

EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

Motion

HON LIZ BEHJAT (North Metropolitan) [1.16 pm]: I move —

That this Council congratulates the Liberal–National government on its excellent performance in the education portfolio.

I also welcome the special guests in the President’s gallery and in the public gallery for this very important thing that we do on Wednesday afternoons, which is motions on notice.

I am absolutely delighted to move the motion that this Council congratulates the Liberal–National government on its excellent performance in the education portfolio. I can see from the notice paper that I gave notice of this motion on 20 June 2013. How did I know on 20 June 2013 that I would be able to stand here today, 14 September 2016—some 15 months later—and say that this Council congratulates the Liberal–National government on its excellent performance in the education portfolio? Apart from sitting down in 2013 to forensically work out all of the motions that we could possibly deal with on a Wednesday, how many hours were set aside for each motion and the timing of all those things, how did I know that if I put that motion on the notice paper in June 2013 that around this time, in the lead-up to the next state election, I would be able to stand here and congratulate the government on its performance in the education portfolio? Members might think that I took a huge risk in thinking I could say these words today. Before I get on to the subject of education, it shows that these motions on notice are a bit of a nonsense. I suggest that future Parliaments may want to look at this whole scenario of motions on notice and how often they go onto the notice paper and what they are done for. Generally, motions in any institution are done when there are matters of urgency or importance. Of course, we will be speaking about a very important issue today and also an issue that is very timely because education is always paramount, certainly in my mind and in most members’ minds. There needs to be some tweaking of our standing orders to ensure that in future, things may be dealt with differently on a Wednesday. As I said, it demonstrates how our standing orders have perhaps got a bit out of sync in how we do that.

That brings me back to my first question: how did I know that I would be able to stand here today and congratulate the Liberal–National government on its excellent performance in the education portfolio and how did I know that we would have done such a great job that I would be able to stand here today and say honestly, hand on heart, that we have done a fantastic job? I do not have a crystal ball. Some people might like to think of me as one of the three witches from *Macbeth* or something like that, but I can assure them that I do not have a crystal ball. I did know that in the first term of the Barnett government we certainly had made massive inroads into education, and that that program had started. I also knew on 20 June 2013, when I put this motion on the notice paper, that the new Minister for Education had been appointed. The person who was appointed as Minister for Education was someone I very fondly consider to be the architect of the independent public school system—none other than the Leader of the House and current Minister for Education, Hon Peter Collier. Today he gets the title of architect of the IPS. I want members to remember that.

When the Liberal Party was in opposition during those dark years when the Labor Party had control of the government benches, opposition members sat down and wrote policies. At that time, Peter Collier wrote the policy that we know today as the independent public school system. He was the architect of that system. He was not chosen as education minister in the first government, and that was fine; he was Minister for Training and Workforce Development and he had a number of other portfolios. But we knew that, in this term of government, he would take over and IPS would go from strength to strength. I know, as I will demonstrate in my contribution, that IPS has certainly changed the face of education in Western Australia and now is changing the face of education throughout Australia, because guess what? Other states are following our lead with the independent public school system. I am very proud. I was quite right in June 2013 when I put the motion on the notice paper. I had the foresight to know that I would be able to stand today and say that I congratulate the Liberal–National government on its excellent performance in the education portfolio.

Not only has this government changed the face of public education since the introduction of the independent public school system, but also public education has gone from strength to strength. For the first time ever, we are seeing parents take their children out of the private school system and put them into the public school system because of the results that we are getting from our independent public schools throughout the state. Of course, that comes down to the fact that this government and the architect of IPS had the foresight to introduce that policy and strengthen it over the years. It is now in practice.

I will give members some figures on IPS. The problem government members will have today is that there is so much information we have to impart on this subject that time will get the better of us. I have some quite interesting statistics to share with members about the IPS system, and when I find them, I will share them.

We are leading the nation in empowering public schools, which is what the independent public school system does. It empowers schools to be the master of their own destiny, as long as they stay within the curriculum. This initiative

represented a significant step away from the centralised one-size-fits-all approach that we had seen in the previous 50 years. I am a product of the public school system. I went to Scarborough high school for one year and then the family moved so I went to Churchlands Senior High School for the last years. Churchlands is now an independent public school, but at that time it was part of the centralised public school system. We had no choice about what we wanted to do because there was one curriculum and everyone had to fit into it. The only reason I went to Churchlands rather than City Beach high school, which was the school for the area, was that I wanted to study German. I could not do that at City Beach but I could do it at Churchlands, so I went there. There was not much flexibility in the system at that time, and that is one thing that we certainly see with this system.

The schools that have become independent public schools have become more autonomous and have done so on the basis of each school community exercising choice, demonstrating readiness and undergoing a comprehensive transition training program. I will talk a lot more in depth about IPS, because we do not get the opportunity that often—we might get to make a member’s statement or contribute to some legislation—to drill down into IPS and what it is about. Later in my contribution, I will share with members my experiences of two aspects of IPS.

In 2010, we commenced with 34 schools in the IPS system. Today, in 2016, there are 445 schools in the IPS system. That has not come about because this government has compelled schools to become independent public schools. We have not said, “This is the way we are doing it.” We have invited schools to apply to become independent public schools and gain the autonomy that they want. They have applied of their own volition to become independent public schools because they have seen what has happened with the original 34 schools, how they have flourished and how well they have done, and they want to become part of that system. In 2010, there were 34 schools and in 2016 there are 445. That IPS figure constitutes 57 per cent of all public schools, so 72 per cent of our teaching staff and 75 per cent of public school students are now part of the IPS system.

As I said in my brief introduction, other states are now starting to follow us with the IPS system. I know that our minister is always giving advice to other education ministers at Council of Australian Governments meetings or whatever their ministerial council is called. In fact, at one stage before Hodgman became Premier of Tasmania, the opposition education spokesman got in touch with me, as an IPS chairman, to talk about my experience of IPS because Tasmania wanted to introduce the same system. As I said, Western Australia has taken the lead in that area.

The IPS initiative breaks new ground in the reform of public education in this state, including in the critical areas of leadership, specifically with an advanced leadership program that draws heavily on independent research that identifies the kind of leadership that links greater school autonomy with improvements in teaching and, ultimately, benefits for students; a fellowship program, which I will also speak about in more detail if I get the opportunity because I am familiar with a couple of people who are undertaking the program at the moment, that acknowledges the very best principals and extends their influence and expertise both within their schools and beyond their own school communities to benefit all public school students; and a school board development program to strengthen the operations and effectiveness of school boards. This is part of what people get to know when they become part of the IPS system, which I am very familiar with.

In term 1 this year, 138 schools attended one of a series of one-day briefings that captured the philosophy, nature and requirements of increased autonomy. With increased autonomy comes responsibilities, and that is one of the things that people are telling me they are thriving on. It is not this central “Silver City”, as we used to know it, telling people what they should be doing; it is the communities that make up the governing boards of these schools and the principals working in collaboration. In fact, Ashdale Secondary College, where I am chairman of the board, has a very good relationship with Curtin University. Students from Curtin University come into the school quite often to do part of their studies. It is a collaborative thing that happens.

As I said, more and more schools are applying to become part of the IPS system. Without letting out too many secrets, because I do not know many secrets, all I can say is that I am pretty sure that very, very soon—I mean very, very soon —

Hon Peter Collier: Very soon.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Thank you, architect. Very soon there will be a further announcement. We know that a number of other schools that are not part of the IPS system have applied to become part of that system, so an announcement will be made imminently. All I can say is watch this space.

Why did I want to talk about education in particular? I am not a teacher, as people know. That is not my background; it is not any of the expertise that I brought to this place. Those members who were in this place when I was first sworn in in May 2009 may recall that on 16 June 2009, I delivered my maiden speech to this chamber. I know that those members who were here will remember exactly what I said because they would have been hanging on every word. However, for those members who were not here, let me read part of that speech from *Hansard* on 16 June. I was talking about our schools and I said —

I am encouraged by some of the programs being run in our schools today, such as the Virtues Project, which I am familiar with through my son who attends Ashdale Primary School—a government school in the suburb of Darch, which is another great area of the North Metropolitan Region.

Of course, that is a region that I am very proud to represent.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: It is all coming back to me now.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: It is coming back to the member now. I am sorry that she has to sit through the speech again but she can mouth along with me if she likes. It continues —

Each fortnight, the students, under the guidance of their teachers and their peer support groups, concentrate on learning and practising one of the virtues from the project. The virtues are too numerous for me to list today in total, but examples include caring, compassion, consideration, diligence, enthusiasm, honesty, humility, humour, loyalty, justice, unity, and so the list goes on. In fact, when I was looking through the list to prepare for today's speech, it struck me that the virtues that I have just mentioned are ones that we as members of Parliament should adopt and adhere to—especially when it comes to the way in which we frame legislation and deal with each other during our debates and deliberations. I highly recommend the full list of virtues to all members and I am happy to pass it on later as compulsory reading if members wish.

Some members may think it is an indictment of parents today that it is our teachers who are teaching our children virtues, and not the parents themselves, but perhaps some parents were not brought up this way and they in turn will now be learning from their children—this is not a bad thing.

This is the part I really want to talk about today —

I pay tribute to all those who have taken up the vocation of teaching. I affirm that they are a precious commodity charged with the education of our future generations and I know that they all undertake their commitment to their vocation with the utmost of pride and professionalism. I know that I still think fondly about a number of my teachers from my schooldays and I thank them for the values that they, together with my parents, helped instil in me.

In today's hectic and electronic society we must ensure that we carry forward those old-fashioned values such as good manners, respect and caring for each other. These are the values that we must all hold dear, no matter what avenues we pursue in our daily life. If we do not maintain respect for ourselves and our fellow Australians regardless of creed, religion or colour, what hope have we got of maintaining the peace and the fantastic lifestyle that we all enjoy today?

That was taken from my maiden speech back in 2009, which sets out why I think education is important. I was quite right when I said that the people who take up teaching as a vocation are a precious commodity because they are charged with the future of our children. I am so passionate about education because of the wonderful opportunity that I was given by some amazing teachers during my time at school, and also the wonderful education that my only child received. In my maiden speech in 2009 I said that he was a student at Ashdale Primary School. Time has moved on. He left Ashdale Primary School and went through five years at Ashdale Secondary College. He is now in his first year at the University of Western Australia studying a commerce degree with a double major in accounting and marketing. All of that is attributed to the fact that he was able to go through the independent public school system. We want to congratulate this government on its performance in education and the inroads it has made because we know that education is the key to much in our daily lives. I am sure that you, Mr President, as a former teacher in the profession, will know that education is the key to much in this life.

Hon Peter Collier: He taught me.

The PRESIDENT: I had some very good students at some stages of my career.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I think you, Mr President, might have had the future architect of IPS as one of your students at one time. Members can see how education spreads out, creates networks and encompasses many wonderful things. We know that it can be the key to help take people out of poverty. It can help address issues of inequality, bigotry and all sorts of other social issues, including health and general wellbeing. It is fundamental that any civil society has a good education system. On this side of the house, we are proud of the education system that we have provided to our children and will provide to future generations.

We have four hours of debate on this education motion. I will spend my time talking generally about IPS and some of the other initiatives surrounding IPS. As is the usual case when we debate motions on Wednesday, there may be some negative thoughts and contributions from members on the other side of the chamber—I do not know. They may choose not to do that, but I want to caution people to think long and hard about one thing before they make any negative comments about this education motion: they should think about which government has put a teacher in front of every classroom since it came into government, and which government has ensured that of all

the states, we have the highest paid teachers. I wanted to issue that little word of caution to members before they speak to the motion. The architect knows the answer to that and I am sure that he will be able to elucidate that during his contribution. We know two things that can be attributed to the Barnett Liberal–National government since it came into power in 2008. Never has a class commenced on any day, in any term, in any year without a teacher in front of it. The same cannot be said about the previous government. We also know that through negotiation and the systems that we have put in place, of all the mainland states, this state has the highest paid teachers, and they absolutely deserve it. It is not an easy task to be a teacher. It is not something that I could ever do or that I would have the patience for, from what I have seen when I have been in classrooms observing the wonderful work of teachers. They deserve every single dollar that they earn. When we came onto the government benches, we made sure that by negotiating, the wrongs were rectified so that teachers would have a very good pay system. In the past, once a teacher reached level 3, they did not stay in front of the classroom; they went off to perform other administrative and managerial roles within schools or within the department itself. Now we have a number of level 3 teachers who are earning, on average, about \$100 000 a year and they are staying in front of the classroom. It is vitally important to get these well-experienced, young and vibrant teaching professionals—I think the average age of teachers throughout the IPS system is 34.5 years—working at level 3 and staying in front of the classroom, and we have structured the wages in such a way that that can happen.

We will talk about IPS and the valuable role that it plays in the system. We will talk about programs that we have put in place to deliver better outcomes for the students, regardless of their ethnicity, cultural heritage, mental capabilities and socioeconomic circumstances, and that in itself is very important. This is a vast state; there is no doubt about it. We all know the size of Western Australia. However, we must be able to look after children from every background to ensure that they get the best that education has to offer. We also have to make sure that pathways for our children’s future are defined and are not necessarily preparing them just to go to university. When I was in school all those years ago, a student went through to year 12 and then on to university or they left school after year 10 to go to a TAFE college or to do an apprenticeship or something like that. We now know that we want to keep the students in the system for the entire 12 or 13 years—if we look at the very beginning of the 13 years of structured education—and pathways have been made available for people of all capabilities. Only about 21 per cent of our students go on to university, so we need to make sure that the programs we put in place are fitting for all those people.

We are also going to talk about how much we value the teaching profession, which I have already touched on briefly. During the course of this debate, other members on my side of the house will contribute in specific areas and talk about advances and successes in their regions. I could wax lyrical about the north metro region, but I will probably concentrate, as I said earlier, on Ashdale Secondary College, because I am intimately familiar with what goes on there. Members on my side of the house will also make some contributions on what is happening in the rural and remote areas of the state, because, as I have said, this is a vast state and there are many differences. However, that is exactly what the independent public school system does. It enables us to cater for the differences in not only the student make-up and the socioeconomic make-up of the area, but also the physical location of the area. What we can achieve in the city we might not be able to achieve in the country, and some things that we can do in the country we might not be able to do in the city. However, through IPS, and in collaboration with the community, we are able to accommodate those differences. We will also talk about the importance and expansion of the school chaplaincy program, school psychology services, suicide prevention programs, and services in the area of disability and, very importantly, autism.

I now want to come back to IPS. People know that I am passionate about IPS, for two reasons. As I have said, my son, Ali, is a product of the IPS system. He successfully completed his Western Australian Certificate of Education exams and has now gone on to university, and hopefully he will be a big success in whatever he chooses to do in his life. The education that he was given at Ashdale Secondary College has given him a great background to continue with his education. He now lives at college and not with us in the suburb of Darch, which is where the school is located. However, he is coming back to our area this afternoon, because he is tutoring one of the year 10 boys at Ashdale Secondary College in maths and physics. Ali excelled in those areas, and he wants to give back to the school that gave so much to him. Former students at Ashdale Secondary College are now tutoring the current students at the school, and that is fabulous, because it means that the connection remains and it shows that the school is part of the community.

There may be members who have not yet had the good fortune to visit Ashdale Secondary College. My colleague Hon Peter Katsambanis from the north metro region has visited the school. The Minister for Education has visited the school, and he came to the school recently to take a law and politics class. The Leader of the Opposition has also visited the school. I am not sure whether my colleague Hon Martin Pritchard is yet to visit Ashdale Secondary College. As chairman of the board, I extend an invitation to him to visit our school at any time. It is a stand-out school in our area.

Ashdale Secondary College has existed for only nine years. It is brand new. It opened nine years ago with only year 8 students, and the number of students has grown as the years have progressed. In fact, when the school first started, the buildings were not ready, so the classes were held at Madeley Primary School. Ashdale Secondary College was an independent public school from the outset, and that meant that we had fabulous people on the board. I was not chairman of the board at that stage. I have been chairman for only the past five years. The board was able to engage in collaboration right from the beginning and get Scitech to come on board, because although the school is a specialist science and technology school, when the school opened at Madeley Primary School, obviously no science laboratories were available, so Scitech arranged for our students to be bussed to Scitech to take their science classes. The school then opened and students were able to take their classes at the school.

During the nine years the school has been in existence, it has produced two teachers of the year, and two finalists for teacher of the year. Carol Strauss, the founding principal, and still the principal, has been named principal of the year. The icing on the cake for me this year is that Ashdale Secondary College is now a finalist in the school of the year, along with three other schools. For a school that did not exist nine years ago, to have this as its track record is testament to the independent public school system that this government has put in place. It is a science and technology school, as I have said. The school has a fabulous board, chaired by me, of course, and we all know how fabulous I am! Hon Martin Lewis, we have to sing our own praises sometimes, because if we do not, no-one else will do it for us. The school has a fabulous board. We have Alan Brian from Scitech; Professor Lynne Cohen from Edith Cowan University; Ayman Hayder, a local businessman; and parent and student representatives. We do an amazing job on the board, I think, in selling what the school is all about, and that is science and technology.

We have talked about the dedication of teachers. Recently, a group of teachers at the school got together and decided to hold a STEM camp for the students from the primary schools. STEM, which stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics, is a very important area of study, especially for girls. I probably have not fully explained how the Ashdale IPS cluster works. Ashdale Primary School, Madeley Primary School and Landsdale Primary School are currently part of our cluster at Ashdale Secondary College, and I am happy to say that a fourth school, East Landsdale Primary School, will join our cluster in the next academic year. The children at these three primary schools interact with the college from a very early age, and definitely from year 4, if not earlier, they do some of their classes at the college and get involved in some of our programs. Therefore, when children leave primary school and transition to high school, for the students in the Ashdale cluster it is not a problem, because they are very familiar with the school and can get on with the work of learning what it is like to be in high school.

As I have said, a group of teachers decided to run a STEM camp for the girls in primary school so that when they get to high school they might consider taking STEM subjects. The camp was run on a weekend. It was not a sleepover camp. It took place at the secondary college over two days at the weekend. The camp was run in collaboration with Scitech, because everything we do in IPS is through collaboration. The notice that teachers put out about the STEM camp said that they will need about 30 students to attend in order for it to be viable. The teachers gave up their weekend to attend the camp and they very enthusiastically ran a range of programs. Sixty-five young girls from the surrounding primary schools participated in that STEM camp to learn what sort of STEM careers they might be able to pursue later in life. That, again, is testament to the way in which this school and the community runs. Parents are very happy to send their children to Ashdale Secondary College because they know that their children will have exposure to some of the finest teachers this state has to offer.

People might think that because I am talking about the school in such glowing terms, it must be in a very wealthy and elite area. I want to quote from the “Ashdale Secondary College 2016 Independent Review Findings”. As all members would know, every school that is involved in the IPS system is subject to an annual independent review. I am pleased to say that Ashdale Secondary College has just come through its second review in glowing terms. The review looked at the important features of the school’s context that have an impact on student learning, and I quote —

The college opened in 2009 with 140 Year 8 students. It now has a population of 1512 and this number will continue to grow due to increased enrolments in the local primary schools. Currently, the Ashdale, Landsdale and Madeley primary schools together with the Secondary College form the Ashdale Cluster, which provides a holistic, integrated, K–12 learning environment. The geographic proximity of these schools lends itself to partnerships benefitting students, parents and teachers whether they are connected with ... the primary or secondary stage of schooling. An additional primary school to be located —

As I mentioned earlier —

in East Landsdale is planned to open in 2017. This new primary school will eventually further increase student numbers of Ashdale Secondary College and it is anticipated that the new primary school will also form part of the Ashdale Cluster.

This is important —

The college has an Index of Community SocioEducational Advantage of 1027 placing it in the 4th decile of all schools. The college's ICSEA has increased since the last IPS review undertaken in 2012, when it was 988, which is below the Australian mean of 1000. This reflects the changing demography of the area. Approximately 35% of students do not speak English at home and this provides challenges for the staff in achieving literacy targets.

That school has been able to achieve wonderful literacy targets. It continues —

College research also indicates that 52% of parents completed Year 12. The college also acknowledges the challenge of encouraging students to aim for a tertiary qualification, which may be due to 88% of the parent community not holding a degree.

Members can see that the school is located in an ordinary area. It is not a leafy green, elite, western suburbs, silver-spoon-in-their-mouth area; it is an ordinary area. What has been achieved at that school is an outstanding testament to and a snapshot of what has happened in the independent public school system.

When putting in place IPS—I was not on the architect's team when that policy was put together; had I been, I am sure I would have been a draftsman on policy alongside the architect because I am passionate about education—and when building anything, whether it is school infrastructure or any building, very good foundations are needed. We know that education is the foundation for life, but the structures we put in place around that must have very good foundations. One of the really important foundations in education is the Department of Education. How often do we talk in this place about bureaucrats and departments that do not perform, ministers who do not know what is going on in their departments and departments going off on tangents and not outlining clearly what they want to achieve? I would like to go on the record today and say that I think Sharyn O'Neill, the director general of the Department of Education, is by far and away the most outstanding director general in any government department.

Hon Peter Collier: I second that.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: The Minister for Education seconds that. I have not been fortunate enough to be part of cabinet, but I know of no other minister who so highly recommends their director general. I have two documents here that outline the strategic plans for 2012–2015 and 2016–2019 that this government has put together in collaboration with the Department of Education. Excellence and equity is the theme of the 2012–2015 strategic plan, and high performance and high care is the forward thinking for 2016–2019. One of the wonderful things about the department is that it forever looks at ways to change the system and to make it better. It does not just pay lip-service and say, “Yes, minister, we will do this”; it really puts its money where its mouth is. As I said, I pay tribute to Sharyn O'Neill and all the people in the department who do a stellar job.

The “Excellence and Equity: Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012–2015” concentrated on the areas of classroom practice, governance and decision-making, staffing, parents and community, support for staff and resourcing. Those major areas were looked at and the strategy clearly outlined what lay ahead and the opportunities that were going to be available in those areas. In classroom practice, we have moved from having less differentiation in the approach to teaching and supporting students to a more tailored and personalised approach to teaching and support. We need to know that within the system a child's individual needs are well looked after in the school. Again through my personal experience, I know that certainly holds true. The curriculum for students has expanded through programs across schools. We are taking advantage of technology and doing things online. If a child is not able to study a subject at their school, it will be offered online. We have collaboration across the schools. It is not just the primary and high schools in my cluster that collaborate; different high schools in the area collaborate to provide specialist programs, and I think that shows the strength of the system that has been created.

Parents and communities are really important. I know that when I went through high school, my parents were not very hands on—probably luckily in some respects—in my education. I did very well at school and I enjoyed it, but there was no real communication and there was no community spirit. In the system we have now, parents are encouraged from the beginning to be involved. They come onto boards, there are rotations through the boards and regular meetings are held with parents. Parents know exactly what IPS will deliver to students.

I have spoken about the importance of teachers, but the IPS scheme—this is through the foresight of the minister and the director general—has developed a fellowship program. The minister may talk about the funding of that program and how that funding came about, but because we were talking about it the other night, I will not do so because I think time will get away from me if I do. The existence of the independent public school principals' fellowship program is a result of the foresight of the Liberal–National government and its desire to achieve

excellent performance in education. As I said, Carol Strauss is the principal of Ashdale Secondary College and one of her deputy principals, a young woman—I am sure she will not mind me saying—aged 34, Melesha Sands, was, at the beginning of this year, appointed principal of Swan View Senior High School. She was chosen recently, along with 19 other principals from around the state, to participate in the fellowship program. People might say, “Big deal! It’s a fellowship program. What does that do?”, but those people get to go to Harvard University in the United States. I think that is amazing. Everyone knows about Harvard Law School and the Harvard Business School, and they definitely know about the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Those principals who were selected for the fellowship recently attended a two-week session at Harvard University. The fellowship is a partnership with Harvard University to offer participants the opportunity to meet peers from across the world, and they got together with a number of principals from across the world and did an intensive program.

They do not just get sent off on what people might think is a two-week junket to Harvard University; it is an incredibly tough program and they come back and are involved in a short-term change project with executive mentoring, and through that there will be further system reform. They choose a project in which they want to be involved. They collaborate with other fellows from the Harvard University program and they are given a mentor—someone within the department who has more experience than they—whom they can bounce ideas off. That in itself encourages someone like Melesha, who, at a young age, is a principal of an independent public school. She will now be a graduate of the Harvard education fellowship program. She will stay in that system and she will have many years ahead of her in which she will be able to contribute very much to the independent public school system.

When I started preparing my contribution to this motion today, I thought that time would probably get ahead of me and I would not be able to go through all the amazing achievements of this government. Before my time runs out, I will very quickly go over some of the statistics, facts and figures. I have given members a fairly good insight into the IPS system and how much I value it, how much it is valued in our community and how much people in the Ashdale Secondary College community value the work that is going on. I will quickly look at some statistics and the investment that we have made in public education. Since we came into government, investment in public education has increased by 70.3 per cent over the last decade. It has increased from \$2.8 billion in 2007–08—that figure is nothing to be sneezed at—to an estimated \$4.8 billion in 2016–17. That is what this government has been, and will be, investing in education. Every one of those dollars is very valuable. I am very proud to stand in this place today and talk about the achievements of this government.

Based on projected student enrolments, the average spend on a full-time equivalent student in 2016–17 will be \$16 784, which is an increase of \$4 951, or 41.8 per cent, for each student compared with the 2007–08 budget. I could put many more facts and figures on the record in my contribution today but others will have to do that, including the minister when he makes his contribution, and my colleagues.

All that is left for me to say is that I am absolutely delighted that on 20 June 2013 I had the foresight to put this motion on the notice paper so that we could all stand here and talk over four hours about the achievements of the Barnett Liberal government. I congratulate the government for those achievements. I am very proud to be on this side of the house and I commend the motion to the house.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [2.02 pm]: It will not surprise the house to learn that I will not agree to congratulate the government on its claim of excellent performance in the education portfolio, but I am very happy to put on the record my appreciation of those people on the ground in WA schools and in school communities who do excellent work every day. I congratulate them for that.

I agree with one of the points made by Hon Liz Behjat: education is indeed transformative. It is the single biggest intervention that the state will make in a citizen’s life. From time to time, we may interact with the health system. Public health matters, such as having clean water, sewerage systems and those sorts of things, are important interventions in the lives of citizens. But the intervention that the education system has in the life of every single one of us, and the capacity for the education system to transform lives and to make parents’ postcodes, degree of education and income completely irrelevant to the outcome, is bar none. That is why it is important that we get it right and why it is disappointing that I do not think this house can congratulate the government on its claim of an excellent performance.

In the gallery today are parents of students who attend a number of schools in the western suburbs and the inner western suburbs of Perth. Some of them are part of a Facebook group called “We Need a High School”. The issues that those parents face, which I want to touch on in my comments today, are about the capacity of existing schools, poor planning for future schools, and their aspirations and frustrations, I guess, as parents of students who attend overcrowded schools in our inner-city areas and in the western suburbs in particular. These are not the only parents whom I have had conversations with about these kinds of concerns. Parents in those inner-city areas where density is increasing have real issues. Many of those schools are very old. Some of the first schools built in the state are in those inner-city suburbs. They are on much smaller land footprints than the land footprints that we make for schools that we build in 2016. Those old schools are at capacity. Many of them are

overcrowded. Those parents want real solutions for those schools. We have pressure points in those high-density areas in the inner city and pressure points up the west coast because of decisions that were made, depending on which schools we include in the cache of schools that were closed, going back 15 or 20 years, and we have real pressures on schools in our new outer suburban population growth areas. Some of the parents in the gallery today are here to listen to this debate. I think they will be pretty keen to hear what the minister has to say about his plans to address their issues.

I want to talk about the “We Need a High School” group. I encourage members to look at their Facebook page, which sets out why the parents in this group got together and decided to be more active in ensuring that the future for their children in public education is as good as it could be. I will quote what they say about the description of themselves as a group. The page states —

Raise awareness and gather support for a much needed high school in the WA western suburbs. We believe in access to high quality public education for all.

We are a group of parents and community members in Perth’s western suburbs who have serious concerns about the capacity of our local high schools to manage growing student numbers.

In particular, we feel that the WA Government’s current strategy to deal with increasing student numbers is not sufficient.

Department of Education plans to increase the capacity of existing high schools not only falls short of meeting the predicted demand but also means further overcrowding at these schools which will have a negative impact on educational outcomes.

A new high school in the western suburbs is a necessity and we cannot wait another decade for this to happen.

This page —

They are talking about the Facebook page —

is intended to act as a community forum to raise awareness of the issues and encourage discussion.

Our aim is to seek answers from the Education Minister and effect change in the planning and timing of the construction of a new high school.

We believe in access to high quality public education for all.

I wanted to talk about another group of parents—to a certain degree, there is some overlap—who wrote to me and the Minister for Education in August. These are parents from the inner-city area where there is higher density. The letter is signed by eight parent representatives on school boards. It is about a schools planning forum in August 2016 and states —

On behalf of the School Boards and P&C’s of the signatory schools below, we would like to invite you to participate in the Schools Planning Forum to be held in August 2016.

They talk about the dates they are suggesting. It continues —

As you would be aware, there is great concern amongst our school communities regarding the increasing pressure on our primary schools and the overcrowding of our local secondary schools.

As representatives of our school communities, we have been liaising with each other to discuss our mutual concerns and work towards a productive solution to the problem. We envisage this forum as an opportunity to engage with the key decision makers about the existing plans to address the school overcrowding issues. As parents, we also see this forum as an opportunity to have input into the planning decisions that will impact on our children’s primary and secondary schooling.

From discussions at our preliminary meetings, and broader discussion with parents at our schools, there is a strong sense of concern at the information vacuum that currently exists surrounding secondary schooling for our children.

Parents are concerned their children will be graduating primary school at a time when your own public projections are forecasting a 2000+ shortfall in secondary school places locally. With the information we have to hand, our only option in public schooling will be to send our children to a school bursting at the seams.

In response to the broad range of issues concerning our collective schools, we believe there are two main issues to be addressed. Firstly, the enrolment pressure on our primary schools and the subsequent overcrowding of these school premises. The second issue is the pressure on our secondary schools and our concern about the enrolment projections for Churchlands SHS and Mount Lawley SHS.

As a result of discussions, we believe a two-pronged approach is required to deal with the secondary school problem. The first, a short term solution, would see the opening of a City Beach (or nearby) secondary school along the original time frame of 2019/2020. The second, a long term solution, would see a new inner city secondary school open with a view to easing the pressure on the surrounding secondary schools (including Churchlands, Mt Lawley and the new City Beach SHS).

In addition to our preliminary discussions, we require further information from yourself and the Education Department in order to present informed and constructive options to our school parents at the proposed forum.

...

We appreciate that some information may be commercial-in-confidence (such as lease values, land costs etc) and we do not require that level of detail. If you are unable to provide the requested information, we would appreciate the reasons as to why the information is being withheld.

Under the heading "Primary School Planning" these parents asked —

1. What do the Department's growth charts for *North Perth Primary, Kyilla Primary, Mount Hawthorn Primary, Highgate Primary, West Leederville Primary, Churchlands Primary, City Beach Primary, Floreat Park Primary, Doubleview Primary, and Woodlands Primary schools* predict the growth in enrolments to be for the decade 2016–2026 (on a year-by-year basis)?
2. What is the department's plan to deal with the projected enrolment in these primary schools over the next decade, with particular reference to building works and/or land acquisition plans?
3. Are the Department's Master Plans/ Strategic Plans for each of the above mentioned schools available for parents to view (please provide details)?

In respect to a proposed school at the City Beach site, the parents ask —

4. What factors contributed to your decision to delay the City Beach High school until 2027?
5. Are any negotiations currently taking place, or a planned to take place, with the International School to negotiate an earlier release of their lease?
6. What action, if any, is being taken to explore the four other potential City Beach school sites nominated in your October 2015 media statement 'Western Suburbs School Planning Underway'?
7. If any of the four sites have been ruled out, please detail the reason(s) why each site was deemed unsuitable.

In respect to secondary school planning, the questions are —

8. I refer to the following statements on the Education Department website and ask; What is the plan to deal with the remaining 2000+ shortfall in secondary school places between 2019 and 2026?

The quote from the website is —

'Projections show that there will be a shortfall of available school placements for approximately 4000 students in the western suburbs by 2026.'

AND

'The strategy includes creating a further 2000 places by expanding the capacity of Shenton College and Churchlands Senior High School.'

9. What is the projected enrolment growth rate at Mount Lawley SHS during 2019–2026 as a result of increased students at feeder schools such as Highgate, North Perth and Kyilla Primary Schools?
10. Has the department considered the further pressure on Mount Lawley SHS if parents at Mount Hawthorn PS and West Leederville PS opt to enrol their children there (as Churchlands SHS and Shenton College become increasingly overcrowded)? What will the projected enrolments be at MLSHS under these circumstances?

In respect to an inner city secondary school, the parents ask —

11. Other than the City Beach High school, are there any plans in place to build a new secondary school in the inner city and/or western suburbs between 2019/20–2026/27?
12. How far have these plans progressed?

13. What potential sites/ potential suburbs have been identified?
14. What are the criteria for any new sites, with reference to:
 - access to transport
 - availability of green space
 - site size and student capacity
 - capacity of the site for future expansion
 - timeframe to build and commission new facilities
 - other criteria ...
15. What is the available budget for any new school site?
16. What is the time frame for any proposed build?

In respect to school boundaries, the parents ask —

1. What is the proposed catchment zone for the new City Beach High School?
2. Who has the final say on school boundary zones? Is it the Education Department or the Minister?
3. Does the department have any plans to amend the local in-take boundaries for Churchlands SHS, Shenton College, Mount Lawley SHS, and if so, what is the time-frame for these changes?
4. If yes, to above, what consultation will be undertaken with parents prior to any decisions being made?

The letter continues —

As you would appreciate, parents make decision about where to live based on many factors, including the school boundary zones in which their house is situation. Parents are feeling very nervous about the current situation and will appreciate the opportunity to learn more at our Schools Forum.

We will also be inviting representatives from the Department who can speak to the specific issues we have raised.

Given the importance of this issue and the forward planning implications over the next decade, we will also be inviting the Shadow Education Minister to our forum. Local MPs Eleni Evangel and Sean L'Estrange, along with the Labor Candidates for Perth and Churchlands, will also be invited.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding the issues we have raised prior to 5 August.

Thank you for your assistance.

That is signed by the board chairs at Mount Hawthorn Primary School, North Perth Primary School, City Beach Primary School, Churchlands Primary School, Woodlands Primary School, Kyilla Primary School, Floreat Park Primary School and Highgate Primary School. That forum did not proceed. In the intervening period, the member for Perth and the member for Churchlands invited—I think it was select, but I stand to be corrected—select representatives from the school boards to attend a forum that the member for Perth and the member for Churchlands were to host with the Minister for Education in attendance. That forum went ahead. The minister will have the opportunity in about 31 minutes to put his view of what happened at that meeting. Certainly, the takeaway that parents explained to me was essentially this message: trust me. Except they were not talking about me; “me” refers to the Minister for Education.

Hon Peter Collier: I trust you.

Hon SUE ELLERY: They do too. It is the Minister for Education whom —

Hon Peter Collier: I will deliver.

Hon SUE ELLERY: He has not so far and they are feeling pretty frustrated.

Hon Peter Collier: I am sure they are, but it is worth the wait; I promise you.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is the kind of language that they reported back to me was being used at the meeting and that did not give them a great deal of comfort, I have to say. That is how they have explained it to me.

The issue is that the vast majority of parents across Western Australia are actively engaged in the education of their children and in decision-making about the education of their children. They do not wait until their children are in year 6 to make decisions about where their children will attend secondary school. They make those decisions well in advance and they make decisions about where they will buy houses or rent or move to well in advance of their children having to front up to their first day at secondary school. That is part of their frustration

as well because these people want their children to go to public schools. They want their children to go to strongly performing public schools and they want to make the decision about where they live well in advance of their children's first day of year 7. They want as much information as they can possibly get to assist them with that decision.

Not unlike the description that Hon Liz Behjat gave members about what the Liberal Party did when it was in opposition, the Labor Party in opposition has been making some decisions and consultation around policy decisions as well. We have also held a number of forums. We certainly had a great session with the parents at some of these inner city schools back in May to work with them to identify the criteria that they would want from an alternative government to make decisions on new secondary schools in the catchment areas of the schools they represented. We had a good session and I thank those parents for coming along and making a valuable contribution to how we will make the decisions that we will announce in due course about our solutions to these problems.

As I said, it is not only about parents' concern about which school their children will go to because they want to make decisions about where they live et cetera.

There are real issues around the size of schools and when we reach a point, particularly at secondary schools, at which we are starting to compromise, if you like, the degree of individual pastoral care students can be given because the school is just too big. There is a view that the prospect of Shenton College and Churchlands Senior High School, two fantastic schools, heading towards enrolment sizes of 3 000, is on the other side of the tipping point. Parents are worried about their children, figuratively and literally, being lost in such a big crowd of students. They are concerned that decisions have not been made to this point and we are working on a set of budget papers that refer to schools heading toward 3 000 without an alternative in place. The other issues around size, I guess, to some extent go to the issue of transportable classrooms. It is not about what is on the inside of transportable classrooms. They are very different in 2016 from the way they were when I was at school. I distinctly remember doing French, sitting in what I reckon was the equivalent of a tin box. Because a small number of students were doing French, we were not in the bigger classrooms; we were in the tin-box transportable. I distinctly remember doing a test with the sweat running down my hand, along the pen and onto the paper because in the middle of summer, we were sitting in a sweatbox.

Hon Liz Behjat interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Indeed. If I remembered any of the French, I could possibly say something in response to Hon Liz Behjat, but I cannot. I can ask for six stamps at a post office in Paris, but that is about the best I can do. "Six timbres", if members want to know.

The point is that the inside of transportables is not the issue. On the inside they are excellent classrooms; it is the infrastructure that is around them, or not around them, as the case may be. Some schools have in excess of 18 or 19 transportables, such as Makybe Rise Primary School, which has 27. An extra toilet block does not come with that yet there are additional students in 27 transportables. When I visited, I think, Meadow Springs Primary School in the Mandurah area, a couple of years ago now, it had more transportable classrooms than brick and tile classrooms. Closer to home for me is Bletchley Park Primary School, a fantastic school, doing a great job but it has an enormous number of transportables. That means there is less play space. The toilet blocks needed to go with the additional students are not necessarily provided nor are extra staffroom-type facilities for the extra staff. The add-ons that we would think go towards making those transportables feel a bit more as though they are part of the school, such as concrete paving along the outside, a cover over the top so when it is raining and the kids step out they are not immediately in the rain and stepping into muddy ground, are not necessarily paid for by the department when the transportables are brought in. Schools have to find the money to make those differences. Those differences do not go to addressing things such as the play space but they go to making transportables seem a bit more a real part of the school and that kids are not turning into drowned rats as they step out into the rain and into the mud. Those things make a difference. Parents, particularly in the outer suburbs of the metropolitan area and even some of the outer suburbs of regional cities, are expressing concern about why we are not building enough schools to avoid that situation occurring for such a long time.

Nobody is unrealistic enough to say we can never use transportables. That would be crazy because suburbs change; they grow older and get regenerated and some become younger again. There must therefore be some capacity to be flexible and to manage the peaks and troughs. However, when we found ourselves in this situation, we were not building enough schools to keep up with the population growth. I tracked back over the budget papers for the last five years when Labor was in government and looked at what happened in the last five years of this government.

A government member interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I hope I am not disturbing anyone!

I am talking about new schools, not replacement schools, because Labor in government built a number of replacement schools. I am not counting them; if we did, the difference in the number between what Labor and Liberal built would be even more stark. In our last five years, we built 24 primary schools and in the last five years this government has built 20 or 21. It is worth noting the difference in what was going on in Western Australia at those times because despite the fact that our economy has slowed, it is still the case that WA's population is growing and that more students are enrolling in public schools. If I were in government, I too would lay that solely at the ground of my achievements as Minister for Education, but that is not the sole driver. The economy is having an impact on whether parents can afford to send their children to non-government schools and pay the fees attached to them. We are seeing increasing numbers of enrolments in public schools but we are building fewer schools than what we were building when the population growth and transfer between the two sectors was nowhere near what it is now. The government is not keeping up. Its planning and building is not keeping up with the population growth in our schools and the population needs in metropolitan Perth. That is starting to agitate people, particularly those on the outer-metropolitan ring of Perth and those in the higher density inner-city areas. The government has got it wrong.

The notion that we would support a motion congratulating the government on its excellent performance when there are stark needs and parents, who have a million other things they have to manage and deal with—work, family–life balance and the rest of it—have had to find a way to form themselves into activist groups to address the issues they want to address, says that this house is not in a position of congratulating the government on its excellent performance. A number of schools are under real capacity pressure and that is due to not just decisions made by the then Minister for Education, Hon Colin Barnett, when he decided to close a bunch of schools on the western coastal strip; it is also about decisions the government is making about capital expenditure now and in its last three budgets. It has not kept up with the need to keep building more schools and it cannot be congratulated for excellent performance when there are too many overcrowded schools and too many schools with large numbers of transportables.

I want to talk about a little bit about the number of transportables at some of those schools. The schools that have large numbers of transportables include Churchlands Senior High School, 36; Aubin Grove Primary School, 26; Baldivis Primary School, 16; Bertram Primary School, 15; Bletchley Park Primary School, 17; Currambine Primary School, 15; Lansdale Primary School, 17; Meadow Springs Primary School, 22; Makybe Rise Primary School, 27; West Byford Primary School, 22; and—I could do a whole 45-minute speech on Yanchep—Yanchep District High School, 20 transportables. That is too many and that number of transportable classrooms on primary school sites is too many. It means the kids cannot run out and play. One of the schools I visited at one point told me it was replacing the grass—not on the ovals because it did not have an oval anymore—within the confines of the school twice a year at its own cost because there were too many little feet running around before school, at recess, at lunchtime and after school, which is what those kids should be doing. They should be running around within the confines of the school but we do not expect a school to have to replace the grass twice a year at enormous cost because the planning and building program for the suburbs and community around it has just not kept up with the demand for school sizes. It is exacerbated in inner-city suburbs because the size of the footprint is so small. That is how schools were built a hundred or more years ago. When new schools are built now, about a 3.5 hectare footprint is needed. That varies depending on whether the school is attached to a shared space with a local council or whatever. Some of our inner-city schools are nearly half that size. For example, Highgate Primary School is on a footprint of 1.74 hectares and Kyilla Primary School is on 1.37 hectares, although in some sense it is in a particularly good position because it has a fantastic open space next to it that is the site of a very popular weekly market. Kyilla is in a slightly different position in that it has that huge open space next to it. If students from Highgate Primary School want to cross the road to go to the park, they have to cross the very busy Bulwer Street. At that park across the road there are from time to time antisocial activities, let me call them that, around the toilet blocks. We would not necessarily want little kids walking over there for sport, or, if they did, additional staff would need to stand around the toilet blocks so that the kids were not stepping on syringes or whatever else happens there from time to time.

The land footprint at Mount Hawthorn Primary School is 2.39 hectares, at North Perth Primary School it is 2.25 hectares, and the tiniest of all is West Leederville Primary School at 1.8 hectares. West Leederville has done well to squash so much into that space. There is fantastic educational stuff going on at that school in such a tiny space. The situation is particularly exacerbated in inner-city schools. There is increasing density, a movement from the non-government sector to the public sector, and smaller block sizes that the schools were built on. We add to that a plain, old-fashioned failure to plan for secondary schools and other primary schools in that vicinity in the last five years or so. If these decisions had been made five years ago, schools would have been built and operational by now. When those things are added together, there is legitimately an unhappy group of parents who are really concerned about making sure their children access the very best public education that it is possible to give them.

In trying to get across the detail of this issue, for a bit over a year I tried to get hold of whatever information I could about the Department of Education's strategic asset plan. All agencies are required to have a strategic asset plan. This plan sets out the existing assets and what areas the department—or whatever agency it is—will have to make alternative arrangements to plan into the future. Through the estimates process I asked the government to provide that plan to me. I might even have asked a question in the house. The Department of Education's annual report specifically refers to the strategic asset plan. It identifies that there is a document it is working towards. It addresses it in the annual report as well as addressing the enrolment pressures and the need to build more schools. The Department of Education's annual report, which is a public document, refers to another document. I asked whether I could see that other document. The decision was ultimately, "No, you can't." I wrote to the Auditor General pretty much a year ago to say, "I don't think this is reasonable but I invite you to form your own view about whether or not it is reasonable that that information has been withheld." There was no attempt by the Department of Education or the minister to say, "You can't have this bit of it because that bit is subject to current consideration by cabinet, but you can have this." I do not accept that the whole of the strategic asset plan is actively under consideration by cabinet. I do not believe that that is the case. I am sure that bits of it are from time to time, but I do not accept that the whole of that strategic asset plan is before cabinet and therefore should come under the heading "cabinet-in-confidence".

Anyway, the Auditor General inquired into the subject that I put in my letter, and a number of other matters. The Auditor General said —

All 3 Ministers —

Including Hon Peter Collier, who was the minister who said no to me —

claimed that the information sought was covered by Cabinet confidentiality and could therefore not be provided to Parliament. Cabinet-in-confidence protects disclosure of information that would reveal deliberations and decisions of Cabinet. This is the first time we have had to consider whether Cabinet confidentiality applied to information that a Minister had decided not to provide to Parliament.

The Auditor General went on to describe the particular issues. In respect to the education issue, he said —

The decision by the Minister not to provide the Department of Education's ... strategic asset plan ... was not reasonable and therefore not appropriate. I formed this opinion as information contained within the SAP was not prepared solely for consideration by Cabinet, and some of the information it contains is publicly available. The Minister did not consider, for instance, if he could provide a redacted version of the SAP.

The Minister properly sought advice from the Department before responding to the question.

This was the question I asked in Parliament —

The Department recommended against providing the information to Parliament as the SAP was used in preparing its budget submission for consideration by Cabinet and should not be released. The Department's advice to the Minister was brief, and did not contain analysis or explore options to provide parts of the information to Parliament.

The Department advised that it sought advice from the Department of Treasury before making its recommendation to the Minister but could not provide evidence of the discussions.

I find that an extraordinary breach of transparency and accountability provisions. The Department of Education advised the Auditor General that it sought advice from the Department of Treasury before it made its recommendation to the Minister for Education, but it could not actually provide any evidence of that to the Auditor General. I personally find that extraordinary. For a government that likes to claim it is transparent and open, here we have a department saying that it advised the minister on the basis of advice from the Department of Treasury; so I assume the Auditor General asked to be shown that advice and the department could not provide evidence of the discussions. The Auditor General went on —

The Department did not seek advice from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet or from the State Solicitor's Office on the application of Cabinet-in-confidence ...

While we accept that information which would reveal the deliberations and decisions of Cabinet is confidential, there should not be an assumption that all information associated with the SAP is also confidential. In this regard, we noted the following:

- An agency does not develop a SAP solely to seek funding in the budget. It is also developed to be an essential business planning tool.

That is why it is referred to in the department's annual report. The Auditor General's letter continues —

In addition to identifying investment priorities and other information for Cabinet, the SAP contains general business planning information such as a stocktake of assets, which may not be considered by Cabinet.

- We reviewed the Department’s SAP and found multiple uses of public information. For example:
- information on the number of students and a breakdown throughout the school system is available from the Department’s annual report and webpage
- demographic information on housing and population is taken from public sources such as the Department of Planning’s *Directions 2031* and *WA Tomorrow (2012)* reports

some information on capital investment is available in the annual budget papers. For example, we identified total funding amounts for 3 new secondary schools in both the SAP and the 2014-15 Budget Papers.

The Department accepted Treasury’s advice based on existing protocols for the handling of SAPs. In our view, better practice would have been for the Department to analyse the content of the SAP and give the Minister options for providing Parliament with those parts that would not reveal Cabinet’s decisions or deliberations.

While we acknowledge the short time frames for consideration and response to questions without notice, the Minister could have requested additional time if needed.

The Auditor General goes on to say that even though questions were asked during the estimates process in December, the department declined to provide any information. He states —

In my view, the decision not to provide any asset planning information to a parliamentary committee tasked with considering matters relating to the financial administration of the state was also not reasonable.

The Auditor General went on to recommend that the department enhance its procedures for addressing requests for information from Parliament.

The point I want to make about that is that for Parliament to assist the groups of parents who have come to see me because they are concerned about matters relating to planning for schools, Parliament needs to be provided with information. The Auditor General’s report reveals that the Department of Education, through its minister, took a kind of take-no-prisoners approach to providing answers; that is, it did not consider whether it could provide any of them, it did not consider whether it could provide information in a redacted form, and it did not consider seeking additional time to see whether it could provide information in any other format. It did not consider any of those options; it just said no. I think that that not only adds to my frustration in trying to do my best to assist those parents who want information about planning arrangements, but also is an insult to Parliament. However, it adds to the story and why the parents who attended the forum organised by the member for Perth and the member for Churchlands felt a little dissatisfied with the outcome of that meeting. Those parents are not prepared to accept, “You just need to trust me. Any minute now, I am about to make an announcement and you will love it.” They do not accept that as a reasonable proposition, and their lack of trust is, I guess, amplified when I tell them, “I am trying to get additional information. I even went to the Auditor General. I have been trying for over a year and still the department has determined that it will not reveal that information.” I think that goes to people’s level of distrust in this government and it is really disappointing that is the point we have come to.

I want to touch on one other small matter—it is not small to the family involved—that is not related to the planning around infrastructure issues. This is about the lockdown, if you like, of local intake areas as a result of decisions by the department about who can attend which school. I got an email but I have not checked whether I can reveal the name of the person who sent it. I will read the email and I will get my office to check with the author of the email and if I need to make a member’s statement or in some way declare to Parliament later that I can put a name to it, I will. This email came to me on 13 September. In fact, it was sent to the minister and copied to me, so I think that means that I can reveal the name. It reads —

Hi, my name is Georgie Fennell.

I wrote to you in year 6 regarding 10 million being taken away from my school, Yanchep District High School.

My little sister, Charli Fennell, was recently accepted into an approved specialist program for Duncraig Senior High School known as the Triathlon Program. Her position in the school was accepted through this program and she received an acceptance letter to confirm it. Charli has just received a letter

announcing that her position is no longer valid due to the Education Department changing the rules. I understand that we live in Yanchep and the school is in Duncraig and that is by no means local, but my sister was so excited and she was so happy she would be leaving our school. At the moment there are plans for a new senior school to be opening in 2018 in Yanchep, but due to how our school is currently run I'm not sure she is ... enthusiastic about the new one. Upon opening the letter my sister was in tears and utterly devastated, I remember trying for the gifted and talented program myself and failing to receive a place and I was heart broken so I can only imagine how my sister feels in the fact that she was accepted and now her hopes are shattered. The school I am currently going to (Y.D.H.S) is not a school I want my sister being stuck in ... My teachers try their absolute hardest to discipline some of these kids and struggle as these 'young adults' believe they can do whatever they want. I'm in year 9 and it has not been a good year ... I want my sister to enjoy high school and I want it to be an experience that she can look back on without regret. I refuse to not act on the situation because I love my sister and I absolutely can not stand and do nothing when she is so upset and devastated. Please explain to me why such a cruel thing has happened to a student who has worked extremely hard to be where she is and why you have taken her hard work and thrown it in the dirt.

If you could please take time to reply I would appreciate it.

She attached to that email the letter that her sister received on 9 September, which states —

It is with great regret that I inform you, that contrary to previous correspondence —

In which she was told that she had been accepted —

I am not able to accept your daughter ... into the Duncraig Triathlon Academy ...

I have recently been informed by the Department of Education that, due to enrolment pressures for Year 7 2017 and beyond, I cannot accept any enrolments from outside our Local Intake Area ... other than for the Gifted and Talented Academic program.

They were told that they could appeal that decision. I understand that decisions are made from time to time about local intake areas and restrictions —

Hon Peter Collier: That has been changed and it changed yesterday.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Excellent. That is really good news, and I thank the minister for pointing that out to me. What is really disappointing, though, is that it got to the point at which the offer was made and then rejected. If we are going to make decisions about changing the boundaries for schools, we need to do all of that up-front so that students do not apply, because they will know up-front that they will not get in.

Hon Peter Collier: She is in. Commonsense prevailed.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you very much. I have congratulated the minister already and I will congratulate him again.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy): Order, members!

Hon SUE ELLERY: I thank the minister for fixing that problem. However, it should not be the case that a decision about intake boundaries is made after offers have been made and accepted by students and their parents. With that, I indicate that we are not at all in a position to agree with the proposition that this government should be congratulated.

HON ALYSSA HAYDEN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.47 pm]: I thank Hon Liz Behjat for bringing on this motion. It is a very worthy motion and a very worthy topic to be debated in this house. It is a shame that we always hear the same rhetoric from members opposite that they can never congratulate the government. Perhaps instead of congratulating the government, they could acknowledge the impressive investment that this government has made in the education portfolio. The education portfolio covers the curriculum, teachers, students and infrastructure.

What needs to be understood is that our teachers and students are obviously the most valuable part of the education system. Teachers need to be supported with infrastructure and the right curriculum to do their job to the best of their ability and for the students to learn and take on the best opportunities available to them. I have no doubt, standing on this side of the chamber, that this government believes in all of that and has invested wholeheartedly in delivering the best opportunities for all students in Western Australia. The fact that Western Australia invests the most into its teachers demonstrates exactly that. This state has the highest paid teachers in the whole of Australia, and they deserve every cent they get. We understand and truly value their commitment and their contributions to the young minds of the future. They are the most important thing in our

education system. I will repeat that: they are the best paid in the whole country and we would not deprive them of one cent. We often hear in the media that we are not investing in education, but if we had to pick only one thing that we should be extremely proud of, it would be that our teachers are paid the money they are worth because we believe in them and so we reward them accordingly. This year, our teachers taught a record number of students. At the beginning of 2016, 296 377 students were enrolled in our public schools, and we welcomed a total of 450 000 students across the state. Everyone in this place recognises that Western Australia has attracted a huge growth in population, which of course puts a lot of pressure on our education system and our schools.

I know that the Minister for Education is extremely proud to stand behind his teachers and to stand behind the fact that he has the best paid teachers on record across the country. That is unlike the situation under Labor. At the beginning of this year, the minister was yelling from the hilltops that this government has put a teacher in front of every classroom. Although we had a massive increase in the number of students across the state, we did not let down one student, one classroom, one parent or one graduating teacher—we had a teacher in front of every classroom. The Labor government in previous years could not put a teacher in front of every classroom. Therefore, when Labor members say they are the people for the teachers and they are the people for the schools, I am sorry, but they could not even put a teacher in front of every classroom.

Hon Peter Collier: They had the lowest-paid teachers in the nation.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Yes, the lowest paid.

Hon Nick Goiran: Who was the minister for education at the time?

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: They had too many. I could not keep up with them.

Hon Jim Chown: Mark McGowan.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: That is right. The Leader of the opposition, Hon Mark McGowan, was the minister at the time, and he now wants to be Premier.

Several members interjected.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I hope he was on holidays, because if he was working and that was his performance —

Hon Peter Collier: He presided over the lowest paid teachers and the highest number of vacancies ever.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Yes. Thank you very much, minister.

Hon Peter Collier: Pleasure.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: We have a minister who cares immensely and puts a lot into his portfolio. We can contrast the two governments. The previous Labor government could not put a teacher in front of every classroom, and our teachers were the lowest paid across the country. The minister in that government, Hon Mark McGowan, the now Leader of the Opposition, is asking the Western Australian public to trust him and to let him lead this state at the next election. The government that is in office now has put a teacher in front of every classroom, even though there has been a massive increase in student numbers into our school system, and, on top of that, our teachers are the highest paid across the country. Therefore, before members opposite condemn us for our lack of ability in education, they should reflect back to 2008. Do they want to go back to the situation that we had in 2008? I do not think so. I can tell members opposite hand on heart that no parent, no student and no teacher in this state would want to go back to the Labor Party's record when it was in government.

Hon Sue Ellery made a number of statements about what the Labor government did compared with what this government is doing. She claimed that the Labor government built 24 schools and we have built only 21 schools. We have actually built 41 brand-new schools across the state of Western Australia since 2009. We have also delivered a 70.3 per cent increase in the total education budget. In 2007–08—the days we do not want to go back to—the education budget was only \$2.84 billion. The education budget has now increased to \$4.84 billion. That is another reason we do not want to go back to the dark ages when Labor was in government and Hon Mark McGowan was in charge of the education portfolio.

Hon Jim Chown: It is lip-service only.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Yes, that is it. It is all talk, and no action, as we talked about last week in the motion about the environment.

This government is also growing the investment in our students. We value not only our teachers, but also every child and student in this state. We have increased the investment into each child by 41.8 per cent. Back in the dark ages, every student across Western Australia got \$11 833. Under this government, every student gets \$16 784. We are investing more in our students than the Labor government could have ever dreamed of. Infrastructure and investment in schools has increased from \$300.4 million to \$1.09 billion. I will go into that a bit later, because the East Metropolitan Region, which I am extremely proud of, has been a huge beneficiary of

this government's investment in schools. As I have said, this government has built 41 new schools across Western Australia since 2009, and 21 schools are currently being built or in the works to be completed between 2017 and 2020.

Hon Sue Ellery said that there are not enough toilets and other infrastructure to cater for the increased population in our schools. I am glad she brought up that topic, because we now have fewer transportables than we had in 2008. In 2008, there were 1 801 transportables. Even though there has been a massive increase in the population of students at our schools, with an additional 40 000 students, we now have only 1 833 transportables in our schools. Therefore, Hon Sue Ellery cannot stand here and say that this government is the one that is putting transportables into schools. Obviously, as has been reflected on, we need to be flexible as suburbs change and grow. We have built more schools and we have put more money into infrastructure.

I now want to go to Hon Sue Ellery's comments about how schools have old and outdated toilets. Hon Sue Ellery said that the Labor government built 21 new schools, but it did not invest in the current infrastructure. I have a perfect example in Maida Vale Primary School. Maida Vale Primary School celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2012. That school has not had one cent spent on it for 75 years. The teachers at that school are still using toilets that were built 75 years ago. They have two old fashioned toilets with concrete floors—members will know what I mean—where the wall does not come to the floor, and there is a little vanity divider between the two toilets.

Hon Peter Katsambanis: It must be before my time!

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: It is way before the member's time! In the modern year that we live in, we are expecting our hardworking teachers to put up with below-average standards. I went out to Maida Vale Primary School in 2011. We were rolling out the new program of putting 40-kilometre-an-hour flashing signs near schools. I would like to talk about that later as well. I identified that because Maida Vale Primary School is on Kalamunda Road, which is an extremely busy road during peak hour—which is, of course, also our school time—it is very worthy and in need of getting those 40-kay flashing signs. I went out to that school to introduce myself, and I asked them whether they would be interested in getting those signs. Little did I know that an hour later, I would finally escape from the school, after they had taken me around and showed me the very poor and substandard school administration block and sick bay block, and also told me that the school lacks a canteen. The infrastructure at that school is so old that the teachers found it embarrassing to show me the standard of the school that they have to operate in. There is a new subdivision in the area, and families who are moving into the school's catchment area are walking up to the front door of the school and then walking away. Those new families are put off simply by the entry and administration block of the school. They have not even gone past the front reception desk before they have decided that they are not going to send their children to that school.

The sad thing about that is that it is a fantastic school. The teachers are amazing. The principal, Darren Greaves, is second to none. Darren Greaves is a young man, who moved to the school at that time. He joined a wonderful team that embraced him as their leader and they are working together and delivering a fantastic curriculum and programs for the students at Maida Vale Primary School. I think there are about 383 students at the school at the moment. The school was losing students from new families coming to their school simply because the Labor government had never invested in upgrading the infrastructure.

I wrote letters to not only the then Minister for Transport, but also the Minister for Education, to get 40-kilometre-an-hour road signs outside the school and asking them to have a good look at that school. The area had a growing population and the school had magnificent teachers and a magnificent principal, and I said that we needed to get in there to support them by providing the infrastructure they deservedly needed because it was so outdated.

Hon Peter Collier visited the school in 2012. I showed him around and it did not take him long at all to agree 100 per cent that this school was well behind and needed to be upgraded and invested in immediately. He acted extremely quickly. In December, I was extremely proud to have had the privilege to go back to the school to announce to the parents and citizens president—a dynamic young lady—the principal, Darren Greaves, the P&C members and the teachers a \$5 million upgrade to Maida Vale Primary School. Members would think that those people had won lotto personally. They were elated and over the moon. The government acknowledged that the conditions at their school were so bad that it would invest \$5 million into the upgrade of the school. The school got a new administration block so that sick kids would not have to lie under the reception desks of the administration ladies as they count the registration fees and do all their paperwork. A separate sick bay has been created, with a medical cabinet on the wall; they did not have that before. The administration staff now have their own admin block and four new classrooms and a new canteen have been built. An old house over 100 years old was being used as the canteen. People were too scared to walk on the canteen floor. No-one was allowed into the canteen and they sold food from the door just in case a child fell through the floor. The staff toilets have also been refurbished and extended. We took them out of the dark ages and gave the staff modern toilet facilities. They now have a refurbished staffroom and a new car park. No longer do parents have to drop off their kids into the mud and gravel car park out the front. One of the most important people at any school is the gardener. The

gardener has finally got a shed in which he can put all his stuff. A wonderful way to make students and teachers proud of their school is to make sure that school gardens are maintained and invested in. The students and staff can now walk around their school with its beautiful manicured garden with their heads held high. Maida Vale Primary School sits at the bottom of the foothills of Kalamunda Road. It has a magnificent bush setting out the back and the gardener has done a wonderful job to make sure it is in keeping with the natural bushland around the school. It is a wonderful thing for us to provide him with his own space and a place to lock away his tools.

I know that everyone at the school is extremely proud of what they have and they celebrate it every single day that they turn up. The new families that now move into the area do not turn away when they rock up at the front door. They are now enrolling in the school. My only fear now is that enrolments may exceed the limit and we will have to work out something, but they have the room to move because the government has invested money to create four new classrooms in addition to everything else that I just spoke about.

To keep members in the loop, in December 2012 when the school was upgraded just before the new school year, 40-kilometre-an-hour flashing signs were also installed. Students at Maida Vale Primary School can arrive at the school safely and the flashing signs provide motorists with a warning. I know that I am not always aware when school is out, when I am going from meeting to meeting, so they are a great way to remind idiots like me behind the wheel that I am in a school zone and to slow down. The flashing signs have made it safer for the children to get to and from school, and to walk into their brand-new, upgraded school of which they are extremely proud.

On that note, I will move to some of the other infrastructure projects this government has invested in. This government has invested a total of \$3.1 billion into public school infrastructure. As I alluded to in my remarks about Maida Vale Primary School, that funding includes upgrades to special facilities, refurbishments and improvements to student facilities and administration areas. An amount of \$1.4 billion has gone into 41 new schools and 15 replacement schools, and that has provided 1 263 new classrooms for the extra 40 000 students now coming through the schools throughout our state.

As I said, four new public schools were built in 2016, including Alkimos Primary School and Rivergums Primary School in Baldivis. In my own electorate, the East Metropolitan Region, \$14.2 million was invested to build Anne Hamersley Primary School in Ellenbrook and \$15.9 million was invested to build Harrisdale Primary School. I have lived in Ellenbrook for 15 years and I know that the people there have been thrilled to see that extra funding for another school. There is a growing population out in Ellenbrook. I do not think any government will be able to keep up with building schools; they will just have to keep putting up new schools every time new funding for new schools becomes available. Ellenbrook is a fantastic suburb and has a huge population. We obviously need to get people out a bit more so that we do not have so many young kids coming into our schools!

Hon Sue Ellery: We need a train as well.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I disagree with that. We can have that debate another day. After living there for 15 years, the most important thing for Ellenbrook was the upgrade to the road infrastructure. We could not get out.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.