

## **POINT PERON CAMP SCHOOL**

### *Grievance*

**MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth)** [9.47 am]: My grievance this morning is to the minister representing the Minister for Education and Training. Members might recall an online petition a number of months ago—there was probably more than one—that called on the state government to save Point Peron Camp School from closure. A mother in my electorate, whose children go to Como Secondary College, was promoting one of the petitions. This was in addition to a number of emails that I also received from parents who had children at Como Secondary College. That was back in March. I also made some inquiries and obtained information that Como Secondary College has been sending students to Point Peron Camp School for about 10 years, or maybe a little longer. Usually, it sends between 150 and 180 students so that they can engage in a wide range of activities in their first year of high school. We all remember that it was a big leap when we transferred from primary school to high school. The school sees this as an opportunity for these kids to meet other students and make friendships, which might last for the duration of their secondary education and sometimes longer. The college has about 850 students. Sending the students to the Point Peron Camp School is about making new relationships. It is a new experience for students coming straight out of primary school.

As members know, Point Peron Camp School is one of seven Department of Education camps schools that are located throughout Western Australia. It has been operating since the 1960s and was set up to enable government school students to extend their educational opportunities outside the regular school setting. There were no camp schools when I went to school. I think we were lucky to get a trip up to Northam, where we were billeted out on farms and things like that.

Also, the camp school is now available to all government and non-government schools, catering to both primary and secondary students.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** My mum and dad knocked you back?

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I actually drove down to Point Peron near the minister's electorate the other day. I have been to Point Peron many times, so I am not unfamiliar —

**Mr P. Papalia:** The Premier's electorate.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Yes, I know that. I drove past the Premier's office. I did not drop in, but I drove past. I understand it is very close to the Minister for Local Government's electorate. It is a beautiful spot. It is a great location. What a great place for kids to go and have an experience. It offers access to a really unique marine setting. It offers these exciting programs that motivate children of all ages and help develop their self-esteem, teamwork and cooperation skills. Obviously I got that from the Department of Education website, so the department believes that there is a good case for these schools to operate. Additionally, I believe this camp school, in its location and set-up, offers the rare and valuable opportunity nowadays for young people to learn and get a hands-on understanding or experience of the natural sciences, because of the great environment with the beachfront land and the water on both sides.

The McGowan government's decision to close Point Peron Camp School will obviously have an impact on many families, including the ones I am talking about at Como Secondary College. For a Labor government that champions supporting the people—the battlers—doing it tougher in our society, we need to look at this, so I stand today on behalf of these families whose kids go to Como Secondary College, who are not from privileged or wealthy backgrounds. Although it is in the electorate of South Perth, the school's immediate catchment area has a large amount of public housing. Evidence shows that the kids who attend Como Secondary College come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are from Aboriginal families that are struggling, some are the children of sole parents and others are members of refugee families. We have a lot of refugee families in that part of my electorate. These children cannot afford to take for granted these opportunities to go to the camp school because the cost has to be carried by the parents.

I am also aware that a few months ago the Premier said that the state government was establishing —

... an expression-of-interest process to seek alternative providers of education opportunities at that facility, in particular opportunities for children to go and stay there, ...

The Premier is not saying that the government is shutting it down, but I believe the Department of Education, in seeking to reduce costs on the department, suggested that maybe it could be put out for private tender.

The worry among my school community is that the plan to tender out the running of the camp school could potentially lead to higher charges that will impact on some of these struggling families. These parents are seeking assurances that if the plan goes ahead and the camp school is privately operated, it will not become too expensive and unaffordable to those families.

I raise this grievance today to ask a few questions about where we are at with this process. Firstly, how can people access information on what is happening with the process? Secondly, where is the process at, and is there a time line for this to eventuate? The Premier also said in his statement that alternatives are available, so what are those alternatives? Finally, minister, will the affected children and young people still have the ability to experience Point Peron Camp School in an affordable way?

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism)** [9.54 am]: I thank the member for his grievance and raising this matter, and also for giving me the opportunity to correct some perhaps intentional or unintentional falsehoods around this entire discussion. Probably some of them have contributed to the member's constituent being concerned about what is happening with the camp sites.

At the outset I say that I think I, probably more than anyone in this chamber, have more personal experience of Point Peron Camp School. I know what it does, what it did, and what the intended outcomes of this process are. I have done this before, but I will repeat it and put it on the record again, because it has been consistently called a school. I know people do that because it is called a camp school on the website. It is not a school. It never has been, never was and never will be a school. It is a misnomer to call the site a school. Because of the bureaucracy of the Department of Education staffing these sites, it had to be called a school to get a certain level of funding or allocation of support for the site through the department's system. It has never been a school. It does not provide curriculum development or any educational service delivery; it provides a camp. The school books the camp and brings its own teachers and supervisors to conduct activities there. That is exactly what occurred 42 years ago when I went there from the then Burekup Primary School. In those days it was not for city kids; it was for country kids to get up to the city because we did not do that sort of thing. I know the member's background, and he had a very similar childhood to my own, with very limited opportunities for experiencing things outside the education system. In those days, we were very appreciative of the opportunity to go there and encounter the different environment, for starters. It was a camp to get away to and be in that environment. The member is right; it is in a magnificent location with a fantastic natural environment. It gives access to some pretty fun activities for young people, given its proximity to places such as Penguin Island and Seal Island, looking out over the water to Garden Island and HMAS *Stirling*.

**Mr J.E. McGrath:** They would learn something from the experience, wouldn't they?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Of course they would. The first thing is that it is not a school.

**Mr J.E. McGrath:** No.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No-one is shutting any schools.

The second thing is that no-one is shutting anything in Point Peron. I understand that in Point Peron there is a process underway to find an alternative operator. That is occurring because we inherited \$40 billion worth of debt from the appalling mismanagement of the state's finances under the previous government. Part of what we have had to do is make difficult decisions. Of course we would prefer not to have to do this; it is just one of the things the Treasurer is confronted with every day. One of the things we have to do to tidy up the mess is look for opportunities to find savings for the taxpayer. In this case, we could transfer the site operation to a private operator, deliver the same sort of service through the private enterprise and therefore remove the obligation on the taxpayer to support it, and that is happening.

**Mr J.E. McGrath:** Will the cost go up?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I have some notes, so I want to respond more specifically to what the member said.

The only change will be that it will not be operated by the Department of Education. The site will remain operational, with the management handed over to those in the best position to provide these services. A process is currently underway to identify alternative operators to lease and operate the Point Peron site. A requirement of the process is that public school students will have priority of access at an affordable cost. That is a direct response to the concerns of the member's constituent. The conditions of use also stipulate that the operators are required to retain an educational focus and use, so it is about providing the same access for the kids from the same demographic. The new operators will continue to provide a similar camping experience for public school students. The department does not expect any significant changes to the current services provided at each site. The department has also ensured that operators with significant experience in running camps for school-age students will be considered. An announcement regarding the final decision about the alternative operator is expected later this month. I think that might have covered all those points.

One other question the member raised was how people can find out about it. I will check, but I think, noting that observation from the minister, that something is about to be announced. All will be made clear later this month. The member's specific concerns regarding access, costs and the nature of the service—all those things—have, I think, been addressed. That is part of the process that is underway. It sounds like it is very close to resolution and at that time I am sure there will be a lot of attention given to how things have been resolved and information will be conveyed —

**Mr J.E. McGrath:** I gather from what you said—thank you for that information—that maybe the new provider will be asked to give a certain price for the public schools, but other users might have to pay a higher level?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am sure the minister will make that clear, but the public school system was always given preference in this system anyway to date, so it is primarily about the public system.

The member asked what alternatives there are around the place. The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries has similar comparable recreation facilities and programs for students located at Bickley, Hillarys, Point Walter, Quaranup and Woodman Point. I know about them because my own son has utilised those facilities. They are out there and are used by both private and public schools, so there are alternatives. Later this month the minister will make an announcement; that is probably the biggest thing that the member needs to convey to his constituents.