlier architecture with high ceilings and big windows like the buildings seen in pictures of rural Western Australia.

When the building became surplus to requirements it was replaced by the current Spearwood Primary School, which almost adjoins it on the campus. A group of parents in that area wanted to establish and run a school as an alternative school and were successful in applying for funding under the innovations and education program. It draws students primarily from within the area but I think people can come from a wider catchment area than the immediate locality. Its curriculum encompasses alternative programs run by the parents.

It is nonetheless a state school operating within the state system. Its staffing resources and capital works are done in accordance with the standard formula applied in state schools generally.

Mr Barnett: How many students does it have?

Mr THOMAS: Not many - I think it has 60. It has two classes. Thanks to my efforts it also has a very good library.

The point I am trying to make is that that sort of thing is a very desirable phenomenon. As we saw with Madame Montessori and the principles she applied to early childhood education, these issues can be very important. However, the Bill contains nothing to suggest that innovation is worthwhile. I refer the Government primarily to clause 63 to which I will move an amendment because a directive should be included in the Bill for principals to be innovative and consider whether there is a better way of carrying out their current practices and objects.

In the light of our diverse community, uniform practices are not necessarily appropriate. My colleague, the member for Peel, spoke about the difficulty with Aboriginal education in his area. Perhaps we should be trying some radically different ideas which can be trialled in some of the schools. That would not be a licence for people to do what they wanted. They would of course be subject to the Curriculum Council Act and the other provision in this Bill. However, within those constraints and the constraints on the discretion of principals through the powers of the Director General of the Department of Education and the Minister they should be encouraged to be innovative.

Another area exists at the other end of the age spectrum in secondary schools where we should be particularly encouraging of innovation. We are all aware of special programs run in secondary schools in which schools should be positively encouraged to engage. Again, no real encouragement exists in this legislation for them to do that. One of the problems all Governments face in the administration of the school system is declining numbers in schools in older areas. As communities age and the number of children of school age declines, pressure is applied to close them. Resistance comes from parents who want their children to remain in the school. It is one of the thorny problems that confronts Governments throughout Australia and probably throughout the world.

A solution to that is for those schools to offer a specific program that will attract students from other areas. John Curtin Senior High School runs programs in soccer, theatre arts and dance. Melville Senior High School has subjects in aviation. They seek to provide something beyond the normal curriculum to attract students from other areas. That should be positively encouraged because varying needs exist throughout the community. They cannot all be met in every school.

We happen to live in a society which has, I think, the highest private vehicle ownership rate in the world. It is possible for parents who are prepared to make the effort to take their children to schools which are not in their immediate locality in order to experience other programs.

I thought it was a good idea for a secondary school to have a specialised program in Australian rules football. Other schools specialise in hockey, cricket and soccer and I wanted to encourage a school in my electorate to set up a specialist football program in conjunction with the Fremantle Dockers. To do that, it was necessary to obtain funding. Unfortunately my brilliant proposal never saw the light of day, not because it did not have merit, but because the Football Development Trust did not have the imagination to realise that this was a good idea. Hopefully that view will change in the future. I am alluding to that because, in considering the question of funding, it occurred to me that it would be relatively easy to get sponsorship outside the normal sources for education, such as government funding. Many businesses like to be associated with and encourage Australian rules football. The principal sponsors of the AFL teams in Western Australia are breweries, and obviously it is inappropriate for them to sponsor football programs in schools. However, it may be possible to get some businesses to sponsor a football program in a secondary school.

Mr Barnett: There is an issue about school sizes. I agree with you. If we have specialty programs, they attract

children to the school who are good at that. Invariably young people who are good at specialty programs, whether it be sport or drama or whatever, tend to be very motivated and perform well at school. A difficulty is that, if the school does not have a very good, broad, educational and quality program, the specialty program languishes. I can think of schools, although I will not name them, which have specialty programs, but because the schools are too small, the parents will not send their children there. We must face up to that issue.

Mr THOMAS: Apart from the merit of the school, the reputation of the school is also involved.

Mr Barnett: It is also the choice of subjects and mixed classes instead of full classes.

Mr THOMAS: I agree with all that. I am just citing the sorts of specialty programs that exist at the moment. I suggest they are possibly only the tip of the iceberg of what is possible. I am not suggesting every innovation should provide elite footballers or theatre arts people. Some schools might provide top of the range programs in manual arts, which are not academically prestigious. There should be encouragement for people who have expertise and ideas in these areas to seek excellence and to try to be innovative.

I return to my football story: I was able to secure an indication that between \$60 000 and \$70 000 a year would be available from outside the normal funding system to provide this football program. Programs, some of which could be in my electorate, could be directed specifically to industry-related areas, such as manual arts, but they would be much more advanced and different from what that subject meant to people who went to school when I did. There is a different approach to that type of work now than there was when I was at school. If such a program were established, it could attract sponsorship from industry which would like to be associated with it.

We will be debating this matter, via some amendments, when we get to the Committee stage. I am very chary of advertising. The Bill makes provision for sponsorship through advertising. It seems to use those terms interchangeably and to say that if there is to be sponsorship, there should be advertising. I do not believe advertising is appropriate in our schools, but sponsorship is.

Last night I went to the Nugget Coombs lecture at Edith Cowan University, which is sponsored by a law firm. In very small letters at the bottom of the program it stated that the function was sponsored by Clayton Utz. That sort of acknowledgment is fine, but it is inappropriate to have what can be described as advertising. There should be only modest acknowledgment.

Mr Barnett: Would you object to logos on school football jumpers?

Mr THOMAS: I would.

MR GRILL (Eyre) [12.05 pm]: I want to talk about the demise of the country teacher transfer system. That has had, and will have, a deleterious effect on the standards of country education. I am very concerned about that. I understand that at the core of this transfer system is a situation whereby transferees within one level have priority over promotions from those at a lower level. As a result of a determination by the Equal Opportunity Commission the core of that stream has been destroyed. In doing so, the Equal Opportunity Commission has gone some way towards destroying the concept of equal opportunity for students within the state school system.

When we talk about equal opportunity, we must consider what education is about. It is not simply about looking after the welfare of teachers; it is about educating children. If a system which has served this State well over such a long time is destroyed, we must ensure it is done in a way which allows some compensation, or another system should be put in place so that those students who are already disadvantaged, and in some cases very badly disadvantaged, in country areas, have an equal opportunity to obtain an education similar to that enjoyed in city areas.

The Equal Opportunity Commission has not taken that into account, and I am afraid, in an excess of zeal, it has lost sight of the real objective; that is, the education of children in country areas. Incidentally - I do not think this is the most important aspect - the careers of a number of teachers, who made decisions to go to country areas and teach on the assumption that they would transfer back to the city, have been truncated or jeopardised. I do not want that statement to detract from the thrust of what I am saying which relates to the standards of teaching in country areas and, in turn, the standards of education for country students.

Mr Barnett: I agree that that problem will be seen to be very serious. The corollary to that is the teachers who land in so-called good or attractive schools and stay there for 20 years. That is equally a problem. That would be true of many schools, perhaps even some schools in the upper class suburbs of Perth where a teacher arrives at that school and will not leave and today is doing exactly what he or she was doing 20 years ago. There are two dimensions to the problem.

Mr GRILL: I do not say that the old transfer system was perfect; indeed, there were defects. For members who are not aware, I point out that the old system worked on the basis that, if teachers spent two years in a country area, they

could transfer to a metropolitan post and have preference over another teacher who was endeavouring to be promoted to that post. There was equality between transferees, but the transferees had priority over people who wanted to be promoted to the position. As I said, that long standing situation has been destroyed by an attack of excess zeal on the part of the Equal Opportunity Commission.

The problem for teachers who want to transfer back to the metropolitan area is that they must compete against teachers in the metropolitan area who have inherent advantages. They have inherent advantages because in many cases they are closer to development courses, and I speak particularly about teachers in remote areas. Many of them are a long way from effective professional development courses. A lot of them are away from any proximity to tertiary institutions, and those things in themselves are problems. There are also other problems, like the fact that in many cases teachers may be a long way from their permanent home and the comforts and amenities associated with that. Country teachers in many respects have inherent disadvantages when it comes to prospects for promotion over their city cousins. That has been accepted in the past, but it appears to be something that has been completely overlooked by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

In this promotional race, there is no on-ground assessment of the ability of the teacher. They are basically assessed on the quality of their curriculum vitae and I understand from teachers that a practice has crept into the Education Department of professional writers writing CVs, so those who are able to afford a professional writer to present their CV in a very attractive fashion and in a way which the professional writers know will meet the approval of the people assessing those applications, appear to have an advantage. Assessment is all done very theoretically on the basis of a CV, which may not have been written by the applicant and in fact has been written by some professional person. There appear to be defects in that promotional system in itself.

I give a couple of concrete examples, and I hope these people do not mind my using their names. There is a teacher in Kalgoorlie called John Mann who is the headmaster of a new school.

Mr Tubby: A very good principal too.

Mr GRILL: Yes. In due course I know he would like to transfer back to Perth. However, the closest in 32 years of teaching he has ever come to Perth is Cunderdin, which is still a fairly long way from Perth.

Another good teacher of 27 years' experience in the country who is well known because of his reputation in the teaching circles is Pat Hooper. His wife Eileen also teaches in Kalgoorlie-Boulder but I know ultimately they have aspirations to transfer back to Perth. There is no doubt that John Mann and Pat and Eileen Hooper were extremely good teachers. They joined the Education Department and worked under the system whereby they would be allowed to transfer back under the teacher transferee system. All that has been blighted for them in the sense that they will now have to apply and seek promotion against a whole host of applicants who would like to be promoted to that position. It certainly makes it harder for them and the sacrifices they have made under a system which they thought would continue to apply counts for nothing right now. That has led to a fair amount of discontent. A new development within the Education Department exacerbates the problem. A teacher can now have six months' turnover situation whereby they can be transferred to a position and hold it for six months and then be transferred on.

We had a situation in Kambalda a few years ago where, because the post of headmaster of Kambalda Senior High School was not a highly desirable position, we had people applying for the position, being granted the position, and then taking their long service leave. They would spend a very small period actually at the school and would then be transferred somewhere else.

There are within country areas and within my electorate - I do not want to specify them because it would stigmatise those areas - schools to which people do not want to be transferred or promoted. At some schools within my electorate, at the beginning of the year in some cases we do not have a teacher appointment because nobody wants those appointments. That is understandable and sympathy should be given to teachers who do not want to be promoted there. However, if a six monthly turnover system exists, teachers will apply for and be granted those positions. They will then fill the positions for six months or perhaps will take their long service leave and then be transferred somewhere else without actually spending any time or only a very small time at the school.

I do not see how this transfer system will help country schools. A system could operate whereby there is a very high turnover of teachers in situations where there is already a high turnover - positions which are not seen to be particularly desirable appointments. In removing the country transfer scheme, we remove the major incentive for teachers to remain in those positions. It needs to be replaced by something else and I have heard from the Minister on radio and in the media that some compensation or incentives are to be put in place. I have heard a figure of \$4m mentioned. However, the teachers on the ground are very vague about what these incentives might be and about whether they will apply, and there does not seem to be any major incentive for those teachers to remain in country areas.

Mr Barnett: I do not pretend there are not complex sets of issues, but I have made it clear and there was an initial discussion just before Christmas with a wide group of parties that we are going to review and restructure the whole system of the appointment, transfer and promotion of teachers to bring it into the twenty-first century. The whole system is archaic and throws up all those sorts of anomalies about which you are talking.

Mr GRILL: But this must be in place so the Minister has only a few months.

Mr Barnett: I make no promise. We are dealing with the teachers' union, the principals' associations, and whoever else. It is not going to be easy to solve.

Mr GRILL: I am pleased to hear that, and I hope the Minister is successful in solving it. There is a real problem. One could take a good school like North Kalgoorlie Primary School - I am not stigmatising this school because people know it is a good school; I could mention other schools that are in a much worse position but I do not want to stigmatise them: North Kalgoorlie Primary School this year has 10 new staff, five of whom are new graduates and that is symptomatic of the turnover situation. If one adds the fact that there is no incentive for the teachers to transfer and six monthly turnovers, the situation could become much worse. As I say, North Kalgoorlie Primary is a good and desirable school to which teachers like going.

I ask the National Party members, of whom there is one or two here, what they, as the traditional defenders of bush schools, intend to do about this situation? What is their role? Are they going to join with us to ensure that country students are properly looked after? We do not seem to be hearing much from them of late on this subject.

Mr Wiese: Most of our members endorse these comments because those problems certainly do need to be addressed.

Mr GRILL: We would like to join with the National Party in that endeavour.

I also question the role of the union. It does a good job, but what role is it playing to ensure that standards in country education are not falling? A lot of teachers in the country believe that the union has become too top heavy with city appointments and that the needs of country education are being left lamentably a long way behind. It is pleasing to hear that the Minister will address these problems and that he is putting in place mechanisms to achieve that. However, that has not been seen to happen in the country and country teachers are concerned that it will not be in place in time for the new procedures. I am told there are about 850 teachers in the country working under the old system whose prospects for advancement have been somewhat retarded by the abolition of the transfer system.

Mr Barnett: I do not know how we will do it, but I guarantee we will not abandon teachers in remote areas.

Mr GRILL: I thank the Minister.

I have endeavoured to take an interest in Aboriginal education for many years. The central desert schools are no longer in my electorate but they were for a long time. I still have a very close connection with the many Aboriginal communities in my electorate. They are reasonably well run and have good administrators and councils. However, given the millions of dollars that we have poured into education for Aboriginal people in those communities for many years to provide very fine facilities, we must be disturbed about the lack of results. Despite all that money, we have never had a secondary school graduate from any of those communities. One must wonder about the system when that happens. There is a general feeling in my electorate that the parents have had a better education than their children. I do not know whether there is any research to substantiate that feeling, but I know the people very well and, on the basis of anecdotal evidence and my own experience, it is easy to come to that conclusion.

Over the years many people have criticised the Mt Margaret mission. I also criticised it because it taught a brand of fundamentalist Christianity that was not very productive. However, at least at the end of the day the kids came out with a basic education and social skills and graces. They had a real knowledge about hygiene, how to dress well and how to conduct themselves well in the community. That is no longer happening. There are many dysfunctional Aboriginal families in my electorate and I do not know whether many of the children will have any future at all. The basic statistics about Aboriginal children - the crime and domestic violence figures - are alarming. I often refer to a figure produced by the University of Western Australia showing that the frequency of violence in Aboriginal homes is 50 times the state average. A teacher might give a child homework and expect that it will be done. However, once that child gets home, in many instances they are not safe. In some cases we have problems placing young Aboriginal girls in situations where they will not be molested.

The East Kalgoorlie Primary School runs a very good program. They take the Aboriginal children to school in the morning, wash them, clothe them and give them breakfast and lunch and then take them home. I do not criticise that for one moment. However, does it instill in the parents individual responsibility for themselves and their children? I do not think so. I know it is breaking the awful cycle, but is it teaching those children that they need to take responsibility? So many of our policies, which are engendered in the inner city suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, are out of touch with what is happening on the ground.

Mr Barnett: The member might recall that about a year ago I made a suggestion that we should look at a hostel for Aboriginal children and I was attacked throughout the nation. It is interesting that the people who supported me were Aboriginal leaders. They said that the system, society and their families were failing a generation of Aboriginal children. The member is telling the truth and it should be said more often. There is a naivete about some of the problems those children face.

Mr GRILL: I support the Minister in his endeavours to put in place hostels to support Aboriginal education.

My colleague the member for Peel made a very fine speech not long ago about Aboriginal education. He referred to a special effort to set up Aboriginal schools that would cater better for their needs. We are talking about hostels, not where the students would spend all their time, but where they would spend the week. They would go home on weekends and for holidays so that they were still able to maintain cultural roots. The Christian Aboriginal Parent Directed School in Coolgardie embraces that concept. The school was set up by the Aboriginal parents but it largely grew from the Mt Margaret mission. The parents felt that their children needed to be brought up in a Christian environment but one where they could learn in a culturally appropriate way and at their own pace. They reside at the school during the term and go home during the holidays. The Minister is referring to hostels attached to schools where children stay during the week and go home on weekends and holidays and still maintain their cultural roots.

Mr Barnett: They have a good diet, a good night's sleep and assistance at school.

Mr GRILL: I made similar remarks to the Tomlinson inquiry when it was in Kalgoorlie-Boulder a year ago; but they did not gain much attention. I have been making the same noises, primarily in mixed white and Aboriginal forums, for some years. I find that publicly when one makes those statements people pour scorn on them, as they did on the statement made by the Minister. However, privately 99 out of 100 people agree. What happens in the private forums is very different from what happens publicly. I do not know why there is a distinction, but it exists.

It comes back to the fact that much of the debate on Aboriginal affairs in Australia stems from areas where there are no Aborigines. Most people have not met full blood Aborigines. I have truly indigenous Aboriginal people in my office in large numbers every day of the week, and that does not make me the most popular person in Boulder. I extend services to them in the same way as I extend them to anyone else. I have many Aboriginal friends and close relationships with Aboriginal people. In fact, when the land council meets annually, I chair the meetings. So there is some element of trust. When I talk to those people on a one-to-one basis or in a private situation about attaching hostels to schools, they agree. However, not one will support me publicly because they do not want to run up against other elements in the Aboriginal industry dominated from the Eastern States, where another agenda altogether seems to dominate. In many respects, that agenda is unrealistic. It does not take into account the realities of the situation for Aboriginal people. In the long term, because it destroys the concept of an individual's responsibility for his or her own welfare and of parents for their children's welfare, it is highly counterproductive. We have a tradition in Aboriginal affairs of being excellent in hindsight about where the mistakes were made. However, we seem to have no ability to make the right decisions on a contemporary basis. It is happening right now. Ministers visit Kalgoorlie-Boulder. We hear shock-horror statements about the standard of living and other facts relating to Aboriginal welfare. They then adopt some means of overcoming the problem. They are well intentioned but often they are impractical. Nonetheless, they put something in place. One, two or three years pass and a new Minister visits again: We hear another shock-horror statement. One can almost write the press release before the Minister gets there. Ministers are critical of their predecessors. We must get away from the system of being wise in hindsight about Aboriginal affairs. We must be more honest.

Many of my colleagues from the eastern States profess great concern for Aboriginal people, but when we get down to tacks, they do not want to address the issue. They do not want to know what are the problems. They would run a mile before having a true debate on Aboriginal affairs and welfare. They do not want to talk about these issues, because they have a certain ideology on these matters that they do not want to disturb. They will not talk about it or discuss it. They will talk about one behind one's back and say some nasty things - as they have with the Minister. However, they will not discuss the issue on a one to one basis because the facts might disturb their pretty and well modelled theory. That is the problem we face. The situation in Western Australia is different from that in the eastern States. Canberra is a long way from the problem and even further away from reality. I will support the Minister in respect of hostels.

Mr Barnett: I do not think he would mind my saying this, but I received a phone call from Ken Colbung. I do not know him well. I thought I was in for a hard serve. However, he made similar comments to those of the member for Eyre. He said the greatest need of Aboriginal children is for a decent night's sleep. It is as simple as that. How can they be educated or participate in school when they are so tired they spend the morning asleep at their desks?

Mr GRILL: I support that concept. I hope the Minister will put in place the concept of a compensatory and incentive package for country school teachers and also something to better Aboriginal education in a real sense.

MR BRADSHAW (Murray-Wellington - Parliamentary Secretary) [12.33 pm]: This Bill will bring the education system of Western Australia into the twenty-first century. We are in a changing world. These changes are not before time and I support them. The Education Department, with other government agencies, has a role to produce outcomes from education for our youth, so they come out of the education system with life skills. Unfortunately, in our society a number of students do not acquire the life skills they should have. A lot of that has to do with their home environment.

The member for Eyre spoke about the outcomes of Aboriginal education, and his comments also apply to non-Aboriginal students who are in similar situations. If society has a problem with educational outcomes it should look at the whole picture. Many of our youth are unable to read and write or have poor reading and writing skills. They certainly do not have life skills. Many of the people who cause problems in society such as graffiti and vandalism performed poorly at school and were not caught in the net to overcome their problems.

I know from visiting schools in my electorate that teachers in Western Australia are a dedicated group. The Education Department and government departments like Family and Children's Services should ensure that students with problems at home receive the appropriate assistance. Often those problems at home will flow on to school and children will not learn. They need to be put on the right track.

Life skills are not only learning the three Rs but also budgeting and the other skills one needs to survive in society. It is unfortunate that many people in the community do not have the ability to live within their means and they run into all sorts of problems. It is important that the Education Department take up the challenge to teach those people life skills. We are not doing the right thing because of the high incidence of youth suicide, depression and society dropouts. We should address the problems experienced by youth before they get to those stages. That needs to be picked up in our education system. It is an onerous task to overcome these difficulties, and we will never have the perfect solution. However, more effort is needed to overcome that.

Budgeting is very important. An article in *Personal Investment* magazine titled "Learning business is child's play" states -

In the Adelaide suburb of Clapham, an interesting experiment in children's financial education is being run. Teacher Peter Koulizos has been running a money and investment elective for his year six and seven classes, looking at issues such as budgets, consumer issues, borrowing, investment fundamentals such as compound interest and gearing, and share and property markets.

I do not think the education system need go as far as teaching children how to invest in the stock market, but this is a positive experiment, where students are learning about budgets and how to cope with that side of life. Education should be heading in that direction.

As the member for Eyre pointed out, teachers often do not wish to go to the country. Sometimes they do not have a choice: If they do not go to the country they do not have a job. In the old days country teaching was attractive because of promotional opportunities. We need to address this area. In country schools teachers are often young, because they have just graduated. We need a balance of mature and new teachers in schools. I do not know how to overcome that problem. It should not be the case that most new teachers are chuffed off to the country because nobody else wants to go there. As much as young teachers need a job they also need the guidance and experience of the older teachers to help them along the way. This new Education Bill considers those issues.

One of the complaints over the past year or so from school principals in my electorate is that these changes are placing more administrative responsibilities on them and they have less time to put into educational outcomes or they are working long hours to try to cope with the changes taking place. Certainly, the changes will come through in the next year or two as a result of this Bill. In the main, the onus will fall on the principals, and it is important that they be given some guidance on how to cope with the changes to make sure they know what they are doing and to help them on the way.

If additional administrative staff are required, they should be provided. One of the biggest complaints I have heard from principals in the past year or two is that they have more to do and no additional staff. Consequently, they are not able to put their efforts into educational outcomes, which they would prefer to do. I am not sure education should be moving in the direction in which it has in the past year or two; I do not understand why a centralised system could not be continued. However, the changes are here in this Bill, and they will put more onus on principals. They need training and help to make sure they survive. They must know how to cope with the situation.

Another problem in my electorate which applies to the Harvey Agricultural Senior High School and, to some extent, to the Pinjarra Senior High School, relates to the number of subjects offered to students. Last year the district superintendent came to the Harvey school and said it would be better for TEE students to go to either the Australind Senior High School or the Bunbury Senior High School because a broader range of subjects were available. This is

not a good trend for schools such as Harvey and Pinjarra. Country towns need high schools that can offer a full range of subjects otherwise it is an impediment to people living in the town. It is important to look at ways of rationalising the subjects taught at these schools. I know other schools offer a wide range of subjects, and that opportunity should be more widely available. When I went to school, TEE students had to choose seven subjects from the eight available; that is, they had the option of dropping just one subject. These days a multitude of subjects are available, and I am not sure that is a good thing.

I support the Bill. Some of the problems that have arisen and will arise must be considered, and emphasis should be placed on educational outcomes for the students. Some of these educational outcomes are not being addressed. It is important that students with learning difficulties be given the support they need so that when they leave school they can cope with society, budgeting and all the other life skills.

MR AINSWORTH (Roe) [12.43 pm]: In my comments on the Bill I shall take up the theme adopted by the member for Eyre and other speakers in the debate about incentives for country schools. Of all the problems that have happened to the education system in country areas in the past two or three years, probably this has been the most lingering. Some of the others have been largely resolved but this has become worse since, in the name of equal opportunity, some of the incentives, such as additional transfer points, have been taken away. The incentive for teachers to move to country areas with a higher cost of living and to remote areas with fewer facilities is almost nil. That has been highlighted by the fact that over a number of years an increasing number of principal positions in country schools have continued to be acting positions; in other words, nobody has applied for the substantive position. Those positions have been filled by acting principals. In many cases these acting principals have done an excellent job, and I am not denigrating them. I am pointing out that there is no real incentive for people to move around the countryside and take up either principal positions or ordinary classroom positions at small schools. That is worrying for the parents of the children concerned because, although the quality of education is good at the moment, as time goes on and more and more teachers take their pick of the schools, the smaller schools will miss out even more. It is very detrimental. I am pleased the Minister says he is working hard to overcome this problem. I do not know what the answer is, but the problem needs to be addressed quickly because it is rapidly getting worse.

Another point that is pertinent to attracting teachers to remote locations, but is not related to the Bill, is the quality of housing. In many cases it is appalling. I am pleased the Minister for Housing has addressed some of that deficiency in the area I represent. Some good quality accommodation has been provided in towns where previously the accommodation was very poor. However, the backlog is still large and, together with the current disincentive to which I have referred, poor housing is another reason people choose not to go to some country towns. Those two problems must be overcome very quickly.

The member for Eyre raised the issue of Aboriginal students. The fact that we are both concerned about these matters reflects the fact that we represent country electorates. I do not claim to have the same percentage of Aborigines in my constituency as does the member for Eyre and certainly Aborigines in my electorate do not come from desert communities. The people I represent come from a much more urban background, but there is still a major problem with truancy. That makes it extremely hard for young children, who already have a disadvantaged background educationally, to attend school on a consistent basis and to make progress. Over several years teachers have raised this issue with me. I have been told that they may have a young student with them for three or four months who is making good progress and, all of a sudden, that child does not attend school for a week or two. When the child returns to school his work has slipped back considerably. In addition, there is the problem of multiple transfers, in that many Aboriginal students from years 3 and 4 have attended up to 12 schools during that period of four years. They get settled in one school and then they move on, and they might not start school immediately after they reach the new town. Each time they move to a new school they lose continuity in their education, and therefore they progress at a far slower rate than they are capable of purely because of the environment in which they live.

Esperance is one of the closest major towns to the Western Australian border, and often Aboriginal families from interstate move into the town. As there is no arrangement for the schools in other States to advise the educational authorities in WA that a child will be moving into its area, some of these students can slip through the net. In one case a young boy was picked up off the street by a person dealing with truancy. It was discovered that the boy had been in town for four weeks, but the education system did not know he was there. For a month he had had no schooling. Goodness knows how long it would have continued had it not come to the notice of the local school. It is another problem that cannot be quickly overcome, but it is an area in which the Minister could liaise with his counterparts in other States to see if there is a better system of keeping track of students so that this sort of thing does not occur.

Another problem which can be very difficult and which has been raised in this debate is that the home environment of some of these students is not conducive to good education. I frequently hear of students who come to school and have not had breakfast and who are half asleep because they have been awake half the night because of a party, or

because relations are living in the house and three or four people are sleeping in the same bedroom. Those students do not get adequate rest and nutrition to come to school in the proper physical state to be able to learn.

[Leave granted for speech to be continued.]

Debate thus adjourned.

[Continued on page 551.]

COMMONWEALTH YOUTH ALLOWANCE

Statement by Member for Kalgoorlie

MS ANWYL (Kalgoorlie) [12.51 pm]: I wish to draw members' attention to the changes to the commonwealth youth allowance which will take place shortly. These changes will have a severe effect on 15 to 20 year olds, because under 18 year olds will no longer be able to claim unemployment benefits, and under 21 year olds will be means tested. Members should be aware of these changes, because shortly there will be an influx of parents into their offices saying they cannot cope financially.

These proposed changes are particularly disturbing given that the labour market statistics published today indicate that there has been a sharp increase to 28 per cent in the number of unemployed 15 to 19 year olds in this State. We also have a slashing of federal government programs such as the Land Care and Environment Action Program and Skillshare and a shrinking of educational opportunities as a result of the increasing pressure on the school system. In addition, many state government departments will be forced to provide funds for these young people who must now return to full time training.

The Office of Youth and Minister Board are doing nothing about these issues, and although the department has identified unemployment as one of the three top issues with which it must deal, its budget is not being spent in that area. When I asked the Minister about that issue last year, he said he had no knowledge of the changes and how they would affect young people. I urge the Office of Youth to pay urgent attention to this serious issue.

GREENHAVEN ESTATE, NEERABUP - BUS SERVICE

Statement by Member for Wanneroo

MR MacLEAN (Wanneroo) [12.52 pm]: For some time I have been fighting for a bus service for the Greenhaven Estate in Neerabup, and I have raised this matter in the House on two occasions. I am, therefore, very pleased to report that from Monday, 16 March, the Transperth No 390 bus service will link Carramar Park and Greenhaven Estate with Joondalup bus and train station. Initially this service will operate off peak with six services per day, and I hope that it will soon expand into a full service.

The bus service is the result of cooperation between the developer - Homeswest - the City of Wanneroo, and the Department of Transport. Homeswest and the Department of Transport spent many months trying to convince the Council of the City of Wanneroo that it should be involved in such a venture. Unfortunately, at the time the council was not very cooperative and decisions were not made, even though the staff were recommending them.

That was not the case when the commissioners came to power, and I pleased to report that one of their first actions was to review the decision of council and agree to become involved in a joint and cooperative effort with Homeswest and the Department of Transport so that areas that were physically isolated from social developments could access these developments by what is still restricted transport but which will be improved in time.

BANK CLOSURES

Statement by Member for Maylands

DR EDWARDS (Maylands) [12.53 pm]: I wish to raise the problem of bank closures in my electorate. We hear a lot about this matter in the country but not much about it in urban centres. It is a significant problem in my area because of the large number of senior citizens who live there.

In 1996, BankWest closed its Morley branch and Westpac Bank its Bayswater branch, and shortly afterwards National Australia Bank also closed its Bayswater branch. The suburb of Bayswater therefore has only one bank, the Commonwealth Bank. Tomorrow, ANZ Bank will close its Maylands' branch, which will leave only the Commonwealth Bank. Undoubtedly that will be a Black Friday for banking in my electorate.

I have already received complaints from elderly citizens who have vision impairment and need over the counter service. As a result of the closures in 1996, I surveyed my electorate, and the responses were pretty amazing. Ninety

per cent of people rated the services as either excellent or good, and only 1 per cent said that they were poor. People were worried that if the banks were closed, they would need to travel more and would need to carry more cash, and 65 per cent said that they would change their bank.

In the week that ANZ Bank wrote to people to inform them that it would close its branch in Maylands, it revealed that it had made a \$1b profit and would cut 1 700 jobs nationally. I have read the Trenorden report and I endorse what it states, but I believe banks should listen to urban customers as well.

NATURAL GAS PIPELINE EXTENSION TO CAPEL

Statement by Member for Vasse

MR MASTERS (Vasse) [12.55 pm]: Last year, AlintaGas extended the Bunbury to Dampier gas pipeline by building a spur to link Capel to the end of the line in order to allow the two mineral sands producers to link their mineral separation and synthetic rutile plants to natural gas, in turn creating energy efficiencies and cleaner exhaust gas emissions. Contractors are currently extending the pipeline from Capel to Busselton, and I am grateful to the Minister for Resources Development and AlintaGas for the benefits that natural gas will bring to the Busselton townsites residents.

However, the residents of the Capel community seem to be the group who have missed out on the benefits of the gas pipeline extension. At present, Capel townsites has a population of about 2 000, and because of the absence of reticulated gas they are forced to use wood, bottled gas, kerosene, electricity or solar energy for most of the applications that would otherwise be serviced by natural gas.

My wife and I live at Peppermint Grove Beach near Capel, and we switched from bottled gas to a solar hot water system some six years ago at an annual saving of about \$400. Capel is recognised as a town where people can get value for money home and land packages, but many of the older and new residents simply cannot afford to install \$2 500 solar hot water systems, or their home builders do not realise that solar designs do not cost more. Many of these people find the cost of bottled gas only just affordable. While I have nothing against Wesfarmers Limited, I am extremely keen to have the more populous residential areas of Capel connected to the gas pipeline, and I advise AlintaGas that I am about to take up the cudgel on this issue.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Statement by Member for Thornlie

MS McHALE (Thornlie) [12.57 pm]: I wish to advocate on behalf of the arts community about the lack of action by the Minister for the Arts in his portfolio, and specifically about his lack of action in introducing legislation to create the Ministry of Culture and the Arts. The Minister decided, without consultation with the arts community, to create a Ministry of Culture and the Arts and to remove the statutory authority status of the five key agencies in his portfolio, thereby arbitrarily creating that ministry.

The Minister promised the Parliament that this legislation would be introduced in the spring session. We have yet to see this legislation. Therefore, for eight months there has been neither a substantive legislative framework for this ministry nor a substantive executive director or director general. There is, therefore, no strong policy framework in which the arts community can operate. The arts community is crying out for a framework for direction for creative arts and culture in this State. There is also a lack of leadership from the portfolio. Above all, there is a lack of a sense of support and concern for direction and innovation for the arts. The arts community deserves more, and I want something to be done about it.

AUSTRALIND AQUATIC CENTRE

Statement by Member for Mitchell

MR BARRON-SULLIVAN (Mitchell) [12.58 pm]: I am pleased to advise the House that planning has begun for the new aquatic centre in Australind, due largely to the allocation of \$1m of funding from the State Government. One-third of the funding for the project has been raised by the community, and I congratulate the local community fundraising team on the great job it has done to date in raising some \$1m. It always pays to look for additional sources of funding for projects of this magnitude. This idea is not new - a couple of people had the idea before me - but I have been promoting the idea of a special numberplate for the Leschenault area. I envisage a numberplate proudly emblazoned with a pelican emblem and perhaps even with a slogan such as "The Waterside Paradise". It is good the member for Dawesville is not in the Chamber to counter that suggestion! This excellent initiative is made possible by the policy of the Department of Transport. While in my electorate I could choose one of four different numberplates, if we were able to pursue this initiative and to raise additional funds for the centre as a result, I would be proud to place a pelican badge on my car.

I congratulate everyone involved in putting this project together. The Shire of Harvey has done a marvellous job under councillor Jim Offer, and Cameron Woods and his team at the leisure centre have also been tremendous. I congratulate the whole community.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

[Questions without notice taken.]

SCHOOL EDUCATION BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage.

MR AINSWORTH (Roe) [2.38 pm]: Prior to the lunch break I was winding up my remarks about the difficulty Aboriginal students have in attending school as regularly as some other students, and the need to deal with some of the social issues that impact on their ability to learn as adequately as they might. It is a difficult area with which to deal, and I am finding it particularly difficult to be heard above the noise in the Chamber.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr AINSWORTH: It is a problem to which the Government must pay some attention if it is to overcome the serious difficulties facing these students. If this is not overcome in the near future, the problem of poorly educated Aboriginal students will be perpetuated into the next generation, and that would be a tragedy.

In speaking of students with difficulties, I turn now to high school students who could be termed non-academic students or, in some cases, students at risk. All sorts of programs have been developed over the years to deal with these students, but one program about which I am very keen and which has worked particularly well is the program that has been in place for more than 15 years at Gnowangerup Agricultural School. This school takes 14 to 16 year old boys who have no real future ahead of them because they have failed in the mainstream education system, or perhaps I should say because the mainstream education system has failed them by not providing adequate training and support for that type of student.

Gnowangerup Agricultural School has the dual role of improving the basic numeracy and literacy skills of its students, which it does very well, and also of giving them manual skills and a change of attitude about themselves which turns them around and produces excellent young people who not only have greater self-esteem but also are more employable. The excellent reputation of that school means that over 90 per cent of the boys have jobs waiting for them before they leave. Unfortunately, that school can take a maximum of only 40 students. It will not be of any value to expand the size of that school because it will then lose the personal touch. That has been recognised by the school and also by at least two of the reports that have been made on it in the past.

I have been proposing for a number of years that another school of this type be located at the agricultural research station at Salmon Gums, which at this stage is very much underutilised by Agriculture Western Australia but is an ideal location for another agricultural school because the farm infrastructure is already in place, and with the addition of a few extra buildings for classrooms and accommodation, it could be up and running within 12 months for another intake of these boys who will otherwise miss the opportunity offered by the Gnowangerup school. Unfortunately, there is a big waiting list for the Gnowangerup school, and boys who do not get into that school one year often miss out the following year because they are too old and no longer eligible. Therefore, the opportunity to take these young people and turn around their behaviour, their attitude and their employability is lost.

I have received good support from the Ministers for Education and Primary Industry for my proposal that a joint operation take place at Salmon Gums whereby Agriculture Western Australia will still undertake its limited role at that site of on farm research and have one or two farm staff on the property, but the remainder of the property, which is currently leased to a local farmer, and the buildings, which are underutilised, will be used for an agricultural school, and where the two will work side by side on that property to their mutual benefit.

I am now in the final process of putting a more formal proposal to the Ministers concerned and also to the departments to hopefully get support for what will be a fairly cheap exercise in the initial stages. As I have said, many of the buildings are already in place, and the additional buildings that will be required need not be a large number of expensive, brand new, brick and tile buildings but can be transportable buildings that are in most cases second hand.

It would be an advantage if the buildings were in that condition, because part of the training program that has made Gnowangerup school so successful, and which could be duplicated at Salmon Gums, is that the boys undertake repairs and maintenance and the upgrading of those buildings. Therefore, they learn hands on skills that they can put to good

use in later life. That results in a double benefit for the Government and the community, because the financial costs are low, and the students are given valuable training. That training has the additional benefit for the students that they can take pride in what they have achieved and have a sense of ownership of those buildings that they would not have if they were expensive, brand new buildings in which they had no involvement. The potential for vandalism is reduced and the general attitude of the students to the school is improved greatly if the buildings are not brand new and expensive but are older building that have been recycled and built up by the students themselves. That has worked extremely well at Gnowangerup, and I believe it can also work at Salmon Gums.

It is interesting that since this proposal has received some publicity in the local media in the Esperance area, other people have heard about it and parents have started to telephone me. Three parents, one from Perth, one from York and one from Kalgoorlie, have telephoned me to say their sons are desperately in need of some support of the type that only Gnowangerup Agricultural School can give but they cannot get into that school because it is full and has a large waiting list. One of those parents was almost in tears when she spoke to me because she said that she saw this as the last chance for her son to gain something positive from his education, perhaps for the first time. She wanted to know when the Salmon Gums agricultural school would open, and I had to tell her that it was still only an idea on paper and had not progressed to the stage where buildings of any sort were on the ground, and that we had to go through that process with the government departments concerned.

The great need for that school is highlighted by the fact that, quite unsolicited, three parents who live nowhere near me and who heard about it on the grapevine have taken the time to find my telephone number, and in one case to even call me at home, to almost beg for somewhere for their sons that would give them the opportunity that they missed by not being able to get into Gnowangerup Agricultural School.

I will be progressing that matter in the near future. We should look closely, as a Government and as a Parliament, at the need to provide for the increasing number of students who, for a range of reasons, are not succeeding in high school and who because of the lack of job opportunities at 15 and 16 years of age, particularly without the proper training, are staying in the school system but are not achieving and in many cases are heading down a road which will prove to be very expensive to the community. We are already seeing that in the metropolitan area with the young people who are going off the rails. The boys who have attended Gnowangerup Agricultural school have proved themselves, they are in great demand and have great employability, and they are completely transformed. If that could be done in a couple of other locations, it would save rather than cost the community money, because the net result would be good young citizens who have a totally different attitude to life and are employable, and not people who see themselves as having no hope and behave accordingly.

MR BRIDGE (Kimberley) [2.47 pm]: I attempted to interject quite politely yesterday when the member for Willagee was speaking. The basis of my interjection was that this legislation is simply revisiting the issues that I have heard canvassed in this Parliament constantly for the 18 years that I have been in this place. When I think back through that time and am able to reliably recapture the nature of that debate, it has often been the case that the Parliament has had a meaningful intent to bring about changes that it regards as necessary and relevant, but notwithstanding its endeavours, we are still revisiting education, health and other matters that canvass the spectrum of government responsibilities and there has been little or no change during that time. The reason is that a framework is in place that is absolutely entrenched, and until such time as we are able to make some inroads into that lack of empowerment and become more responsive to the needs of the citizens of our country, we will continue to be engaged in such a debate for the next 18 years. That is the framework within our system of Government to which I refer as the juggernaut of power. It is a framework within which we place the best ideas derived from great ideals. Because those ideas find their way into that structure inevitably and invariably they are lost in the mists of time. Therefore, as we debate this issue today in all seriousness, it will be a meaningless pursuit unless we can change that system which is irrelevant to the practical needs of our country. If we are unable to change the system to accommodate the practical needs of our people it will not matter how many times we debate these issues, because we will not be able to remove the impediments standing in our way.

The member for Eyre made an important point on that aspect when he said that he had seen Ministers visit the goldfields, throw up their hands in horror, and then promise to do something about the situation. He said that he had seen that happen many times. That is precisely the situation. The goodwill and good intent of the Minister is reflected in his attitude and his reaction to the situation that he observed and in his wise understanding of the issue. However, because he is unable to drive the issue as an individual, through the processes necessary to bring about change, invariably the matter finds its way into the juggernaut of power. In the main, the desperation of the Minister and the pleas of the people are lost in the mists of time.

As parliamentarians, we must understand that in that process, empowerment is removed from the people. Therefore, the system is irrelevant. It will never deliver in the way we promote, suggest or advocate it should deliver, because there is no connection between the system and individuals - be they students, or anyone else. We will never have the

means by which an acceptance of the system will evolve, and the application of individuals' ideals will never be fulfilled simply because the system will not allow it.

As a result, I do not support the suggestion made yesterday by the member for Willagee that the notion of extending the education period should be a fundamental requirement. If we do not change the system, if we do not tackle the juggernaut of power which dominates the system, the empowerment of the individual and the containment of power by government forces in this country - that is, the government system driven by the bureaucracy - we will never have valid reasons to extend the tenure of students in institutions. Such a move will not bring about the results that the member for Willagee believes can be achieved.

My fear is that, if we do not change the system, if we continue to accept the dominance of the juggernaut of power, if we accept an extension of the time taken to achieve an education, we will only be committing students further to an irrelevant system. People who promote impractical theories will inflict their rules on individuals, together with their conclusions and requirements for students to accommodate the system. That is an insult; it is demeaning, immoral and unspiritual. It is also downright rude, because this system is so entrenched it almost enforces that requirement on us. It almost means that people must take it whether they like it or not. That is the message being conveyed to us. Therefore, I will not advocate the benefits of and need for education. I will not stand here and subscribe to a scheme that will further entrench in the system the empowerment of the juggernaut of power. I have been defiant of this concept throughout most of my political life and I do not intend to depart from that thinking now.

When I was a Minister in government I began a concept called "three dimensional evaluation" in the Agriculture portfolio. The Deputy Premier is well versed in that concept.

Mr Cowan: I remember it well. I remember the box at the top had your name on it!

Mr BRIDGE: And many farmers were in that box with me, remember!

Mr Cowan: I do.

Mr BRIDGE: The Deputy Premier has confirmed that farmers were in the box with me, and that highlights why the structure was set up. The three dimensional evaluation concept was set up so that the farmer would sit beside the Minister, thus giving the farmer empowerment. Therefore, when the farmer in the bush spoke to me as Minister, often I was able to reflect his views in the Cabinet. When I set up the Watering Australia Foundation I deliberately indicated my displeasure with the juggernaut of power. That box now contains a group of so-called decision makers who are an impediment to the system. This reinforces my belief that the impractical methodology being employed in that structure is the major cause of concern about a lack of advancement, and a lack of benefits - when benefits should emerge from the education system.

We have talked about this issue for countless years, and we are disappointed to see that these aspects of education are not necessarily being considered. In a very convenient way, we proceed to talk about peripheral issues instead of identifying the problems.

This country needs practical people who have the capacity to commit themselves to the work force from an early age and be diligent in pursuing a career. Will such individuals be produced through the complexity of the education system we have in place at the moment? I think not. That is why many young people feel uncertain and enrol and re-enrol for different courses. They almost are fodder for the system.

We must get back to a practical solution. The member for Roe talked about the Gnowangerup-type of country school. We should pursue such models and ideology vigorously. The plans and direction of such institutions affect the students. Often, the practical considerations of such schools carry through to their planning. Despite the juggernaut of centralised power, an element of practical know-how finds its way into the system. To say that a centralised bureaucracy is working for rural Australia is a joke.

As we pass this legislation, we must be clear that unless we change the scale of central power exerting control over the stewardship of people's lives, a person will stand in this Chamber 20 years from today and repeat the words I utter today almost verbatim. Nothing will have changed. I feel sad about that prospect. One of the great tragedies of society is to conclude that nothing has changed after countless years of endeavour.

The member for Eyre said that he heard comment that indigenous people were generally better educated in the past than the indigenous people today. What does that say about the wisdom and counsel we provide today?

Mr Cowan: Is it true?

Mr BRIDGE: I am not in a position to say whether it is true.

Mr Cowan: You had better not assume that it is then.

Mr BRIDGE: I am merely saying that the comment was made. However, when considering the truancy, absenteeism, social upheaval and major problems confronting families today, it is conceivable that the comment is absolutely true!

Mr Cowan: I do not think it is.

Mr BRIDGE: Maybe not, but it could well be true. I am surprised by the Deputy Premier's comment in view of the social disruption and trauma families face today. Years ago families with children were not subjected to the pressures facing our modern society, with the traumatic circumstances with drugs, alcohol and other intrusions encountered today. I would not be too sure that the Deputy Premier is right in questioning that comment. It is a matter of judgment. Nevertheless, the member for Eyre expressed that scenario, which may well be accurate.

My judgment tells me that a major impediment in the system is the impractical way in which strategies and policies are applied. There is a difference between constructing policy and implementing it. In many cases good policy, reasonably soundly based and with a degree of relevance, is put forward but then falls apart in its implementation.

When dealing with the human race, to achieve solutions one must return to basics. We have such highfalutin ideas about education that we have departed from the basics. We will have little or no success in correcting that deficiency unless a driving commitment is found to pick up the entire system by the scruff of the neck and say, "It belongs to the people" and to preside over and execute a plan to make that system relevant to the public. When that happens, it will be unnecessary for me, or anyone else, to repeatedly discuss these problems because things will have been put right.

MR GRAHAM (Pilbara) [3.08 pm]: I disagree with my good friend the member for Kimberley. I have listened the best I could to this debate on education without remaining in the Chamber for the entire debate, using the speaker system in the building, and believe a common theme has emerged in a large number of speeches: The need to reinforce the three Rs, to get young people into sports and other physical activity to save them from themselves, and, as my friend said, to return to basics in education. I find that interesting on two fronts.

First, I recently read my uncle's maiden speech in this Parliament from 1944 in which, by chance, he spoke about education. He referred to the need in 1944 - the country was at war - to re-evaluate where we were going in education by placing a great emphasis on the three Rs, introducing more sport and sex education into the curriculum for the benefit of all, and returning to basics. Regardless of the time in history, many people of my age - and younger people like the member for Kimberley! - look at the young and suggest they need to get back to basics. I have a different view. The youth of today are generally smarter, better educated and certainly more wily and eloquent than would have been their counterparts at any other time in history. The difference between what a 14 year old child knows now and what I and my peers knew at 14 is quite extraordinary.

Mr Cowan: What you know now is no more.

Mr GRAHAM: That is fair comment. One has to think for only a short period about the changes in technology that these children have learnt to deal with daily in spite of our education system and about the ease with which they take to technological innovations and apply them. All members travel around the schools in their electorates. Those who take the time to sit down and listen to the children and see what they are doing are blown away. Many years ago the school production at the end of the year consisted of children singing songs. It is not unusual now to see computer driven lighting, and plays written and staged by children - they make their own make-up and programs. Years ago children were unable to do those things and were not interested in doing them. Teachers and parents did not think the children were capable of doing them. In the field of sport young people are extraordinary. It is unbelievable to see the way in which young children nowadays can apply themselves to sport, to see their achievements and, more importantly, despite the odd headline, to see the way in which children conduct themselves when they play sport.

The Bill contains many issues upon which we could speak. This morning with the Public Accounts and Expenditure Review Committee I had a briefing from Future Kids. I will not go through the presentation, but the program is about teaching children about computers. One of the interesting things the group gave us was a Perth government school survey with a list of 13 subjects. It summarises a study conducted by Dr Wally Moroz from the Edith Cowan University. I know nothing about it other than this result. The survey asked students and teachers to rank the subjects according to the ones they liked most and those they least liked; that is, it asked what the children like to learn and what the teachers like to teach. The result is extraordinary. At the bottom of the subjects the children least like learning and teachers least like teaching is religion. Creative writing was third favourite with the students and fourth with the teachers. After that it was a mirror image; that is, what the children like learning the teachers hate teaching and vice versa. The top subject for children is sport and the second is computers. The third to bottom of the subjects teachers hate teaching is computing, and sport is the fifth worst. Children like music, but that is right down the bottom next to religion for teachers. We have heard many speeches about getting children to improve their reading and writing. They like the subject fifth and the teachers like it second. Everybody wants them reading but we have

this image that there is a problem. I suspect that if teachers like teaching it and the children like learning it, it may not be as big a problem as we think. I am particularly interested, as is the committee, in computing, which the Education Department must address.

The arguments about what our schools are for, where they are heading and how we should get them there are very vexed. A number of members have mentioned home education, which seems to be an emerging issue. I was recently in the United States and learnt that something like 15 per cent of children there will never set foot in a school. They will learn by various mechanisms, not the least of which will be the Internet. That is a pretty staggering statistic. However, for those of us who live in remote and regional areas it is a practical, everyday occurrence - our children do not go to school. They study through the School of the Air. I am aware of the School of Isolated and Distance Education in West Perth. I have visited its premises on a number of occasions and make a donation to it every year for an award for its children. Many people in my electorate have a lot of involvement with the school.

However, it is no accident that whatever measure is applied to schools the further one goes from the central business district the less academic achievement there is. The Northern Territory Parliament conducted a study on education in remote Aboriginal communities. We have never done such a study in Western Australia but I suspect we should. The study quantified the degree to which the people in remote and rural areas fall behind in the education race. It made the point that the further one goes from academic institutions the less likely there will be a culture of learning. Once people lose the culture and the value of education they no longer want to be a part of it. If they do not see it as providing any benefit to them or their children they do not become part of it if they have an alternative. If they live a long way from the centre they have the alternative.

The Education Department, or whatever it is called this week, and the Minister for Education must address this fundamental question. It may be okay for people in rural areas close to Perth to send their children to colleges where they can get a quality private school education. They can return at weekends or stay in a second family residence in the city. It is otherwise not okay because is not an option for many families in remote and rural Western Australia. When we take that difficult option in conjunction with low incomes and low values placed on education, as the Northern Territory says, the chance of some children breaking out of that cycle and into improving their lives withers away and becomes pretty close to nil.

I will not preempt work being done in other areas but I suspect a large part of the answer lies with technology. It is possible and becoming cheaper to deliver education into people's homes without the need for formal schools and classrooms. I am not for one moment suggesting that we replace schools with new technology, but where only limited education is currently in place or too few children collected together to reach a threshold level for a class to be taught, the technology that currently exists is absolutely ideal. The idea of children on remote pastoral properties being able to see the teacher while they talk to him on what is now called the School of the Air is exciting. The idea of those kids being able to sit in a classroom for more than an hour or two a day to learn, see and do things on the screen with their colleagues and a teacher is a revolution in education in the bush. It is now technically possible and affordable and any change in the education system that does not allow for it and in fact fails to actively encourage it is a deficient system.

I was recently in Victoria, which is in the process of putting a computer in every school - not every classroom - and connecting it to the Internet and dealing with all the problems of access and equity associated with that. It will enable not only city schools but all schools to get high speed modems. They are quite excited about it. However, as the Internet goes into schools, they are having difficulty dealing with it. The principal has a "thing" on his desk which he is not sure how to use other than to read an email from head office every now and then. The staff in the school have difficulty dealing with it because they are not sure how to use it or what to use. However, because they are located in school libraries in Victoria, during recesses and lunches children queue to get onto the Internet. I have been into those schools and seen primary school children doing their assignments on the Internet. They access and download information, print it out and produce assignments for primary school classes that would have got them a university degree 30 years ago. It is amazing how quickly they take to it. To ignore that technology and those changes would be a tragedy.

There will never be a replacement for the classroom teacher; you are safe, Mr Speaker. I am not advocating replacing everything with computers and screens, but there is a large place for them. One of the obstacles to technology coming into the classrooms is the teachers' ability to deal with it. Throughout the world in both the education and the health fields people who have been involved in introducing computer based technology highlight two problems: The difficulty in schools is usually to do with teachers and in health it is the medical practitioners. I suspect it is time to change. I hope the Minister will apply himself diligently in that regard because it needs a tad more than just a comment or a speech here and there. This Government has made great noise and effort about truancy and the absence of children from schools. As a parent, I consider that policy has been taken to the nth degree. My 17 year old daughter, who has a great attendance record, was two minutes late for school one day.

Mr Cowan: She has picked up some of her old man's habits!

Mr GRAHAM: Yes. As the regulations now provide that any unauthorised absence needs a note, we received four letters from the school and, I think, three phone calls to track down a two minute unauthorised absence. If my daughter were a habitual truant or had missed a day that was unexplained I could cop it. However, it is not reasonable in this day and age for a 17 year old girl to be put through that process because she is two minutes late. Those hard, fast policies should be tempered.

Mr Barnett: The Government does not set them. I expect principals to display commonsense combined with leadership in our schools.

Mr GRAHAM: She will kill me for saying anything.

Mr Cowan: She has been looking for that excuse for quite some time!

Mr GRAHAM: At the same time, despite the manipulation of the figures to show that increased funding has been put into truancy, among Aboriginal children in the north west it is a major problem. Unless a large allocation of funds is made in a strategic sense the problem will not go away. I have written to the Minister a number of times about the problem and although we dispute the figures, we agree on the general thrust. In Port Hedland somewhere between 30 and 60 children do not go to school. The Ministry says 30; I say 60. Even if we agree on 30 it is still a major problem in a town of 12 000 people.

Mr Barnett: I have said that the rate among Aboriginal children is between 15 and 20 per cent. Others have said 30; I have not. Nevertheless, it is a huge problem.

Mr GRAHAM: Without a huge change and allocation of resources it will not be solved. I commend a Northern Territory Public Accounts Committee report of a couple of years ago which dealt with some of those problems in remote Aboriginal communities. It has some of the answers right.

One of the other difficulties for people in the bush is the removal of priority for teachers. Without central resourcing or a comprehensive package of incentives we will lose the ability to entice quality teachers into the bush. I understand why that policy fell away, but something must be put in place. We have very good teachers who are prepared to commit to an initial two years in the bush and then extend that annually if they enjoy where they are, it is worth their while and they can see a benefit. We in the bush appreciate their coming in. They bring new ideas into the town, a different approach and a level of education we would find very difficult to sustain without drawing on the resources of the city. It is my usual country-city argument reversed. The ministry and the Minister must put in place something to enable that to continue or the education system in the bush in Western Australia will rapidly decline. Many school principals approached me at the end of last year, and early this year. I will visit them, as I go through my regular start of school period, when they are halfway through what they thought were five or six year bush postings. Their children are off their hands; they are happy to put something back into the system; they have the house in Perth rented and they will clear the mortgage in five or six years.

The country incentives package and the promotional chance it gave them means that in five or six years they will come back to the city and slip into a reasonable position. With those diminished or removed, they are marooned in the bush. They are not from the bush; they do not want to be there. They will transfer out at the first opportunity. The difficulty confronting those in the bush is that we will then not be able to replace them with people of similar skills. I have written to the Minister about this and I genuinely plead with him in the process of reviewing the education system to get in with the union very quickly - if that is his wont; if it is not, he should make an offer wherever he can, but I am not fussed about that - and fix up the difficulty that we will have, and that is confronting us now, in keeping quality teachers in the bush.

MR NICHOLLS (Mandurah) [3.30 pm]: Education is vital for everyone in the community. We all know that. Changes in technology, in society and even to the point of more complex and detailed decision making required in every day life necessitates all people having access to good quality education. I share the concern of the member for Pilbara about distance education and teachers in country areas. The restructure that will come from the passage of this legislation will go along way towards addressing them. The rhetoric that most, if not all, of us continually espouse - that is, education is paramount to the future of our children - is something that we must put into practice, rather than simply mouth. Many children are not able to, or choose not to, take advantage of the current schooling system. If education is that important, the challenge we face is to ensure all children have the opportunity and the skills to take advantage of our education system, no matter where they live or their socioeconomic background.

This Bill creates the potential for the local education environment to meet the needs of the children it purports to serve. I congratulate the Minister and all those who have worked very hard to bring this Bill to fruition. Concerns have been raised with me and, I am sure, with all other members of Parliament, by home educators who were worried

about their ability as parents to make decisions about the education of their children and their ability to continue to teach their children, if they so wished. It is very important that we support, encourage and, wherever possible, provide the necessary resources to help people who want to educate their children at home. I do not believe we should be making life more difficult for people who wish to be home educators or who are looking at an alternative for the education of their children. However, it is paramount that the children receive quality education. I do not support a situation in which, simply because parents choose that their children not attend school, the children suffer by having a substandard education. The current guidelines for home education have been positive and children who are participating in home education by and large receive quality education.

Changes introduced by the Education Department recently in all the education districts have created a positive foundation for future planning. It is a pleasure to talk to people in the department about the needs in the local areas and also about the differences of opinion between the department and the local community about the projections in pupil numbers. In Mandurah, where there has been rapid population growth over the past decade, historically we have had ongoing arguments with departments about the projected number of students in a certain area, only to find that if not on every occasion, then on most occasions, the projections are by far an underestimate of the eventual numbers. Consequently, schools have large numbers of students, and find it beyond their capability to house them in the existing buildings.

As is the case in many other areas, we have a large number of demountable classrooms clustered around the permanent school buildings. That is a satisfactory option in the short term; however, the number of demountable classrooms at the Mandurah Senior High School is escalating. When I became a member of Parliament in 1989, it had 21 demountable classrooms, and that number decreased between 1989 and 1993 or 1994. The projection is that the demountable classrooms at that school will increase from 21 to between 25 and 27 in the next year or so. We are talking about a school with another school surrounding it, and that is unsatisfactory.

Not only is the current Education Department prepared to accept the need for a new school to meet the demands of rapid population growth in this area, but also we are talking about a substantial change in the Mandurah region. Mr Deputy Speaker, you would have direct knowledge of the provision of a senior campus as that system is operating in Geraldton. We are embarking on a substantial change in Mandurah which I hope will lead to a senior campus being built by 2001 or 2002, and another high school being built in the Halls Head area by the year 2000.

If that can be achieved, we will have caught up with the population growth and the current demands, although it will not stop the ongoing demands that must be met in the next century. The local area planning concept not only ensures that the structure fits the needs of the local area, but it also allows the local community to participate in the planning for schools and, through this legislation, in a number of other decisions about education in our local environment.

There is no doubt in my mind that we must continually review the structure through which we deliver education. Times are changing; that is a phrase coined by many people, including some folk singers. With the changes in technology and in demands and the need for our children to be better educated to meet their future challenges, we must continually review legislation as well as structure. I urge parents, teachers and the wider community to use the changes that will come about because of the new legislation to be innovative in the way they deliver the education services to their children.

We should not be looking at the needs of just the top 60 per cent to 70 per cent of students who are high achievers, but of all students, even those who are hard to manage or at risk. Every student must benefit from our education system. I believe the legislation will allow individual schools to look at the environment in which they are delivering education, to assess the students they are seeking to educate, and to make the necessary changes so that the students have the best possible opportunity to take advantage of the education system.

We must find better ways to educate our children. It is not acceptable simply to write off a certain percentage of children either because they are hard to manage or simply do not have the intellectual ability to keep up with the other students in that grade or in the school.

The needs of intellectually disabled students, and of students who have other disabilities which prevent them accessing the mainstream facilities need to be included and I expect and hope that as a result of the changes in this legislation, we will see greater autonomy at the local level and of course encouragement for local communities to look at what is best for their children that will result in more innovative approaches and a better quality education.

Clear links between social issues that cause distress, harm and trauma in the community and a lack of education are well documented, and I do not believe there is any doubt the link exists. The challenge is to find ways to break down the obstacles preventing children from participating in the education system. Education is not a luxury, it is a necessity for every child irrespective of where they live or what family arrangement they are in or what disabilities they have. As a Government, as community leaders, as parents, as simply participants in communities in Western

Australia, we have a responsibility to support changes that will lead to better education and therefore better quality of life for these individuals and hopefully for our whole community.

While no doubt many issues will come forward from the substantial changes contained in this Bill, I hope that the Minister's department and the Government continue to take an attitude that we need to look at what is best for children. We need to look at ways to make the education system more attractive and, through continual consultation or through a continual appraisal of the education system, I would like to see this Bill as a good starting foundation for something that evolves over the next decade or two into something that becomes a substantial mechanism for children of all ages and backgrounds to become better educated and better individuals in our society and hopefully become the catalyst for many of the positive changes addressing the social issues that currently cause division or conflict within our community and trauma within individual families. I commend the work that has been done and I would like the Minister on my behalf and everybody's behalf to congratulate those people who worked so hard to make this Bill possible.

MRS HOLMES (Southern River) [3.44 pm]: I rise in support of this Bill. I would like to speak on two aspects that pertain to it.

The first aspect that I would like to address is absenteeism. Absenteeism is prevalent in many schools within my electorate. This topic came to my attention during the election campaign through one of my constituents, Mrs Mary Eckesley, who came to see me, because her son was a truant and she did not know what to do with him; she asked if I could provide some assistance. Through that approach I became aware of the VIP program which deals with children who are extremely bad truants and whose parents do not know what to do with them. Through the community policing committee in Victoria Park, we got in touch with the Education Department and, through the funds available to us, we offered support to the VIP program, which had no funding at the time. Through the Education Department and its assistance and a lot of negotiations, we managed to get the program off the ground.

About 10 to 12 children who were extreme truants went on to this pilot program for the south region. The children were very within themselves and withdrawn when they first arrived. It was obvious they did not want to be there. We had a wonderful lady in charge of the program and she understood the needs of those children. They do not like to be penned in; they like to have some freedom. They have a very short concentration span of about half an hour at the most.

The program was provided with a house in Victoria Park, and this lady organised a group which got a group dynamic going between them. She identified each child's different area of interest. One young man absolutely adored cooking and he got the job of cooking for the group. There was another young lady who adored children and she got the mother role. Another young man was a graffiti artist who liked to draw graffiti wherever he could; he was put in charge of decorating the dunny. The other children were all identified in their particular areas of interest.

I kept a close watch on what was going on to see how the children were progressing and I had morning tea with them cooked by the young chef and I asked how they were finding the program. This was after about five to seven weeks. By that time they were in a group dynamic and it was obvious the idea was working out. They did the whole program and I kept my eye on it the whole way through and at the end of the program, I was invited to go back to this house at Victoria Park with the District Superintendent for Education and the police and various other people. When I arrived, I found that the whole of the house had been painted by these young people. The kitchen was absolutely immaculate. The children were sitting there looking smart and proud. Every one of those children obtained their year 10 certificates. The young man who was doing the cooking is now an apprentice chef. The young lady who adored children has been given a job in a kindergarten looking after children; she intends that to be her lifetime occupation. The young man who liked to paint the dunny with his graffiti is working as an apprentice for a signwriter. All those children now have a path in their life and an educational certificate to carry them forward. Had the program not taken place, I have no doubt those children would have still been truanting. I am very proud that the program has received funding support for this year. It is something I draw to the Minister's attention because I believe it is an excellent way in which to deal with absenteeism and truanting.

I refer now to parent and community involvement in government schools. My electorate contains large areas that have no infrastructure and no support for the parents inasmuch as they do not have their own schools. Working very closely with the Minister for Education and the community, we proved the need for a new primary school in Atwell. This new primary school has evolved along the lines that are described in the Bill. It has involved the community from beginning to end, including assistance with appointing the staff at the school. They have a wonderful headmaster, Mr Phil Mort, and P & C association. It has turned out to be the most magnificent school and it stands up for the principles contained in this Bill. Community involvement, the involvement of the parents, and their ownership of the school inasmuch as they designed their own uniforms and did everything for the school, is working in Atwell. They have state of the art equipment and they absolutely love their school and really feel a part of it. It has become the hub of that community. This part of the Bill leads us into the future because I believe parents should

have a lot more involvement in their schools and their children's education. After school, when we have computers lying idle in our schools, we could look at doing some extra work with perhaps handicapped people or seniors where the children, who have far more knowledge than we do on how computers work, may be able to give someone else knowledge that may assist them.

I have read this Bill and the notes accompanying it. It will take us forward into the new millennium and will stand the parents and children of Western Australia in good stead in the future.

I compliment the Minister for the work he has done on this Bill. I thank him sincerely for the assistance he has provided to me in ensuring that new schools in my electorate are state of the art. I commend all who assisted him and I look forward to sharing the outcome with the people of Western Australia.

MRS ROBERTS (Midland) [3.51 pm]: I have read the comments on the Bill from the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia, the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, and the correspondence sent to me by schools within and outside my electorate and by many individuals, again, both inside and outside my electorate. Those individuals who have written to me and come to see me include home schoolers.

The SSTUWA believes the Bill title is a misnomer; it has little if anything to do with school education. That is correct. Perhaps we should call it the "School Administration Bill". That could be more accurate. If it takes into account home education and other issues, it might have been better called the "Education Administration Bill". It has more to do with the administration of the education system in Western Australia and providing a general framework for education in the State than providing solely for school education. The inclusion of the word "school" narrows the interpretation of the legislation.

I am proud to tell the House that I was previously a president of a branch of the SSTUWA while I was teaching at John Curtin Senior High School for a number of years.

The union believes that the Bill should set out provisions that guarantee the right of children to a quality education. Whenever I speak to people in the community about education, that is the key word that comes up again and again. People want a quality education for their children. I am not sure that a Bill like this can fully prescribe a quality education; it does nothing more than provide a framework. Government policies, budgets and a number of other factors will determine the quality of education that children receive. The framework provided by the Bill could lead to some excellent outcomes, but the possibility also exists for some very negative outcomes.

The Bill gives the Minister significant powers. Naturally the Minister's and the Government's administration of education under the auspices of this legislation will be a very significant factor in determining the quality of education that is provided in Western Australia at government and non-government schools and in home schooling.

The SSTUWA is concerned about the general residential qualifications. It has suggested that clause 76 is deficient because it does not guarantee local intake arrangements for children at their local school. I agree. The union refers to experience overseas, especially in New Zealand, which has seen rigid class-based stratification of schooling emerge since the Government eliminated local school intake arrangements.

I am very concerned about the whole issue of access and equity in education. One of the difficulties that I see emerging currently with the devolution trend is that some schools are obviously better off and providing better educational outcomes and a better atmosphere than other schools. Many parents are voting with their feet. It is all very well to say that parents should have the right to do that; I am not advocating that they should not. However, it indicates that parents want to move their children from some schools. Parents are removing their children from at least one school in my electorate because of what they perceive to be a lower standard of education. They are driving their children on a daily basis to other schools, sometimes within the electorate and sometimes outside it. People also tell me that they will not send their children to the local state primary school but choose to send them to a local Catholic school for the same reasons. That should draw the Education Department's attention to the fact that something must be done at that school so that it performs well and offers as good an education as that offered in neighbouring schools.

Some of those problems occur because insufficient resources are allocated to schools that under Labor Governments and until now have been known as priority schools. My electorate has a number of priority schools. They include the schools at West Midland, Midland, Midvale, Bellevue and Koongamia. I would hate to see local parents withdrawing their children from those schools in favour of other schools because they did not feel their child would get the same quality of education. Even if children do not have learning disabilities or problems of their own, if they are placed in a class that has many other children with significant learning disabilities or problems, those children will attract the attention of the teacher and that teacher will need to spend time bringing them up to speed. I am not sure that, given the way the system is currently operating, sufficient resources are allocated to those schools to ensure that all children achieve suitable standards in education for their age. The shame of it is that we are still turning

children out of primary schools who do not have the level of literacy and numeracy that most of the community would like to see them achieve at the end of primary school.

It is not simply a matter of education and schooling or literacy and numeracy for its own sake. This also relates to how those children can participate in our community in later life. Other members have already said that dollars spent early in the education process can be far more productive than those spent later, after the children fall through the gaps and potentially get involved with the criminal justice system or other areas in which they will cost the community much more money.

By way of example, numerous studies indicate that juvenile offenders have much lower literacy and numeracy standards than their peers. One hears of figures in various studies of up to 40 or 50 per cent of repeat juvenile offenders not having basic literacy skills. Those problems are not brought about solely because that child cannot read. There may well be factors in their home lives such as child abuse which may have come into play which have affected their attitude to society, schooling and the laws of the land. We need to identify these children early and give them some form of priority. We cannot ignore them year after year and let them float through the system and come out as people without basic literacy and numeracy skills, ill-equipped to participate in society and without the prerequisite job skills to find employment and a useful role in our society.

As Labor Party spokesperson on police matters, I am only too well aware of the juvenile justice and crime problems which can arise with disaffected people in the community. Young people in particular who feel they have no place in society and have no respect and perhaps no job, can rebel and be involved in vandalism, car theft or burglaries. Also, as part of this despair, these same children often turn to drugs and other escape mechanisms because they are unhappy with their lives. If we come through school not being able to read and write, and having a very negative attitude of ourselves, we might also despair. It is a shame that we do not pick up children on the way through the system.

I started my remarks by referring to residential qualifications. One of the suggestions made in the teachers' union's notes on this Bill is that in other places where similar processes have taken place, a ghettoing of schools has occurred in working class areas and areas with a significant Aboriginal population. I have many areas within my electorate which are working class and have a significant Aboriginal population. Nothing is solved by parents taking students out of those schools to place them at other schools as destination schools are inadequately resourced and do not support the mechanisms for those with disabilities and children from Aboriginal families with special needs.

I issue a word of caution in this respect: In so many areas of government in recent times we see the divide between the haves and have nots growing to a greater extent. Although some people might be comfortable about that, the consequence is negative to the whole community. Unless we are an inclusive society in which everyone has a role to play and everyone is valued, we will create a group of people who do not fit in and who will rebel. Of course, the people in the other group in society will throw their hands in the air and say, "Why have things gone wrong? Why are our homes being burgled, our cars stolen and our suburbs vandalised?" In many instances, these problems can be taken back to government policy in many areas other than law and order. It is a matter not only of having more police and locking up people when they do wrong, but also nurturing our children and young people through their formative years so we can prepare them to take their place in an inclusive society.

The union's notes also refer to fees. The union is strongly opposed to any child being disadvantaged at school in the event that their parent or parents are unable to pay school fees and charges. All of us well know that current fees in government schools are proportionally much higher than they were 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr Barnett: It is interesting to put that to the test because the last time that so-called compulsory school fees were adjusted was in 1972. If they had been indexed, they would be in excess of \$60 today. Again, you can make that statement. I do not deny it is a burden and difficulty for many people, but I do not know that you could sustain your argument.

Mrs ROBERTS: I did my primary schooling during the 1960s and attended a number of primary schools. I briefly attended Sacred Heart in Point Peron, and later Highgate and Inglewood Primary Schools. When I attended the two later schools, the fees were next to nil or totally insignificant.

Also, in that era no real perceived difference could be found in the quality and standards of education between one government primary school and another. It was a very good thing. As I move about the metropolitan area now and visit schools in my previous electorate of Glendalough and my current seat of Midland, I see some wide disparities between the facilities available at government primary schools.

Mr Barnett: You always get variations between school facilities. Again, I am not being political, but the amount of expenditure on school buildings in the past few years has been unprecedented. What we must be prepared to do - it is difficult - is realise that as the population shifts, some schools probably are not worth saving. In the days when

most people in this Chamber went to school, primary school education was straightforward and simple. It is not any more - it is now far more sophisticated. The concept of a local primary school at the end of every street which was the same as the next have gone. Times have moved on. No-one likes that, but it is true.

Mrs ROBERTS: That is not the argument I am pursuing. It is a statement of fact that schools like Bellevue, Midvale and Koongamia Primary Schools are not as well equipped as many other primary schools around the metropolitan area.

Mr Barnett: Those schools, from the lower socioeconomic areas, for want of a better term, have more public expenditure on them per capita than at the so-called better schools.

Mrs ROBERTS: And so they should.

Mr Barnett: I agree, but I want to get to the facts. There is a tone through much of this debate that somehow the less advantaged groups are being neglected to the benefit of so-called wealthy areas. Much of the funding goes into the poorer areas.

Mrs ROBERTS: The Minister has taken the argument one step further. The argument I am pursuing is that expenditure on schools like Midvale, Bellevue and Koongamia should be much greater than it is in other areas, as should the per capita expenditure. Any analysis of those school populations to compare the background of the children there on any range of independent criteria would show that children at those schools have much greater needs. The other factor which I have raised before with the Minister is that those children do not have the same advantages at home as children in higher socioeconomic areas. Generally they do not have computer facilities at home and they may not have the extensive libraries at home as children have in wealthier areas. They do not have parents, on average, as well qualified or educated or able to assist them with their education. We need to pick up these children and be able at the very least to let them leave primary school with the same level of education and the same kinds of educational standards as children in other schools throughout the metropolitan area have achieved.

Mr Barnett: I accept that and do not doubt your sincerity. The logical sequence to that is that you must be prepared to support the reallocation of educational resources. We have average increases in funding of about 5 per cent, which is pretty good, and is on average \$50m to \$80m a year. Fundamentally we cannot continue to fund high schools that are two-thirds empty. We need to reallocate and rebuild schools, particularly so in the type of area you are describing where we need to build senior colleges with a strong emphasis on vocational programs and good links to TAFE. All of those things need to happen to raise aspiration levels. The problem we have in the community is that when we talk about reallocating or closing a school and combining it to produce something better, all the shutters go up. That is the intellectual dishonesty of the whole debate.

Mrs ROBERTS: I have no major point of disagreement with the Minister. He will well remember that I took up the case to keep Osborne Primary School open. The parents went through a long process and came out the other end with the agreement that their school would remain open. One of the things that is sometimes neglected in these assessments is the kind of environment that small primary schools are able to provide. In the case of Osborne Primary School, and it would be true for some of the schools in my current electorate, a very high percentage of children were from single families and the parents of others who had been at much bigger primary schools moved them to a smaller, more nurturing environment. The benefits of being in that environment on a social and personal level need to be considered. The children can be in a school where the smaller numbers of children mean that they are known personally by the headmaster and other teachers, by the lady in the canteen and other people who become constants in those children's life. It means that when they come back at the end of the school holidays they recognise people and people recognise them. They feel part of the school community.

Mr Barnett: You must challenge the facts. I hate the ranking of TEE schools but some of the bigger schools came out better. I do not read too much into that but I think that Willetton Senior High School came out on top. You are talking about putting resources into areas of need.

Mrs ROBERTS: My argument is in respect of primary schools where that nurturing environment is more important. I do not have an argument with large high schools.

Mr Barnett: In some cases in so-called difficult communities I might agree with you, but if you decide to have lots of small primary schools, and my electorate is full of fairly small primary schools, they are high cost operations. You do not then have the resources to put into the areas you are advocating. There is no way out of it. I have been around this a million times.

Mrs ROBERTS: Most children in the Minister's electorate would probably cope with being in a much larger primary school.

Mr Barnett: The reason these schools are generally a small size is that they are old. They are not well equipped.

Mrs ROBERTS: One of the better submissions I received was from the Upper Swan Primary School. Among the writers' opening paragraphs was the following -

It appears within the document that the first over-riding concern is with saving money within the education system. While we acknowledge that delivery of educational services is an expense to the community, we would like it known that the community is already funding a large proportion of our school's budget over and above the school development grant.

We bring to your attention the findings of the Senate inquiry lead by Senator Rosemary Crowley into state school funding in Australia, which found that Parents and Citizens groups are funding an average 27% of schools' operating budgets. As an example, the P & C association at this school has recently committed \$15 000 to assist in adequately funding the identified area in the school's current development plan.

Mr Barnett: That report is totally misleading and was presented in a misleading way. To say that parents are funding 27 per cent of the operating budget means that people read the word "operating" and interpret it as meaning that the parents are funding over a quarter of the schools. That is sheer nonsense. It was very poorly constructed and reported.

Mrs ROBERTS: Is the Minister talking about the report by Senator Rosemary Crowley?

Mr Barnett: Yes.

Mrs ROBERTS: The letter was signed by about a dozen members of the staff of that school. Their concern is shared by many people to whom I have spoken. They want an assurance that the overriding concern is not with saving money but with achieving educational outcomes and a quality education for our children. That is the most important thing.

As I said at the outset, the Bill is about providing a framework. More important than this will be the budget, resources and policies of the Government which administers education in this State. My overriding concern is for the quality of education and equity within education and fairness for everyone in our society.

MR JOHNSON (Hillarys) [4.18 pm]: I want to touch on some comments in the second reading debate and then refer to the Bill. The member for Fremantle in this House yesterday referred extensively to the Tony Blair Labour Government policy for changing education in the United Kingdom. For the members who do not know, the way the education system works in the United Kingdom is similar in one way to how it works in Australia, but it is very different in other ways. The United Kingdom has only two forms of government; one is the national Government, which is run by either Labour or the Conservatives, and the other one is local government. There are 32 London boroughs and many county councils throughout the UK. In Australia the delivery of the education service is by the State Government with a lot of funding from the Commonwealth. In the United Kingdom the delivery of service is quite definitely within the province of the local authorities.

The local councils all have different education policies. Conservative councils have different policies from some of the Labour councils. Tony Blair's Government is now trying to correct some of the problems Labour created in the 1960s and 1970s when it tore apart the education system in the United Kingdom. During that period the Government chose to tear down a tiering system which involved three tiers of high school education - secondary education, central education and grammar school. At the 11 plus stage, which was always a bone of contention for some people but which worked very well, children were tested to see in which system they would be placed.

The not so bright young people would normally go into the secondary education system. Those who were middle of the road went into the central system and those who were academically gifted went into the grammar school system. That meant that none of the brighter children were held back. However, the others had a chance to progress into the grammar school system. Children often went from a secondary education school to a central school and the central school children often moved into a grammar school.

It was administered by the local authorities. The local authority with which I was involved was the London borough of Sutton in which there were 64 schools. The council, as the local education authority, administered the education policies. Members will not be too surprised to hear that it was a conservative controlled local authority. There were three tiers of education within that system. All the young children had the opportunity of moving up that system. It was called streaming and it worked very well.

When the Labour Government was in power in the 1960s and 1970s it wanted to tear it down. Through an Act of Parliament it tried to abolish all grammar schools. It wanted one simple comprehensive schooling system for less academic and gifted academic children. That was welcomed by many of the looney left Labour councils. Prior to that change the children's average academic results were quite good. However, as soon as the single system was created in the local authorities controlled by Labour the rate of overall academic achievement declined.

My old London borough did not want to go along with it and it had a running battle with the then Labour Government for three or four years until the Conservative Government got back into power. Fortunately, we managed to retain our grammar school throughout that period.

I agree with what Tony Blair wants to do today and with what the member for Fremantle supported. It is a more conservative approach than that of Margaret Thatcher. The looney left councils would never dream of closing a school or getting rid of hopeless teachers. Let us face it, some teachers in the system are hopeless. We are lucky here with many very good, dedicated teachers. However, a very small minority of teachers are not suited to the job.

In one of the schools in this country which two of my children attended one teacher could hardly speak English. My children and many others could not understand what she was saying. When they asked her to repeat something the teacher went off in a temper. My kids are quite placid.

I have been involved with education over a good few years.

Mr Carpenter: Are you saying that the Education Department employed teachers whose English was so bad the children could not understand them?

Mr JOHNSON: At the school my children attended, a teacher, who fortunately moved on fairly quickly, could not speak coherent English. It was very difficult for the children to understand what was being said.

Mr Cunningham: In the UK it might have been the accents!

Mr JOHNSON: It was here. I have always taken an interest in education. I have four children and five grandchildren so far and I hope there will be more. I believe sincerely that every child deserves the best education we can give them.

The member for Fremantle said he agreed with zero tolerance of underperforming schools in the UK and they should be closed as a last resort. I wish Tony Blair and his Government good luck. If he can do it he is a better man than I am. He will face huge resistance from the looney left Labour controlled areas in inner London. However, I do not disagree with his aims. If a school is underperforming something should be done. How should an underperforming school be closed? It might be desirable to move the students somewhere else but enormous problems arise trying to get children to go to other schools. What should be done with the teachers? If some of the teachers are not performing to where should they be moved? Will the department get rid of them? In the past it has been very difficult dispensing with the services of teachers. I am delighted that under the new Act teachers will come under the public sector management provisions.

I believe very much in school councils and that local communities should have a say in how their schools are run. Parents should have a say by being part of the school council, although it should not be dominated by them. Part of their involvement should be to employ the principal. If the school community is happy with a principal and his record that school will benefit. The school would also have the support of the community because it would not have a principal thrust on it who was not seen to be doing an adequate job.

Many other people in the community can assist with the school councils. In the UK they were called governing bodies. They were made up of parents, local business people, service clubs and representatives from Lions or Rotary Clubs. In most areas the Lions and Rotary Clubs do what they can for many of the schools. They conduct mock interviews for high school students leaving school to show them how to behave at interviews. Having a Rotarian or a Lions Club member on a school council is an excellent idea. They are very caring people who do a wonderful job throughout the world, let alone in Western Australia.

My local Rotary Club here does the same thing. Most Rotarians and Lions Club members are business people. They attend high schools and conduct mock interviews to advise the young people who are due to leave school how to perform, what to wear, what to ask and how to answer questions. They would make a valuable contribution on any school council.

The principal should employ the staff. In the UK the principal employs the teachers. It is a very good system. The principal is given the job of running the school with the backing of the school council. The only way to let him run the school is by letting him recruit staff rather than having a less than adequate teacher thrust upon him.

Dr Constable interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: The new system will result in less movement of people.

Dr Constable: Why.

Mr JOHNSON: Over the past four years one of the schools in my electorate has had three principals. They never

feel at home and they are moved on by the Education Department. If the principals were appointed by the local school council, there would be more encouragement for them to stay on. They would not be moved on merely to suit someone else's purpose.

Dr Constable: I am not sure that is how it works here. This is such a big State.

Mr JOHNSON: I accept that. The United Kingdom covers quite a large area as well. Teachers move throughout the whole of the United Kingdom and the education system in that country faces different problems. In the same way as we have problems in the rural areas, there are problems in the United Kingdom in some of the lower socioeconomic areas, particularly in the north. Both countries have favourite areas where teachers and principals want to work. If the local school council is given the authority to recruit the principal and, in turn, the principal has the authority to appoint the teachers, it will balance out overall.

I refer to the expulsion of pupils from schools. Under the new system a school disciplinary advisory committee will be in place. I suggest that the Minister may like to look at the alternative system of having the school council take over that role. If a child is expelled by the principal, that decision can be upheld or overturned by the school council. Each school would have its own council which would comprise local parents, teachers, people from the local business community and local workers. They would have a better grasp of the situation and the needs of the pupils who attend that school than would an outside panel of three people who might not know all the ins and outs of what happened at the school. The school council would have a working knowledge of the school because it would comprise committed people who would ensure the school functioned properly. I suggest that it is quite possible for the school council to be the disciplinary panel that can either uphold or rescind the decision of the principal to expel a child. This Bill contains a number of good points. I reiterate that the school council process is long overdue and it can only enhance the working of a school.

MR CUNNINGHAM (Girrawheen) [4.33 pm]: We have heard many speakers from both sides of the House in this debate. I intend to put a parochial view.

Mr Johnson: That is not like you, Ted!

Mr CUNNINGHAM: It is unusual! I will bring to the House the good work that is being done by the many schools in my electorate of Girrawheen, which comprises a multicultural community. These schools are of an extremely high calibre. The young people are fortunate to attend Balga Senior High School, Warwick Senior High School and Girrawheen Senior High School and to have caring, compassionate teachers.

Girrawheen Senior High School, under the leadership of the new principal, Lesley Street, who has outstanding skills, and with the help of her deputy principal, and the year 11 and 12 coordinator, Milton Butcher, who are both diligent, hardworking teachers and have the support of excellent teaching staff, conducted a marvellous enterprise day recently. It was aimed at bringing students into contact with business people in the local community and to engender an enterprise culture. The day also established vital networks between the schools, local communities and business people.

Since that day numerous young people have approached me seeking advice about setting up a business. The enterprise day was organised by a committee comprising local members of Parliament, both federal and state, councillors, business community leaders, their staff and the students. Special thanks must go to the Minister for Youth. At a very late stage in the proceedings we put the hard word on him for a grant which was forthcoming and very much appreciated. The work of the committee was shaped by the positive contribution of its student members. Students nominated the champions of the day, and brainstormed the theme for the enterprise day - "Step into enterprise, a way of living".

The very capable mayor of Wanneroo, Mr Brian Cooper, opened the program which was held at the Wanneroo Civic Centre, with guest speakers Tina Altieri of Channel Nine, and well known Perth businessman and dynamo John Hughes. The day was planned to maximise student involvement, and following the opening session a workshop was held covering a safe food handling certificate course, personal motivation, running a successful business and enterprise games. Those games promoted skills such as working in teams, good communication, problem solving, decision making and lateral thinking.

Following on from this highly successful day, Girrawheen Senior High School has been invited to send students to attend the launch in New South Wales shortly of the new enterprise education kit, "Making it happen". The co-presidents of the student council, Lisa Koni and Daniel Drummond, will travel to Sydney for this event. Despite these positive programs, this high school is continually implementing schemes such as enterprise day. However, the school still battles with fundamental issues, such as student safety. I know this is hard to believe, but students must use the same entrance to the school as motor vehicles driving into the car park which is located at the front of the administration building. It is extremely dangerous.

Mr Barnett: Is there a fence around the school?

Mr CUNNINGHAM: Yes. There is an opening further along. There must be a way around this congestion. The Minister has an open invitation to come to this school. I have already told the principal that he has said that he will visit the school. There is a grave concern about the large number of vehicles using this main entrance in both the morning and the afternoon because of the potential for a tragedy to occur.

I wish to comment on an influential person who has worked hard for the youth and families in my electorate. For four and a half years Senior Constable Tony Copeland has been a great calming influence on students at the Girrawheen Senior High School. He has worked closely with teachers and parents to facilitate the transition of students from primary school level to being caring and contributing members of the community. In a multicultural, ethnic community young people and their parents encounter many problems associated with maturing into young adulthood. Young people and their parents, in many cases, face additional cultural differences, and sometimes those differences cause great difficulties within the family unit. In his role as the school-based police officer at Girrawheen Senior High School, Senior Constable Copeland has had the foresight to address many problems before they occur. He has 24 years' experience in the Police Force, and has the necessary maturity to address the many and diverse problems that occur in any community. Senior Constable Copeland is the coordinator of the Joondalup region for school based officers. He is equipped with the expertise and knowledge necessary to lead our community based police officers in their unending fight to prevent young people becoming involved with drugs and alcohol.

Senior Constable Copeland is a friend to youth; he is an outstanding role model for young people in the community and for his peers and fellow police officers. It disturbs me greatly to think that this wealth of experience and knowledge will be lost when Senior Constable Copeland is forcibly retired. Even with the current severe shortage of police officers, this valuable resource - and many others like Senior Constable Copeland - will not be given the option of continuing his irreplaceable role in and service to the community. This valuable resource will be told that because he has reached 60 years of age he can no longer play a part in the Police Force. This is a tragedy. It will be a sad loss for the community.

I urge the Minister for Police to urgently investigate the situation. The Minister can offer officers such as Senior Constable Copeland, who have demonstrated their outstanding qualities, a special role - if not within the Police Force, at least working alongside police officers. Would it not be appropriate to consider appointing Senior Constable Copeland as a special constable so that he can continue to provide a stabilising, strong and positive role model for our youth? My sentiments are supported by many people in my local community. The school community supports Senior Constable Copeland 100 per cent. I am aware of the old saying that no-one is indispensable, but his exit from active duty will create a void in my electorate.

I have highlighted some positive elements in this address. However, I am appalled at the recent budget cuts that have been made in funding to Burbridge School. As my esteemed colleague, the member for Willagee and shadow spokesperson for Disability Services, has already brought to the attention of the House, Burbridge School has been devastated by the rationalisation of its services to the most needy and dependent members of our community. Burbridge School has always provided outstanding teaching facilities for its students. Its teachers, staff and parents have continually shown great commitment to and faith in their students, and for this they must be commended. Burbridge is truly a community based, interactive school. These young people - many with severe disabilities - need Burbridge to continue its innovative work and programs. It should be the role of this Government to provide young people with every conceivable opportunity to become members of our community. Any cut in funding will have a major impact on the ability of Burbridge School to continue its high standard of education, support and care for its students.

The School Education Bill will provide opportunities for changes to be implemented. As members of Parliament, we have a very urgent obligation and responsibility to ensure that our youth have a right to receive a responsible, innovative education. We must also set high standards for the youth of the future. We must set in place a positive path to education which will carry this State into the twenty-first century.

MR BARNETT (Cottesloe - Minister for Education) [4.47 pm]: I thank members for their contribution to this debate. The record indicates that 33 members spoke on education issues. That is an indication that members take education very seriously. I appreciate the comments on and interest taken in this Bill. In a general sense, I appreciate what I interpret to be fairly broad support for this legislation and recognition that the Government has gone through a lengthy consultation process through the reference committee, the Green Bill, public consultation, public meetings and the like. In that sense, the product before us is the result of contributions by many people and a great deal of community input. I hope that the Bill will pass; I am not against amending it, but I make the observation that an enormous amount of thought has gone into this legislation. It has been a collective effort.

I cannot pretend to respond in detail to 33 speeches. Many members spoke more generally about education - which

is fine - rather than the specifics of the Bill. I undertake to write to the many members who have raised specific issues, if I am unable to deal with them now. We have covered many issues during debate, some of which are federal matters. Priority schools programs, enrolment benchmarks, and TEE schools and the publication of league tables are examples of important education issues but do not pertain directly to this Bill.

Many issues raised by members are covered within the clauses of the Bill, and that will emerge during debate. It is a large Bill containing some 230 clauses and attends to much of the detail. In many respects, it is an administrative Bill. I do not accept the comment that it is boring or bone dry. Largely, the Bill is set up to facilitate and to allow education to evolve and be dynamic. It tries to cater for education in both the government and non-government sectors; it recognises the diversity of our education system, and will provide a framework to allow education to develop for many decades into the future.

A number of members commented that we should have ideals. I will return to that issue later. We have a complex education system which will continue to change. A number of members wished to pass on their appreciation to the member for Roleystone, as the Parliamentary Secretary. I have already done so, but I repeat that he has done a wonderful job with his commitment to this project.

A number of important issues in the Bill did not receive a lot of attention in the debate. The roles of school councils will come up during Committee. Some attendance and enrolment matters were discussed. Perhaps members did not recognise that the new procedures allow for flexibility in addressing the needs of individual schools and students. There was not much discussion about the non-government school sector, which is 25 per cent of our students. We need a legislative framework that addresses that sector.

Mr Ripper: In my consultations with the non-government sector there seemed to be broad acceptance of the Bill. There were very few suggestions for alterations, which is an indication that they are happy with the consultation process.

Mr BARNETT: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition also raised the issue of a Committee stage. I am not surprised that this Bill will be dealt with in the Committee of the Whole. I am comfortable with that. I intend to share different sections of the Bill with the Parliamentary Secretary. I hope we can move through Committee reasonably proficiently. I hope this Bill will pass through both Houses before midyear. Many comments were made about resourcing and funding of education. That is legitimate comment. However, everyone understands that the legislation does not address funding issues as such.

There was a lot of discussion about the Bill not laying down principles or objectives of education. I remind members that four key objectives were stated in the legislation and have been widely canvassed. First, every Western Australian child has a right to receive a school education. The right to education is enshrined. Second, parents have the right to choose the form of education that best suits the child's needs, whether a government or non-government school or in a home education setting. Choice is enshrined in the Bill. Third, parents have a responsibility to work together in partnership with schools for children's schooling to be successful. The parent's have a responsibility. Fourth, a government schooling system must be provided to meet the education needs of all children. That is a clear government responsibility. I feel comfortable with those four objectives; they are appropriate.

If we started to include all sorts of objectives about the aspirations of the community in education and equality - all things that we might glibly agree as being appropriate - we would get into the same sort of dilemma that occurred in the recent Constitutional Convention. How does one raise all those issues about equality, objectives and ethos in a school system which has schools with different aspirations - government schools, Catholic and Islamic schools? This issue was canvassed. I am not against including principles, broad objectives and ideals of education. However, there have been attempts to do that and they are fraught with difficulties. In the recent debate in the Constitutional Convention, in which I took part as the Deputy Premier, discussion on a national constitution included a preamble containing our ideals as a country.

In principle that sounds great, until someone says, "Will we include the right to bear arms and defend ourselves and, if so, where does that take us legally?" It would be the same in education. I would hate to see legal cases to interpret a preamble or set of ideals to pursue issues in education. Some people might say that is a good thing, but I think there are certain dangers. I do not rule out trying to insert something, but I warn against the difficulties of doing that. We would run into the same difficulties as occurred in the Constitutional Convention: If one lays down broad ideals one opens a minefield of potential litigation and dispute that will be difficult to resolve and perhaps not achieve much. Maybe we can look at those objects and make them a bit livelier.

Similarly, issues such as ethics and civics are important. Again, in terms of the objectives of education, much of that is done through the curriculum framework. The most important issue is what is taught in schools. We need to make a distinction between the curriculum, the process of teaching, the programs, and the framework that oversees administration. I concede that this Bill is about how we administer an education system in this State.

There was some discussion about penalties and recognition that they have been changed. There were quite a few comments about the fact that if we changed school boundaries we would have the haves and have nots and we might residualise some children or areas. I understand those arguments and I share that concern. We must be careful in seeking some sort of absolute equality not to hold back parts of the education system from developing and being innovative. The approach should not be to contain some level of mediocrity but to recognise that particular schools and communities may need extra help rather than hold back the whole system.

The matter of school boundaries is an issue of priority for local children. The Director General of Education has the ability to declare a school boundary. However, generally, where there is excess space capacity in a school and as schools become different in the future there will be a lot of merit in allowing parental choice. It will generate some competition between schools. Schools will compete for students and staffing. That may have difficult consequences in some cases. That will be one of the forces that will make our education system more vital and progressive. We will see how we go with local area planning.

Quite a few comments were made about levels of so-called school fees or charges. We have had a committee looking at that. I have yet to see its recommendations. If those recommendations have not arrived today they are about to. As I indicated, I will make that public during the debate. I do not know whether the Government will have made a decision but I will express my views on that. I argue that it is reasonable that parents contribute some modest amount to the education of their children within government schools as they have always done. The real question is how we help those parents who genuinely cannot do that. I would rather do that than deny the school system that level of parental support which is so valuable.

Home education did not attract a lot of attention in this debate, which is a relief given that it tended to dominate the public meetings until we decided to have a separate meeting on that. A number of the changes made to the original Green Bill, particularly the establishment of a home education board, have largely been well received by home educators. This Bill recognises the role of home education and is not in any sense intended to penalise or limit the activities of those parents who are committed to home education and are able to do it. We must maintain the principle of compulsory education and I appreciate the support of the Opposition for the principle of universal and compulsory education; in some cases penalties may be appropriate to ensure that children are not neglected.

Some issues were raised about the use of an education ombudsman which was promoted by the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations. Again that is an interesting issue that I have discussed with WACSSO. I do not have any in-principle objection to an education ombudsman, but I question what it will do. The ombudsman would have powers only to review a process that is affecting a child. Over time that would effectively take away the ability of a Minister of the day to exercise some discretion. Most parents think that their final source of appeal on education is the Minister. If we create a position of ombudsman, all he can do is comment on whether there has been due process. Sometimes, as members of Parliament appreciate better than anyone, the Minister makes a subjective decision based on a particular circumstance and he or she may do something that is against the normal rules of the game, for whatever reason. An ombudsman would not have that capacity. Even after talking with WACSSO I am not convinced about an ombudsman. I think parents might lose out.

We have set up panels and review groups. The decision making process is a lot better. For example, the Minister will no longer decide whether to suspend students; that will be left to the director general. Ultimately, if the parents feel aggrieved they can come to the Minister. That should be open to the person. The procedures for dealing with all those difficult issues are more formal.

The general issue of students with disabilities was raised. There was good support for the way this issue was addressed within the context of the legislation. There is clear recognition of that role, and members will be aware that the Government has done much recently to substantially accelerate integration programs in schools. That has all sorts of implications, but the Government is moving down that path as quickly as is reasonable. Comments were made about the level of support for particular schools for students with disabilities, and that is a resourcing issue.

A number of members spoke about the educational standards among Aboriginal students. I agree and I, and I am sure many Education Ministers before me, have said that it is an area of great deficiency within the education system. Despite expenditure of \$0.5b since 1990 on Aboriginal education in this State, there is no discernible improvement. That is a tragedy. It is not because of lack of resources. It must be handled differently. I welcome the frank comments by the member for Eyre and others about the reality of providing quality education and a quality environment in which these young children can learn. It remains a huge challenge.

Some issues were raised about quality and quality assurance. The member for Fremantle talked about external review functions. He somewhat radically suggested that if a school were not up to educational standards, it should be closed. I do not know whether he will make that speech at the teachers' union next year! There is certainly some debate within education circles about the different standards between schools and, again, if the Government goes down that

path the matter needs to be handled with great care. The community and parents are demanding that schools perform, at whatever level it might be. It does not mean they must all produce top TEE students. They may perform in vocational education or by achieving high attendance or retention rates and the like. I have some hesitancy about an external unit running around as a bunch of auditors and conducting inquisitions in schools. It could create a host of problems; nevertheless there is a growing feeling in the community that schools must be accountable in the educational product they provide and what they can do to enrich and develop the knowledge of young people. Currently there are proposals for open seminars and discussions during the course of the year on quality assurance and review of schools.

Mr Ripper: What is needed is an acceptable range of measures for assessing school performance. With the publication of the league tables, we have some information, but it is way short of an acceptable way of measuring the comprehensive performance of schools.

Mr BARNETT: There are all sorts of problems with measurement, particularly in a State as diverse as Western Australia with its geography and its indigenous people. It will be extraordinarily difficult to do that. Nevertheless, there is a mood in the community that there should be greater levels of accountability. We should not resist that, but if it is to be done it should be done properly.

The member for Churchlands also raised the issue of the registration of teachers. Again, I am quite supportive of that. I know there are differing views among members, but it is part of the development of professionalism in teaching. It should preferably be done in a uniform way across Australia, and I am prepared to raise it informally at the next meeting of federal and state Ministers for Education in a month's time. There are different positions in other States. If we can demonstrate that it would raise the professional standards of teaching, raise the status of the profession and allow greater mobility between States, it probably has substantial merit. I will take that on as a positive suggestion.

Dr Constable: Why does it have to be national registration? Other professions, such as doctors, dentists and lawyers, have done it at a state level.

Mr BARNETT: I am not suggesting a national registration system, but if we are to have a registration system I would like it to be on a uniform basis across Australia but administered at a state level. It has been talked about informally, and teachers' representatives are looking for that. That does not preclude Western Australia from doing it. Much of the argument is related to paedophilia, recognition of qualifications and so on. I have not formed a final view, but if there is broad support I am prepared to seriously consider it in this State, and I hope it can be done in a uniform way across Australia.

Time does not allow me to respond to the individual comments made during the 33 speeches in the debate, but I will write to members on the specific points they raised. I have already responded to some points raised by the member for Belmont. He spoke about principles of education. It is important but it is difficult to enshrine them in the Bill. He spoke about school closures and was critical of the consultation in the local education planning process. I share some of his concerns. It has not been ideal but it has been a genuine attempt. It is difficult to ask parents to consider the future of their schools. Experience shows it tends to be divisive and drives parents into corners. It is a difficult balance. I am sure people would be outraged if there were an autocratic system and the Minister made the decisions, but if people are involved there are conflicts and divisions. There is no alternative to a consultative process, but it is not easy to handle. The department will learn from this and improve the process, but it will always be difficult and contentious.

Members talked about the quality of education and the need for more technology, vocational programs, more excellence, special programs and so on. I agree that that is the future of education. However, equally they must recognise that for that to occur at the right standard, schools must be viable in terms of student numbers, facilities and staffing. That will not be achieved with too many small schools. Equally, it must be recognised that school resources, such as money, buildings, staff and support services, must follow the students. There may be greater need for specialty schools, senior colleges, vocational colleges and so on. I am conscious that the member for Rockingham has overcrowding in the primary schools in his electorate, but in inner suburbs of Perth the schools are under crowded. That resource must be shifted. That is one of the difficulties currently experienced in local area planning. How can adjustments be made to an education system largely built in the 1960s and 1970s to reflect a strongly growing population at the edges of the urban area?

Country areas have been debated continually, especially the problems of smaller schools. The electorate of the member for Merredin is full of small schools, but fewer than in the past. That has been a trend over a number of years. It is an issue about how long young children can be expected to travel in buses to and from school, viability and so on. All these matters are important.

Equally, can quality education continue to be delivered in very small schools? Elements of judgment must be made.

It is not so difficult in primary schools but it is a real issue in high schools, particularly senior high schools. The quality of education that can be provided in relatively small district high schools also is an issue. If that were said in country areas, people would have a fight on their hands.

The Government will continue to struggle to raise the level of debate on education. It is no good just saying the things that people like to hear about more computers, better teachers and higher quality education if people do not also have the courage and intellectual honesty to look at how it is done in practice. The practical side is less popular.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about principles. He said the Bill was minimal. I have commented on that. Fees and charges will be an issue because there are lots of politics in them. The member for Bassendean talked about individual talent and the need to nurture it. I agree. Some of the variety and specialisation in education will work to that extent. The member for Dawesville supported the Bill, particularly the way it addresses children with disabilities and the role of school councils. The establishment of school councils is encouraged in this legislation and, again, it is somewhat of a paradox. For example, in some school communities - often those in the higher socioeconomic areas - there is a high level of parent involvement. Parents who are well educated themselves are able to contribute in a meaningful way to the schools. Sadly, in many schools - often in less advantaged areas - parental involvement may be almost zero.

That will not be easily solved. It is a challenge for local communities. I do not mean that parents do not value the education of their children or that they are neglectful or anything else - it is the reality. I have been to schools where three or four people are virtually trying to hold the P & C association together. It is almost impossible to get parental support. They are often in areas with a high proportion of single parent families, which means that the person does not have the option. A mother may have babies at home and so can hardly become involved in the school. There are many other sorts of pressures.

Mr Ripper: I am glad you mentioned that it is a matter of pressure. It is a matter of people's lives and skills and the instability caused by people moving in and out of communities.

Mr BARNETT: Transition is a big issue. At some of the schools I recently visited in the Peel region they had those sorts of problems. School councils and greater parental roles in decision making are fantastic. It works wonderfully well in the St Hildas and Scotch Colleges of this world and in some of the better developed, long established schools in strong communities. But there are a whole range of options. I want to see if school councils develop. The idealism reflected in this Bill is appropriate, but there must be a lot of realism. In some school communities it will take a long time to develop. We should not make schools feel lesser in any sense if they are slow or take many years to develop school councils. The opportunity is there but it is up to schools to run with it.

Dr Constable: In areas where there is not strong support in other ways, it is becoming more and more difficult to get parents to be involved because of changing social patterns, such as two parents working.

Mr BARNETT: I agree. As I said earlier in the debate, having gone to more than 300 schools I have yet to have a parent group say to me that they want to run their school. There is lots of talk in educational circles and lots of philosophy about it but in reality it is not out there. We must try to find the right balance. The Bill attempts to pick out the right areas on issues such as uniforms, school discipline and the ethos of the school. One can get reasonable parental involvement in those areas. To take parents to the further step of playing roles in the selection of staff and administration has all sorts of difficulties.

Dr Constable: I agree with you. The parents of children in schools in my electorate say that they do not want to be involved in that because they do not think they are competent to do it.

Mr BARNETT: As Minister I do not particularly want them either; I want to see school principals involving parents in those areas in which they should be involved and essentially for principals to run the school.

Dr Constable: At the St Hildas and Scotch Colleges you were talking about parent groups do not choose teachers; that is done by the principal of the school.

Mr BARNETT: Yes. The member for Avon stressed the importance of enhancing the position of teachers. We have headed down that path. The reasonably significant salary increase has been part of that. The Centre for Professional Excellence which is about to be established in the electorate of the member for Fremantle -

Mr McGinty: It is looking good.

Mr BARNETT: It is. All of those things are part of trying to restore the status of teaching to something it was perhaps 20 years ago. If I may say, perhaps a bit gratuitously, as members of Parliament we have a responsibility. We should debate education and the Opposition in particular should be critical of education in the true sense of the word. However, we must be very careful not to pull down education, particularly government education. I know it

is a difficult thing to do when in opposition. I am not saying that we were any better when we were in opposition. We used to get stuck right into the former Labor Government about funding, maintenance and everything else. The danger is that if the criticism is seen to be aimed at government schooling there will continue to be the drift of students into the non-government sector.

Mr Ripper: Within the limits of our role we have been very supportive of government education.

Mr BARNETT: I acknowledge that. The Opposition has been consistent in its positive position. Every time there is an issue on schools or when the media run on an incident of violence, vandalism or whatever else, the perception can form that government education is on the decline. I do not feel that at all from going around the schools. Our government schooling system is improving. However, it faces many challenges from which some of the non-government sector is free.

I referred earlier to the comments of the member for Fremantle. He is an advocate of Tony Blair's White Paper on closing schools that are not performing. That is good. We should be having such debates. I do not know if it will win universal support among the teachers with whom the member for Fremantle will deal, but it is important that we have a proper debate about accountability and the measuring of the performance of schools. Although a lot of the focus might be on schools that are seen to be declining or small schools in rural areas, equally schools in well off areas have teacher profiles which have not changed for decades. They have teachers who have been teaching the same subjects to the same age group for the past 20 years. That can be just as big a problem as those in some of the smaller schools or those in more difficult areas.

The member for Perth spoke about home education. I have commented on that. The member for Nollamara talked about putting values back into education. I agree but that largely comes through the curriculum framework and the ethos of the school. Some of the things we have seen in government schools are the reestablishment of uniforms and those sorts of symbols of our society, civics and the like, which are doing the right thing. We are seeing a lot more pride coming into schools and schools having their own identity.

The member for Swan Hills spoke of the good provisions in the Bill relating to the sharing of school facilities. Again, it is logical. School buildings are used only some 15 per cent of the time during the course of a year. A huge investment of several billion dollars' worth of buildings are used for only 15 per cent of the time. There is enormous scope for using school facilities and to have shared and joint development.

The member for Churchlands talked about the registration of teachers. I have commented on that. She is generally supportive of what the Bill is trying to do. The member for Willagee spoke at some length about some of the problems with the schools in his electorate and the need to improve education for Aboriginal students. Again, I agree with that. I wish I had the answer; it is incredibly important. Lots of things have been tried. As a non-educationalist I might say by way of observation that one of the problems is that we have had almost too many schemes and projects in the area of Aboriginal education. There is much to be said for getting back to the things that clearly do work. One of the things that is working very well at the moment is the tracking program, which involves effectively keeping track of Aboriginal children who tend to be fairly transient. That is starting to produce some results, but it is a huge challenge. The member for Kalgoorlie made similar comments and stressed the importance of school welfare officers and the like.

Mr Ripper: Aboriginal education cannot be addressed in isolation without the other circumstances confronting Aboriginal communities and families. An integrated approach must be taken by all government agencies dealing with Aboriginal communities and families.

Mr BARNETT: Yes, the issue is far wider. The member is saying that we cannot solve it. We might look at a hostel arrangement to see at least if that might work. It can work only if it is supported by the local Aboriginal community. The most likely site would be Carnarvon. I hope this year that we will be in a position to start a systemic school in the Perth area for Aboriginal children. Again, there must be strong support from the Aboriginal community for that to work. There will be the inevitable conflicts between different groups and families, so it will not be easy. It might create an environment in which Aboriginal children are happy to be at school and start to succeed in school. This legislation will allow that sort of flexibility and enable schools to be run in different ways that might work for those children.

The member for South Perth complimented the format of the legislation and its plain English style. I commend all of those involved in its drafting for that. The member for Rockingham talked about TEE rankings. I agree but again, as I said in the debate, it is not of my choosing. The information was obtained by *The West Australian* under the Freedom of Information Act. We released it this year because we had no choice as it was about to be obtained again. We tried to release it in a form which was at least as reliable as it could be made. It was grossly misinterpreted. Nothing was said about the schools or vocational programs. The fact was ignored that a league table is exactly that.

If we have 20 schools and one goes up, by definition another will go down even if nothing has changed at that school. All sorts of anomalies arise out of it. But that did not suit the media at the time. The member for Maylands talked about some issues in the schools in her electorate and about sponsorship. The member for Armadale made some good points about Abstudy and the need for those funds to go through to the school. I will certainly pursue that.

The member for Joondalup congratulated the Minister - he was the only one who did, I think - and talked about the participation of parents. That is a great idea, and although it is difficult to achieve, we should continue to pursue it.

The member for Roleystone has played a wonderful role in this matter, and his address answered many of the issues that have been raised. The member for Peel said that the test would be in the implementation. I agree. No matter what we put in this legislation, we will not improve education by a piece of legislation alone. However, this legislation does provide a framework which will enable us to do a lot better in the years ahead. I agree that support workers, social workers and psychologists are very important in schools that face particular challenges, and although they are very expensive, I believe the community will expect them to be provided. I do not know whether my colleagues agree with me, but I sense that people in the community are of the view that they would prefer to have Governments spend more money on education and less on other things. I am not saying that just because I am Minister for Education -

Mr Ripper: Is this your budget submission?

Mr BARNETT: No. I always do alright in the Budget. We all say glibly that education is important, but I believe the community is starting to share that view and wants to see increasing resources and increasing quality of education, probably at the cost of many other areas of government. I certainly share that view.

The member for Collie talked about the need to recognise local conditions. That is particularly important for country areas. Again, what might work in one town or region might not be appropriate in another, and this Bill will allow for that flexibility.

The member for Cockburn talked about the need to encourage enterprise and innovation in education. I agree. I do not have the clause in front of me, but the Bill does refer to the principle of providing leadership. If members opposite think that would be enriched by saying leadership and innovation in education, I would be comfortable with that, so long as the words were appropriate. I am not against putting in some of these more inspirational things so long as we do not create down the track a legal or litigious minefield where people start going back to some sort of Bill of Rights for education. We cannot create that, but we can put in something to add a bit more flair and sense of purpose to the Bill, if that is the desire.

The member for Eyre talked about the country transfer system. That is a difficulty. Again, that is an administrative problem and is not solved through this legislation. We have undertaken the important task of trying to totally revamp the system of appointment, promotion and transfer of teachers. That will be difficult to do in a way that does not disadvantage existing teachers, and it may need to apply to new teachers only. It involves housing and a range of issues. No-one within government or opposition fails to recognise the importance of having attractive conditions to encourage teachers to go into regional and remote areas of the State, and the need to ensure that we have an appropriate balance between experienced and young teachers, and some stability in those areas. I do not think it is beyond the wit of the system to do that.

The member for Wellington talked about the balance between experienced and new teachers. The member for Esperance talked about having too many acting principals in country schools. I agree that that is a problem. We need to ensure that work and service in country areas is recognised and becomes an important part of the curriculum vitae of a teacher and part of the promotional system. Some work is required in that area.

The member for Kimberley talked about Aboriginal education. The member for Pilbara made some comments about technology in schools, the remote School of the Air and so on. Technology is a big demand in schools. I concede that we are behind some of the other States, and in some respects we may be behind internationally, particularly compared with the United States. We have undertaken a big program of putting computers and technology in schools. Equally important is the training of teachers and the backup and technical support. Parents want their children to have access to good technical equipment, but that is extraordinarily expensive. It is easy enough to go out and buy the computers, but it is expensive to maintain them and have the programs work effectively. We will not do that in a lot of tiny schools in the metropolitan area but will bring schools together and develop those sorts of facilities. Again, the community wants it, so one way or another it will be provided. The member for Mandurah also talked about technology and innovation. That was a reasonably common theme.

The member for Southern River talked about the example of Atwell School, where she played an outstanding role in convincing everyone, against the odds, that a new school was needed. She demonstrated that a new school was justified and, therefore, got a new school.

Mr Ripper: As promised by the Labor Party during the election campaign.

Mr BARNETT: That is okay. She got it, and that school is about to be formally opened. That was a good example of a local member of Parliament knocking on doors and physically counting the number of children in the area, and proving that the statistics of the Education Department and various local government authorities and planning groups were wrong. That is a good example of a local member doing it the hard way and getting a result.

The member for Midland said that the Bill was largely administrative. That is a bit unfair. The Bill is clearly about the administration of education in this State. There is no doubt that it sets out to do that. It tries to set up a framework that can last for a long time.

Dr Constable: Seventy years!

Mr BARNETT: That would be a great ambition. We will not be here then, and we can only imagine what the debate will be about in 70 years - it may be about going back to the dark ages of the 1990s when this Bill was put through! The Bill is an administrative framework; it does not try to do everything, and it should be seen as complementary to the curriculum council legislation and some of the other changes taking place within schools.

The member for Hillarys talked about some of the situations in the United Kingdom and made some comments about teaching. The member for Marangaroo talked about some schools in his electorate, which I appreciated, and, as I said, I will look at the situation in Girrawheen. One of the true pleasures of being an Education Minister is that it is a portfolio in which one can do fairly modest things fairly quickly. I cannot say I will solve all of the problems, but it is an area where quite small changes can have significant impacts for many people. It is a very satisfying portfolio in that sense.

I thank all members for their contribution to the debate, and I thank them for what I interpret as broad support for the structure of this legislation. I hope we can move through Committee reasonably quickly. The Opposition has asked that there be a gap before we go into the Committee stage. I am happy to accommodate that and to make available access to Ken Booth and his staff for any drafting, comments or interpretation. There is not a lot of politics across the Chamber about this Bill. In fact, there is a genuine desire to come up with a good piece of legislation. We have that with this Bill, and if it could be improved though its passage in the Parliament, I would be appreciative.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY TRAINING FUND AND LEVY COLLECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Council's Message

Message from the Council received and read notifying that it did not insist on its amendments Nos 1 to 5 to which the Assembly had disagreed, but with a further amendment.

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION AMENDMENT BILL

Council's Message

Message from the Council received and read notifying that it did not insist on its amendments to which the Assembly had disagreed, but with a further amendment.

BILLS (2) - RETURNED

1. Country High School Hostels Authority Amendment Bill.
2. Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill.

Bills returned from the Council without amendment.

BILLS (2) - RECEIPT AND FIRST READING

1. Charitable Trusts Amendment Bill.
2. Guardianship and Administration Amendment Bill

Bills received from the Council; and, on motions by Mr Barnett (Leader of the House), read a first time.

House adjourned at 5.32 pm

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers to questions are as supplied by the relevant Minister's office.

"VALUING DIVERSITY: A CHARTER TO AIM FOR" CERTIFICATE

2948. Mr RIEBELING to the Minister for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs:

In relation to the publication of a signed certificate headed *Valuing Diversity: A Charter to Aim For*-

- (a) what was the publication of a certificate that allows the reader to simply fill in their name to receive the certified certificate designed to achieve;
- (b) what measures or indicators are to be used to gauge the success of this program;
- (c) what was the cost of this full page advertisement; and
- (d) is the certificate a forerunner to a new larger and more colourful poster about living in harmony?

Mr BOARD replied:

- (a) The Charter of 'Western Australians Living in Harmony' is part of the promotion of the Government's *Living in Harmony - A Community Relations Strategy for WA* which was launched in October 1997. By displaying the Charter in a prominent place business, community organisations, sporting groups, local government and members of the public can show their support for the Strategy and affirm that positive community relations benefit all Western Australians.
- (b) The effectiveness of this initiative will be measured by the number of recorded Internet downloads of the Charter and the number of enquiries and mail outs of the Charter.
- (c) The cost of the 20cm by 15cm (less than 1/4 page) advertisement was \$2,397. It should be noted that the Chief Editor of *The West Australian* has recently offered to re-run the Charter advertisement together with a series of human interest stories relating to the *Living in Harmony* initiative free of charge.
- (d) No.

REGIONAL BUYING COMPACT

3041. Mr BROWN to the Minister for Services:

- (1) Did the Minister/Government recently launch the Regional Buying Compact?
- (2) Does the Compact provide financial preference for regional businesses?
- (3) If so, what is the nature of the financial preference?
- (4) In the 1996-97 financial year, what was the total amount the Government allocated to the private sector to provide capital works, equipment, goods and services?
- (5) How much of the total budget allocation was awarded to regional businesses within the definition of that term as now defined?
- (6) What was the underlying rationale of providing the -
 - (a) 10% preference;
 - (b) 5% preference?
- (7) What research was carried out to determine the degree to which that level of preference would tip the balance in favour of regionally based businesses?

Mr BOARD replied:

- (1)-(2) Yes.
- (3) The following table summarises the preference framework.

Description	Preference	Comments
<i>Goods and service</i>	10% to a maximum of \$50,000	Applies to general consumables and services.
<i>Construction (works, housing)</i>	5% to a maximum of \$50,000	Applies to regionally based contractors.
<i>Competitive tendering and contracting</i>	10% to a maximum of \$500,000 -applies to government activities being outsourced	Applies on a once off basis and when the contract is renewed, the standard preferences are used.

Contractors based outside the prescribed distance may claim a local content preference which encourages the use of goods, services and materials from the region.

Government agencies in regional areas also have authority to buy locally up to the value of \$50 000 per line item, even when a central (common use) contract exists. Quotations need to be called and the purchase should represent value for money.

Prescribed Distances: The State is divided into the following three (3) zones:

Zone 1 is the metropolitan area and preferences do not apply in this zone.

Zone 2 is the south west corner of the State from Jurien Bay to Bremer Bay, the prescribed distance is 200 kilometres from the point of delivery.

Zone 3 is the balance of the State; the prescribed distance is 400 kilometres.

- (4) \$4 billion (estimated).
- (5) A study conducted in the Mid West region of Western Australia in 1996, suggests that around 70% of Government regional requirements are sourced locally. In this study, the value of Government spending on goods, services and construction in the Mid West was established at \$50 million, of which \$35 million was purchased from local businesses. The Government proposes to undertake further studies to obtain additional indicators of regional spending in other regions.
- (6) (a)-(b) Preference arrangements to assist decentralised manufacturing and suppliers are well established and have been found to be effective in supporting regional suppliers. As part of the proposed evaluation of the Compact these margins will be closely examined.
- (7) Extensive research was conducted with Government agencies, industry associations and suppliers to establish the effectiveness of the previous Regional Purchasing Policy and the impact of the proposed Regional Buying Compact. Experience has shown that the majority of contracts is awarded to regionally based suppliers without the preference being applied. The preferences impact on approximately 10% of contracts. The preference provisions represent one element of the Regional Buying Compact which is designed to create the environment for increased regional purchasing. The changes introduced with the Compact rectify anomalies associated with coverage, such as some construction activities which were previously excluded, and the amendments also improve agency capacity to spend in the regions.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

WHITBY FALLS HOSTEL - CLOSURE

916. Mr McGINTY to the Minister for Health:

- (1) Does the Minister concede that it is a remarkable coincidence that the Government decided to close Whitby Falls Hostel and remove its 35 psychiatric patients last November, yet this decision did not become public until after Ken Court's company applied for mining leases over 80 per cent of the hostel's land on 12 February?
- (2) Will the Minister guarantee that there has been no insider trading with the Premier's brother given information not available to the general public?

Mr PRINCE replied:

- (1)-(2) After that utterly scurrilous suggestion, I can certainly give a guarantee there has been no insider trading. Reviews of Whitby Falls Hostel undertaken by the Health Department of Western Australia in 1995, and the Disability Services Commission in 1996 concluded the facility's accommodation and services do not meet modern mental health treatment standards. The property's relative isolation promotes segregation from the wider community. The lengthy periods of institutionalisation of patients make their rehabilitation and consideration for alternative accommodation more difficult. The lifestyle of residents falls well short of even a remotely ordinary life giving them little opportunity of developing daily living skills. There is an absence of long term planning of case management of individual residents.

There will be a progressive program for the residents of Whitby Falls Hostel to give careful and totally individualised assessment and rehabilitation into community based and well supported mental health treatment facilities. That is in line with the recommendations of the Task Force into Mental Health started by my predecessor. They have received bipartisan support in this place and from the whole of the medical community. Whitby Falls has performed a very valuable service for a long time. Its method of treatment in this day and age is out of date and it should be closed. Nobody would doubt that the people should be put into better surroundings because the expertise that considered this matter said that.

In consideration of the redevelopment of the Armadale-Kelmscott hospital site and services associated in the area, as the member for Armadale knows, the question of Whitby Falls Hostel arises. It was raised at a meeting when we announced that we would proceed with the Armadale-Kelmscott reconfiguration last year.

Mr Court: You asked the question, didn't you?

Ms MacTiernan: I have asked so many, but I have not got any answers?

Mr Court interjected.

Ms MacTiernan: I did not.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr PRINCE: It was not the member for Armadale; it was a union official whom I know. In any event, it has nothing to do with the Premier's brother or anybody else. It is to do with providing the best modern treatment for the 35 males in the hostel. Clearly, the people who know best about how they should be treated are saying this is no longer the place for these people and they should be put into better facilities.

Dr Gallop: Can I ask a supplementary question? Can they move tomorrow as they wish?

The SPEAKER: Order! No. However, I will ask the Minister to bring his answer to a close fairly shortly.

Mr PRINCE: I will take that question if I can, Mr Speaker. No they cannot move tomorrow as they wish, because other support mechanisms must be found for them. We are talking about proper community treatment for people who have mental illnesses, who are institutionalised and who all the experts say should be treated differently. That will happen and it will happen with the care of the patients being the paramount consideration and not anything else.

WHITBY FALLS HOSTEL

917. Mr McGINTY to the Minister for Health:

I ask a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Will the Minister guarantee that this C class reserve will be retained for its purpose as a crown reserve designated for health, hospital and allied purposes?

Mr PRINCE replied:

I can give no such guarantee.

Mr McGinty: You know as well as I do that this area will be mined by the Premier's brother and that is what you intended all the way along. That is why you are throwing these 35 people out.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr PRINCE: Come on! Thirty-five people are in an institution that everybody says should be closed. They should be in much better care elsewhere. That is what I intend will happen and it will. I cannot and will not give a guarantee about the future use of the place because I cannot answer that now. However, I guarantee those 35 men will get better treatment in accordance with modern standards in much better surroundings.

Mr McGinty interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members, we allow one supplementary question, not a string of them. I remind Ministers to keep their answers relatively short so that we can deal with more questions.

EASTERN STATES PUBLIC TRANSPORT VEHICLES

918. Mr MASTERS to the Minister representing the Minister for Transport:

Will the Minister provide general information on -

- (1) The proportion of government public transport vehicles in the more populous eastern States which are powered by compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas and fuels other than diesel?
- (2) In the past three years, what proportion of new buses purchased for the public transport systems in those States are powered by compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas or fuels other than diesel?

Mr OMODEI replied:

The Minister for Transport has provided the following response -

- (1) Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, and Brisbane have a total of 5 870 government public transport buses, of which 226 are powered by natural gas.
- (2) In the last three years 127 natural gas powered buses have been purchased in those cities. A further 353 natural gas powered buses are on order in Sydney and Adelaide.

I advise the member that 1 per cent of the world's buses are gas powered.

BYRON, GARY - RESIGNATION

919. Dr GALLOP to the Premier:

In relation to the resignation of Gary Byron, why should the public not believe his account of events when -

- (a) he kept meticulous records of his meetings with the Premier's chief of staff, Ian Fletcher;
- (b) he resigned from his job because of what Mr Fletcher told him; and
- (c) he gave detailed evidence to this effect twice under oath to the Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations?

Mr COURT replied:

- (a)-(c) We had this debate yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition seems to want to question evidence that has been given by Mr Fletcher and Mr Byron to the committee of the other place.

Mr Ripper: Mr Fletcher's.

Mr COURT: Ask me questions about me.

Dr Gallop: He is your chief of staff, Premier.

Mr COURT: Hang on! Mr Speaker, I seek your advice. They were asked by a House of this Parliament to appear before the committee and were questioned and cross-examined. What more can a public servant do? The Leader of the Opposition asked me about his keeping of meticulous notes. I do not know whether Mr Byron took meticulous notes; that is his business.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE - LYING ALLEGATIONS

920. Dr GALLOP to the Premier:

Is it not the case that Mr Byron is telling the truth and the Premier's chief of staff is not?

Mr COURT replied:

Mr Speaker, I seek your advice, because these questions have all been asked in the other House.

Dr Gallop: This is the second stage of the cover up.

Mr COURT: How can we have a cover up if a committee of the Parliament has been questioning and cross-examining people? The leader is asking me whether Mr Byron kept meticulous notes. I would not have a clue. As I understand the evidence given by Mr Fletcher, he does not recollect those things happening.

Dr Gallop: It was about three weeks ago! This is ludicrous. What sort of Government do you manage?

Mr COURT: Mr Speaker, I am interested to know what is the process when someone goes before a committee and is cross-examined. I am now being questioned on questions that have been asked before a committee.

The SPEAKER: The process does not really concern me; I am not in a position to give advice on these things. Opposition members and other members are entitled to ask questions and Ministers and the Premier give their answers. Sometimes the answer is not what they want, but that is their problem, not mine.

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES - RESOURCES

921. Mr OSBORNE to the Minister for Family and Children's Services:

Does the Minister believe that her department is adequately resourced?

Mrs PARKER replied:

I certainly do believe that the Department of Family and Children's Services is adequately resourced. This Government places the highest priority on services to families and children. As an indication of that, over the past four years the department's budget has been increased by \$26m, which represents 24 per cent of the recurrent expenditure budget. This Government has also demonstrated its commitment by increasing the number of staff in direct service delivery by 170 FTEs since 1993.

It is interesting to note the Labor Government's record in regard to the department. In 1991-92, it reduced the number of FTEs by 128, and a member in the House can confirm that because he was the Minister at the time. Prior to that, the Labor Government cut the staffing level in 1987-88 by 117 FTEs and in 1990-91 by 35 FTEs. The previous Government kept reducing and cutting the resources of this department, but this Government has continued to increase its resources. It is time the facts were presented.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! We allow some interjections because they can add to the debate. However, when several members interject consistently and drown out the Minister who is trying to answer, it is just not on.

Mrs PARKER: It is important that these matters be placed on the record so that we can establish the facts. I must also put on the record my disappointment in the past few weeks about the absence of facts in some of the statements that have been put on public record regarding the department and its processes. I will table a media statement released on 27 February by the member for Kalgoorlie with the headline "Family and Children's Services encouraging paedophilia". The first paragraph states that the department routinely failed to inform parents of allegations of abuse against their children. I will also table departmental admin instruction 412, which explains the general practice and instructions for staff regarding allegations involving children.

It is time that the Leader of the Opposition had the honesty to look at the disparity between this instruction and the scurrilous press release. He should deal with the spokesperson who has used trauma and difficulty in the lives of families in this State and made outrageous statements -

Ms Anwyl interjected.

Mrs PARKER: I invite the member for Kalgoorlie to read the admin instruction - she might learn something. As I have a responsibility in this State, so too do members opposite, not to mislead and make cheap political points on the back of family trauma.

[See paper No 1247a.]

MINDARIE LAND SPLIT

922. Dr CONSTABLE to the Minister for Local Government:

I refer to the 432 hectare Mindarie super lot 17 purchased in 1984 in three equal shares by the Cities of Perth, Stirling and Wanneroo as tenants in common.

- (1) With the planned split of the City of Wanneroo, will the city's one-third share be equally divided between the two new local government authorities?

- (2) If yes, will the Minister, as a matter of equity, undertake to split the one-third share of the old City of Perth equally between the four rightful owners - the Towns of Cambridge, Vincent and Victoria Park and the new City of Perth?
- (3) If not, will the Minister please explain to the ratepayers of the three towns why they are not being given equal access to an equal share of their own asset?

Mr OMODEI replied:

- (1)-(3) That is a good question and the member would be aware that when we split the old City of Perth into the city and three new towns, commissioners were appointed to undertake that task. The Carr-Fardon report released at that time recommended a certain course of action. The commissioners set up the cities with staff, new plant and equipment, new office accommodation and \$1m in reserves. The towns' annual financial reports show that they have progressed well financially with considerable reserves held on account. The commissioners made the decisions at the time in relation to the split and they were agreed to by the Government. There has been considerable talk about the splitting of the City of Wanneroo. When that does occur, the commissioners will consider where the city's assets will go. I will receive that advice from the commissioners and then make a decision. So, this discussion is a bit premature. The one-third of the Mindarie land that belonged to the old City of Perth will not be split because a decision has been made already about how the assets are to be allocated. A number of assets were addressed, including the endowment land fund held by the City of Perth and the parking fund of which the Minister for Local Government has control until May 1999. It is important that those funds are distributed equitably. The funds held by the City of Perth were distributed to set up the three towns, which are now running very well and efficiently. The exercise has been a success.

OAKAJEE PORT

Expressions of Interest

923. Mr MINSON to the Minister for Resources Development:

As a result of the Minister's visit to Geraldton last week, when he announced that the Government would be calling for expressions of interest to build, own and operate an independent deep water port at Oakajee, will he outline the likely processes involved?

Mr BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for Greenough for some notice of this question and for his support and that of the member for Geraldton in Geraldton.

Dr Gallop: Has Hon Murray Criddle been helping you as well?

Mr BARNETT: There has been a lot of debate in this Chamber about the midwest iron and steel project and, in particular, the Oakajee industrial estate port. The Opposition has suggested various figures for this project, including a figure of \$800m. At the time I remarked that we could build three ports for that. The best estimate at this stage is that the port would cost \$192m with a plus or minus 25 per cent margin for error. We will call expressions of interest for the port development before the end of this month both nationally and internationally. We expect that will generate great interest. The port developer will need to finalise design, construction and financing arrangements and also make proposals on the port operation. This will be a fully open and competitive process and the relationship between government and business will be done by the book. The process will be administered through Arthur Andersen. The necessary documentation will be available to all bidders.

Ms MacTiernan: How much will the documentation cost?

Mr BARNETT: About \$100. The member for Greenough raised the issue of timing. Expressions of interest will be called by the end of this month. All going well we hope to have a port proponent around August or September. If the Kingstream project starts construction the Government through this arrangement will start construction of the port simultaneously.

SURE SALE INVESTIGATION

924. Ms MacTIERNAN to the Minister for Fair Trading:

With a bit of luck today the Minister might provide an answer.

- (1) When did the Minister first have discussions with departmental officers over the need to take the Sure Sale investigations out of the hands of the Real Estate Agents Supervisory Board and into his ministry?

- (2) What directions did the Minister give to ministry staff concerning the removal of the Sure Sale investigation from the board?
- (3) Was the appointment of a special investigator to handle the "politically sensitive" Sure Sale investigation raised with the Minister?
- (4) When did the Minister first become aware of Mr Stockton's appointment to the ministry?

Mr SHAVE replied:

My good friend the member for Armadale has been quite cunning because she sent me two questions on notice and I prepared the answers. Quite rightly she should have given me some notice because, as she understands, they are operational matters. I have the relevant answers to the questions.

Ms MacTiernan: This is a question about your involvement. Do you have to get your departmental staff to answer questions about your involvement?

Mr SHAVE: If my good friend the member for Armadale puts the question on notice I will get the information for her.

SURE SALE INVESTIGATION

925. Ms MacTIERNAN to the Minister for Fair Trading:

Does the Minister require notice of any question that relates to discussions that he has with his departmental officers?

Mr SHAVE replied:

No, I do not. However, I do not like the member for Armadale being so deceitful.

NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT BILL AMENDMENTS

926. Mr BLOFFWITCH to the Premier:

The Commonwealth Native Title Amendment Bill has now passed through the House of Representatives. Is the Premier aware of amendments proposed by the Federal Opposition and what are the implications of these amendments with reference to Western Australia?

Mr COURT replied:

The Native Title Amendment Bill has again passed through the House of Representatives and has been returned to the Senate. The Labor Party has already supported amendments which we understand will be put forward again.

It is important that people in Western Australia understand what the Labor Party has put forward. The three key areas cover the right to negotiate, the threshold test, and the confirmation of extinguishment on certain titles granted at certain times. The Labor Party's amendments in each of these areas will work against finding a practical resolution and workability in this legislation. The federal Leader of the Opposition has met with a number of interest groups and explained that he understands the problems and supports the need to make the legislation workable in these areas. However, in Canberra he has come up with amendments which are the exact opposite of what he said he would do to fix the problems.

I have formally written to the federal Leader of the Opposition outlining the concerns of the Government of Western Australia and offering to provide briefings so the Labor Party has a full understanding of the practical difficulties.

Mr Kobelke: We have a problem with native title because you refused to accept the High Court's Mabo decision and because of that we ended up with legislation full of problems that the Premier helped create.

Mr COURT: Does the member for Nollamara support the Labor Party's amendments?

Mr Kobelke: The Premier should have been trying to put in place workable solutions; he is the problem. The High Court decision was 7:0.

Mr COURT: The member for Nollamara has all the answers. Does he support Labor's amendments?

Mr Kobelke: Labor is trying to overcome problems caused by a Federal Government that does not know how to fix the problem. The Howard Government would not have a clue about how to fix the problem. It is creating years of uncertainty.

Mr COURT: I asked a simple question: Does the member support the Labor Party's amendments? Not one member opposite will say that he supports the Labor Party's amendments.

Dr Gallop: Of course we support them - every one of us.

Mr COURT: They all support them! Those amendments include the right to negotiate applying to the renewal of mining leases even when a project has already been developed; a separate right to negotiate would apply to both exploration and mining titles.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have allowed a lot of interjections but they are getting far too great.

Mr COURT: That means that when the initial leases of the Mt Newman project and all other large project leases expire and are due for renewal those companies must go through this full right to negotiate proposal.

The Labor Party states that a threshold test will stop ambit claims, yet Labor's amendments will do nothing to stop those ambit claims. We will have multiple claims and all the problems that will cause. The Labor Party amendment provides that confirmation of extinguishment will apply only to private freehold titles and all other tenures will be left to the courts to decide. That means that the problems we have experienced down south with conditional purchase properties and government freehold property like Homeswest which requires its title changed - if we wanted to sell off Homeswest homes - will continue, and we must go through the whole process. Members opposite have given a blanket endorsement of these amendments put forward by the federal Labor Government which would guarantee this legislation is totally unworkable.

MINISTRY OF FAIR TRADING INVESTIGATOR - MR NEIL STOCKTON

927. Ms MacTIERNAN to the Minister for Fair Trading:

Some notice has been given of this question because, quite clearly, the Minister is incapable of answering any questions himself. Last November the Minister refused to provide Parliament with information about the background and appointment of former New South Wales police officer Neil Stockton to the Ministry of Fair Trading. In light of the damning report on that appointment tabled in this place yesterday, I now ask the Minister -

- (1) Did Bailey Compton or Jenny Bunbury initiate contact with Mr Stockton and advise him of the available investigator's position in the ministry?
- (2) If they did, what was the nature of the contact and on whose authority were they acting?
- (3) Was Mr Stockton known to either of these officers before he was interviewed for the position?

Mr SHAVE replied:

- (1) I am advised by the ministry that Mr Stockton initiated the original contact with the ministry after the ministry had advertised for another position.

Ms MacTiernan: You are saying they did not approach him; he approached them. It is really important.

Mr SHAVE: Do you want me to repeat myself?

Ms MacTiernan: No.

Mr SHAVE: Does the member understand what I said?

Ms MacTiernan: I want to make sure you understand what you are saying. You do get confused.

Mr SHAVE: The member for Armadale confuses me. That is my problem.

Ms MacTiernan: I think your problem is being given a ministerial post, sport.

Mr SHAVE: Some of my colleagues think that also. I will repeat the answer to make absolutely sure the member for Armadale understands what I say.

- (1) I am advised by the ministry that Mr Stockton initiated the original contact with the ministry after the ministry had advertised for another position. He then sent his curriculum vitae to the ministry. Mr Will Morgan, then real estate manager for the industries business unit, subsequently phoned Mr Stockton regarding a possible investigator's position. Mr Stockton rang and then the ministry rang him. Is that clear enough for the member?

Ms MacTiernan: I know what you are saying.

Mr SHAVE: Having given the answer to the first question, question (2) is not relevant. However, I would like to elaborate so that the member does not feel I am avoiding the question asked.

- (2) I am also advised by the ministry that at that time it had approached a number of people to work as investigators within the ministry. Managers had authority, with the agreement of the relevant director, to approach people in this manner. Mr Morgan contacted Mr Stockton after discussions with Mrs Bunbury regarding the need to deal with one particular case which appeared at that time to require a special investigator for approximately six months. Both Mrs Bunbury and Mr Morgan were aware that there was unlikely to be anyone available and suitable for this task within the ministry.
- (3) I am advised by the ministry that Mr Compton was not employed by the ministry at the time the interview took place, and he did not meet Mr Stockton until they both became employees at the ministry.

Ms MacTiernan interjected.

Mr SHAVE: Is the member implying that the officers are telling lies?

Ms MacTiernan: You are the Minister - you give the answers.

Mr SHAVE: It is nice to see that the member is showing some care about public servants at last.

Mr Compton commenced employment with the ministry on 17 February 1997. Mrs Bunbury had not met Mr Stockton before he was interviewed for this position, and first spoke to Mr Stockton on the telephone in the circumstances outlined in the response to question (1).

MURRAY DISTRICT HOSPITAL - OBSTETRIC SERVICES

928. Mr BRADSHAW to the Minister for Health:

- (1) Is the Minister aware of concerns in the Pinjarra area that the obstetric services at the Pinjarra hospital will stop?
- (2) Does he support such a move?
- (3) If not, will he guarantee that obstetric services will continue to be provided at the Pinjarra hospital when the new Mandurah Hospital is fully operational?

Mr PRINCE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1)-(3) As members know, a project control group has been working for some months and considering the redevelopment of the Murray District Hospital and the various services provided. That group consists of local doctors, representatives from the local authorities, local shire, community and Peel Health Services and others. It is preparing a report that should be available by the end of March. At present all obstetric services in the Peel region, apart from a few births, are being provided at the Murray District Hospital in Pinjarra. Approximately 32 babies per annum are born at the Mandurah Hospital - it is a very limited birthing service. In the eight months from July 1997 to February 1998, the Murray District Hospital dealt with 314 births in total. Of these, 218, or 70 per cent, involved Mandurah residents; 76, or 26 per cent, involved residents of the shires of Murray and Waroona; and 20, or 5 per cent, were from other areas. Predominantly 70 per cent of the babies born in the Pinjarra hospital are from people who live in the Mandurah area, and only 26 per cent live in the Murray area.

The new Peel Health Campus at Mandurah will have 114 beds and extensive facilities. It will have five birthing suites, 15 public obstetric beds and a flexible number of private obstetric beds. With the national shortage of midwives, and the close proximity of Pinjarra to the new facilities at Mandurah, the Government must carefully consider and evaluate the viability of obstetric services at Pinjarra as opposed to Mandurah. Clearly, that is where the population is. The Government will wait for the report from the project control group, and then consider it in the context of the future.

GLOBAL DANCE FOUNDATION - UNDER TREASURER'S ADVICE

929. Mr GRAHAM to the Premier:

I refer to the Premier's claim during the debate last night that he received advice from the under treasurer on the funding of Global Dance Foundation and ask -

- (1) Which under treasurer does the Premier claim to have spoken to?
- (2) When did the Premier speak to the under treasurer in relation to this matter?
- (3) What advice did he receive from the under treasurer?
- (4) Was that advice given in writing?

Mr COURT replied:

- (1)-(4) I must take those questions on notice because I do not have the details and the dates. I will provide that information to the member.

GLOBAL DANCE FOUNDATION - UNDER TREASURER'S ADVICE

930. Mr GRAHAM to the Premier:

Can the Premier simply tell me the name of the under treasurer to whom he spoke?

Mr COURT replied:

In relation to the dates, I will check all the information. We are talking about a considerable period of time and I will provide it all to the member.
