

EDUCATION CENTRAL POLICY — PERTH MODERN SCHOOL

Motion

Resumed from 24 May on the following motion moved by Hon Donna Faragher —

That this house notes both the significant concerns being raised across the community and the lack of consultation undertaken by the McGowan government on its Education Central policy, particularly the proposed relocation of the state's only fully academically selective senior high school, currently at Perth Modern School, to a high-rise inner-city school within the Perth City Link, and calls on the government to —

- (1) reverse its Education Central policy and maintain Perth Modern School as a fully academically selective school; and
- (2) revert to the comprehensive western suburbs secondary schooling strategy announced in September 2016.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [1.09 pm]: As they say, a week is a long time in politics and since I last rose in this place to speak to this motion, we have certainly seen some significant changes, most notably the announcement by the government this week that Perth Modern School would not have to be moved from its existing location and that Education Central would potentially now be built at a different location. I had it in mind that I would have to once again elaborate on all the reasons why it was a really bad idea to look at moving Perth Mod from its current location, and I am really relieved that I no longer have to try to make that case and that that decision has now been taken off the table.

I will say how disappointed I am that so much distress was experienced by so many of the parents, students and alumni of Perth Mod while uncertainty raged around what was going to happen to the school. I maintain, as I outlined in my remarks last time I spoke to this motion, that good consultation would have indicated very early on just how unwanted this decision was for the Perth Mod community. I am very clear about how important that sense of history and tradition is and how important the current location is to the Modernian community. It is a really important part of their sense of identity. I hope this means that lessons have been learnt and that it is now understood that sometimes it is really important to not mess with communities when they are going pretty well, thank you very much.

I want to reflect a bit more on the distress involved. I have met with parents and have seen people in tears. It has also been reported to me that the decision had a very divisive impact on that community; not because people were divided about whether or not to move, but because people were starting to feel so paralysed about what to do about it and about how to make the government listen and to reverse this decision that was so unpopular and so unwarranted, and that people so absolutely did not want.

I also want to express my sadness to that community over the recent loss of one of their students. I know how difficult that has made it for the parent body to feel as though they can move forward and do something to recognise the significance of that passing. I am hoping that this week's announcement means that there can be some sense of comfort about how people move on that.

There is a broader issue here about consultation. I have spoken in this place before about what consultation looks like and what it means around the National Disability Insurance Scheme and a range of other issues that are incredibly important to various communities in which people's lives are affected. We are going to have to start talking about the basic standard for consultation. This decision in no sense involved consultation and, as I said, should never have occurred in the first place. I hope that Perth Mod parents feel as though they were well heard, and I hope there can be an opportunity for them to move forward and feel as though their community has been respected.

I also want to talk about some other issues that came up during the course of the campaign; I feel it would be remiss of me not to raise them in this place. Throughout the course of the campaign to try to keep Perth Mod at its current location there were different tactics employed to try to make the case for saving Perth Mod. I have to say, from the outset, that the Greens did not agree with two of the positions that were put, and I need to put on the record where we stand on them.

The first matter is that comments were made by some parents about St George's Anglican Grammar School, which is our first inner-city vertical school. It is not the first inner-city school; there is another school in Fremantle that has been going for a very long time, Lance Holt School, which is held in very high regard and is what we term an inner-city school. It is not high-rise, but it is an inner-city school, and it is an excellent school. For years it has taken advantage of the community of Fremantle and the surrounds. I want to speak out in support of St George's because I know that some of the comments made about it have also caused distress. I would like to tell people that St George's parents love their children every bit as much as Perth Mod parents, and

St George's parents are every bit as concerned about the wellbeing of their children as Perth Mod parents. If one talks to the students of St George's, one will find that they are every bit as proud of their school as students at Perth Modern, and there are reasons for that, because it is an excellent school. It is also, in my opinion, a potential model for how vertical inner-city schools need to operate.

There are some distinct differences between St George's and what was proposed for Education Central, but I will speak specifically about St George's. St George's is six storeys and has effectively been kitted out as a purpose-built building. It has facilities on the roof, such as basketball facilities and areas for the kids to hang out and spend time together. It is a small school; it is capped out at just over 400 students. It needs to be acknowledged that the Anglican Schools Commission put an awful lot of work into developing its model for St George's, and a huge amount of work went into it. It has a range of arrangements with the City of Perth, in particular. The children undertake chapel at St George's Cathedral. The school library is the beautiful new Perth State Library. The students do rowing down at Elizabeth Quay and sports on the Esplanade. They use Beatty Park Leisure Centre for swimming and they do their theatre arts at the Heath Ledger Theatre. They also use the Art Gallery of Western Australia. The school has truly the most exceptional arrangement. I also acknowledge that, as a private school, St George's has the money for an appropriate staff-to-student ratio. It is absolutely diligent in how it ensures the ongoing wellbeing of its students, and it really takes advantage of the opportunities that are available to an inner-city school.

It is a wonderful model. I encourage people to go and check it out, but I would suggest that if they want to check it out, they will have to get on a waiting list. I will challenge some of the comments made around this, because I was told during the campaign that St George's student numbers were dropping. I am sorry, but there is absolutely no truth to that whatsoever. Over its two years of existence, St George's has increased its enrolments by 20 per cent per annum. That is projected for the future and, indeed, it has students on its waiting list up until 2029. Over the last 12 months alone, the number of requests from parents of prospective students for tours of the facility has doubled, to the point at which there is now a waiting list for prospective parents to undertake tours.

The reality is that this particular model of school is very popular with a lot of people. I do not want to see the baby thrown out with the bathwater by people confusing a passionate desire to maintain a school like Perth Mod with effective denigration of another school. I am speaking out very heavily around that.

Hon Peter Collier: I opened that school. The parents at St George's had the choice.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Absolutely. I am talking about making sure that when people are trying to save their own school, they do not denigrate another.

Another thing I want to say is that I have heard a lot of comments made about high-rise or vertical schools. As I have already articulated, there are models and there are models. St George's is a model that has pretty much got the balance right. They have provided some wonderful opportunities for their kids and there is a very strong sense of community within that school. The Greens are not prepared to throw out the option of any sort of high-rise or vertical schools as we go into the future. It is very important for people who live in the middle of the city and it is particularly important for people who live immediately around the city, and it is a good use of space. As a model, it is something that has been explored internationally, and we have excellent models here in Australia as well. There are plenty of opportunities for us to get it right.

I went to two public high schools where the footprint was huge and there were massive ovals. I have to say that my experience, as has been described by others, is that I was not a sporty person. Certainly most of the people I knew used the oval at lunchtime to go down there and smoke. I think we need to talk realistically about the way people use these spaces. I understand that for a lot of people it is really important, but it is not true to say that children who attend inner-city schools are not exposed to green space and do not get access to a range of sporting facilities. In some cases, they get more opportunities than are available to other people. I felt that I needed to say that, and I say it as somebody who can claim to be a long-term mental health advocate and who strongly supports saving our green spaces and urban bushland and encouraging people to keep mature trees. I feel quite confident that my credentials on this issue are pretty well known. I needed to comment about those two matters.

Getting back to the second part of the motion, I am really glad that this is where the debate needs to happen. Perth Modern School has been saved. Good. It needed to be saved. It should never have been on the table in the first place. Now the discussion—I have a feeling this discussion will be heard in this chamber for quite a long time—is about where is the next need for a school. We have two options. An inner-city school has been proposed with the Subiaco option and on the table is one in particular that we have been talking about—the western suburbs secondary school plan, which was put out before. As I say, I do not think this discussion will go away in a hurry. If it was up to me, and I suspect everyone around this place would agree, and we had the money, I would love to do both. I would love there to be an inner-city school and I would love a western suburbs secondary school to be an option. The reality is that we need to cater to the growing number of people living in

the middle of the city. We also need to do something for people who live out towards the eastern suburbs, particularly given the pressures on Mount Lawley Senior High School. However, we know we have to deal with Shenton College and Churchlands Senior High School. The projected overcrowding is a huge problem.

As I mentioned last time I spoke, I am being lobbied very heavily by parents, particularly around City Beach, who thought they were getting a school, which was the option presented to them, and are becoming very alarmed because they feel that that option has been taken off the table. Not only that, people are getting concerned about what will happen about the rest of the schools originally proposed in the western suburbs secondary schooling plan. It was going to impact on schools such as Carine and Mount Lawley Senior High Schools. It has a massive flow-on effect for a lot of people.

One of the things I will not get into in this place is whether Education Central, which I assume is still the name we are using to talk about this strategy, is best placed in Subiaco. Frankly, I do not have the data to be able to independently make that assessment. That is one of the difficulties I have in this place. The former Minister for Education is obviously in a unique position having been privy to population data, projected need and all those sorts of figures, and the existing Minister for Education, since taking on her portfolio, has also been subject to receiving this information. I have not received that information independently. I have never been an education minister and I am not an education minister now, but I am expected to somehow use competing data—that is what I have been presented with—to try to figure out what the Greens are supposed to support. I have to say that that is pretty difficult for me. I am not quite sure. I accept that more and more people are attracted to inner-city living and the vibrancy that brings, which is borne out by the population data. I am also aware that the western suburbs, through bad planning by successive governments on both sides of this place, have been left at a real crisis point with a lack of schools and failure to consider projected overcrowding of schools, which will be absolutely untenable. One of my difficulties is to figure out what side of the fence I am supposed to support with this competing data.

In trying to assess at this point where I need to lie, given I have a particular motion in front of me, I come back to the basics around consultation and who knows what is going on and how these conversations have been had. The parents who are contacting me and are concerned that City Beach in particular has been taken off the table are saying that they did the consultation and were part of the discussions, so they thought this was something that had been agreed and that they were moving forward. I am not suggesting there is not a dire need for an inner-city school but we know that that same level of community engagement has not occurred. We also know that we are at a crisis point with what Shenton College and Churchlands Senior High School face with the overcrowding that will occur very soon. I note Hon Donna Faragher's comments; I saw her on the television news on Sunday commenting that City Beach was "shovel-ready". I have been thinking about that, and it is true; in many ways it is ready to go. The time frame is consistent with us being able to get some movement on it fairly soon. I know also that no matter where the most dire need is—again I cannot make that assessment—we will need a western suburbs school at some point. I am looking at whether we proceed with an inner-city school—I will say "inner city" rather than talk about the Subiaco option because I want to focus on the inner city as a model, and, again, I am fine with a certain type of vertical school—or do we need to proceed with City Beach as a matter of priority? The City Beach site seems ready to go and we know we will need both at some point. That will create difficulties for the budget. I imagine that people are concerned about—I agree—that most of the small amount of money that is available will be utilised for City Beach and the money will never be released to create what I accept and recognise is a necessary inner-city school to provide additional options to deal with growing populations. I take Hon Peter Collier's point about choice and that we do not know what will happen. However, we know that the City Beach site will be needed, so I am reluctantly trying to fall on one side—and I will explain why I say reluctantly in a moment. At this point, weighing up all options, we will probably support the City Beach option as a priority over an inner-city option. I say reluctantly because—the Greens came out during the election campaign with this—it is doing my head in that these decisions appear to be politicised. I say that because if this were genuinely being independently determined, there would be no discussion about which model is the best or most desperately needed because it would have effectively been sorted out by an independent body. Then we would know where we need to spend our dollars and the argument would be about how many dollars we spend and how many schools we can build and when. That would be the argument.

One thing the Greens have been calling for is the establishment of something like an independent schools commission. To be very clear, we are talking about a similar model to that of the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission is charged with the responsibility of determining the redistribution of electoral boundaries. It uses population data. It looks at the existing population, projected population and communities of interest. The commission also calls for submissions. I know that most parties put in submissions about their ideas of what things should look like and all sorts of things. I should add that individuals can also make submissions, not just political parties. The Electoral Commission consults and can factor in the information it receives. The Electoral Commission has the data and uses it to get some idea of where the need might be. With that

consultation, bearing in mind communities of interest and what communities want, as well as where there is demonstrated need, the commission announces where the electoral boundaries will be.

One thing that bothers me about new schools and upgrades of schools is that all the announcements are made during election times. I have lived and raised my children in what is termed a safe seat, and I can tell members now that the high school in that safe seat is never offered upgrades or offers to be made pretty. The school really needs it, and I would see other schools in marginal seats get offered thing after thing. I think that people get really sick of that. People want to see genuine decisions made about the public education system, about where schools are opened—that is, as opposed to an identified need in a new suburb; clearly where there is a new suburb, a new school is needed. People want to feel as though things are done because a genuine need has been demonstrated. A particular high school that is falling apart and is covered in asbestos—but is in a safe seat—should get equal attention to the very large school in a marginal seat. That is one of the things the Greens are talking about. The reason that we will continue to maintain these decisions are not independent is that there is a situation right here in which we can see a lack of transparency in how either of the decisions were made. Even as a member in this place I cannot independently assess which proposal is most important based on its merits. The public expects these decisions to be made in a way similar to the way that the Electoral Commission spells them out: “This is why we have made this decision; this is why we are doing the redistribution in this way.” People can then see where they fit within the scheme of things, and that a regional high school, for example, does not have to go without. These are the sorts of things that vex me.

I want to reiterate where we are at. I am really, really glad that Perth Modern School has been left alone. I reiterate to parents, students and all former Modernians that I hope they will now be able to get some peace, regroup and use this opportunity to reflect on how well they campaigned on so many things. Hopefully it becomes a unifying experience for the Perth Mod community—I genuinely hope that—and I look forward to getting my invitation to come to Perth Modern soon! I remind people that it is really important not to bring other schools down and that we need to keep an open mind about different types and models of schooling arrangements. I understand that the government has made it clear that it is quite supportive of looking at vertical schools. The Greens are supportive of vertical schools. I certainly do not want to misrepresent where the opposition is, but I understand it is also open, depending on the model, to the possibility of vertical schools in the future. This is something we should keep on the table. This is something we should keep an open mind about. We should also look at some of the best practice. The Greens are not interested in dismissing any of those options. I can say we do not know which is more important at this point—the inner-city school or the western suburbs school. We do know that the western suburbs will need one at some point and they are ready to go. I just wish that we were able to remove all of this discussion from this place and that the topic was not politicised, so we could ensure that these decisions were independently determined and out of the hands of politicians. Then, everyone could feel very confident that no matter where they live, if their child goes to a public school, that public school is given every opportunity to be the best public school it possibly can be regardless of whether it is in a safe seat or not.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [1.36 pm]: It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of this motion. What a dismal topic of discussion this has been, brought about by a dismal process of decision-making and naked politicking. I welcome the government’s decision to backflip yesterday, but it really did not go far enough. Although the parents of the students at Perth Modern School are probably now satisfied, absent in yesterday’s statement was any sense of contrition or apology for the distress and disruption —

Hon Sue Ellery: That’s exactly what I did.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Okay.

Hon Peter Collier: You blamed us.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The government blamed us. It was galling. There was no sense of responsibility or accountability.

Hon Peter Collier: You blamed us for your mistake.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Indeed.

Let us go back a little bit. It was an ill-conceived thought bubble. Putting together artists’ renderings and dropping them to *The Sunday Times* does not comprise an inner-city school plan; it is not a plan at all. I have worked in the planning industry and the property development sector. Commissioning artists’ renderings is the easiest thing to do; that is not planning for education. The proposal was completely bereft of any analysis.

Hon Jim Chown: The policy of scoundrels.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I would not say that!

There was no demographic underpinning and absolutely no consultation. I will talk to members opposite: consultation does not mean making a decision, dropping a statement and then saying, “We have made a decision; people have voted on this.” That was a completely disingenuous statement that the minister made when this issue was first brought on in this place. It was focused primarily at winning marginal and inner-city seats to the disadvantage of western suburbs families. That is all it was about—it was about regaining the seats of Perth and Mount Lawley. I know that hurt the Labor Party. I know the pain of losing seats, but sometimes the Labor Party overreaches. It reminded me a bit of another overreach that the Labor Party considered. Twelve months out from the state election there was a bizarre weekend when Stephen Smith was coming back to the rescue. The Labor Party was getting close, but sometimes the anxiety of being close is so tantalising that we need to go a bit above and beyond. That is exactly the same thing that happened with this policy.

Hon Peter Collier: He acted totally alone.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: He acted totally alone. There was no-one there; no support for that measure. The Premier’s bacon was saved and I am sure those people who supported the Premier have been given their due recompense.

The PRESIDENT: Member, I am listening carefully and waiting for you to get back on track to talk about the actual motion in front of you and to make sure things are relevant.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you, Madam President; I will take your guidance.

I recall that when this issue was first brought on Hon Donna Faragher tabled a petition containing about 6 500 signatures. This is an issue that has had thousands of words devoted to it—hours and hours of conversation. Those numbers did not really matter; they did not seem to have a bearing on the government, but one number seemed to, and I think that is where it all changed. It was the \$30 000 that the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Planning spent on a one-day trip to Sydney. I am still staggered that a one-day trip can cost that much money. Perhaps that mythical key that my friend Hon Peter Collier never found when he was a minister should be on the reception desk of every minister of this government so that if they need to consult with people who live in the eastern states, they can go to the fourteenth floor of Dumas House and use the videoconferencing facility. That is a completely unjustified expenditure of public money—just a jolly! It is an interesting acceleration of hubris. This is the kind of stuff that normally happens in a second or third-term government. Members opposite have done it within three months of their first term in government. It is unbelievable. I wonder what will happen in four years’ time.

Yesterday’s backflip perpetuates the sins that got the government into this trouble in the first place. This is just a replacement thought bubble for the original thought bubble. It is bereft of analysis. There is no demographic proof. It is just a statement of opinion that there is a need for a new school and Kitchener Park is the place for it. I cannot understand the Labor Party’s obsession with Kitchener Park and all things to do with Subiaco Oval. It is a perennial issue. This is another decision by this government that has been made with no consultation and no analysis. I refer to the tripartite statement that was made yesterday. That media statement has an interesting title, “New Inner City College at the heart of Subiaco Oval transformation”. The government has dressed up an education backflip as a land development opportunity. That says all we need to know about the government’s commitment to education policy. This is not about Perth Modern. This is not about the parents and students at Perth Modern. This is not about dealing with the undersupply of schools. This is about dressing up Subiaco. This is the kind of thing a government does when it is running away from its own embarrassment. The reason I know the government is running away from its own embarrassment is because it made the clichéd and euphemistic statement that it has listened to the public. That is what a government does when it knows it is on a hiding to nothing.

However, what struck me most was the speed of this backflip. The Premier said in his statement, “We have moved swiftly to come up with a complete plan”. That underscored by the statement from the Minister for Planning, “We have moved quickly to establish a new plan for Subiaco Oval”. In that speed and in that haste, what has the government missed out? What has the government not told us about this plan? The government has missed out telling us pretty much everything. Kitchener Park is an A-class reserve. How does the government propose to deal with that planning impediment? How does the government plan to deal with the thousands of schoolchildren who will need to cross Roberts Road? I will be interested to know. The government has absolutely no plan to deal with that. The government has rolled out this plan, without any thought, because it was boxed into a corner. The government has rolled out this plan not out of any sense of moral obligation, but out of embarrassment to save the Minister for Education and Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council from herself. This is a very sad and salutary lesson about how not to govern. I am glad the government has learnt this lesson in its first three months in government, and I hope it does not repeat it.

Although the decision not to mess with Perth Modern is welcome, the Education Central policy is still not dead. The government is still obsessed with that policy. That is to the detriment of other needs. I speak here as an alumnus from Carine Senior High School. It is about 23 or 24 years since I went to that school. I want to remind

members in this place that the former government had a comprehensive plan to deal with overcrowding in high schools in the western suburbs. I know that for this government the western suburbs is persona non grata. The Minister for Education went to great pains to reinforce that there is no class agenda here. I thought the minister doth protest too much about that particular point.

I want to speak for my former school, Carine Senior High School. Carine is not a wealthy area. It is a comfortable area. It is an ambitious area. However, these are not the kinds of parents who can easily afford to send their children to a private school. They rely on the excellent local high school in their area. I want to talk about what Carine Senior High School will miss out on by virtue of the Labor government's jettisoning of the previous government's excellent, thorough, well-considered and well-articulated plan. It will miss out on \$18.8 million worth of upgrades to provide accommodation for an additional 300 students who live north of Scarborough Beach Road. Those students are now in facilities that are overcrowded and unfit for use, to be perfectly honest. Carine Senior High School was also to be home to a science, technology, engineering and mathematics-focused gifted and talented student cohort. I spoke earlier about how if we fail to invest in STEM-based education, our children will be global academic and economic also-rans. The government is taking away that opportunity from students who live in Carine and Duncraig and nearby suburbs. The government is doing that to its shame. That is an appalling thing to do. The building of that expanded accommodation was due to begin this year. It would probably be underway by now, in the same way that the expansion of City Beach Senior High School would probably be underway by now. The former government had proposed a raft of shovel-ready projects. The bulldozers would be busily working on those projects now were it not for the Labor Party's spite in wanting to get rid of that plan, just because it does not fit its policy agenda. That is a shameful thing to do.

In 2016, Carine Senior High School was the ninth top public school in Western Australia, with a median Australian tertiary admission rank score of 82.5 per cent. That is an excellent result. Carine Senior High School is led by an excellent principal, Damian Shuttleworth. I lament missed opportunities. That school could do so much better, and it would do so much better, if it were to receive a very modest upgrade of its facilities. Other northern suburbs and western suburbs schools will also miss out on opportunities because of this government's obsession with Perth Modern. I would like to know where this obsession originated and whose hands are on the policy drafting process.

I will take up some of the remarks made by Hon Alison Xamon. I agree that there is a need for a clear-headed and clear-sighted review of school needs across the state. The Perth Modern inner-city school policy was the antithesis of that. That policy dealt with the needs of people who live in the inner-city area, to the exclusion of everybody else. That underscores the nakedly political motivation behind the Education Central policy. I also echo the comment of my friend Hon Alison Xamon that the need for new schools will not go away. Sooner or later, the government will need to deal with schools not only in the inner city and the western suburbs but in every suburb. We are yet to see from this government an expansive schools policy. This is a details-light and lazy government that is not prepared to do the hard work to deliver results for people irrespective of where they live and how they traditionally vote.

Madam President, that is all I wish to say on this motion.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [1.47 pm]: Madam President, I rise because there are some things that I want to ask, in the hope that we will get some response from the government. I also feel that there is no answer to the questions that I want to ask, and that is another reason those questions need to be placed on the record. I did pause briefly before I rose to speak, because I know there are a number of members opposite who are determined to do the right thing by their community. I say that sincerely. However, I have not seen any member on the government benches rise to applaud the actions of the Premier, and of the Minister for Education and the Minister for Planning. Perhaps they are still shell-shocked. The silence is absolutely deafening.

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Madam President, the unruly interjections here are outrageous!

The PRESIDENT: Order! The only person on his feet is Hon Simon O'Brien, who can address his comments to me and not to the rest of the chamber.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Thank you, Madam President. I was amazed when I saw the news of this backflip. In fact, it was more than a backflip. I think I described it yesterday as a backflip with a full pike and a half twist. It was very acrobatic indeed, but a bit showy and poorly executed and with a tragic landing at the end. I want to make sure that members, particularly members opposite, understand where this is going seriously, seriously wrong. We have had the benefit of the advice of my colleague Hon Donna Faragher, whom I congratulate on bringing this motion to the chamber with great effect. She has been going around and doing the things that needed to be done, such as consultation with affected parties, to great effect. She had a lot to add to this debate.

We have listened to the former Minister for Education, who had a great deal to offer to this debate because he knows what he is talking about. I hope members here in the house of review are prepared to take on board the advice of those who know what they are talking about in contemplating this matter, rather than getting caught up in some sort of misguided “let us all have our eyes down and pretend we’re doing something else” demeanour that it seems is being adopted now. This government is being run off the rails in this matter. The taxpayers and the affected schoolchildren now and into the future are going to suffer. They are under threat. Members opposite want to sit there and twiddle their thumbs instead of using the forums available to them, whether it is the caucus room or all the other mechanisms available to them to communicate their concerns. However, they ought to be using them, because, if not, they will stand condemned.

A couple of days ago, members opposite were prepared to be a cheer squad for this lunatic discredited scheme to move Perth Modern School into some high-rise building yet to be constructed in Northbridge. They were a cheer squad for it. They not only were notable for their silence in opposing, but also thought it was a great idea. I did not hear any of them say, “Hang on, maybe we should be doing something different.” Ultimately, somewhere in the counsel of government they decided that they better change tack, not because it was the right thing to do or because they had it wrong, but because they might be haemorrhaging a bit politically. That is a misplaced priority if ever I saw one.

As my friend Hon Tjorn Sibma has just pointed out, it is extraordinary to see this amount of decay in a government that is only five minutes old. Hon Tjorn Sibma introduced some matters of substance and put some flesh on the bones, because the government certainly is not doing that. The government has come up with a graphic. I will not dignify it by calling it a pretty graphic, but it has come up with a graphic showing a set of buildings at Kitchener Park. There is a big orange bit to the north of Subiaco Oval. Is that the train line? I am not sure what is involved.

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I apologise for the unruly interjections of these people here.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think you need assistance from your own team.

Hon Peter Collier interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. I will deal with this. This Perth Modern School idea was misconceived. We have been through that in some detail in the last few days. We know that the government has backed off from that, but it has now opened up a problem for itself and for a lot of families and students now and in the future. Heaven only knows why the government would want to commit itself to such an unnecessary injury as the one that it is now inflicting upon itself. I hope that there is some debate going on in the Labor caucus room because I am not seeing it anywhere else. Someone needs to say, “Hang on, whose bright idea was this?” Hon Tjorn Sibma, as an alumnus of Carine Senior High School, was reminding us that it is not about Kitchener Park and whatever this new school will be called; it is about real people and real institutions. The government brags about how it will not refurbish City Beach senior high school, which is needed. The government is not going to do that, so that is one school community that the government has ripped off. Where is the complaint about that? The government is going to hear plenty of complaint from us. But there is one school community the government has ripped off to the tune of millions of dollars.

The government has also ripped off the Churchlands Senior High School community, because it was going to benefit from the City Beach refurbishment. Hon Tjorn Sibma has reminded us that the Carine Senior High School community and students who were going to join that community have also been ripped off by millions of dollars, which this Labor government is now going to do what with? I do not know. Misspend it? Stick it in its pocket? It is not spending it on the communities that need it. Furthermore, what about the people of Mt Lawley? What is going to happen with Mount Lawley Senior High School? The Leader of the Opposition, the former Minister for Education, was able to tell the house in great detail again—he even has the figures on the tip of his tongue—about the amounts that were to be spent on Mount Lawley Senior High School. In addition, I have mentioned Carine and City Beach.

Hon Peter Collier: It is \$39.6 million.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It is \$39 million. Was that to be spent on Mount Lawley Senior High School?

Hon Peter Collier: And they need it for another 650 students.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I wonder what the new member for Mount Lawley thinks about that. I do not even know who the member for Mount Lawley is and I am not finding out now because that new member should be raising merry hell about this. Yesterday we had a ministerial statement and a press release. What did the member call it—the triumvirate?

Hon Tjorn Sibma: I don't know. Triumvirate, tripartite —

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Not a triumph that is for sure! Perhaps the triweekly—I do not know. But the announcement yesterday was about an inner-city college, the first stage of which will cost \$68 million. That seems like it came straight off the back of an envelope. What is the government doing? Where is that \$68 million coming from? If anywhere, it is presumably coming from some of the projects that I have outlined. The government is robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Hon Peter Collier: It's certainly robbing me.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes. There is a thunderous silence and a glaring omission from all the government's announcements about who has been consulted. As we have heard this morning, the answer is basically nobody. There is a thunderous silence about how this plan has been developed. Just remember that yesterday when we got up, this was not needed. Are we saying that while the government was saying that this is not needed, it had someone in a secret back room plotting a course that was not needed? No, this has been done up in crisis mode on the run.

Hon Peter Collier: On the back of an envelope.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: As the Leader of the Opposition says, it has been done on the back of the proverbial envelope and there is no business case.

Hon Peter Collier: And political expediency.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It will be a political hamstring for this government. We have mentioned some of the communities that are being ripped off to pursue another folly. Whose folly are we going to call? Three ministers put out yesterday's press release, so I do not know whose folly it is. Is it McGowan's, Ellery's or Saffioti's folly? It is a tri-folly! But it is not a joke; it is a very remarkable case of a collapse of process by people who ought to know better. It is purely in support of trying to address a political bushfire that has broken out. It is purely of the government's own creation. In order to deal with it, the government has thrown some more petrol onto it, as it will shortly discover. I hope we have the instruments available to us in this house to properly examine the government's conduct on this matter. I would like the benefit of advice from the Department of Education about what it thinks the government should be doing.

Hon Peter Collier: The estimates committee might like to look at it.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Perhaps one or several of our standing committees might be able to examine this and get to the truth. I find it very hard to believe that the plan announced in September last year, which had been worked on for years, was somehow redundant and that a thought bubble, "Hey, that sounds like a good, progressive idea; let's move Perth Mod to a high-rise building in Northbridge" could somehow supplant a plan that had been worked on for years, only to be overturned by another plan that has had even less preparation time—the so-called Kitchener Park model. If we look hard enough, there are good ministers in this government. When is the government going to say, "Hang on, enough is enough of this nonsense"? "This carry-on is damaging the reputation and standing of this government." Perhaps the government thinks it can get away with it. Maybe it realises there is no election this Saturday so it is determined to tough it out. It was determined to tough out the policy to move Perth Mod, until it backflipped on it. Perhaps the government will try to tough out the Kitchener Park policy. I would suggest that all government members, whether backbenchers or in cabinet, take another look at this and work out whether this is the sort of government that they want to support. They should ask themselves, "Is this the sort of thing that we're doing? Does this make me feel proud? Does this pass any test of reasonableness?" If government members think it does, go out and consult after the fact! Go and talk with the Carine Senior High School community. Go and talk with the City Beach people whom we have seen out in the public domain—they are not very happy. Go and talk with the Mt Lawley community. The government might find that what it is doing is absolutely indefensible.

I would like an answer to this question: what is wrong with the plan that Hon Peter Collier described to us in such detail which was developed in concert with the education department? Do not give us any throwaway lines, "Oh, no, no; that's not where the people live." The education department knows where the students live. It knows where they have to come from. It has projected that, the way we are going, there will be 4 000 students at Churchlands Senior High School and it knows where those students will come from. Do not tell us that Kitchener Park is somehow across the road for all of these schoolchildren and that is where the school needs to be, because that is rubbish. Tell us how the government arrived at the Kitchener Park conclusion, if it can genuinely point out that the education department was deficient. The government can demonstrate to us, if it can, that this is not a matter of petulance and that it wants to abandon something simply because it was a plan developed during the term of the previous government.

While the government is at it, it might also tell us how it arrived at a cost of \$68 million for the first stage of a high school. The Leader of the Opposition is the former Minister for Education and I am a former

Minister for Finance. I was in charge of a number of building agencies, including ones that used to build high schools—they still do, if they get the chance. What does the first stage of the school mean? How many stages are there? Why does the first stage for this school cost \$68 million? I know what \$68 million looks like in the hands of government building agencies. People will debate the value for money of those things, but it is a heck of a lot of money. But why is it \$68 million just for a first stage? We do not know how big a first stage is. It sounds to me as though it is going to be pretty big—pretty substantial. That strikes me as an extraordinary amount of money and more than it would cost to refurbish the other schools we have been talking about. What on earth does the government think it is doing? We want those works to go ahead now, it is ready to go now, and the money is available now—or it was—yet what is this government going to do? It is going to do nothing. It will not spend the money that has been planned and budgeted for. No, it is not going to do that. It will go ahead with this other Kitchener Park idea that has not even got to first base with any planning or design requirements. Again, what is the first stage? How many stages are there? How did the government arrive at these costs? These are questions that obviously require answers, but I will be disappointed today because I am not going to get those answers and this house is not going to get those answers. The public of Western Australia is not going to get those answers. Why? For one reason, I do not believe the answers to those questions exist. I cannot believe that the government has done any appropriate amount of homework in arriving at the announced course of action. Members opposite ought to be asking: what are the answers to the questions that are being posed? Otherwise, what are they doing here? Members are not here just to be a cheer squad for their party; they are here to stand up for their communities.

I was looking at the motion moved by Hon Donna Faragher. I was thinking: in view of the announcement yesterday—it seems as though it was weeks ago; it was only yesterday—perhaps we need to revisit the wording of this motion. Is it still current? I read through the notice paper, and do members know what? I think this motion is entirely appropriate to proceed with unamended. The government has not addressed the concerns that were being expressed, except to the extent that there is a stay of execution or the axe has been removed from over the head of Perth Modern School.

It is still necessary in part (a) of the motion to reverse this Education Central policy that clearly is ill-conceived, has not been properly developed and does not pass muster on any criteria, and many of those criteria have been mentioned during the course of this debate. The government certainly needs to revert to the comprehensive western suburbs secondary schooling strategy announced in September 2016. Will it do so? I doubt it, but then again in view of the extraordinary way it has behaved during the course of this issue, I do not know what it is going to do. I honestly do not know. The really sad thing is that I do not think the government knows either; it has not got a clue. I wonder whether the Minister for Education and Training was the author of the backflip or whether it was foisted upon her. I do not know; perhaps I will never know. There are times when all of us can recognise a dog of a policy direction. I tell you what, I am looking at one right now, and I do not think anyone wants to own it. The Minister for Education and Training wishes she was somewhere else. Again, I do not know whether she was the author of this backflip or whether she was just doing what the government decided to do, whether she liked it or not. I do not know who else wants to claim ownership of this policy direction: let us involve the people. I do not think Hon Tjorn Sibma is really on board with it yet. We know about Hon Donna Faragher; she is not on board yet. What about our friends in the Nationals? I do not see them marching in the streets saying, “Good on you, Mr McGowan, this is a terrific policy.”

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: We didn't see them doing that with Mr Barnett either, so at least they are being consistent.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is a fair point. If that is the only hurdle government members have to come up against, good luck to them.

I do not see anyone else on the crossbenches saying to me, “Sit down, member. There is nothing wrong with this. It is a great policy. How dare you?” Nobody is saying that to me because everyone can recognise what a pointless and ultimately destructive policy direction this is and one that should be abandoned, apart from a number of members sitting on the government benches. What do they think? I can go on about this issue, and I probably will until the cows come home. This will be like groundhog day. I am sure that through standing committees in this place, through the good work of Hon Donna Faragher and in umpteen other ways we will keep revisiting this quagmire until the government comes to its senses. The chances are that that will be a very long time. In the meantime, I am going to sit down now. For the record, I have plenty more time if I were interested in using up time. As Hon Peter Collier knows, I know how to do it. However, this is a time-limited debate. I am going to sit down now, specifically to hear a government member—who knows, maybe even a parliamentary secretary—stand up and tell us —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Our minister has spoken so you might as well use your time.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: What is it about these people opposite that they just cannot help getting themselves in trouble? Despite that interjection, I think the house is quite able to vote on this motion. We should vote to

support it. We should congratulate the mover, Hon Donna Faragher, on bringing it forward. For now I will give a chance to members opposite if they do want to stand up and defend the indefensible.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [2.14 pm] — in reply: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I did hover for a moment in case there was a member on the other side, from the government, who was prepared to stand up and speak to the motion.

Hon Alanna Clohesy: How the mighty have fallen.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I think that probably the mighty have fallen on Hon Alanna Clohesy's side of the house this week and none of them has bothered to stand up and defend any of their decisions thus far.

Hon Sue Ellery: I did, and I made a ministerial statement to the house yesterday.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Yes, and this is the motion today, not the ministerial statement.

Hon Sue Ellery: It's about the same thing—exactly the same thing.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: The minister should give me a minute and we will go through a couple of things.

I thank members who have contributed to this debate and for what has been a very good debate. I acknowledge particularly the comments made by Hon Alison Xamon—I will say something about her comments in a moment—Hon Tjorn Sibma, Hon Simon O'Brien and Hon Peter Collier, as well as the comments that were made by the minister in this place a couple of weeks ago. As Hon Alison Xamon said, a week is certainly a long time in politics. I am very pleased, as indeed the Liberal opposition is, that at least one part of the motion that is currently before the house has been achieved; that is, that the flawed, misguided and unnecessary Education Central policy is now gone, particularly as it relates to Perth Modern School. I have said in this place, and I have certainly said outside of this place, that the Liberal Party wholeheartedly supports the government in its decision. In my view good sense has finally prevailed. It took too long; the government allowed around five months for this issue to fester. It caused immense distress, frustration and concern for far too many people with an interest in this issue—parents, students, supporters of Perth Modern School, the Perth Modernian Society, and many others who just felt that the Education Central policy was the wrong policy. I picked up on the comments made by all of the members. I accepted what the minister said in this place a couple of weeks ago that it was not her intention to cause such unhappiness and concern for parents and students in particular. I accept that. I know the minister and I know that she would not have wanted that to occur, but it did occur so I am pleased that, with the announcement yesterday, now the Perth Modern community can finally go back to what it does best—that is, educating outstanding young Western Australians at a fantastic school with a fantastic history and wonderful traditions in the same place that it has taught education for a hundred-odd years. For that I say to the government, thank you, and thank you for finally listening.

It is important to reflect though that it was not just an issue for parents, families and students in the western suburbs. I will say that it was not comments that were made in this place but certainly there were some ill thought out comments made. I know that we do not refer to members in the other place, but some ill thought out comments were made by members in the other place about this issue and the people it affected. It was not just an issue for students and families living in the western suburbs. The fact that I presented a petition in this place on two occasions signed by 8 418 people is testament to that fact, particularly when those signatures came from people right across Western Australia—north, south, east and west; from metropolitan Perth to the most regional parts of Western Australia. People power has worked in this instance. The protest that was held—I think they called it the peaceful rally—was an important reflection of the depth of concern and unhappiness in that community. I am delighted that that has been fixed.

I will comment on the remarks made by Hon Alison Xamon about St George's Anglican Grammar School. I read some of the same comments the honourable member has referred to. Unfortunately, sometimes in the heat of a debate on a subject as emotional as this and that raises much concern, people sometimes look to pit one issue against another. On this occasion I do not think it was many, but there were some examples of an argument being used in favour of not moving Perth Modern by referring to St George's. Certainly, the Liberal opposition never did that. I agree with and accept the comments of Hon Alison Xamon that on an issue such as this it is not helpful to effectively pit one school against another because students and parents are involved and they are two quite separate issues. I certainly take on board those comments and I am sure that the Liberal opposition would be pleased for Hon Alison Xamon to relay these comments to the St George's community if any concern had been raised.

I come back to the second part of the motion. The opposition maintains that the western suburbs strategy announced in September last year by the former minister, Hon Peter Collier, is still the best way to deal with overcrowding in western suburbs schools. It was comprehensive, multifaceted and shovel-ready. A lot has been

said about the City Beach site. It is interesting that when overcrowding has been referred to in the debate the only the reference often made is about whether a school is going to be built at City Beach or now Subiaco. The fact is that the strategy announced by the former minister—Hon Simon O'Brien went through a number of those elements—including not only a complete redevelopment of City Beach. Some comments have been made in the past 24 hours that apparently the government was just going to carry out a refurbishment.

Hon Peter Collier: A bit of spit and polish! How condescending!

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Yes, a bit of spit and polish.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Laurie Graham): Order, please!

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: As Hon Peter Collier has said, a \$58 million refurb is not just a spit and polish. It is absolutely incorrect to suggest that is what the former government was intending to do at the City Beach high school site. Equally, however, it was about not only the City Beach high school site, but also expansions and extensions at Churchlands Senior High School and Shenton College and improvements at Carine Senior High School—Hon Tjorn Sibma has gone through that—and Balcatta Senior High School. It is interesting that when the government refers to the inner city and the need to deal with overcrowding problems in inner-city areas, they do not mention Mount Lawley Senior High School. The government has announced expenditure of \$4 million probably for a —

Hon Peter Collier: It's a spit and polish.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I think that is probably for a "spit and polish", to use Hon Peter Collier's terminology, at Mount Lawley. We, as the former government, had put forward a \$39 million commitment to Mount Lawley. That would have included capacity to cater for an additional 650-odd students at Mount Lawley Senior High School. It also included, I think, a number of other improvements in general learning areas, food and textiles, performing arts —

Hon Peter Collier: Science.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: In taking Hon Peter Collier's interjection, it included improvements in science. There has been no mention at all about Mount Lawley. I find it interesting that in all the commentary the government focussed on only City Beach and not the entire strategy that we put forward.

There is a shovel-ready school site at City Beach and buildings could have been going up now. But what have we got? Two weeks ago, the government said that the school absolutely had to be in Northbridge. We heard ad nauseam why that was absolutely necessary. Two weeks later, the government is saying that it absolutely has to be in Subiaco. Apparently all the planning is organised and everything is ready to go and there will be a new school in 2020. Phew! A lot happens in a week in politics. All I say to the minister is that the Liberal opposition will be watching the government—it will be not only us watching—every step of the way on this matter. The government has made a decision to just step away without, I might say, ever being able to articulate why the western suburbs strategy was not the right policy. It has never been able to properly articulate what was wrong with that policy. The government just has a philosophical objection to what we put forward.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, please, members!

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It's about where the students are.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: If so, the government should support some improvements at Mount Lawley.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, please!

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It's about where the people are.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: If that is the case, does the government support more money going to extensions for Mount Lawley Senior High School for another 650 students? There is silence. All I say is this —

Hon Peter Collier: The minister's own department made that determination.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is exactly right.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, please!

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Because we are running out of time, all I say is this: it is now squarely on the minister and her government to deliver this project. We will still take a different view, but the government has now made a clear decision to locate the school at Kitchener Park—as I say, two weeks ago it was Northbridge

but now it is Subiaco—and we will hold the government to that every step of the way. The government has said that it is going to be built by 2020. We are going to follow this matter very, very closely, and watching the government will be not only the Liberal opposition, but also the parents and students who were presented last year with a very strong, credible and comprehensive plan that would have dealt with overcrowding in the western suburb schools. They were given a plan, which I have to say everyone agreed with when it was announced. I do not think even the then opposition said anything, so we all thought it was not an issue; the problem was fixed last year. This government created a problem. It fixed only part of the problem yesterday, which is fantastic, but the problem still exists. We will continue to hold this government to account. We will follow this matter every step of the way, and if the government does not have a school at Subiaco by 2020, which the government says it is going to build, then the matter will be in the government's hands. The minister, the government and all members here—that is, the members for the North and East Metropolitan Regions—will have to explain to the community in the western suburbs and inner-city areas why the government did not go ahead with the former government's proposal.

I urge the house to support the motion.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting President (Hon Laurie Graham) casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (20)

Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Robin Chapple
Hon Jim Chown
Hon Tim Clifford
Hon Peter Collier

Hon Colin de Grussa
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Donna Faragher
Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Colin Holt

Hon Rick Mazza
Hon Simon O'Brien
Hon Robin Scott
Hon Tjorn Sibma
Hon Charles Smith

Hon Aaron Stonehouse
Hon Dr Steve Thomas
Hon Colin Tincknell
Hon Alison Xamon
Hon Ken Baston (*Teller*)

Noes (11)

Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Stephen Dawson
Hon Sue Ellery

Hon Adele Farina
Hon Laurie Graham
Hon Alannah MacTiernan

Hon Kyle McGinn
Hon Samantha Rowe
Hon Matthew Swinbourn

Hon Pierre Yang
Hon Martin Pritchard (*Teller*)

Pairs

Hon Michael Mischin
Hon Martin Aldridge

Hon Darren West
Hon Dr Sally Talbot

Question thus passed.