

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS - STAFF AND RESOURCES CRISIS

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr F. Riebeling): I received a letter today from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate as a matter of public interest the following motion -

That this house calls on the government to more effectively address the current staffing and resources crisis in Western Australian government schools.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

The SPEAKER: The matter shall proceed on the usual basis.

MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood - Leader of the Opposition) [2.52 pm]: I move -

That this house calls on the government to more effectively address the current staffing and resources crisis in Western Australian government schools.

I rise to address the deplorable situation in education and to highlight the government's disgraceful performance in that area. I particularly want to refer to the waste of administrative staff in the central office that we know as "Silver City".

The three major areas in which state governments have responsibility are health, education and law and order. I will highlight the Gallop and Carpenter governments' record on law and order and health, especially when it comes to staff numbers.

Law and order was a constant part of the Labor Party's mantra in the 2001 and 2005 state election campaigns. It is an area in which the Labor Party has consistently failed, particularly in the area of the provision of sufficient police officers. In 2001, Dr Gallop said that he would fix the Western Australian health system. Six years later, doctors and nurses in the public health system are working in crisis conditions. Medical professionals are thin on the ground and nurses' resources are becoming slimmer and slimmer. In the meantime, the administrative staff of the Department of Health continue to grow at a phenomenal rate. If the Department of Health's administration staff is growing at a phenomenal rate, the Department of Education and Training's administration staff is certainly doing the same. This is a recurring problem. There are not enough faces on the frontline, yet there are plenty of job opportunities for bureaucrats in the back offices. The imbalance in the Department of Education and Training is even more profound, despite the fact that, from my estimations, Western Australia was about 260 teachers short just two days before the commencement of term 1 this year. Overseeing that fiasco was "Silver City". In 2004-05, "Silver City" took on 728 more staff; however, it could not process enough teachers to place them in our classrooms. Many of those 728 staff were ex-schoolteachers who would have been more valuable in our classrooms than in "Silver City". In two years and three months, 728 more bureaucrats were employed at "Silver City". These new employees were taken on at a rate of 1.25 every working day, or more than six every working week, for more than two years. That number is more than the total number of players on the Australian Football League's list. Six new employees started every working week. What do those employees do? Where are they housed? It is apparent that the system is not working. Since Christmas, "Silver City" has become even better at recruiting staff.

The Department of Education and Training employed 130 administrative staff during that time - more than two staff for every working day, and more than 10 for every week. The trouble is, the department could not provide the required number of teachers. Sadly, teacher numbers did not correspondingly increase. It is a pity because that is what the department is paid to do. Between 2004 and March 2007, the number of administrative officers and district officers at "Silver City" swelled by 40 per cent, while the increase in teachers available in the classroom increased by a pitiful three per cent. The coalface battlers battled on with a three per cent increase and were supported by a 40 per cent increase in administrative employees. What are the costs? Teachers' incomes in Western Australia continue to fall behind those of basic labourers; their incomes are just pitiful. The starting salary for teachers is about \$40 000. They attend their classrooms knowing that their employer has spent an additional \$51.8 million on new non-teaching staff. The efficiencies produced must have been absolutely spectacular. That is \$92 000 every working day for more than two years, and \$6.5 million more than the entire 2005-06 budget for the Department of Education and Training's district officers from Albany to the Kimberley, and from the goldfields to Swan. Evidence shows, however, that the department was not more efficient. We know that it was a scandal because at the start of the school year Western Australian schools were dramatically short of teachers. As recently as last weekend, when I was in Carnarvon, a teacher claimed there was a school that was 10 teachers short. I think it was Carnarvon Senior High School. However, that is nothing new.

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

Mr M. McGowan: It's wrong.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Is that not true?

Mr M. McGowan: No, it's not true.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Maybe the minister can give us the figures before the end of the day.

Mr M. McGowan: You're just trading in rumours. You don't trade in rumour.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: We know how the former Minister for Education and Training operated and what a wasteful effort occurred while she was minister. Last week she rather proudly told the Legislative Council that there were only 28 teaching places still to be filled, yet we are now approaching the end of term 2. The state was 258 teachers shy of the full complement at the beginning of the school year. "Silver City", as members will remember, employed an additional 728 staff, 130 of whom were employed at Christmas. However, the department still failed to provide the required number of teachers for the first day of term 1. At the end of term 1, "Silver City" still had 345 teachers awaiting their Western Australian College of Teaching accreditation. Without this accreditation, they cannot teach. It is really an appalling situation. A fortnight later - this is really working hard - the figure had been reduced to 44. This was miraculous work. The Acting Director General of the Department of Education and Training actually released a press statement saying that everyone was really working hard. I congratulate her on her recent appointment as director general. The reality is that without the persistent efforts of the shadow Minister for Education and Training, Peter Collier, and media exposure, I am sure that the hard work would not have been done. Someone at "Silver City" obviously became embarrassed. Someone cracked the whip, got the battalion going and obviously a number of teachers were accredited. This begs the question: what was the Department of Education and Training doing over the previous two years and two months? If it could do all that in just over a month, why could it not have done it before? There were six new staff working every day for more than two years, more than \$92 000 spent per working day for more than two years, and more than two new staff per working day since December 2006. Who knows what the cost is?

I turn to the complaints management unit. Its role was to investigate complaints against teachers. It is currently being rebadged under some warm and fuzzy title that fits the department's culture. Again, the minister and the department were kept on notice by Hon Peter Collier, who received a number of complaints from teachers. The teachers were saying that the process of having cases heard against them was woefully slow. Mr Collier asked several questions in the upper house about those numbers and those questions were responded to, after a fashion, on 24 October 2006, 15 November 2006 and 16 November 2006. He wanted to know whether the CMU was fully staffed and was told, twice, that it was. When he asked how many staff were employed at the CMU, he was told that there were 7.5 full-time equivalents. He then asked how many were on leave, and the answer was that six full-time equivalents were on leave. The simple mathematics involved should have hit home with the minister. Out of the 700-odd extra staff, somebody should have been available to help the CMU. The questions asked in the upper house revealed that 18 complaints against teachers had been handled between November 2006 and late March 2007. One could hardly say that that was great output - only 18 issues were resolved in more than four months.

I refer to the Balga Works issue, which goes right back to when the Premier was Minister for Education and Training. Three successive education ministers, including the Premier, appear to have been oblivious to the amount of money that has been spent - about \$2 million - on the Balga Works program. I understand that on the Premier's watch as education minister, \$180 000 was paid to the Balga Works program only months after he had rejected the initial proposal in August 2004. The community safety minister, on the recommendation of the Office of Crime Prevention, approved another \$44 000 for a feasibility study into the program in October 2004. Mr Hodge, the chairman of the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Council, had been told two months before by the then education minister, Mr Carpenter, that he did not support the program. The next education minister was Hon Ljiljana Ravlich. She injected another \$220 000 into Balga Works. The Department for Community Development provided another \$380 000. Who is running that beast? A proposition has been put forward by the shadow Minister for Education and Training, Hon Peter Collier, to establish a parliamentary committee to examine that issue. I hope that the Legislative Council undertakes to do that. It is a very important issue. I hope that when the Legislative Council agrees to establish a committee, the whole saga of the Balga Works program will be laid out for all to see. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

There are deficiencies in education everywhere one goes in Western Australia. When I was in the south west on Sunday, a teacher who is a dyed-in-the-wool Labor supporter told me that he had to sit down and talk to me about OBE. He said that it was not working and that something had to be done for our kids in Western Australia.

Mr M. McGowan: Did you say "OBE"?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 13 June 2007]

p3031b-3042a

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Yes, outcomes-based education. This dyed-in-the-wool Labor supporter said OBE was unworkable. The Minister for Education and Training would have been approached to talk about issues with English. Has the minister been to Bunbury to talk to those people?

Mr M. McGowan: I have been down many, many times.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: To talk about English and the OBE structure?

Mr M. McGowan: I talk in English in Bunbury all the time.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: All the time. I will check to make sure that the minister did go down there. This is a serious issue. It does not matter where one goes in Western Australia, education is an issue. Those issues have not been resolved. The government stands condemned for not being able to address those issues.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Darling Range) [3.03 pm]: There is no doubt that there are major problems and issues to address in the education and training portfolio. There is plenty of anecdotal and empirical evidence to support that statement. The motion calls on the government to more effectively address the staffing and resources crisis in Western Australian government schools. This is a major task for the Minister for Education and Training. It is not as though this issue has occurred just in the past few months or so or, indeed, that the government has just been given responsibility for these problems. The government has been in office for six and a half years. Over that time, for various reasons, there has been a deterioration in these particular aspects of the education and training portfolio. The current minister has been in his position for only the past six months or so, so we do not hold him responsible for the origin of all the problems. However, he needs to give active attention to doing more to resolve the problems. Prior to him, the hapless member for the East Metropolitan Region, Hon Ljiljana Ravlich, was the minister for two years. She was moved out of the portfolio because of a demonstrated inability to face and effectively deal with the major issues in the portfolio. Prior to her, the Premier, who I am pleased to say is in the chamber at the moment, was Minister for Education and Training for four years, from 2001 to the beginning of 2005. These problems have developed over time. These are not just my words. The Gerard Daniels report that was prepared for the government and made public a couple of months ago or so states, amongst other things -

We argue some of the changes to the workforce could and should have been predicted by the Department.

It is a matter not just for the department, but also for ministers, of course, to ask the right questions to ensure that issues are addressed. They should not simply be involved in spin and in coming up with particular gimmicks, some of which we have seen over the past few years. Other comments within the Gerard Daniels report are also very instructive and quite damning of the government's record in this area. For example, it states -

This year the Department has been surprised by the larger than usual number of resignations of permanent teachers aged under 55 years, the growing number of retiring teachers over 55 years, the unprecedented number of graduates who rejected offers of employment and the complete collapse of the supply of new teachers prepared to work anywhere in the State.

In relation to older teachers, I recall a conversation that I had with a constituent who contacted me. He has been a dedicated teacher for at least 30 years or so. He rang me last month prior to going on long service leave overseas for four months. I know from conversations with him that he has just about reached the end of his tether. He made the point, amongst other things, that a lot of older teachers in particular are taking long service leave at the moment and will not be returning to the profession. This is because of the pressures and stress that they face and the instability that has existed within the whole system for the past few years or so. He also made the point that a lot of retired teachers who are responsible for providing relief teaching will not meet the necessary criteria within the next five years, and that will also lead to an exacerbation of the crisis.

Regarding younger teachers or new graduates, I was listening to ABC radio yesterday morning and heard the call from a mother of a young female who had recently graduated from one of our universities with an education qualification. She had applied for a position within the Department of Education and Training. She was advised that a position was available for her in Port Hedland. Apparently, she was given 10 minutes to make up her mind about whether she wanted to take the position and had to be on the plane the next day to travel to Port Hedland. Perhaps needless to say, this new graduate did not take up the position. New graduates, particularly young female graduates, need to be given more notice than that if they are to be sent to remote areas of the state. They need to plan and make sure that they have appropriate accommodation. To be given 24 hours' notice to be on a plane is simply not acceptable. Therefore, that particular graduate returned to study and has been lost to the teaching profession. That is an example of the sort of problems which exist within the system and which the Gerard Daniels report has drawn attention to. Another comment from the executive summary of that report is that the department's -

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 13 June 2007]

p3031b-3042a

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

. . . workforce planning and governance of human resource management generally is clearly inadequate. As the largest employer in Western Australia, and an employer dependent almost entirely on professional human capital, we would expect to see a much more sophisticated approach to workforce planning, recruitment and retention.

Further on it states -

In an unenviable display of 'application fatigue', we found that graduate teacher applicants are required to complete, in handwriting, between six and eight forms requiring the same personal details.

As I said, these issues have arisen not overnight, but over the past few years or so. These issues should have received a lot more effective attention from the government than they have. This motion calls on the government to more adequately address these problems and come up with realistic solutions, which are based not just on gimmicks or media statements, but on actions of substance.

MR M.J. BIRNEY (Kalgoorlie) [3.09 pm]: I would like to talk a bit about the practical ramifications of a teacher shortage. In particular, there is a teacher shortage in many country areas today. To try to put it in some kind of perspective, one of the ramifications of a teacher shortage is that normal full-time teachers who are trying to cope with a full-time workload also end up doing relief teaching. That relief teaching then cuts into their duties other than teaching time, which is generally used by teachers to prepare the next lesson or, perhaps, lessons to be given that afternoon or even the next day. Therefore, what we have, particularly in country areas, is a host of teachers who either are not getting duties other than teaching time or are getting a greatly reduced amount of DOTT time. Therefore, the quality of teaching in our schools is suffering.

I must say to the house that I find it absolutely amazing that a new teacher straight out of university, on attending school as a teacher for the first time, is not presented with a massive file from either the principal or perhaps the head of the department that has a heap of learning activity resources in it, such as overhead charts, multiple choice tests, practical assignments, work sheets, and the list goes on. Instead, those teachers, some of them very young indeed, are left to their own devices. I know that many teachers out there will spend hours - in fact up till midnight - the day before on the Internet looking for something to teach the kids the next day. Therefore, when we consider that we have a teacher shortage, those periods set aside for teachers to plan and prepare their next lessons are taken away because those teachers have to perform relief teacher duties. If we have diligent teachers who are prepared to spend hours at home at night on the Internet researching, looking for lessons for the following day, we might be okay; but if we do not have such teachers, we have a poor quality teaching system. I put it to members that teachers should not be left to their own devices but should have adequate support and backup from the education system.

I know that many older teachers who have been around for many years would say, "Don't tell me what to teach and don't tell me how to teach because I know how to do it. In fact, I have a whole heap of resources that I use on a daily basis." That is fine. However, many teachers within the system do not have any resources and do not know where to find the resources. They might end up teaching their students about the history of some far-flung country that nobody particularly cares about because they found it on the Internet. It is very important that the education system provide a level of support to teachers. Therefore, if there is a teaching crisis and teachers are denied their DOTT time to prepare the next lessons, at least they would have a file that they could go to, and they could pull out a worksheet or an assignment and have a lesson already prepared for the students. I am not proposing that those resources become compulsory. However, I am certainly proposing that they become an optional resource given to all teachers that they can call upon in the event that they have to do relief teaching because of the teacher shortage.

There is an organisation that is, as I understand it, part of government, and it is called WestOne. WestOne, I think, grew out of the organisation known as the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education. WestOne, which is a wholly government-owned organisation, I understand, is actually responsible for developing some of those very resources that I was just speaking about, and it wants to sell them to the teachers. I find it to be an extraordinary notion that the government would sell the tools of the trade to its teachers. Can members imagine police officers having to front up with their weekly pay to buy a baton or a gun, or can members imagine nurses having to front up with some of their weekly pay to buy hospital beds for their patients? It just would not happen. In fact, it is unfathomable that a teacher would have to spend some of his hard-earned money - many of them do not earn very much - buying those resources from that organisation, WestOne. If the minister has not heard anything else that I have said today, I would certainly urge him to look into the dissemination of resources for teachers. To break that down in a practical sense, I am talking about giving new teachers some lessons to teach the kids, because if those teachers are being called upon to do relief work, they do not have time to organise their own lessons.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 13 June 2007]

p3031b-3042a

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

It is not just me who is saying that there is a teacher crisis in the country. I will quote now from a letter that was sent to me from one Shannon Johnston, who is the union representative of the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School Branch-work site. Ms Johnston states -

Dear Sir

Please be advised that the members of the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School Branch / worksite of the State School Teachers' Union are concerned that the Western Australian Government is failing to treat the current teacher shortage crisis with the seriousness that it deserves.

The issue of teacher shortage in this school has resulted in many difficulties, including, but not limited to, the following:

- The school FTE not being filled currently
- The school FTE being filled as a consequence of short term and relief teacher placements
- The requirement for teachers/administrators to plan for and teach out of area of subject expertise

That is an important point. The letter goes on -

- Difficulty in attaining the services of relief teachers for the purpose of sick leave coverage
- Restrictions on teacher attendance at professional development due to difficulty getting relief teachers
- Loss of administrative time for administrators
- Loss of planning and preparation time (DOTT) for teachers
- Inability to run some planned programs
- Increases in class sizes
- Inability to provide conditions in our EBA to graduates. E.g. . . . planning, preparation and mentoring
- Rising exhaustion and stress levels amongst staff
- Loss of staff due to pressures associated with teacher shortages.

There we have it in a nutshell, right from the coalface, as it were. Shannon Johnston is a union representative and a teacher at my very own high school, and she is telling me and anybody else who will listen that her teachers are exhausted because they have to cope with their full-time workloads and in addition have to undertake relief teaching, which is greatly hampering their ability to prepare lessons for classes.

I would love to do a bit of an assignment, and I put this to the minister: he might want to go into some of the classrooms and look at the sorts of things that are being taught. Some of it has been snatched straight off the Internet because teachers have no alternative. They are very short on time because they are doing relief teaching. I think the minister will find that some of it at least is of very poor quality indeed. I hope he will see his way clear to investigate WestOne, the organisation that prepares some of these resources, and look into the possibility of WestOne supplying resources to teachers at no charge. Why should teachers be required to pay for teaching resources? Why would they? Why would teachers spend hard-earned money that they could spend on their own families to buy teaching resources, which any outsider would assume would be automatically provided through the education system?

What of the crisis itself? There is no doubt that there is a teacher crisis and a teacher shortage, particularly in country areas. I would like to throw a few ideas into the mix that the minister might consider as something of a solution to the teacher crisis. None of these is a silver bullet. At the moment teachers get biannual trips to the city; perhaps they could get annual trips. Many of them pay rent or have their rent paid in country areas, but there is no incentive to buy a house because that rental assistance then dries up. We should be looking at issues such as school violence and class sizes. Those are the practical things that the government could do in addition to the provision of teaching resources, particularly to new teachers.

MR G. WOODHAMS (Greenough) [3.18 pm]: I think we were all in the house during question time when the Premier made the comment that the Howard government is looting Western Australia. I suggest to the Premier - he is not here but perhaps the Minister for Education and Training will take a message to him; I am sure he will - the Western Australian government is looting the regions. One of the ways it is doing that is by failing to provide adequate educational resources and teachers to many of our government schools. I also heard the Premier say that the economy is bursting. I doubt that the economy that has burst, so to speak, is being visited

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 13 June 2007]

p3031b-3042a

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

on regional Western Australia. If members go into many of our regional towns, they will see, as members on this side of the house have adequately demonstrated, that schools are understaffed and under-resourced. The major issue confronting my electorate and many electorates in regional Western Australia at the moment is the drought. I continually field questions on the drought and speak to people on a daily basis about it. The second most important question and the second most consistent question that is put to me is about education. It is consistently being raised with me by teachers in primary and secondary schools across regional Western Australia. They are concerned about their extra workloads and about their colleagues leaving. They are concerned about staff morale, student behaviour and the social disadvantage being created in this time when the economy is bursting. Something is seriously wrong with the way this government is administering education and training in Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia, where there continues to be a migration of teaching professionals who are either seeking employment in other areas or are retiring. Western Australia does not offer the necessary financial incentives to encourage people into the teaching profession or to keep them on board.

I do not have a lot of time in which to speak. I am sure that the minister is prepared to travel over the next few months to look at the tide of transportables that pass themselves off as schools in Western Australia. An enormous number of schools in Western Australia are predominantly built around transportable education. That is a totally inappropriate environment for both our teachers and our children. Many of the transportable classrooms in the north need air conditioners and many in the south require heating. I plead with the Minister for Education and Training to speak to the Premier and the Treasurer and to bargain for more money for education. Education should be the platform upon which the economy of Western Australia is built. If we do not have successful students, we will not have a successful economy in Western Australia, no matter which side of politics is in power.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [3.21 pm]: I will make a few comments on this motion.

Several opposition members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I hope that the clock was stopped while I was rudely interrupted.

I oppose the motion based on the experience I have of my own electorate. I congratulate all the education ministers who have been part of this government and Geoff Gallop's government. For eight years the previous member for Yokine made promises about two major high schools in my area, particularly regarding the Mt Lawley Senior High School, which I am proud to say is now one of the jewels of the public education system in this state. I urge any member who wishes to see how education is prospering in this state under this government to visit Mt Lawley Senior High School. It is an unbelievable centre of excellence. I have many older established schools in my electorate. The member for Greenough mentioned transportable classrooms. We make great use of transportable classrooms to deal with the fluctuations from time to time in the populations of certain areas. Many of the older established schools are seeing huge increases in infill development, particularly in places such as the City of Stirling where the Department of Education and Training has responded magnificently to ensure that young people are taken care of. Parents can see that their children are getting a magnificent education and that teachers there are well supported. They are some of the best teachers in the world, not just in Western Australia. My daughter teaches kindergarten in year 1. My sister is a teacher also and her daughter in turn is a teacher. They all work well within the public system. Of course there are pressures placed on the system. I worked in an organisation for some 30 years that had difficulty retaining people in the country and encouraging people to work in the country regions where they would live and work under great difficulties. Under this government, the advances that have been made in support of conditions for teachers have been enormous. However, yes, we can always do better. We all know that.

I noted when the Leader of the Opposition was talking about Balga Senior High School that he never mentioned the involvement of the federal government in these programs. The Leader of the Opposition also never mentioned that the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training was happy to gloat about these programs when they were seen to be successful. I must note also that the Leader of the Opposition never mentioned the other successful program that is still operating. He never mentioned the fact that the federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs unilaterally withdrew the funding for that program, without consulting the school concerned, and without even consulting his own education minister, and virtually threw onto the scrap heap the 30 young women in that program, and their babies. As a result of the Minister for Education and Training in this house listening to my grievance about this matter recently, and the matter being taken up by Senator Ruth Webber in the federal Parliament, I am pleased to say that the federal minister has now reinstated, grudgingly, in a very small way, the funding for these young women. The minister has still not given any assurances that that funding will flow onto the young women who will come behind the ones who are currently in the program, and neither has the minister given any assurances that that funding will be extended when these young women go on to undertake tertiary or TAFE education etc. These young women

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

have gone out of their way to come back into the education system. I congratulate the people at Balga Senior High School for supporting these young women in this way. Furthermore, just last week we opened a creche at Mirrabooka TAFE that not only supports that program, but is teaching these young women, during school hours, how to deal with care issues, and is producing trained workers for the childcare sector.

That all links together, because of the vision of the ministers who have taken over the education and training portfolio in the time we have been in government. We constantly hear the carping of members on the other side of the house. However, they fail to appreciate, and even acknowledge, the great advances that have been made in this state in education compared with the situation under the previous government. Every government has issues with education, no matter what its political persuasion, as every government has issues with safety and security, health, and other matters. To come in here and carp about resourcing for education, when great advances have been made in education under this government, is just small-minded political point scoring, quite frankly. It is about time members opposite looked at their own areas -

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Rubbish!

Mr G. Woodhams: Talk to the people who teach English in Geraldton!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It is not rubbish at all. I know people who teach English in Geraldton. Yes, more can always be done, as I have said. Last year, I had the great privilege of visiting my old high school in South Wales in England, where I grew up. That is a grammar school under the public system. If that school were in this country, it would be closed, quite frankly. There is no comparison between the resources and the funding for those teachers, and the resources and the funding for our teachers and our school premises in this state. I dismiss this motion as nothing but a nonsense.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It is absolute nonsense. It is absolute claptrap. Furthermore, members of the National Party should hang their heads in shame for trying to build a country-city divide, for nothing but base political purposes. This state has an excellent Minister for Education and Training. This state has had three excellent Ministers for Education and Training that I am aware of. I compare those ministers with the previous Minister for Education and Training, the member for Cottesloe. I recall a letter that was tabled in this house, which the then Under Treasurer wrote to the Premier at the time, about the way in which the budget for the Education Department was being mismanaged, and virtually destroyed, by the member for Cottesloe.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Spending too much money on education! What a terrible thing!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Spending too much money on education! He was spending too much money on mismanagement, Leader of the Opposition! The Leader of the Opposition should be the last one to talk about management, when he cannot even manage his own staff. He has form in this issue. This is not the first time he has been involved in destroying somebody's reputation in this house by bringing things into the chamber. I can still recall the Aboriginal family down in Manjimup that the Leader of the Opposition almost destroyed by coming into this house trying to score base political points. The Leader of the Opposition also has still not answered the question about how his chief of staff got that report. How did he get a copy of that report?

Mr P.D. Omodei: How did Lewandowski's report get to you?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I told the house how that happened, but the Leader of the Opposition is not prepared to 'fess up.

Mr P.D. Omodei: How did Lewandowski's report get to you? The trouble with you is that you are a crook.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We know that he would have sat around his office -

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr M. McGOWAN: I heard the Leader of the Opposition use an incredibly unparliamentary term, and I ask him to withdraw it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I did not hear the term, but if the member did use it he knows to withdraw it.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I did say that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I withdraw.

Debate Resumed

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Yokine, perhaps we can return to the motion.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I do not take any notice of the slings and arrows from the Leader of the Opposition. I would say to him is that he must look to himself and what he does when he tries to destroy the reputations of good people in this house, because it will come back to bite him.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 13 June 2007]

p3031b-3042a

Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Day; Mr Matt Birney; Mr Grant Woodhams; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan; Deputy Speaker; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Papalia

I have said enough. I know that the minister has a few things to say. Western Australia has an excellent education system - one that is the envy of other states and other countries. Yes, there are issues; there are always problems with staffing. We all know that. It does not matter which government department is referred to; there are always pressures. I absolutely and totally oppose this motion.

DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands) [3.32 pm]: What we have just heard from the member for Yokine proves the point I want to make. Too many people have been in denial about this problem for too long. That was just total denial of the issues facing the education system that I know from the estimates committee the minister is trying to come to grips with; that is, that there are teacher shortages.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I did not deny that.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It is not all rosy and wonderful.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I was talking about the education system as a whole.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The member just painted a picture that is simply not correct. It is my turn to speak, and I have only five minutes. About eight years ago I was contacted by some former colleagues from my time at the University of Western Australia, where I lectured for a number of years, about a report by the deans of education around Australia on what they saw as looming teacher shortages. I raised that issue in estimates committees at the time, and I have asked dozens and dozens of questions about teachers and looming teacher shortages ever since. At the time I was brushed off, by not only the minister of the time, the member for Cottesloe, but also by officers of the Department of Education and Training, who said that the deans had it all wrong and that there would not be any teacher shortages in the years to come. Everything was rosy, and it was going to be fine in Western Australia. Where do we find ourselves today, but with shocking teacher shortages? There are a number of reasons for that. There was an opportunity to consider the issue and plan for the future to see whether we could be in a better position than we are now, but that has not happened.

It is evident to me from the answers that I get to questions that the Department of Education and Training has never really analysed its teaching force. If I ask a question about the number of physics teachers over a period of years, the department cannot tell me. It just has science teachers. That is a bit like a company that employs engineers not knowing whether they are mining engineers, construction engineers, chemical engineers or whatever. We need to know whether there will be a shortage of physics teachers, chemistry teachers or calculus teachers next year, because we want years 11 and 12 to be taught by competent people. However, the department never seems to know anything about the teaching force that it is employing. The most telling answer I got was in the form of supplementary information at this year's estimates. It tells the whole story of what we face in teacher shortages. The question referred to the cohorts of new graduate teachers starting at schools over the years 2001 to 2006. I have traced the number of teachers who have dropped out of the teaching force. I will give a couple of examples of the difficulties the education system is facing. We all should be helping this minister and supporting him in trying to come to grips with these difficulties and to find some answers. We should not be fighting or arguing about who did better and when. Of the cohort that started in 2001, 81 teachers, or 13.9 per cent, left at the end of their first year. In 2006, 210, or 22.4 per cent, left. A trace over the six years indicates the numbers who left: 13.9 per cent in 2001; it dropped down to 10.2 per cent in 2002; it went up to 15.2 per cent in 2003; it was 16.1 per cent in 2004; 17.9 per cent in 2005; and 22.4 per cent last year. What on earth will it be this year? Let us hope we can do something about it.

Why did the Department of Education and Training not follow through that trace and see that that was happening? Why are we in this situation and why is it so bad? In the past six years, of the 2001 cohort - those who started teaching in 2001 - 230 have left altogether, or 39.4 per cent over six years. Compare the 230 who left over those six years with the 210 who left last year - in one year. We cannot afford to lose bright young graduates in this way. What is wrong with the Department of Education and Training that it cannot nurture and help these young people? It is not just about boom times in Western Australia. We knew that this problem was looming long before we anticipated a boom in WA. We have been faced with this problem, and the Department of Education and Training has failed miserably. I want to know from the minister what will happen and what we all can do to support an improvement in this situation.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham - Minister for Education and Training) [3.36 pm]: I thank members for their comments, although I must say that I am reminded by something that Billy McMahon once said when he was Prime Minister. He was touring the country and he said that everywhere he went people knew something was wrong. Of course those words were used devastatingly in relation to him because people knew wherever he went that something was wrong!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Like most things in Australia and Western Australia, we know that as a state we do things pretty well. We do most things extraordinarily well. We are world leaders in so many fields that it is amazing. When I visit other countries, I can see that we do things incredibly well. I actually think our teaching workforce and our education system are world standard. My experience in the past six months as education minister, with all the advice I have received, all the documents I have read and all the people I have spoken to, has reinforced the viewpoint that the education system is world standard. People who say that we do not have a world-standard education system are wrong.

Mr P.D. Omodei: But you are killing the teachers!

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is not to say that there are not issues in the education system, but I want to put a bit of context around that. As I said, in Australia we do very well in most things we do in every field. There will always be issues; that is the nature of things. Nothing is ever absolutely perfect. However, the real question is what we do in trying to fix those issues. Members opposite will say that everything is awful, but that is the nature of opposition. I will put a little context around the issues.

Since we came to office six years ago, there has been a 30 per cent real increase in the education budget. Of all the states, we spend, on average, the most money on education per student. Our average spend per student is 12.3 per cent above the national average. If members compare Western Australia with the other states, which is a fair comparison, they will see that we spend more comparatively on education than the other states. If members look at the capital works budget, they will see that we build more new schools than any other state, bar Queensland. New South Wales has more than three times our state's population, but we build more new schools than New South Wales builds, and Queensland builds more than we do.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Is that per capita?

Mr M. McGOWAN: No; more full stop. We build more new schools than does any other state, bar Queensland. We have a \$1 billion capital works budget. When we took office, it was less than half a billion dollars. During our term in office we will build 39 new schools throughout the state, many in the outer suburbs but many in country areas. I have the budget here; I might go through it later. The capital works throughout Western Australia just in this budget, including the additions and maintenance budget for schools throughout Western Australia, cover the length and breadth of the state. It takes little heed of electorate; it takes account of demand and need. I am looking at ways of trying to enhance that budget and get even more resources into that area.

Since we have been in office, we have changed the system so that all 16 and 17-year-olds must remain in school, formal education or approved employment until the year in which they turn 17. Of course that increases the demand for teaching staff. We have allocated more resources to take account of that extra demand. It is a historic achievement to keep all young people at school until they turn 17. The former minister, the Premier, was responsible for that. We have moved to introduce school-based apprenticeships in years 11 and 12. Now students can start a trade in school. We are also adjusting the courses. We have seen all this hoopla and crazy mantra about the outcomes-based education courses in years 11 and 12. We are making sure that we not only have good academic courses but we also have good vocational courses for all those students who are now staying on to year 12. Seventy per cent of the students who stay on in high school will not go to university. The former system completely focused on those students going to university. We have to take account of the other 70 per cent, by far the majority, who are now required to stay at school, and we have to make sure the courses are adjusted so that schools offer the types of courses that interest them. That is what the new courses of study is about in a nutshell. I urge everyone to ignore the rubbish that is put out about that issue.

More than 1 300 additional teachers have been employed since we came to office. There are an additional 2 000 education assistants. People run down the additional employment, saying that it is all a waste of money, but the education assistants are in the classrooms, often dealing with students with special needs. That is almost entirely the public education system's responsibility. There are more education assistants in the classroom and 1 300 additional teachers.

We have also lifted the standards, as I alluded to a couple of weeks ago. We are introducing a community service obligation for students in years 10 to 12. Students are required to do 20 hours of community service to graduate from high school. They can do things such as help at a local aged person's home, plant trees, etc. We have introduced healthy menus and removed junk food from canteens; students are required to do two hours of sport a week at school until year 10; and students will have proper school uniforms. We have brought all those things into our schooling system. We have done a range of things to keep Aboriginal students at school. They have been broadly spectacularly successful. The number of students staying on to year 12 is roughly five times what it was when we took office. Courses are now in place that will provide them with not just academic opportunities but also vocational opportunities to get trades. That is particularly important in the north west,

which has a high percentage of Aboriginal students. If we can get them engaged in a trade, they will be able to get a good, high paying job after they leave school. We have secured funding for the Clontarf Academy, which will operate at six or eight locations around Western Australia, keeping boys engaged in education. Those sorts of initiatives are historic. Gerard Neesham, the man who came up with that initiative, is a wonderful man, as are his supporters, Ross Kelly and so forth. We are very pleased to support it.

Members opposite referred to the complaints management area. We have revolutionised that area by establishing the position of a professional standards director who will work with a senior police officer. By the time it is fully operational in the middle of this year, it will be the best-staffed office in the country to deal with staff misconduct issues. Staff misconduct will happen in every education system now and forever. A professional standards director will deal with those issues and properly review the records of our workforce in the education system. The list goes on.

In terms of the positives, the last point I raise relates to the Western Australian College of Teaching. I have introduced a bill that deals with appointments and elections to the board. I urge members opposite to support its speedy passage so that we can conduct elections and properly set up the body as quickly as possible. If members opposite are willing to give that commitment, that excellent initiative will be operational in the second half of this year.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Are you aware that some teachers in my region - I have been touring schools in my area - are not attending professional development courses because their principals cannot afford to let them be absent because of a lack of teachers? Young teachers are missing out on professional development. Are you aware of that? That is what is happening at the moment.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The shortage of teachers in the Western Australian education system is 30 out of 21 000 teaching positions. There is a staffing formula for all schools; some schools have a higher staffing formula depending on their location and the cohort of students.

Mr T.K. Waldron: If that is the case, why is that happening?

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member can bring me specific examples; I would be happy to investigate them. We are short 30 teachers out of 21 000 teachers. The word "crisis" is thrown around all too regularly in the political discourse of this state. I urge people to think about that. I admit that at the start of the year the number was 200. Some people have said that it was 264; however, it was 200. At this point of the year in 1999, the system was short 72 teachers. We have a minimum of 1 270 more teachers than when we came to office. We have 2 000 extra teacher aides than when we came to office and there has been a 30 per cent increase in the education budget since we came to office. There are issues in some parts of the state. When I was in the north west the week before last, I visited some schools in that region and met with many teachers. I understand that they are under pressure. Some locations and environments are difficult. I am committed to doing something about the problems faced in those regions. We commissioned and released the report undertaken by Gerard Daniels - it is now being used to bash us - which is a private sector recruiting firm. It made a range of recommendations after making some disturbing findings about the workforce plan and recruitment sections in the agency. I have released that report - the media did not expect me to do so - and have said that it sets out a blueprint for change. Over time we will implement those recommendations to improve the short and long-term workforce planning and recruitment practices in the agency. Traditionally, recruiting teachers has not been a problem. Indeed, usually there are more applicants for university positions than there are positions. Generally, we have not had a problem. As I said, in 1999 - and perhaps 1998 - there was a problem. Generally, teacher recruitment has not been a big problem. This year, of course, the economy is so strong that many teaching graduates - I think the figure is 25 per cent - are doing something else. Literally thousands of Western Australian teachers are working overseas, particularly in Britain. Many teachers are approaching retirement age. The average age of the teaching workforce is between 45 and 50 years, which is higher than the average age of the general workforce. We must take a statewide strategic approach to resolve these issues.

It would be great if the federal government took these issues seriously. The commonwealth's rhetoric about state education, particularly public education, has been nothing short of appalling. The Prime Minister recently said that what is taught in schools is sludge. That was irrespective of the fact that international analysis has placed Western Australia in the top five places around the world for academic results. We are up there with Finland, Japan and Switzerland, yet the Prime Minister described what is taught in our schools as sludge. He has not been in a classroom for 50 years and has not learnt anything about our education system since. Is it any wonder that so many teachers have morale problems? They turn on the radio every day to hear the Prime Minister describe what they teach as sludge, while the federal education minister comes up with wacky and hair-brained ideas about consulting children on what teachers should be paid. The federal minister has said that we should accommodate her pay ideas in the existing budget, which would drive down the wages paid to some

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 13 June 2007]

p3031b-3042a

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teachers. The problems with teacher morale are often caused by such things, but there are also other issues. As I said, there was an issue with staff numbers. We have a plan to deal with that in the short term. Professor Lance Twomey has been asked to put in place a long-term planning strategy for the next 40 to 50 years for our teaching workforce. He is going all around the state to listen to people. He is an incredibly accomplished individual. He will address all those issues in a long-term strategy for Western Australia, which will be presented by the end of the year.

There are other issues. When I became Minister for Education and Training, the big issue was the OBE debate. I will provide some context for this issue. The OBE issue really started in 1998 when the then government abolished the syllabus. The then minister, the member for Cottesloe, said in a press release -

. . . that the new framework represented a fundamental shift in school curriculum away from focusing on what schools had provided and teachers had taught as prescribed in a syllabus, to what students would learn.

In other words, he was abolishing the syllabus. From 1998 to now there has not been a school syllabus but a curriculum framework. That has meant that teachers, and particularly young teachers in country locations, have been confused about what they are supposed to teach. At the end of this year, a nationally assessed K-10 syllabus will be in place.

The rest of the OBE debate followed. I will again provide some context for that debate. A newspaper article from this year is headed "The OBE works, says Barnett" and indicates the member for Cottesloe's support for OBE. Considering that he introduced it, I am not surprised. The current shadow Minister for Education and Training, Hon Peter Collier, said in a speech in 2005 -

I say on the record once again that I acknowledge the benefits of outcomes-based education. Any system that promotes personal fulfilment and development at all levels of learning has considerable merit. That is what outcomes-based education is all about. I particularly applaud the move away from strict syllabus-style teaching, with rigid objectives and goals . . . teaching to exams, which I find totally unproductive.

I disagree to some extent with many of those sentiments. However, I am sure that ensuring that we focus on what a student learns more than on what is taught is a good philosophy. We have moved back to traditional methods of marking; put in place a syllabus, clear reporting and a set list of English texts; made sure that Australian history is part of the history course; allowed teachers to use traditional methods of assessment; and increased the number of exams in year 12 so that the number of students who sit exams will increase from about 30 per cent to 60 per cent. They are the sorts of measures we have put in place just this year to address some of those issues.

Dr K.D. Hames: Can I ask my question yet?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Before I get to the member for Dawesville's question, I outline that we have put in place standards, additional resources and long-term plans to address the future of the teaching workforce, and we have undertaken far more capital works. All those things are in place and we are moving forward.

Dr K.D. Hames: A parents and citizens meeting is being held at Glencoe Primary School in Halls Head on Monday night at which people will be talking about the inclusion policy for children who have some degree of disability, particularly kids with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and those children spending more time in the classroom. Those people are saying that although that is great for the kids who have these conditions, teachers do not have any more resources for this purpose, and the other children in the class find that a lot of the time of the teacher is taken away from the rest of the class and given to the child with a behavioural difficulty of some sort. I have a child like that, and without education support, it can be very difficult for the teachers. Is that an issue that has come to the attention of the minister recently?

Mr M. McGOWAN: The inclusion policy was put into effect a long time ago. It was reviewed in the early part of this decade. However, I think it was actually introduced in the late 1990s. It is designed to take out of specialist classes children who are able to fit into mainstream classes, and provide additional resources to them in those mainstream classes. People may say that not enough resources are provided, but 2 000 extra aides are out there, so there are additional resources. However, I understand the concerns of many parents that this is taking teacher time away from mainstream students and putting additional teacher time into those other students. It is a vexed issue, and it is one that I am happy to talk to the member about and I am happy to listen to him. It is one of those issues on which I am currently listening to people and about which I am learning. I know that the member for Peel has a lot to say, so I will sit down.

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Mr P. PAPALIA (Peel) [3.56 pm]: Not surprisingly, I rise in support of the Minister for Education and Training and in opposition to this motion.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I did want to say that. He is a fantastic minister and he is doing a great job.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (20)

Mr M.J. Birney	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr D.T. Redman	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr T.R. Buswell	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas	Mr A.J. Simpson	Ms S.E. Walker
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr G. Snook	Mr G.A. Woodhams
Dr E. Constable	Mr J.E. McGrath	Dr S.C. Thomas	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr P.D. Omodei	Mr M.W. Trenorden	Mr T.R. Sprigg (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (25)

Mr A.J. Carpenter	Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan	Mr A.P. O'Gorman	Mr P.B. Watson
Dr J.M. Edwards	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr P. Papalia	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mrs J. Hughes	Mr M. McGowan	Ms J.A. Radisich	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr J.N. Hyde	Ms S.M. McHale	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr S.R. Hill (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr A.D. McRae	Mrs M.H. Roberts	
Mr R.C. Kucera	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr T.G. Stephens	
Mr F.M. Logan	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr D.A. Templeman	

Pairs

Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr P.W. Andrews
Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr J.R. Quigley
Mr C.J. Barnett	Ms M.M. Quirk

Question thus negatived.