

**PUBLIC HEALTH AMENDMENT
(IMMUNISATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ENROLMENT) BILL 2019**

Committee

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting. The Deputy Chair of Committees (Hon Dr Steve Thomas) in the chair; Hon Sue Ellery (Minister for Education and Training) in charge of the bill.

Clause 1: Short title —

Committee was interrupted after the clause had been partly considered.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Before we rose, I gave an undertaking that I would seek permission to table the response provided by the Commissioner for Children and Young People. I am advised that the commissioner himself was not able to be contacted, but the Minister for Health, whose policy officer was the one who received the response, has agreed that I can table the email, so I am comfortable to table that email.

[See paper 2784.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: I want to go over some of the mechanics for an exempt child. If a child fits within the exempt category, who specifically determines whether that child is exempt? Does the kindergarten or childcare service provider the child attends make an assessment or is some other mechanism required to determine whether the child is exempt?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is the principal at a school; and, at a childcare centre, it is the person in charge. The person in charge has a specific meaning in the legislation that covers childcare centres.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The person in charge of that centre is the one who makes the determination. It has been indicated that there will be a follow-up program for this exempt child for their vaccination. What are some of the actions that would be taken to bring that child's vaccinations up to date?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The Department of Health would follow up with families of those children to provide additional support in accessing local immunisation services. Communication would provide information on how to get their history updated, where to access local immunisation services, how to access translation services if required, and where to find more information on the immunisation requirements online. The strategy is that in the first instance, an email would be sent to the families by the communicable disease control directorate in the Department of Health. After a month, the families of remaining under-vaccinated children would receive an SMS reminder from CDC—that is, the communicable disease control directorate—in the Department of Health. Bear in mind that the relevant people would already have had to provide contact details in the process of seeking to enrol their child. After a further month, the families of under-vaccinated children would then be contacted by phone. In the metropolitan area, parents would be contacted by the metropolitan communicable disease control public health unit. In the regions, the communicable disease control unit has provided additional resources for the WA Country Health Service to provide the follow-up with these families through the public health units. The public health units will provide this follow-up through their preferred choice in their local communities and across their regions.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Once the child is enrolled and we take up these follow-up programs to encourage parents to get their child's vaccinations up to date, if they do not do so, will the child continue to be enrolled or is there some point at which after they fail to bring their vaccinations up to date, they will cease to access their kindergarten?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is the member talking about children who have been granted an exemption?

Hon Rick Mazza: That is correct.

Hon SUE ELLERY: There is no final penalty for that child, if that is where the question is leading. The Department of Health may, and I would expect that it would, make additional efforts to contact that family to keep following up, but if the member is asking whether there is ultimately an end point, for example, when they are excluded from school, no, that is not considered as part of this legislation.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I take it from what the minister said that because they are exempt, they are exempt. I see the minister is nodding in agreement. Regarding a follow-up for a family with a child whose immunisation status is not up to date—they turned up to the school to enrol and were told no, because they were not up to date and they do not fall within any of the exempt categories—I am keen to understand, in that instance, is it intended that information will be provided to those parents when they seek to enrol and it is determined that they cannot, because they do not meet those exemptions? If so, could the minister explain to me what the process will be for those children and whether in that instance the schools will be required to inform the Department of Health that it has been notified that there is a child whose status is not up to date?

Hon SUE ELLERY: We are talking about a circumstance in which the vaccination is not up to date, the child has been refused enrolment, they are not eligible for an exemption and the question is: what information is provided

when they seek to enrol and is there an obligation from the principal or the person in charge to provide that information to the Department of Health?

Hon Donna Faragher: Correct.

Hon SUE ELLERY: When families seek to enrol, they will be given an information pack that explains how they go about fixing their enrolment status. But because the child is not enrolled, there is no obligation in the legislation for the school or the childcare centre to notify the Department of Health, because they will not have enrolment details to provide to the Department of Health.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: This is where my question comes in. I note the responses that the minister made about the grace period in her summing up of the second reading. I want to clarify. The comments that I made were not necessarily about a grace period, if I might put it that way—their child might be enrolled but they might have a time within which they can become up to date—but rather a situation in which they would have a conditional enrolment; that is, they provide all the evidence that they need to enrol in X school. It is clear that they are not up to date, but they can have a conditional enrolment, subject to their providing before the start of the following school term the relevant document outlining the immunisation that brings them up to date. I would have thought in that instance that that would allow the school to make contact, in whatever process, with the Department of Health. I want to be clear about what I was putting forward, because there is a distinction in what I have suggested, particularly because in some cases the kindergarten enrolment process begins well before the start of the following school year. We will get to that at clause 2, but I take the opportunity now to clarify that and whether any advice has been given to the government about an alternative conditional enrolment that requires some proactivity on the part of the parents, if they so choose, to get up to date prior to the following school year.

Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to standing orders.