

**EDUCATION PORTFOLIO — REGIONS**

*Motion*

**HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA)** [1.06 pm]:  
I move —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to honour its November 2016 policy position that commits to providing “a quality education to Western Australian children and young people regardless of where they live” by —

- (1) reversing the decisions to —
  - (a) shut down six camp schools;
  - (b) close Moora Residential College;
  - (c) take 20 per cent from the agricultural education farms provision trust;
  - (d) cut the number of frontline regional education professionals;
  - (e) increase fees for VacSwim; and
  - (f) reduce the boarding away from home allowance; and
- (2) recognising the stress, uncertainty, and mistrust created by making rushed decisions in the regional education portfolio.

I thank all members of the Liberal Party, the National Party and the crossbench for their support in bringing this motion on notice to the top of the notice paper today. It was disappointing yesterday, when I gave notice of this motion, that the Labor Party did not consider the issue of education financial cuts to be a sensitive, topical issue and a matter of concern for communities, particularly in regional Western Australia, despite a very well attended rally held at Parliament House yesterday. During the rally, it was obvious that a lot of angst and a lot of anger were felt by people. I think the frustration shown at the rally was that regional and rural people feel they are not being heard. For the members of the Labor Party in this chamber not to support debate on those issues on behalf of those regional people was very disappointing, to say the least. The Minister for Education and Training has to talk about these issues wherever she goes all the time, and will attend the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia conference this Friday. I am looking forward to that conference and the minister addressing the ICPA members’ concerns. This is not something that is new to the education minister. I am sure that the minister is keen to debate issues that are relevant to her portfolio and wants to hear the debate of this house, as we as members raise concerns that she can take away and deliberate on. However, I cannot understand country or regional Labor members of this house not supporting the motion yesterday that we should debate this issue today. I really cannot understand that. That says to me that they accept that regional education is a lesser priority inside the education portfolio. I think that has been evident from the outset when these announcements were made in December last year. When we were dealing with the Schools of the Air issue, members of the other place such as Kevin Michel, the member for Pilbara; and members of this house such as the minister; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Kyle McGinn and Hon Darren West attended rallies across the state. It is great that they did that. I am glad that they heard the concerns of those constituents. At the outset, they were asking people to accept that this was the way forward and that there would be a \$64 million cut in education funding. In the lead-up to Christmas—the week before Christmas, I think—those members were selling the argument for regional education cuts. In their own portfolios of regional development and in their own electorates, they were saying, “You people are not a priority to our education portfolio. Here you go. Here are \$64 million in funding cuts to swallow.”

It is very disappointing that they came to this house yesterday and did not support the right of the house to debate the issue, which is very timely and being felt by people in the regions. It is within the right and remit of this house, and of members of this house. Indeed, the idea of motions on notice is that we debate issues that are timely and sensitive to members of our electorates. It is very important that we as members have an opportunity to do that. It is very relevant for us to have this debate today. I thank members who voted for that motion and I look forward to hearing their contributions on this matter.

Let us cast our minds back to 13 December last year. I think it was the last week of school. In fact, it was probably the last or second last day of school last year. As I alluded to in the lead up to Christmas, the Minister for Education and Training made these devastating announcements. In fact, the Premier and the minister have now said that they took it a step too far. However, back on 30 December last year, that was not the case. They fully believed that \$64 million could be cut purely from the regional education portfolio. At the time, the government claimed that that \$64 million in savings would be reached over four years. Just two days prior to that, the government was spruiking a \$68 million inner-city college in Subiaco. What a backhander to the members of electorates and our

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constituents who had to face news of the closure of the schools two days later! That goes to the heart of the anger around this issue. Both in the city and in regional areas, parents believe fundamentally in the Labor Party's own policy—that is, regional children and young people have an entitlement to education, no matter where they live. Apparently, that is not so because if children live in Subiaco, they can get a brand-new school, but if they live in Moora, their residential college is going to close. Indeed, if they rely on Schools of the Air, those schools were going to close. There is a big disparity in this government's priorities and that was on display in that final week. Within one week, the government had stated that if children lived in Subiaco, they were entitled to a brand-new school, but if they lived in regional WA, their services had to be cut.

Those families on the ground who live in vast areas of the state, came together prior to Christmas after having this thrown at them. They used their feet and cars and whatever means of transport were available to them to attend those rallies throughout the state and to express their anger and disappointment about those decisions. Fortunately, after a strong and coordinated campaign, the government reconsidered its position on some of the education funding cuts that were announced on 13 December. I welcome that decision but we did not have to get there in the first instance.

We saw a backflip by this government on the closure of Schools of the Air, the Northam Residential Colleges and funding for gifted and talented education programs, but other cuts remain in place. I think it was evident to members of this house who attended the rally yesterday that those cuts are still being deeply and keenly felt by people in regional areas. I have attended many rallies at Parliament and I have to say that yesterday's rally was one of the angrier ones and some of that spilled over in a way that I had not seen before. I think that is because people just do not know how to express the deep anger they feel. We saw that spill over into actions that we would not otherwise see here at Parliament House. The McGowan government's partial reversal of that very cruel suite of education cuts was a show of regional Western Australia's people power. That brought about the decision to change. With the support of those living in the city, regional Western Australia rallied together. This was a big campaign that was run through media in the city and a lot of parents were genuinely angry about these cuts being made to regional education, which brought about very difficult and emotional decisions for families who live in regional WA about what to do about their kids' education. All parents feel that. As a parent, I want other people's children to have access to a quality education. I think we all fundamentally agree with that. That is what makes Western Australia and, indeed, Australia, one of the great places to live. We can provide that to our children. The decision of this McGowan government to cut services in Western Australia is the first turning point at which there has been a second-class citizen approach to education in regional Western Australia. It is a very scary thing for parents and it provides them with no options. Those are the reasons that people leave regional centres. Parents are currently being faced with a very difficult decision, particularly parents of children at Moora Residential College, who expressed their frustration yesterday. On the one hand, they are hoping for a reversal of this decision, but on the other hand, they are having to make alternative arrangements for 2019 because they are not sure whether the school will be open for their kids to access an education based closer to home out of the residential college.

Over the period from 13 December, members of Parliament's offices were immediately contacted by parents and people who were outraged about this decision. Some 34 000 people signed a petition from the member for North West Central stating that they did not agree with these education funding cuts. Hundreds of people attended rallies in Karratha, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie and many more wrote letters, and used social media and talkback radio to voice their opposition to that decision. The people of Western Australia told the government that they wholeheartedly agreed that students in regional WA, no matter what postcode they live in, deserve a quality education and they should have access to the same opportunities afforded to those in the metropolitan area. The National Party welcomed that backflip, as I said, but remained bitterly disappointed about the closure of regional camp schools and Moora Residential College in particular. We also cannot give up on those families whose boarding away from home allowances have been slashed or the agricultural colleges that have seen their farm provisions trusts raided. Just last month, the Country Women's Association of WA rallied on the steps of Parliament House for the very first time in its 94-year history. It is unbelievable that this has been its first rallying point in its 94-year history—that it believed it had to march to Parliament House. I commend the Country Women's Association, an institution that many of us deal and work with on a daily basis, for the work it does in regional communities. It has been this issue that has brought it together.

Yesterday, we saw another coordinated campaign protest about the closure of Moora Residential College. This demonstrates the depth of feeling towards this government and its ill-thought-out decisions. The anger is as much about the way the government has handled those decisions as the decisions themselves. There is no doubt that regional WA was blindsided by this government. Even WA Labor's own regional members were blindsided by this decision. Those who are directly impacted, the parents and kids, had absolutely no idea just before Christmas what was coming their way. The member for Kimberley said on ABC radio just after the announcement that she did not know about this, but her constituents were directly affected. How does this government seek to engage

with its regional members and, therefore, apparently, as Hon Darren West continues to tell us, hold regional Western Australia at the pinnacle of its decision-making? Clearly, it does not, because this one area—education in regional Western Australia—is the very reason regional Western Australians move to the city. We all know that as regional members. Where were regional Labor members of Parliament when this decision was being made? They were not even consulted. It is obvious that the minister is not worried about them in her decision-making and not worried about their complaints either.

The timing of the decision was strategic. The announcement was made in the lead-up to Christmas in the hope that the community would be too busy doing other things—school was ending and people were not expecting that their education services were going to be cut—and that it would go unnoticed. Sitting in the background of all that was the targeted voluntary severance scheme, enticing staff with additional weeks of severance pay if they advised their desire to terminate their employment early. This left the remaining staff and students in limbo over their immediate future. They are not the workings of a kind, compassionate, clever, transparent or honest government. That is not the rolled-gold transparency of government that Premier Mark McGowan suggested to Western Australians he would deliver. It is the prime example of how not to do it.

In defending this decision, the Premier has said —

“What we’ve done is look for savings measures—things at the edges that are nice to have, but not necessary to have,” ...

I mean, please! The arrogance of that statement and the ignorance about those services that the Schools of the Air, camp schools, residential colleges and the boarding away from home allowance provide for regional families. There was no access, no visits, no engagement and no consultation. Even in the wash-up of all these decisions, the Premier still showed his arrogance in dealing with this issue and continued to get on the ABC. I heard him a couple of months ago, saying, “Well, really, they can send their children to Geraldton.” It is just mind-blowing that the Premier of this state, who seeks to represent the interests of families in this state, did not actually consider going to Moora. He should understand the diverse geography he is talking about. He should understand the Aboriginal culture in Moora, which was on display yesterday. They want to send their kids to country; when they are on country they are home and they are happy. The Premier should have some understanding of that. It beggars belief that the Premier can actually make that statement, and continually say, “It’s okay; you can just send your kids down the road to another school.”

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Hon Jacqui Boydell has the call.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** The Premier said —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! We started out really well. We have all been able to listen to Hon Jacqui Boydell in silence. I think that is how you should continue.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** The Premier has also said that Schools of the Air, camp schools, Moora Residential College and funding to the gifted and talented program were all at the edges of what government could afford. I cannot believe that a decision about the institution of the Schools of the Air was made with no consultation. It is an institution in education in regional Western Australia —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Minister!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Hon Jacqui Boydell has the call. I am not too sure which part of “listen in silence” people missed. Would you like to continue your comments, please.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** The institution of the Schools of the Air is well known, documented and written about in Australian history. For the Premier to suggest that it is at the edge of education, beggars belief. I cannot believe that decision was made without alarm bells going off in somebody’s head, to say, “Jeez! This is probably not going to go down that well. We actually should consult with a few people, and maybe the first people we should consult are our Labor regional members.”

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** Where’s Country Labor?

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** Yes—“Country Labor may give us some idea about where to go in this area.”

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** No! They're all happy about it.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** No. I cannot believe that this decision was announced without somebody suggesting, "Minister, this may not go down that well."

Do members think that the people of Western Australia would have continued supporting WA Labor and its commitment to Metronet and all its other extravagant Perth-based election commitments if they knew that in return the quality of regional education was going to be compromised? I suggest not. What we have seen over the past 12 months is a government that prioritises metropolitan Labor and Labor-held seats over the delivery of essential services across regional Western Australia. This government will be forever known as the government that has devastated and betrayed regional communities such as Moora, and we saw that yesterday.

I am going to talk about Moora Residential College, but I want to read from an opinion piece that my colleague, Shane Love, the member for Moore in the other place, wrote in *The West Australian* yesterday. I think his opinion piece from 13 March, entitled "Education and the economy win if we save Moora college" sums up this matter, because this decision will result in other economic impacts in the Shire of Moora.

The opinion piece states —

Labor's failure to reconsider the decision to close Moora Residential College is embarrassing because it is one the McGowan Government cannot justify.

Numerous times, Premier Mark McGowan and Treasurer Ben Wyatt have made reference to \$8.7 million being needed to make the college fire-safe—a figure that doesn't stack up.

Moora Shire puts the real figure at closer to \$500,000.

Moora was one of a number of State residential colleges in line for an upgrade and the quoted figure was to deliver a complete refurbishment, not to simply make it compliant with fire and safety codes.

Over the past five months, I have repeatedly asked Education Minister Sue Ellery for the costings associated with maintaining or closing the college—information that the Government would have relied on to make such a decision—but these requests have fallen on deaf ears.

Until yesterday —

Responding to a grievance I delivered in Parliament last September, after the proposed \$8.7 million college upgrade was shelved, Ms Ellery referred to consultant reports detailing a scope of work to make the Moora facility compliant and offered to share information from the reports.

To date, this information has not been provided.

This piece was published yesterday, 13 March. It is now some six months since that grievance. The article continues —

Public rallies in Moora and at Parliament—including one to take place today—and the tidal wave of anger from the school and wider community over the closure has demonstrated how vital this issue is for Moora and the wider Central Midlands district. Moora is the only senior high school between Perth and Geraldton and the only senior high school in the Moore electorate, which is bigger in area than Tasmania.

The loss of the college will directly affect the budget of Central Midlands Senior High School and its ability to provide for the education of local children. The end result is a dumbing down of education in the district and the effective "de-development" of the area.

The region surrounding Moora is ripe for economic development through intensive agricultural and horticultural projects. But without good local education opportunities it will be impossible to attract professionals with families to the area, the very people needed to help drive growth in the district.

The Moora Shire's economic impact study confirms the fears of the local business community. Job losses and reduced local spending are among the immediate effects of the college closure, but these give way to a second round of impacts that will force families to move because of a lack of educational opportunity.

Mr McGowan's claim that he is going to preserve Royalties for Regions as a hypothecated fund needs to be called for what it is: a hollow promise propping up the Water Corporation's budget and pet projects in Labor seats.

If the Premier truly believes in regional development he would ensure there was a viable opportunity for education in the Moora district and provide adequate Royalties for Regions funds to keep the college open.

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The Labor Government's short-term "Budget fix" will cause disruption for families in the Central Midlands. Yet it will have a more insidious effect through the diminution of educational access in a region already suffering from a lack of opportunity and access. This short-sighted decision affects not only the current students but future generations.

News from the Treasurer that WA's operating deficit is tracking better than anticipated surely indicates there is room for the Government to move.

A compromise offer could see Moora's Residential College retained, ensuring current and future students can exercise their fundamental right to a quality education within a reasonable distance of their home.

That says it all and encapsulates the very question that the Moora community is asking the minister. The community wants the government to consider its needs, the needs of families and educational opportunities in Moora. If the budget is tracking well, let us have some wiggle room. Let us see what we can do to support those families, because we know they are suffering as a result of the decision that was made.

I will move on to camp schools. This is an area that has perplexed me greatly. The state of play with camp schools continues to change. Even yesterday, the minister was asked a question on this. Another member and I asked questions, and I was grateful for the minister's answer. Where the camp schools are at highlights the rushed decision-making and ill-thought-out process of the government in what it intends to do when cuts like this are announced. It seems to me that no plan was in place. The government seems to fail to understand that it is messing with people's livelihoods and that it is causing a great deal of angst and uncertainty in the community. First we were told that these camp schools were going to close—that is it; they are going to close! The government announced that camp schools are not a core business of education. I have visited a couple of the camp schools. They do provide educational programs; that is a core part of their being. I do not quite understand how the Department of Education does not believe that camp schools fit in to the core business of delivering education, but I look forward to the minister's comments on this motion. Then we were told that the Department of Sport and Recreation camps and other private camps would take up capacity from those camp schools. Now we are being told that those sites are going to be privatised and will be run by not-for-profit providers. Indeed, the minister commented yesterday during question time on how many organisations had approached her to do so. We still have not been provided with any further details on its plan to privatise those camp schools and whether that will result in a reduction in current staffing levels, increased fees to students or diminished facilities. I again come back to the fact that the government has not done its homework on this decision to cut these educational programs. I was at the Dampier camp school last week. There were 200 kids there on the day I was there, who were involved in leadership programs and doing sailing programs towards their training accreditation. The staff do not know what is happening. The manager at the camp school does not know what he is going to do next year. It is very concerning; they are up and down about where they are at. First the camp schools were going to be closed, and then they were going to be taken over. They are very concerned about fees and access for students, and that they will not be able to continue to provide programs at an affordable rate to families and students. There is such a long way to go in that space. It is very demoralising.

On the agricultural education farms provision trust, obviously the government's plan is to take 20 per cent, or around \$300 000, per annum of the trust budget. That is another example of not understanding how the trust works for the agricultural colleges. They reinvest that money in their facilities and machinery. They work together to ensure that they can continue to provide a quality education. We are talking about some big machinery. Some massive budgeting is required to buy new headers and harvesters. That requires financial planning from those ag colleges, which are now in jeopardy. They are not sure how they are going to manage that. For students who seek an agricultural science education or agricultural school as an alternative to mainstream curriculum schooling, is the capacity for those schools to operate going to continue? I very much doubt it. It is unprecedented that a state government would take money that has been generated by a public school to continue its operations and then still expect it to continue to deliver the same product it delivered the year before but with less budget. I do not know how these colleges are going to do that. This is specifically about agricultural colleges because of the machinery they require to conduct their programs.

The VacSwim program and its fees have not had as much publicity, probably because it has not received one of the bigger cuts that were made. VacSwim is an important program because Australia is an island, and the rates of drowning in regional centres is some 3.7 times greater than in metropolitan areas. It is very important for kids in regional areas to learn how to swim and to have access to VacSwim at an affordable rate, which is something that families have long enjoyed and children have benefitted from. Again, I do not understand why this government's decision-making process is targeting families and young children who have no capacity to fight these cuts.

The cuts to the boarding away from home allowance have been significant and, again, are creating angst for families in regional areas because they have to make a decision around either moving to the city and leaving the

community that they have grown up in, which in itself is quite traumatic, or not being able to provide a quality education to their children. Families are feeling bemused and demoralised about having to make those decisions. One of the difficult things in the debate about the boarding away from home allowance is that it has been suggested in the Premier's comments that the boarding away from home allowance is not needed and it is skewed towards supporting wealthy families who do not need the support of taxpayers. In 2016, only 26 per cent of students who were supported by the boarding away from home allowance attended the top, elite private schools in Perth compared with some 51 per cent of students who attended regional schools, including private and religious schools, and some 44 per cent who specifically attended state regional schools and utilised the state residential colleges. Again, this decision shows no understanding of the usage by regional families of the boarding away from home allowance. It is not there to help elite, wealthy families educate their children, as suggested by the Premier. It is actually offensive to suggest that. The boarding away from home allowance, in the majority, is being used by families who actually need it. If they did not have it previously, their children would otherwise not have had access to education. I ask the Premier to please understand the allowances paid through the boarding away from home allowance and the people who use it, because maybe this misunderstanding of the boarding away from home allowance, or this misunderstanding of the Schools of the Air and the role it plays, or the misunderstanding of camp schools and the role they play, and the misunderstanding of the Moora Residential College and the role it plays is creating this arrogance that the Premier seems to have. When the Premier attended the Country Women's Association rally in February, his arrogance to the rally was astounding. It was very hard for people to listen to his comments. I ask the Premier to please understand what we were talking about and its impact on regional families. Those people did not just turn up here at Parliament for no good reason because they did not have something else to do that day. They are hurt, upset and angry, and their kids are going to miss out. Before the Premier determines to make those arrogant statements, he should please undertake to understand what it is that he is talking about.

In conclusion, as I said during my contribution, the way that this government has handled these issues and the way it went about these cuts in education, were as much a problem as the cuts themselves. They were rushed, they were senseless and they were made without any thought or foresight. If they were made with thought, that shows an intent by this government to create and cause pain for regional families who can ill afford to lose those services in their communities. I am not sure which one is worse: an intent or just a lack of forethought. The jury is out on that for me. Sweeping statements from the Premier that these decisions will not have an impact on regional communities are baseless and unfounded, and they show that the government is not listening to those rural families. I call on the Minister for Education and Training to show the Moora community that this government has completed its due diligence into the social and economic impact study and that we have a full costings review. It should not be the postcode that determines how great the facilities are or whether investment is delivered. I believe in that great policy position. The government's message that these measures are all in the name of budget repair has been lost in the regions when this government cannot show that debt is declining and, two days prior to announcing \$64 million cuts in regional education, it can announce a \$68 million build in Subiaco. Those two announcements do not correlate: "We have been left with a terrible set of circumstances and this is all the in the name of budget repair." I am sorry because, first, that is not accurate because the budget is not declining, and second, it is hard for regional families to understand how an announcement that \$68 million is to be spent on a new school in Subiaco is okay when the services in their small community are to be cut. That is the heart of the problem right there. Without a financial plan and with a suite of extravagant election commitments that the government is still committed to, because it has a choice to stop spending on those election commitments given that the government seems to be aware that its budget is in disrepair, it is clear that these decisions are about funding those election commitments. This is it not about cost-saving measures; it is about funding election commitments. The Premier and the minister admitted that they made rushed decisions, that the pursuit of saving measures in education were taken too far, that they overstepped the mark and that they needed to get the balance right. I suggest that the community would like the government to get the balance right before it inflicts such pain in regional communities and then ask families to accept that. I ask the government to please do that. Do not rush into those decisions. Please consult and allow those regional families to have a voice within the government's decision-making process, because at the moment it is clear that they do not have a voice.

The Labor Party, in this chamber at least, prides itself on having more regional members of Parliament than any other party, as Hon Darren West suggested. Therefore, the Labor government should live up to that expectation, which means that regional members in the Labor Party need to have a voice. At the moment it is clear that they do not. Minister, it is time, particularly in relation to Moora, for us to sit down at the decision-making table to try to find a way to discuss the concerns of Moora parents, to allow the residential college in Moora to remain open and to at least provide some certainty to those families as we move forward today.

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training)** [1.49 pm]: I will address all the elements of the motion but first, I want to start by putting it into some context because I think we are having the discussion in a vacuum; that vacuum is about the state of the finances. If members opposite think that they do

not want to talk about that, I can understand why, particularly after the release of the Langouant report in recent weeks. I can understand why members opposite —

**Hon Jim Chown:** I'm happy to talk about it any time!

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I love it when Hon Jim Chown talks about anything!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! The last speaker was heard in relative silence. The Leader of the House is on her feet. Please do not encourage other members to participate in your discussion. The Leader of the House has the call.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thanks very much, Madam President. I look forward to hearing, as I always do, from Hon Jim Chown. We just do not hear enough from him and we do look forward to hearing from him.

I want to put this motion into some context because I think we are having the conversation in a vacuum. The context is the state of the finances. In recent weeks, the Langouant report shone a most disturbing light on no small reason for how those finances got into the mess they were in. We have had to make some tough decisions, there is no question about it. In my portfolio, we have had to make some tough decisions and I did not want to have to make any of them, but unfortunately the situation is that we need to repair the budget. A false narrative is being run that somehow regional Western Australia is bearing the brunt of budget repair. That is simply not the case. Everyone across Western Australia, in all sorts of areas, is being asked to make a contribution. It is a nonsense—a convenient nonsense—particularly for the National Party to run, but it is a nonsense nonetheless. We inherited the worst deficit and worst debt in this state's financial history since post the Second World War. Members opposite are right: we had made a series of commitments to Western Australians about the things that we wanted to do. We have endeavoured to deliver on our election commitments and still get the finances back in some order, and put in place some serious governance, accountability and transparency measures around the way budget decisions are made, which were seriously absent from the complete dysfunction that existed at the previous government's cabinet table. Effectively, there were two governments. Members opposite may say that that cannot possibly be true, but more members of the Liberal Party have said that to me than anybody else. Effectively, two governments, certainly two budget processes, and two Treasuries were running. Money was allocated outside any sound financial process, which drove the state into the most appalling set of debt and deficit figures that we have ever seen. We have had to address that in coming into government. Yes, we have had to make some really difficult decisions, including in my portfolio, where we looked at things like rationalising and the usage of residential colleges, for example, in the wheatbelt. That is just one area we have had to look at. We have also looked at duplication and the like, and made decisions about whether a particular element—whatever it is—is core business to the Department of Education. We have looked at whether a service can still be provided, particularly to public schools, or be accessible to students, but not necessarily be delivered and paid for by the Department of Education. I did not want to have to do any of that process because a million other things—fantastic things—are happening in education and training, but instead, I have had to focus on doing some of these things, which I did not want to have to do.

We cannot pretend that this is happening in a vacuum and that it was not because of the decisions of particularly those who were ministers and members of the National Party in the previous government. We cannot pretend that they did not make a series of decisions that led us to the point at which we have had to make some really tough decisions to get the budget back in order.

The Langouant report found huge levels of incompetence and financial recklessness. Although there were two parties sitting at the cabinet table, they will not say it in here, but I reckon I know that one of those parties knows that it was the National Party, which it had to rely on to form government in the first round, and then it was not brave enough in the second term to say, "You know what? We're not going to accept the kind of financial recklessness that you put us through. We're going to put some measures in place to bring the budget back into order." Those members need to be saying, "Actually, yes; that is how we got to this point." I look forward to them acknowledging the role that they have played in that. The findings of the Langouant report on governance, accountability and transparency really were shocking. The report found that the projects that were put up by the National Party under royalties for regions "did not have an adequate business case". Some projects had no business cases.

I will come back and talk about it at the end, but let us talk about one of the matters in the motion—the boarding away from home allowance. It is made up of two components. One is the component that is funded by the Department of Education, which has not changed. I repeat: it has not changed. Members of the National Party decided that they wanted to use royalties for regions funding to top it up. Instead of putting in a sustainable, permanent set of arrangements to ensure that the BAHA grew over time, they topped it up, budget by budget, with a bit of royalties for regions funding. That was not sustainable. It was not a permanent arrangement, which the education department's component of BAHA is.

**Hon Jacqui Boydell** interjected.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I did not interrupt the honourable member, and I would ask her not to interrupt me because I have only 45 minutes, and I want to talk about all these issues.

The BAHA is a classic example of how royalties for regions was used as a stopgap—a temporary measure. Members of the National Party had eight and a half years to look at the BAHA and ask how it could be given a permanent, sustainable footing, but they did not. They kept using temporary measures to top it up—temporary measures that came to an end within their own budget papers. That is what they did.

We have phased out that component of the BAHA over time. I think it is something like \$150 less a year. We cannot sustain a temporary measure that was put in place by royalties for regions. I can understand the National Party making that kind of decision to top it up in its first budget, and maybe in its second budget. I can understand the National Party making that decision to top it up for its entire first term, but it had eight and a half years and two terms to put in place a permanent, sustainable structure to ensure that the BAHA, at the levels it deemed appropriate, continued to provide the financial assistance that those families came to rely on. But it did not. So with all the rest of the mess that we have to clean up, we have been left to figure out how we can respond to that. That is just one example, which was not in the Langoulant report. It is a classic example of how the National Party applied itself.

Langoulant found that many of the business cases considered by cabinet were flawed and most came with inadequate risk assessments. The generally poor quality of business cases that were reviewed was concerning and John Langoulant said they were “difficult to comprehend”. Since these deficiencies —

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Oh, my friend, Hon Jim Chown! Why does he not sit there and write a question he could ask in question time? I would love to hear his dulcet tones in question time.

**The PRESIDENT:** I would like to hear your dulcet tones and not his.

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Madam President is saying that she would like to hear my dulcet tones and no-one else’s, so I will abide by her helpful suggestion. Cabinet did not follow the rules that all new spending proposals should be supported by business cases. For those projects that did not have an adequate business case, he found that valuable resources were wasted, there was a lack of attention paid to risk management, it was questionable whether the projects aligned with what the state, region or agency were trying to achieve, and there was limited research and analysis of all the options.

**Hon Simon O’Brien:** It sounds like your \$39 million slush fund. There’s not one of those with a business case, is there—not one of them.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is what he found, honourable member. I know that Hon Simon O’Brien does not like the fact that we made election promises, won a bunch of seats and therefore are delivering on the things that the local members who were elected promised to deliver. I know the member does not like that, but it is a consequence —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Things were going really well and all of a sudden everyone has woken up. The Leader of the House has the call and everyone else will endeavour to listen to her in silence.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you, Madam President.

I want to make two more comments about the way the finances were handled. The Under Treasurer gave evidence to the special inquirer, and at page 154 of the report his evidence is recorded this way —

*“And I recall discussions with key players in government at that time where there was considerable doubt expressed about Treasury’s GST relativity forecasts and this was Treasury being typically pessimistic. And I recall quite clearly having the discussion ... that the relativity projection is virtually a mathematical certainty by sheer nature of the formulae ...*

We are talking about the GST formula —

*And I think the political hopes were pinned on a political intervention by the Commonwealth to ensure that the relativity would not eventuate.”*

That is how the budget papers were crafted—“Let’s not listen to what to what Treasury is telling us about what the projections are on GST based on an unfair, but simple, mathematical formula. Let’s not rely on that; let’s just

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hope that there is a political fix.” The special inquirer has concluded that if the warnings that Treasury provided that the policy settings of the day would cause major difficulties in the future had been heeded, it is highly likely that the state’s current budget and debt positions would have been mitigated in a material manner. It was a failure of process and there are former ministers sitting in this chamber today who were part of that failure of process. That is the context that needs to surround this debate; that is, there are former ministers still sitting here today who were part of that process, and members of the National Party, for whom this was their central election platform going into 2008, have to accept responsibility for the findings that Mr Langoulant made in his inquiry report just a few weeks ago. It is a failure of process that led to bad spending and the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. The absolute classic was the case of Kalgoorlie, as exemplified in the evidence of the CEO of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. This is in volume 1 of the report on page 139. He said —

*“Another project was the Ray Finlayson Centre.*

Ray Finlayson was an outstanding citizen of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The CEO goes on to say —

*A \$16 million project. Did we need it? Probably not. We had quality sporting fields already. But because there is a lot of money there, it had to be spent.”*

That is the kind of decision-making that led to the worst set of finances since the Second World War that we have been left fix. I am sorry that we have had to make some really tough decisions.

*Point of Order*

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I do not mind a bit of latitude in this debate—I really do not—but we have sat here and heard about the Langoulant report for 15 minutes. The Leader of the House has been on her feet for 15 minutes. This motion is not about the Langoulant report, but I have no problems at all debating the Langoulant report, I can assure you of that.

Several members interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Excuse me, this is a point of order. If members want to contribute, they can get on their feet in a minute.

The topic of this motion is quite specific. It is about calling on the McGowan Labor government to honour its election policy on camp schools, Moora Residential College and so on. It is not about the Langoulant report. As I said, I do not mind a few minutes of introduction et cetera, but, really, one-third of the member’s time thus far has been taken up on something that is completely irrelevant to the motion on the notice paper.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you for your point of order. There is no point of order. I have been listening very carefully to the debate so far and I know that quite often people will use the start-up phase of their speech as a bit of a warm-up, and I think the minister has been using her discussion around the Langoulant report to justify and explain some of the decisions that have been made. I know that she is getting to the part of her speech in which she will start to address those key elements of the motion that we are dealing with.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you, Madam President; you are quite right. As I had set out in my opening comments, I thought it was important to state that this debate does not happen in a vacuum and that there is a context and a reason for the decisions I am being asked to reverse. People need to understand the reason for the decisions that I have been asked to reverse. They are also the reasons that I cannot reverse the decisions that the motion asks me to reverse. That is why I have spent the time talking about the things that I have been talking about, and I was delighted and pleased to hear the Leader of the Opposition say that he is happy to debate the Langoulant report at any time, because he will be. That is good.

**Hon Peter Collier:** Good; I can assure you that we will be as well.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is good. I have made the point —

**Hon Peter Collier** interjected.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am scared!

**Hon Peter Collier:** You should be.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes, I am. The Leader of the Opposition terrifies me every day!

**Hon Peter Collier** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Leader of the Opposition, you will get an opportunity to speak during this motion at a later point. The Leader of the House has the call and she does not need any assistance.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you, Madam President.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** You are failing badly.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Dear me; Deputy President indeed.

**The PRESIDENT:** Leader of the House, you have the call.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you, Madam President.

**Hon Alanna Clohesy:** I love it when there's love in the air!

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes!

I want to touch on each of the elements raised in the first part of the motion, as I said I would, honourable members. That is what I am doing. For those who do not know, Moora Residential College is a residential facility across the road from Central Midlands Senior High School.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** Have you been there?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No, I have not, and Hon Martin Aldridge knows I have not.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** Are you going to go there?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am going to proceed to make my comments in response to the motion moved by the honourable member's leader. I have no doubt that at some point, my friend, you will stand and make your contribution, but this is my contribution. The member will recall the comments made by the President just a few moments ago that I need to get on with my remarks, and that is what I am going to do.

Yesterday, I made a ministerial statement about that residential facility and I tabled five reports. Those five reports go back to 2012 and include the building condition assessment report. This is the BCA and it is an important one to remember. It costed work on what were deemed necessary upgrades to the residential facility at the time of the report at about \$161 000. In February 2015, an order of magnitude assessment costed the work at around \$17.7 million. In April 2016, the Moora Residential College preliminary project brief costed things at about \$8.7 million. In June 2017, the Moora Residential College project definition plan had a range of options in it, including option 1, a light refurbishment costed at some \$7 million; option 2, a major refurbishment costed at \$8.5 million; option 2A, a major refurbishment costed at \$8.7 million; and option 3, a new build costed at \$11.2 million. Then, in October 2017, a fire upgrade opinion gave an indicative cost of some \$696 000.

It is worth noting that during the eight and a half years of the previous government, it had ample opportunity to upgrade the residential facility in Moora. It set out a program to upgrade residential facilities attached to regional schools across Western Australia. It is worth noting as well that two of the early residential facilities that the previous government invested money in had been the subject of significant upgrades in the last couple of years of the previous Labor government. Two of those colleges got a significant upgrade, and then a new government came in and again upgraded those two before it spent any money on Moora, which as far back as before then was clearly starting to show signs that it needed significant work. My point is that choices were made about when and where to spend the money. Choices were made at several points during the term of the previous government not to proceed to spend any significant money on Moora Residential College. In fact, at one point that \$8.7 million—the final bit of the money left for expenditure on residential facilities—was in the 2015–16 budget papers. In the last budget of the former government, it was moved into the out years. The former government made a clear budget decision. It had the money, but it was not going to spend it at that point; it was going to push it out. Off the top of my head—I will have to check the budget figures—I think the proposal of the former government was to spend that money in 2018–19. So at several points decisions were made not to spend any money upgrading Moora Residential College. At the same time, decisions were made to spend money in other areas in the wheatbelt and across regional Western Australia, but not in Moora. The previous government knew those facilities were starting to show serious age and wear and tear and made a series of decisions that it would not spend the money. It in fact made a conscious decision. I do not know whether it was that the former government wanted a further election commitment, or whether it finally got to the point of realising it needed to do something about the effect on net debt in its budget papers and so decided to push a capital expenditure sideways. I do not know whether that was the motivation, but that is what it did. At several points it made a decision not to spend any money on Moora.

We got to the point of having to make some tough decisions, and one was whether we could rationalise the number of residential facilities available in the wheatbelt. Our initial decision was to close two—Northam and Moora. We listened and we recognised and announced that we had gone too far, so we revisited it. We looked at how we would make the decision to revisit. Northam school has around 700 students. There is a level of, if you like, economy of scale that happens in secondary schools in that if there is a certain number of students, a broader range of face-to-face courses can be offered. Lots of schools across Western Australia provide secondary school courses

using the School of Isolated and Distance Education. There is nothing wrong with that, and as a government, we put in more resources to assist those students using SIDE. There is no question parents would prefer more face-to-face education.

We had to rationalise the number of residential colleges available across the wheatbelt. Northam has 700 kids and can offer a broader range of courses, if that is what the parents want, and it has room in its residential facility. If we had to choose one to keep, is it better to keep open the Northam one and assist any of those families at Moora who might want to go to Northam to take advantage of the broader course options? Is it better to do that, or to keep open the Moora one where we know that there are fewer than 200 students? Frankly, the previous government should have seen that coming because those numbers have been trending down for a significant number of years. The previous government should have done a lot of things to help Central Midlands Senior High School, including giving it some certainty and ongoing permanency in the school leadership. We got the figures. There have been something like eight or nine principals since 2008. As leaders, members opposite know there has to be consistency of leadership to develop the kind of culture and learning wanted in an environment, including in a school environment.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** So what are you doing?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is a good question, and at another time I will be able to talk to Hon Martin Aldridge about it.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** You don't know.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes, I do.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** You do not.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We had to rationalise and make a tough decision. I have already set out the reasons we did not want to make it—we were forced into it—but if we had to rationalise and make a tough decision, we had to apply some criteria. They were the criteria that we applied.

I understand completely the level of commitment of the parents, some of whom were there yesterday, and the parents of students who attend both the school and the residential college in Moora. I understand and appreciate their commitment and worry about their children's education. I would be concerned if they were not concerned about their children's education, but they are and are deeply committed. I also understand their commitment to their community. I asked the man who swore at me yesterday to think about the fact that kids were present, but I understand his anger. I said, "You can yell at me, but there's kids here. Don't use that language in front of those kids." But I understand the level of passion that was there yesterday and I understand what drives it.

We have put in place a case management approach, if you like. A team of people will assist each of the families of the now 26 students, some of whom are brothers and sisters, who occupy the residential facility in Moora, many of whom come from a variety of places. Sometimes what gets lost in people's quick discussion about Moora Residential College is that, of course, students do not stay there if they live in the town. They and their families live somewhere else, and the residential college in the town enables them to attend that school. So their families do not live in Moora and the students come from all around the place. We have put in place a case management group to work with every single one of those families to identify the best alternative for their children. The starting point, of course, is that they do not want any change. I understand that. But if we get beyond that, can we help them identify what their child is looking for and what they are looking for for their child's education? We will assist them to do that in a way that means they do not incur any additional costs. Equally, we will ensure that the budget for the school stays the same as if those students were there, so they are not losing any money this year.

I will run out of time before I can talk about all these things, but the Shire of Moora economic analysis report states that either last year or this year the school received emergency funding of some \$288 000. That is not what it was. As a result of the budget last year, we made an equity adjustment. The former education minister would be aware that for some time the student-centred funding model—a school funding model I endorsed—has favoured really large secondary schools where huge economies of scale can be achieved, and smaller and medium-sized secondary schools struggle a bit under that model. Last year we did an equity adjustment—the larger secondary schools were not that keen on it—to redistribute some of the money so that some of it went to smaller and medium-sized schools. Of course, most of the smaller and medium-sized secondary schools are in regional Western Australia. Central Midlands Senior High School got an extra \$288 000 out of that process. No emergency money was given to it; that was additional money as part of an equity adjustment to recognise that it is hard to be a small or medium-sized secondary school and offer the range of services that people want. I am running out of time, so I will talk about some of the other things.

First of all, all these changes will take effect in 2019, so people have a year and we will work with them to make adjustments that need to be made. Camp schools are facilities that are valued by those who use them. A quick analysis—this was drawn to my attention when I visited Kalgoorlie camp school a week or so ago—shows that the make-up of bookings is about two-thirds public and one-third private schools. Depending on each camp school, there is a smattering of adult community groups or adult organisations looking for a training venue for a retreat or something like that. It is certainly the case that many, many schools, both public and private, go on school camps, but they do not all use the camp schools run by the Department of Education. They use facilities all over the place, including places such as Fairbridge in Pinjarra, and all sorts of other camp sites. They do not all use the camp schools run by the Department of Education. The camp schools run by the Department of Education are managed by a camp manager and there are cooks, kitchen staff, gardening and cleaning staff and some other staff. Depending on which camp school we look at, the vast majority of visits by schools are for one day only, not for two, three or four nights. Some people put up the argument that camp schools run curriculum. They do not employ teachers, so they cannot run curriculum. They run curriculum developed by teachers at the camp schools; the curriculum is run and led by teachers from the school of the kids attending the camp school. The camp managers organise a fantastic range of activities for the kids and there are a fantastic range of projects they can do while at camp schools. But curriculum is not delivered by non-teachers; it is delivered by teachers. The camp managers organise excursions from the camp schools and a range of other things, but they are not developing and delivering curriculum. We have been approached by, I think, eight—I have been directly approached by two—well-respected organisations that have expressed an interest in running all or some of those facilities. I said that I wanted to ensure that two criteria are in place in any contractual arrangement. One is that public schools get priority of booking—they get priority of the booking times for the use of the facilities—and the prices must remain affordable for schools. Those are the two criteria I want to establish. If we can do that and have reputable organisations running them, we could end up with a pretty good outcome, but that is yet to be seen.

I want to quickly touch on the agricultural education farms provision trust, which is kind of misnamed. It is an operating account held in the Department of Education; it is not a trust in the way that people might understand a family or business trust. There is no legal framework around it. That is what it is called. I have had a couple of meetings with the members of the advisory committee. Even one of them did not realise it was not a trust in the sense that we might understand a legal trust to operate. The decision that has been announced is to take 20 per cent of the 40 per cent that goes into the pooled funds. The agricultural colleges are paid by the department a total of \$26 million for operating costs. That includes some of their equipment and staffing operational costs that go with that. They sell produce and raise money and put it in a pool; 60 per cent stays with the five ag colleges and 40 per cent goes in a pool that is shared between the five ag colleges and the five smaller agricultural schools. They use it and plan to use it for expenditure on equipment. I certainly acknowledge, particularly the way technology and electronics are developing, that some of that equipment is very expensive. These days many are entering into lease arrangements rather than buy-out arrangements themselves, but a range of propositions are put in place.

**Hon Rick Mazza:** How are those pooled funds held?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** They are held in an operating account in the Department of Education.

**Hon Rick Mazza:** On trust?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes. The advisory committee receives applications and determines how it will allocate the money. One of the things the advisory committee decided itself was to put 10 per cent aside and allocate it in a particular way. It makes the decisions about applications it receives and does the planning about applications it anticipates receiving based on regular information it gets.

**Hon Rick Mazza:** Those funds aren't held in trust.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** They are held in a bank account held by the Department of Education. It is not a trust in the sense we might understand a family trust or a business trust to be; it is a bank account.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** Is that how you are going to fund Perth Chihuahua Rescue?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not know what Hon Martin Aldridge is talking about. I think he is trying to make a joke, but I do not get it, so I do not know that he is as funny as he thinks he is. I have 10 minutes now, so I will keep going. The ag trust today has a \$1.3 million carryover of money it has decided not to allocate.

**Hon Donna Faragher:** Part of that is for contingencies, so let us just reflect on that.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Of course it is, and that is sound practice. If, for example, the 20 per cent that came from the 40 per cent equalled \$300 000, the notion that taking \$300 000 from the ag trust will see the end of agricultural education as we know it is a stretch too far. It is worth putting on the record that the ag colleges provide outstanding

agricultural education. They lead the nation and in some areas they lead the world in the agricultural education they offer. The notion that taking —

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Let us see how it plays out, because the proposition that, at the high end, the 20 per cent equals something like \$300 000, and that will destroy agricultural education, is a bridge way too far and diminishes the work they do and have been doing. I think that is farcical.

I have eight minutes. I do not think Landsdale Farm School was raised yesterday, but it is an interesting issue to talk about. It is a highly valued community asset. It has something like 60 000 visitors a year, and most of those are adult community members. About 11 000 are from schools. Half of those school numbers are kids with an intellectual or physical disability. The vast majority of visitors are adults on weekends—not schools and not during the week.

**Hon Peter Collier:** So they don't matter?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Of course they matter; they are a highly valuable community asset. My point is that of the 58 000 visitors, nearly 60 000 are adults. Is that the core business of the Department of Education?

**Hon Peter Collier:** Yes, it is.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Of course it is important that people with disabilities have ongoing facilities. I will not be lectured by anyone about looking after people with disabilities. Of course it is important. We are working with a range of organisations, again, to see whether we can get someone to take it over who will continue to recognise the important role it plays in the life of students with disabilities. Is it the Department of Education's core business, at a time we are trying to fix the mess that the former government left us, to run a facility when the vast majority of those who use it are adults who use it on the weekends? That is not the Department of Education's core business.

I want to talk about VacSwim. This is really important. VacSwim has gone from \$1.30 a class for 10 classes to \$3.50 a class for 10 classes, plus, for the first time, there is an in-built concession. Those families on a Health Care Card who cannot afford to pay \$13.50 for 10 swimming lessons with a professional swimming teacher will get a concession. Depending on where people want to swim, it costs them around \$3 or \$4 each time they walk through a turnstile at a pool. Getting 10 professional swimming lessons for \$13.50 is a bargain, my friends! Having a concession element built into that that takes account of people on a Health Care Card is a really important step forward. I wish I did not have to increase the fees from \$1 to \$3.50 but in harsh economic times, \$13.50 for 10 lessons from a professional swimming teacher is a bargain.

I want to quickly turn to Aboriginal education. In the motion, a reference was made to regional positions. Two things have happened. First, the previous government started making some structural changes to the way that Aboriginal education was represented within the Department of Education hierarchy. Aboriginal support services had already been redirected to focus on improved teaching and learning for Aboriginal students by the creation of the Aboriginal Education Teaching and Learning Directorate with five new positions—one principal adviser and four principal consultants. That puts some of the Aboriginal people holding those positions into some of the highest positions held by Aboriginal people in the public service in Western Australia. It recognises that leadership has to come from the top. There are a whole range of measures in this process that was started by the previous government to recognise the importance of how we properly engage and address closing the gap for Indigenous students at the top. That was one part of it.

Second, the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework —

**Hon Peter Collier:** The first in the nation!

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes. Good on Hon Peter Collier for doing it.

It sets the policy framework within which Aboriginal education should be delivered. After that restructure that I talked about, the remaining permanent regional Aboriginal education staff, with the exception of those who were interested in taking voluntary severances or redeployment into other roles—some of them already have—will be placed into targeted schools with the most Indigenous students so that we maximise the number of Aboriginal resources in those schools with the highest number of Aboriginal kids. It has been difficult to make some of the decisions that we have had to make but we have tried to do it to maximise how we best use those resources.

I want to talk about the second part of the motion, which was about recognising the stress, uncertainty and mistrust. I acknowledge that change is difficult in the best of circumstances and I acknowledge that people have been disappointed about some of the changes that we have had to make. A pretty important element here is that the changes announced will take effect in 2019. That was to give people time to make the changes that they need to make and to give us the time to work with the affected organisations and families to get the best possible outcome for their children. At the same time, we are delivering on a whole range of proposals that improve not just regional

education in Western Australia, but education. The equity adjustment in secondary schools was a change that I talked about. The introduction of independent learning coordinators in 10 regional schools to assist kids in years 11 and 12 who are doing subjects through the School of Isolated and Distance Education to provide them with more one-on-one support in their classrooms is really important. Over the top of that, regional learning coordinators will provide assistance to regional secondary schools to maximise the capacity for students to get the best that they can out of their courses.

Forty-nine per cent of the first tranche of education assistants have been allocated into regional schools on the basis that they would be best placed in kindy to year 2 and in those schools with the lowest socioeconomic status. Forty-nine per cent of those are in regional Western Australia, so that is where most positions have been allocated.

In addition, our science labs in primary schools take advantage of the fact that if we give students an authentic learning environment, we will encourage their involvement and excitement about learning far more than if teachers just take a plastic tub out of the storeroom into the wet room and try to conduct science lessons in that way. That is where the jobs of the future will be and we are ensuring that science labs are spread across Western Australia, including regional Western Australia.

The direct-to-market changes allow schools to make choices—local choices if that is what works for them—to spend on minor capital works and faults up to \$20 000 by going through a local procurement process, with measures put in place so that people cannot use their dodgy brother-in-law who has lost his plumbing licence. Measures have been put in place to allow people to buy local in the most serious of ways to assist their school. I know and have been told that direct to market is a really popular mechanism.

**HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan)** [2.37 pm]: I rise to also say a few words in strong support of the motion that has been moved by Hon Jacqui Boydell. Although the focus of this motion is very much, and appropriately so, based around the education cuts that are impacting regional Western Australia most severely, I agree with the Minister for Education and Training on one point; that is, other areas in metropolitan Perth have been equally caught by this penny-pinching government that, quite simply, has got its priorities wrong. Speaking on this motion, I want to go back to an exchange that I had with the minister during budget estimates hearings in this place last year. I asked the minister a fairly straightforward question about whether she could assure Parliament that there would be no reduction in funding for public schools in the out years. This was part of her response —

We are locked into funding models that are driven by the number of students and driven by the industrial arrangements in place about teaching numbers as well. In terms of that, in fact it is a great protection —

I want everyone to hear that—a great protection! It continues —

for this agency compared perhaps to some others ...

Yet the outrageous cuts announced by this minister in late December clearly show that there is no such great protection for public education in this state under a McGowan Labor government. Colleges are set to close and funding is absolutely being cut. Although some of the cuts have been reversed and that is very much welcomed by everyone in this house, it has not been all the cuts by any stretch. The longer this farce goes on, the longer the hurt and anxiety goes on. That was expressed in Hon Jacqui Boydell's motion. Yet the government is just not listening. We heard it again today. It is not listening to the very people who are most affected by these cuts. It is not listening to the broader Western Australian community, which is outraged by the decisions that this government has taken. It is not even listening to its core constituency, the union movement, which is also very unhappy with it. What we get instead are glib responses from the Premier like the one Hon Jacqui Boydell has mentioned that appeared in *The West Australian* on 26 December, Boxing Day—Merry Christmas, everyone! It states —

“What we've done is look for savings measures—things at the edges that are nice to have, but not necessary to have,” ...

Try telling that to the students, families, staff and communities that are being impacted. Tell those who hold Moora Residential College dear that they are at the edges. Perhaps the Premier should have had the gumption and courage to stand on the steps of Parliament House and say that to them yesterday. I have a strong feeling I know what the response would have been and that is probably why he did not go out there.

When did this all begin? Hon Jacqui Boydell has reflected on this, but I also want to do so. It all began when, funnily enough, state Parliament had already gone into the summer recess, the school year had less than two days to go and the last of the school graduations were underway. The Minister for Education and Training, hoping to avoid parliamentary, media and public scrutiny, announced, by press release, a swathe of massive cuts, totalling some \$64 million. There was no consultation and no understanding of their impact. They were cuts that went to the heart of our education system, cuts on top of the staffing cuts that had already been announced towards the end of last year, and cuts that were to be made, despite what the minister may say, for no other reason than to pay for

**Extract from Hansard**

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the billions of dollars of unfunded Labor election promises that it made during the last state election. The most visible, of course, was the government's decision to cut the Schools of the Air—something quintessentially Australian. In many ways, Schools of the Air reflects who we are as a state. It reflects our geography and our unique challenges. It is something that most Western Australians—most of us here in this house—would have never come into contact with, but, I tell you what, we have all grown up knowing about it! We all know that children in regional and remote Western Australia deserve the same opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts. The Schools of the Air provides that opportunity for students who are in some of the remotest parts of Western Australia. It has for years and years allowed those students to have a comprehensive education, tailored to their individual circumstances and needs, through daily contact with their teachers, their peers and their home tutors, of course. It is complemented with school camps, home visits and other supports. Importantly, it gives them invaluable social connections and helps them develop meaningful relationships despite the distance between students, parents and teachers. It is not something that can be re-created overnight; yet, armed with that knowledge, with a stroke of a pen and two short paragraphs in a press release, it was gone.

The government did not count on the backlash; it was immediate, severe and intense. That decision, only after weeks of angst and hurt, was, thank goodness, finally reversed; so, too, were some of the other ill-thought-out funding cuts, but, alas, not all of them. The remaining cuts, which at the time received less public attention, were not spared the chopping block, yet they are, as we have heard today and as I am going to outline further on, as important to those people and those communities. It is for that reason that they also need to be reversed. Let us go through some of them. The first is, of course—this is particularly relevant given the rally held yesterday—the proposed closure of Moora Residential College. I have to say that the government's story on why it has to close just keeps changing depending on who you talk to and what time of the day it is. I will read part of a letter written by the president of the Central Midlands Senior High School P&C, Tracey Errington, who I must say, and I think everyone would agree, spoke incredibly well at the rally yesterday. I spoke to her and indicated that I was going to refer to parts of her letter. She said to me that she has yet to receive a response from the Premier, so, hopefully, ministers opposite will listen and that will elicit a response from the Premier. I will not read all of the letter because it is quite long, but I will address the central points. It states —

Dear Premier McGowan,

I am writing in response to an 'On Air' question I raised with you on radio 6PR this morning. I would also like a response —

I do not know whether they have received a response to this one, so maybe ministers opposite might check —

to the ... P&C's letter of 8<sup>th</sup> January 2018. To date we have not received a formal reply from you or any Labor Members.

The question I asked on 6PR was "what are the costings for the essential repairs and maintenance on Moora Residential College?"

The question was not answered. Instead you gave a misleading response to 6PR's listeners.

We would like to address those responses as it appears you have either been gravely misinformed by your advisors, or are choosing to ignore the facts.

There has been no consultation with any members of the Moora or surrounding community on this decision. Of even greater concern, you have not consulted the parents of the students of the College and the parents of the local students who will suffer the immediate impact of the loss of up to \$350,000 in funding to CMSHS, ultimately affecting the quality of education available.

A flawed assumption has been made that one third of our students can go to Yanchep. There is a bus run in place, but it does not go all the way to Lancelin. Mr Premier you stated it was "57 minutes", this time is from Google Maps and by CAR. Factor in stops along the way to pick the children up and it is much more. Currently, kids who use this bus run are on the bus for 1hr and 20 minutes (each way) five days per week. To take the service into Lancelin itself will add another 20 minutes to the trip and would be over the prescribed 1hr and 30minutes.

The letter goes on —

... you may also like to know that last year children attended Northam Residential College from Narrogin, Merredin, Dalwallinu and even Perth so the point, raised by you about where the students are from is irrelevant. Residential Colleges catchments are not set and cover the whole of the state of WA to allow parents to choose the option that is best for their child.

Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; President; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Alannah Mactiernan

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We have never once claimed the children came from Moora, and have always referenced the towns they did come from, so I am not sure how we are misleading people?

Fourthly, parents send their children to us for a variety of reasons, the main one being that we are still a truly rural school in that we offer a small, friendly, nurturing environment for their children and at the same time big enough to offer a variety of subjects not available at District High Schools. This is exactly the main reason why Northam (with a school population of 700+) and Geraldton with 5 feeder Secondary Schools is not an option for our students.

The majority of our students are closer to Moora than either Geraldton or Northam.

The letter goes on —

Our school offers face to face ATAR subjects, VET services and Certificate training via the attached TAFE campus (whose numbers will also be affected along with CMSHS). We also have a State of the Art Trade Training Centre recently built on the ... Campus which is also a draw card for many of these students. These current educational opportunities are at risk of not being available for our local population if the closure proceeds.

This disproves the fact we are a “duplication of services” as was claimed in the initial argument for the closure. We are not, and that is why the parents choose us.

I also want to read in part from the economic impact assessment that was done on behalf of the Moora shire council. There are two main headers. The first states —

**Economic Impact of the Closure of Moora Residential College**

**Combined the two rounds of economic impacts directly associated with the closure of the College will lead to an annual reduction of \$2.0 million in local GRP and 19 jobs (directly and indirectly), which equates to 1.0% of the Shire’s GRP and 1.6% of total employment in the Shire. More concerning to local businesses would be the expected annual loss of \$2.3 million in local expenditure or turnover in the economy, stemming from the closure of the College.**

The last point is —

**By far the most alarming potential impact of the Moora Residential College closing would be the closure’s ability to spark the beginning of a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle of decline. If the College is closed, then the High School will lose funding. Combined with other expected funding losses, the ability of the High School to appropriately cater to Year 11 and Year 12 students will be significantly decreased. This decreased ability may cause families to move away from the area to access another offering, which will reduce funding for the schools further. This further decrease in funding may cause additional families to leave, which reduces school funding and the available expenditure in the economy further, putting additional pressure on the businesses and families that have remained.**

That is what the economic impact assessment states and that is what the P&C is saying, yet no-one seems to be listening. The minister has said—I heard it again today; she made an interesting point, which I might ask her about in question time—that the government’s decision to close the college will not affect its senior high school status. However, taking away around 20 per cent of the student population will have an impact. Everybody knows that. The fact is that fewer students means less funding to the school, which means fewer staff, which means fewer face-to-face courses. It might keep its name, but that is about it. Yesterday’s rally was very clear—it was unambiguous—yet the calls for the reversal have been ignored, and continue to be ignored, even at the highest level.

We then turn to camp schools. Again, Hon Jacqui Boydell reflected on this issue. A number of misleading statements have been made. First, they were set to close. The minister’s December statement was categorical. The statement read —

Six camp school sites run by the Department of Education will close. These are not the core business of education and there are other government and commercial providers of similar services.

There were no ifs and no buts in that statement; they were to close. But clearly sensing a problem, the government did some fancy footwork pretty quickly and all of a sudden it wants them to stay open, just not under the department. Did it consult anybody before making that announcement? Absolutely not. As Hon Jacqui Boydell reflected, the fact is that these camp schools are important. They are not what the Premier dismissed in the other place as “so-called camp schools”. They are not just camp sites, which the minister continues to refer to them as. I appreciate that the minister is out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business and I know that she will not take any of my advice, but if I were to offer some advice, it would be to not keep calling them camp sites, because

people get really unhappy about that. They are programs. I took on board the point the minister raised about the curriculum, but the fact is that the programs are linked to the school curriculum. The schools are fully compliant with the various departmental policies that are in place. The annual report of the Goldfields camp school refers to that. It states —

The Camp School is valued by teachers as a strategy for improving student outcomes especially in the areas of:

The minister needs to hear this —

- *General Curriculum*

To support teachers in the development, application, enrichment and extension of processes and topics studied in the classroom.

It keeps on referring to the curriculum. It continues —

- *Outdoor Education*

To support teachers implementation of the Australian Curriculum Outcomes.

- *Environmental Education*

To support teacher's implementation of programmes to improve student's conceptual understandings and appreciation of the natural environment.

I think this next one is important —

- *Social Interaction and Personal Development*

To provide activities in a structured environment, which contributes to the students emotional and social development and personal growth complimenting on everyday family life which is held in such high esteem by Australian communities.

The minister says that they are not teachers and they are not delivering the curriculum, but what they are doing is supporting teachers in their delivery of the curriculum. That is very clear to anyone who knows about it. The fact is that each of the camp schools are different and unique, which is the great thing about them. Point Peron camp school, for example, offers a range of programs, from abseiling to team building, orienteering and raft building. The Goldfields camp school —

**Hon Peter Collier:** Yes! My old school.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I did reflect on that when I was visiting there the other day with the very hardworking member for Kalgoorlie, Kyran O'Donnell. That is perhaps a slightly different camp school from some of the others. It very much focuses on the rich history of our state. Of course, it has a particular focus on the goldfields. There is a focus on mining, water resources and environmental education. All these programs also help build resilience, teamwork and other essential life skills. When I was there, students from Schools of the Air were there; it was their first time coming together since the school holidays. I want to read a letter to the editor, which sums it up pretty well. It is from Reg Whitely in Geraldton and reads —

I write with extreme concern about Education Minister Sue Ellery's misrepresentation and distortion of the facts relating to the Department of Education camp schools, in particular the Geraldton Camp School with which I have had professional experience since 1987.

Contrary to the minister, there is nothing equivalent to the Geraldton Camp School elsewhere in the Mid West region.

Further, there are no equivalent local government or Department of Sport and Recreation facilities, and certainly none with experienced educators —

That is important —

familiar with the Australian curriculum, capable of planning, preparing and running the programs required for delivery of those lessons.

Adding to the minister's distortion of facts —

Here we go —

the camp schools are not "camp sites" as she suggests, but legitimate schools, with qualified teaching staff and educational programs aligned with the Australian curriculum.

The description "camp sites" suggests they are similar to caravan parks or bush camping areas. What a falsehood.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** No, I am talking; Hon Alannah MacTiernan can speak in a moment. I have limited time.

Several members interjected.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I am just reading. Just take a chill!

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Members, I am finding it very hard to listen to the member because of excess noise.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** His letter goes on to state —

Further, from what I understand the Geraldton Camp School is fully booked for 2018.

What evidence does the minister have for her assertion that “occupancy rates (of camp schools) have declined over time”?

This begs the question as to whether the minister has ever visited a camp school when students from small schools have come together, taking part in leadership activities, team and confidence-building challenges, building their resilience, and enjoying the total experience, all being led by the camp school staff with the support of their classroom teachers? The minister appears intent on tearing those experiences from the children, removing an essential component of their education in life skills.

In the interests of the children in our schools Statewide, I ask the minister to reflect deeply on this matter and reverse the ill-informed decision to close those schools.

Further, I ask her to give them the support and resourcing required to continue the quality educational services they currently provide.

The list goes on. We also have the raiding of the —

**Hon Sue Ellery** interjected.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I listened in silence, so the minister can also listen in silence.

The government is raiding the agricultural education farms provision trust. It is skimming funds, but it is not putting them back into the Department of Education; it is just putting them into consolidated revenue. This comes from the Labor Party, which according to its platform believes —

321     Agricultural education makes an important contribution to the long-term competitiveness of the industry and increasing the general understanding of the importance of agriculture to the Western Australian economy. WA Labor will:

- a)     Improve agricultural education opportunities in regional and rural centres;
- b)     Develop an integrated and well structured system of agricultural education from primary to tertiary level;

Really? The government is taking money from the trust, it has abolished positions directly linked to agricultural education in the department, yet somehow it is improving educational opportunities in regional and rural centres. The fact is that the trust provides an essential source of funding to our agricultural colleges for a wide range of projects and equipment. There are six contributing colleges, but there are other schools, which the minister reflected on, that might not contribute directly to the trust but do provide important agricultural programs. They are in both the city and the country and they also benefit from the trust.

I will go through a couple of the funding allocations that have been given to the schools over the past few years. For the period from 2001–02 to 2016–17, the college in Cunderdin—a great agricultural college that I visited with Hon Jim Chown a couple of weeks ago, a fantastic college—received \$1.5 million; the college in Denmark received \$1.6 million; the Harvey college received \$1.5 million; the Morawa college received \$1.2 million; and the Narrogin college received \$1.4 million. That money is for a range of things like machinery sheds, silo lids, portable cattle yards, shearing heads and sheep yards—the list goes on. As I said, other schools also benefit, including Kiara College in my electorate, Kelmscott Senior High School, also in the East Metropolitan Region, and schools in Manjimup, Margaret River and others. For example, between 2006–07 and 2016–17, Kiara College received more than \$190 000 and Kelmscott high school received \$226 000. Although they have not directly contributed to the trust, they receive a benefit.

A key concern for those who are intimately involved with the workings of the trust is that when the funds go down, everything will need to be reprioritised. The agricultural industry requires that students both now and into the future are exposed to and trained on the best available plant and machinery. But it costs and it depreciates and it

also needs to be replaced. If the government takes some of that money away, and I appreciate it is not all the money, who will pick up the tab when the equipment needs to be replaced? My question to the minister is: will the government pitch in when one area has a bad season or a bad crop?

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Will you take an interjection?

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** No, because I am on limited time before we finish. I will ask the minister in question time—there you go. This is an important question that was put by the vice president of the WA College of Agriculture Cunderdin’s farm advisory board, Murray Williams —

“We see the value of the trust very much in that capacity to redistribute a percentage of funds that come in from across the whole system to where it’s needed most,” ...

“The dairy industry might be battling for three years and not getting income that they need, Morawa might have a drought for three years—it’s that capacity for the rest of the system to support needs in an area, which then ends up giving an equal opportunity to a student for good quality education regardless of the site that they go to.

“If it wasn’t for the trust we would have some colleges progressing and others that would be regressing.”

It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I have only a very short time left, but with all that in mind, I want to come back to the motion moved by Hon Jacqui Boydell. The government came in with the mantra that all children, no matter where they live, deserve quality education. I believe that as a house, we all believe that. We all believe that children are as important whether they live in the remotest parts of Western Australia or inner city Perth. We all believe they deserve quality education. But, sadly, time and again, the actions of this government in the past 12 months have shown that it has not had the ability to listen, consult or understand the ramifications of the rushed decisions that it continues to make across the education portfolio. This is not the only example of where it has made gross misjudgements in the education portfolio since coming into office. It is a very sad state of affairs that we even have to debate such a motion as we are today. I want to assure the house that I, along with my colleagues, fully support this motion and that I, along with my colleagues, implore the minister to go back to the drawing board, reverse these cuts and start again.

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [3.04 pm]:** As the Minister for Education and Training said, if there is a silver lining in all of what has happened out of our requirement to deal with the budgetary circumstances we find ourselves in, it is a real focus on rural education and the need for us to ensure that children right across regional areas from Wyndham down to Esperance have access to high-quality education.

Before I get onto some of the more specific issues raised in this motion, I want to talk about a couple of rural education programs that we have put in place that perhaps have not been considered in this discussion of our investment into rural education. One is the \$25 million program in Kimberley schools that over the next four years is designed to really turnaround some of the most entrenched disadvantage. It will deal with those students living in remote Aboriginal communities for whom the education system has completely and comprehensively failed, in a far more dramatic way than we see in the disadvantage that might be experienced in other rural areas. These young people are to a significant extent being denied, through the lack of acquisition of foundational skills, the opportunity to walk in the modern western world and have that ability to live both within their culture and to participate in a greater Australian economy. We know that this is a major problem for not only those young people, but also their whole community and the development of northern Australia. I have been very pleased to be able to work with the Minister for Education and Training to make sure that that program is entrenched and that those people who are most disadvantaged are given this opportunity for proper exposure to proper, supporting pedagogy and wraparound service in terms of speech therapy and occupational therapy, which is necessary to take them forward. We have also committed to a \$7 million package for the Pilbara region over the next four years to deal with, in part, some of the specific needs of the Martu and for kids living largely in remote communities.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.