

MELVILLE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL — PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

Grievance

MR M.H. TAYLOR (Bateman — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.49 am]: I rise today to speak on a matter that I know many people in my community care about. I am passionately pursuing this issue with the Minister for Education, Hon Peter Collier, MLC. Melville Senior High School wrote to me seeking support for a new dedicated performing arts building at the school. Its proposal is for a centre for arts excellence that would encompass and showcase all of its artistic disciplines in a modern building designed to connect the school with the community. In September I visited the school to view the existing facilities and discuss the proposal with the principal, Phillip White, and deputy principal, Kylie Bottcher, who is now the acting principal while Mr White is away on well-earned long service leave. From the time I arrived to the time I departed Melville Senior High School, I was extremely impressed by all the staff and students I met. I was also really impressed that this old school has self-funded a long-term program to convert dark concrete-walled classrooms into light-filled glass panel classrooms with new interiors. Melville Senior High School should be commended for this leadership that is making the learning environment and experience for its students so much better. These classroom conversions, together with landscape upgrades, visionary administration and other initiatives, have resulted in the school undergoing a wonderful renewal in recent years that has transformed it into a high-performing academic school. I witnessed this firsthand at the school's recent year 12 valedictory evening, when the standard of achievement and student character was inspiring.

The school's transformation is most clearly demonstrated by Melville Senior High School's renewed appeal among the local community, with significant enrolment growth from 850 students eight years ago, to 1 400 students at present. Local parents are again trusting the school to provide excellent education opportunities for their children. There is, however, a need for Melville Senior High School to expand its facilities to meet community expectations and continue to deliver strong educational outcomes for all students. Therefore, following my initial visit I invited the Minister for Education to join me to tour the school and speak with the acting principal, Kylie Bottcher, staff and students about the arts centre. I thank the minister for joining me and my colleague, Hon Nick Goiran, MLC, for the visit to Melville Senior High School on 1 November.

During the visit we were shown the current arts centre. The school is certainly making the most of the facilities; however, the performing arts room—it is just a room—where concerts and plays are performed is about the size of two squash courts and expected to contain the performers and their audience. Unfortunately, the room can fit in only 100 people, and that is at a squeeze. That means the immediate families of the students cannot even fit in the current room, let alone all the friends and community members who want to attend their performances to share the experience. In my opinion this is woefully inadequate, and a new, larger, purpose-built facility is desperately needed. Melville Senior High School has a strong and vibrant arts culture. The music focus program involves over 180 students, the drama program around 125 students, and the dance program over 100 students.

Minister, as a government we have a proud record of funding education, the arts and communities. I strongly request that we support students, staff and the local community by funding a new centre for arts excellence at Melville Senior High School. The school believes a dedicated performing arts building could be integrated above the existing arts facilities to include a theatre with seating for 400 people, and transform the performing and audience experience from a small classroom into a purpose-built theatre. This is an opportunity for the Western Australian government to partner with Melville Senior High School to invest in social infrastructure that will deliver significant benefits for generations to come.

I know there is strong community support for this proposed new centre for arts excellence because I received an overwhelming response to my MLA Facebook video post in which I said I was fighting for the school to receive WA government funding to build Melville Senior High School's proposed centre. In just one week the post has reached over 13 000 people, and has received over 430 responses in the form of "Likes", comments and shares. Not one of these responses has suggested that the centre is not warranted, and in fact there are many comments from locals expressing how important such an improvement would be for the school.

I wish to place on record my thanks to the Minister for Education for visiting the school personally and touring the site. I strongly request that the necessary funding be secured to produce an inspiring outcome for Melville Senior High School and our broader community.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Police) [9.54 am]: I thank the member for Bateman for this grievance and for raising this very important issue. I will make some comments that have been provided to me by the Minister for Education.

As the member mentioned, Melville Senior High School has experienced significant growth in the numbers, and more than 1 400 students are enrolled at the school; I think that is testament to the quality of the school, its staff and the educational opportunities provided there. The gifted and talented program, specialist programs in

aviation, graphic design, media and netball make it a very desirable choice for students from the area. I actually had the opportunity to visit Melville Senior High School as part of the graffiti SLAM program that was run with the City of Melville, when the students from the performing arts centre put together some plays around the causes of young people heading towards graffiti, and how one of the outcomes of untreated family violence can often, sadly, be that young people will be pushed out onto the streets; indeed, that was the picture and the story that the very talented students of Melville Senior High School put together as part of that graffiti SLAM event I attended as Minister for Police.

I understand that quite a few of the students are from outside the local intake area. They attend the school so that they can go to the specialist programs; I know the aviation program is particularly highly regarded. There are also quite a few students from outside the local intake area who attend the intensive English language centre at Melville Senior High School, which I understand is particularly highly regarded. I am aware that the school has a very keen music focus. One-third of the students participate in the performing arts program at Melville Senior High School, and I note that the swing band plays at local shopping centres and goes around to all the local schools, and the music focus at Melville Senior High School has certainly been very popular. I also note the success of the drama program at Melville Senior High School, with three students from 2015 receiving entry into the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, which is a very competitive process. Acceptance into WAAPA is one of those pathways that many students who engage in drama in our high schools aspire to—very few are chosen, though. It is testament to the quality of the drama program and the talent of the students at Melville Senior High School that three of those students gained entry into WAAPA in the field of drama.

I understand the current performing arts facility was constructed in the 1960s, at the same time as the school. It was probably deemed suitable at the time, but obviously with the growth in numbers I expect there are probably more students and parents who would like to see the presentations of the performing arts students—the concerts and plays et cetera. A recent audit by the Department of Education found that although the facilities are functional and in good condition, they are below what would normally be provided for a large senior high school of the size of Melville. The Minister for Education is aware that the school community, led by the chair of the school board, is very keen for a new performing arts centre to be built so that performances can be attended by more than the current eighty guests that the current facility allows. The minister assures me that the proposal will be considered in the context of statewide priorities, and a generous future capital works program is being put together by the Department of Education to ensure that we are keeping our senior high school and primary school facilities contemporary.

I have been advised that the facilities have received \$8 million worth of capital works funding over time, to keep it in a workable state. Some of that appeared in 2003–04; capital funding was allocated to the school and to the two-storey Leach Highway wing, which was redeveloped into 14 general learning areas, six computer resource areas and four staff offices. That was an investment of \$5 million. The existing library at that time was converted into the new media and visual and performing arts centre, which included some new change rooms, a drawing and print-making studio, music rehearsal areas, drama, dance and ceramic studios. The new library resource centre was provided, and the aeronautics program was relocated from the old caretaker's cottage into a purpose-built aeronautics centre. Further capital works have included the refurbishment of three science laboratories, upgrades to the design and technology facilities, and toilets. Melville Senior High School is a fantastic school. It is a great alternative to the nearby John Curtin College of the Arts, which is another excellent public school.

I am pleased to report that from 2008–09 to 2015–16, this Liberal–National government has invested approximately \$3.1 billion in the construction of new and replacement schools, as well as the refurbishment and upgrade of older schools. An allocation of \$300.4 million has been made for infrastructure in public schools in 2016–17, and a total of \$1.09 billion has been allocated across the forward estimates. I encourage the member for Bateman and the chair of the school board to continue to work with the minister and the Department of Education. With an allocation of \$1.09 billion across the forward estimates, it may be a case of continuing to work with the Department of Education and the minister's office to ensure that Melville Senior High School's needs are being put front and centre, particularly the need for a new performing arts centre. Arts and drama were less significant components of the education system a long time ago, when I was going through school, but these days there is an expectation in the community that these sorts of facilities be provided so that we can give our students a well-rounded educational experience, and opportunities other than academic opportunities to develop our students in lots of different career pathways. I thank the member for raising the grievance with the Minister for Education, and I am very pleased to provide that response on his behalf.