

SEVENOAKS SENIOR COLLEGE — SANTA’S WORKSHOP

Statement

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [6.22 pm]: I want to respond to a matter raised by Hon Simon O’Brien during members’ statements last week with regard to Santa’s Workshop. Santa’s Workshop was funded by Outcare and was located in two large sheds at the rear of Sevenoaks Senior College. The arrangement for Santa’s Workshop to operate at the school was by way of a memorandum of understanding between Sevenoaks College and Outcare. The school was advised that Outcare would not be continuing the ongoing resourcing of Santa’s Workshop, ceasing the relationship with the school. As Hon Simon O’Brien pointed out in his statement, it is irregular for an organisation like this to be located on a public school site in the first place.

I am aware that Kath Partridge, the principal of Sevenoaks Senior College, met with Hon Simon O’Brien and advised that in order to assist Santa’s Workshop volunteers, it was important to try to find an alternative venue. I am advised that the group, which does sensational work and would be supported by most right-thinking people, has about 30 to 40 volunteers, with 10 to 12 accessing the site at any one time at irregular intervals. That number of people using the site, and the time at which they use the site, needs to be taken into account when thinking about an alternative site. It is important to note also that the group is not an incorporated body. This presents the risk that the group could not obtain the required insurances to operate on a school site.

Mr Pablo Manalac, a representative of Santa’s Workshop, wrote to me in July 2018 requesting the identification, and possible use, of alternative Department of Education sites. I provided him with two possible schools which the department had advised me might have the capacity to support a community program and with which he could make inquiries—namely, Yule Brook College and Thornlie Primary School. I understand this has been unsuccessful. I am happy to ask the Department of Education to continue working with Santa’s Workshop to try to find a suitable space for it. However, I am not sure that a school site is suitable at all. People would appreciate that although there might be space today at a particular school, the demographics might change in a couple of years and we would be back in the position we are in now.

I am happy to give the honourable member my commitment that I will approach my cabinet colleagues to see whether we can find an alternative site or an alternative process to assist Santa’s Workshop. As I have said, given the number of volunteers, which is great, the number of people who will need to be accommodated on the school site, and the fact that Santa’s Workshop is not an incorporated body and what that means for the required insurances, I am not convinced that a school site is the appropriate site.