

EDUCATION — FUNDING

**29. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Education:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to ensuring that every Western Australian school student receives a quality education.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the Cook and Albanese Labor governments are partnering to deliver an additional \$1.6 billion in investment for Western Australian public schools?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this partnership will further strengthen Western Australia's public education system?

**Dr A.D. BUTI replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Kingsley for her question. The member for Kingsley, along with the Premier; the federal Minister for Education, Hon Jason Clare; the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Sabine Winton; and the federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, Hon Dr Anne Aly and I were all at East Hamersley Primary School on the first day of term to make a very important announcement. I should set the scene. The shadow Minister for Education, the member for Roe, two days before, had an op-ed in *The West Australian*. He was lamenting that the WA Labor government was doing nothing in the education space. I have to say that it was a pretty spiteful op-ed. It was actually quite personal. Anyway, leaving that aside, he talked about there being no funding by the state government. That is interesting because in the last budget we had a \$6.4 billion recurrent funding in education, which was 30 per cent more than the last budget that the Libs handed down in public education. It is interesting that he sees it as underfunding. He talks about underfunding and two days later we gather in the electorate of the member for Kingsley to make this incredibly important announcement. It has resulted in \$1.6 billion of extra, additional funding that will go into public education over the next 10 years. The member's timing was not that good.

Let me talk about the agreement that was signed. We signed a statement of intent with the federal government. It is all to do with the funding arrangement between the commonwealth and state government on public funding of education. It relates to the *National School Reform Agreement*, which is the agreement that determines that funding arrangement. The federal government initially wanted to increase funding by 2.5 per cent. At the moment, it funds public schools to 20 per cent of what is called the Gonski standard, which is the school resource standard or what Gonski determined is needed to ensure students have a proper education. The federal government funds 20 per cent of public school students and the states have to do the rest. At the moment, the basic level around Australia is 75 per cent, so there is a five per cent gap. We are funding higher than that at the moment, but 75 per cent is the average. The federal government stated that it will increase its funding by 2.5 per cent, but the states have to increase their funding by 2.5 per cent. The initial offer by Minister Clare was that the federal government would increase its funding over five years by 0.5 per cent a year, so we would not get to full funding until 2029. We are in the position to increase our 2.5 per cent quicker because of our sound financial management. We went to the feds and said, "We'll sign the statement of intent, we want to get moving, but we want our 2.5 per cent commonwealth funding quicker." Therefore, by the end of 2026, we will be the only jurisdiction in Australia—the Australian Capital Territory excepted—that will have full public funding of our schools. Does the member still stand by that op-ed? By the end of 2026, all our public schools will be funded with 100 per cent of the Gonski funding. I am sure that even the member would see that as being very important.

What will that funding be used for? It will be used to ensure that we have improved equity and excellence in schools, and that we are supporting the wellbeing of students and teachers and providing a strong and sustainable workforce of teachers and non-teaching school staff. I should also add that we will be targeting the most disadvantaged schools first, so many of our disadvantaged schools will be funded by the end of 2025. I should also add that we have a no-disadvantage clause in the agreement, so if other states are somehow able to negotiate a better deal, we will also get that better deal, like we did with the GST. We funded a better deal with the GST and we are funding a better deal with the school funding agreement. No wonder the member is concentrating on federal government issues; he has no way to attack the state government! But I am not going to stop there while I am on my feet.

It is interesting that the member has talked about that op-ed today. His contribution yesterday in this house was unbelievable. He went on about the Grattan Institute's report. He said —

... I know that some other states are looking at phonics and explicit instruction as part of their programs to improve reading. I look forward to being enlightened about what this state is doing and whether that was a condition of the minister signing up.

You are the shadow education minister; is that correct?

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** That's correct.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Do you not know that our schools have phonics taught by explicit instruction? That is the policy. Every school has to do that; if they do not, they get reviewed. We are also the only state, as far as I am aware, that actually tests for phonics in grade 1. Is the member not aware of that? Clearly not. On a more positive note —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

*Point of Order*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister appears to be trying to subvert this to question time for the shadow Minister for Education, rather than what is actually the situation. It is the Minister for Education who should be answering the questions.

**The SPEAKER:** You have made a point. It is not actually a point of order. The minister is entitled to ask rhetorical questions, but I would urge him not to badger people opposite for an answer.

*Questions without Notice Resumed*

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

In regard to the funding that the Cook government is investing in public education, we have invested \$626 million in new and upgraded school facilities in 2023–24, which is more than double what the member's government did when in office. As part of the new schools, I was actually with the member for West Swan, the Deputy Premier, out at Henley Brook Primary School about two weeks ago now to open its \$31.3 million beautiful new primary school. The shadow minister was there and he actually posted it up on Facebook. He wrote —

... a pleasure to attend the opening of Henley Brook Primary School last week. What an amazing campus, with lots of open green spaces, great sporting facilities and state of the art classrooms.

There is even a photo there with myself, the member for West Swan, federal member Carmen Lawrence—not Carmen Lawrence—Tania Lawrence, and also the local mayor, Tanya Richardson, and he even had the generosity to put a photo of me up there that he took. It was really well done. That is what we are doing. We are not underfunding, as the member well knows. We reached a historic agreement, so how about being positive? As the member knows, the values of Henley Brook are “hero”, which stands for heart, some compassion—we know that opposition members do not have compassion—excellence, resilience and optimism. Show a bit of optimism, member!