

WIRRABIRRA EDUCATION SUPPORT CENTRE — MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

Grievance

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [9.37 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Education and it regards the Wirrabirra Primary School and the Wirrabirra Education Support Centre. This centre is an excellent facility. It provides an essential service to children with varying degrees of disability. Fortunately, through the federal government's Building the Education Revolution program, the school will receive \$250 000 for a multipurpose room at the education support centre. Part of the template plan for a multipurpose room is that it have a kitchen. It seems that the Wirrabirra Primary School and support centre already have three kitchens. What the school desperately needs is a toilet facility for children with disabilities. Presently, there is one such facility at the school, but that is not enough for the number of students enrolled at the education support centre. The problem is that, although it would seem to be fairly simple to switch a kitchen for a toilet, we are meeting what is probably a bureaucratic wall that is providing resistance to that fairly minor design change to the template. I can understand the need for the use of templates, but on this occasion there is good justification for the minister to intervene and give the direction to the people who are undertaking the works to switch the kitchen area to a toilet area. We have heard some rather strange excuses as to why that cannot occur. I saw in some newspaper reports the suggestion that this could pose a hygiene risk. I assure everyone that I have checked on the arrangements of toilets in proximity to a classroom. The situation is very much akin to that of having an ensuite bathroom that most members would have in their homes. No-one would suggest that there is a hygiene risk with having an ensuite bathroom. The design set-up is very good and can be done in such a way that there is absolutely no hygiene risk at all. If we were to make this simple design switch, we would create a toilet facility for the students. In some cases, some of the students are still undergoing toilet training and wear nappies. Therefore, it is not viable for these poor young kids to have to queue up for the toilet. I believe that it is causing trauma to the children and it is difficult for the people who are trying to help them negotiate the difficulties of using the toilet. We needed need a better facility.

I wrote to the minister about this and received a response from her. I also gave the minister my letter to her in this place. Her response is dated 13 April and states that presently the number of disabled toilets available for students' use exceeds the minimum number required. How can having one toilet exceed the minimum requirement? There seems to be a problem of logic on that point alone. The minister can intervene on this. I have checked that there is still scope for changes to be made to the site works at this stage. I gather that the concrete pad has been laid in the past 48 hours. There is great support in the local community for this change to be made. The school parents and citizens association and has been instrumental in bringing this issue to my attention. They have heard a rumour that it would cost as much as \$20 000 to make this simple design change. The school P&C is outraged by that. They consider the need for the disabled toilet to be so urgent that they are prepared to spend their hard-earned and gathered P&C funds to pay for the toilet. They do not want to do that, but that is what will have to be done if the minister is unable to bring about this very simple change. The school P&C is so organised that it is prepared to provide volunteers to do the drafting and some of the plumbing. We are very lucky that we have people in the area with the technical skills to do that. A degree of coordination could bring about a very simple change that would save precious taxpayers' funds. I have heard that the school does not need a fourth kitchen but that it badly needs another toilet for the students with disabilities. The P&C has its priorities worked out and we have a responsibility to make sure that it can deliver on those priorities and that we do not waste public money by putting in a kitchen that is totally unnecessary.

I understand that the federal member for Hasluck has written to the Minister for Education about this. Although the member for Hasluck received an acknowledgement letter, she did not receive a response from the minister. I received a response from the minister on 13 April. It is important for us to see some of the paperwork on the decision-making process that has led the director, Mr James Thom, to say that he does not believe that the change is necessary. We should see the decision-making process that has lead him to come to that conclusion. From my observations on site, I believe that this change would be fairly straightforward and it should not be open to the variation costs that builders sometimes claim when they say that because of a variation there will be a huge increase in the cost. There is no way that should happen in this case. I stress that the local community is prepared to provide whatever resources it can to bring about this change.

DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands — Minister for Education) [9.44 am]: I thank the member for Gosnells for raising this issue. I will correct a couple of things. Wirrabirra Education Support Centre received a notional allocation of \$250 000, which is the amount that the member referred to, under the guidelines for the Building the Education Revolution program funding and the Primary Schools for the Twenty-First Century program, which is part of the BER. The member is absolutely correct to say that there were very tight time lines. To meet those time lines, the Department of Education developed designed templates for various types of buildings for different primary schools and education support centres. That allowed the whole process to be efficient. Western

Australia has done the best job of all jurisdictions regarding the BER projects by being on time and on budget. The Western Australian projects have been very well managed. That is the context in which this was built.

The initial cost estimates of the building that we are talking about indicated that additional funding would be required. The department put in a submission for extra funding for the multipurpose classroom and was awarded an extra \$270 000. All up, more than \$500 000 has been provided for this building, based on the template alone.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: The building itself costs only \$250 000.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: My briefing notes show that the initial notional allocation, based on the number of students in the education support centre, was \$250 000. In order to get the multipurpose building that people wanted to have built, an extra \$270 000 has been allocated.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It is only \$250 000 for the room, and within that we need to swap the kitchen for a disabled toilet.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: No. I will read it to the member. My notes show that —

Initial cost estimates indicated that additional funding was required to provide multipurpose classroom required at Wirrabirra. To meet these increased costs, a request for \$270 000 was submitted to the Australian government, which was approved.

Extra funds were needed. The briefing note says that \$270 000 was requested for increased costs. I do not know whether that was an additional \$270 000 or just an extra \$20 000. I will go back and check that. Nevertheless, additional funds were required for it. The school requested extra toilet and bathroom facilities.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Not extra—a swap.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It says “additional” in my notes. I do not know the details of the planning codes and the design codes and so on about swapping, but I do not believe that it is as easy as the member maintains. Extra kitchen facilities are needed to prepare and to keep food for people with disabilities.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: The school already has three kitchens.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: One is probably in the staffroom and is not for the students. Extra kitchen facilities are needed for children with disabilities. I am sure that we would all agree with that. That is why it was part of the standard template. From the letter I wrote, the member knows that there are considered to be enough toilet facilities. The member does not think there is. I will check that so that we can talk about the toilet facilities after this grievance. I have been advised also that if the principal believes that the school needs more toilet facilities, a request can be put in separately. This building is due to be completed in July 2010, which is in just two months. It would be impossible to vary the contracts and the design at this point.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: I have been in contact with you since 12 March.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The building was already under way and the contracts were already let by March. It is not a two-month construction. The process takes much longer and the architect’s designs would have been done by then and the contracts would have been signed.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It is a minor plumbing change, minister. That is all that is required.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That is the member’s opinion but it is not the opinion of those who have been advising me. That is where the difference lies in this discussion. It was not possible to do at the time that the member wrote to me. If the principal of the school believes that additional toilets are needed, the principal should deal with that as a separate issue. We are beyond the contract phase and the building will be finished very shortly. My advice is that the current toilet bathroom facilities at Wirrabirra meet the needs of the students at the school. If that is not the case and there are now more students and more toilets are needed, we need to know about that and I will get it looked into for the member. As far as this building is concerned, the time has passed to make those modifications.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: This is exactly the sort of thing that is undermining people’s confidence in the BER funding.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I do not think it is undermining people’s confidence.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: We have a state education department giving people what they do not want when simple design changes could give them what they want.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The time frame for the BER was such that the templates were put in place. That has allowed us to do this on time and on budget. I am advised that there is no need for additional toilet facilities at

Wirrabirra. If that is not correct, but it is the advice that I have been given, we need to look at it as a separate exercise. It cannot be part of the current exercise for this BER building. The time has passed for that. I will work with the member on that. I will make sure that the department goes out there and has another look to ensure that there are, according to the needs of those children, sufficient toilet facilities. That seems to be an area of contention in this grievance. The member's claim is that there are not sufficient toilet facilities. I am told that there are. We need to sort that out.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: You are talking about a stand-alone building that will cost the state a fortune. It is not a good use of public money.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The timing for this has not allowed for the change the member is requesting. The time has passed, contracts have been let and the building will be finished in two months. Let us work on those points of contention to see whether they can be resolved.