

TRUANCY — ANTI-TRUANCY PROGRAM

305. Mr W.J. JOHNSTON to the Minister for Education:

I refer to the agreement reached by the former state Labor government and the Rudd government to trial an anti-truancy program in the Cannington district and the rejection of this trial by the Minister for Child Protection.

- (1) As the responsible minister, is the Minister for Child Protection relaying the views of the Minister for Education?
- (2) If not, will the minister take up this trial opportunity?
- (3) If the minister is opposed to the trial, will she explain why to the house?

Dr E. CONSTABLE replied:

- (1)-(3) The matter of truancy has been under discussion for some time in the media and, as former ministers will know, it is one that is not easy to solve. I know of the work done by the previous government and the task that faces the present government to deal with this issue. Mr Speaker, you may have noted weekend media reports in which it was reported that truancy rates have increased in the 2006-08 period, albeit marginally. I think we have to remember the other side of the coin, in that 90 to 92 per cent of children are at school on any one day in Western Australia. About six per cent of children are absent for legitimate reasons. We have three or four per cent of children who are truanting or who are away from school on any one day. This is a very difficult situation.

I note that the very small increase in truancy between 2006 and 2008 coincided with the increase in the school leaving age. It is possible that that group has had some impact on those truancy figures. That is something I am looking at at the moment. It is not surprising because a lot of those kids, who are now in school because of the increase in the school leaving age, are those who were often disengaged earlier at school. We have to make sure, as the previous minister did, that we continue to offer programs involving school, some employment, some training and even apprenticeships in those years so that they are actively engaged and have the best opportunities for later on in their lives. My office has been in contact with Jenny Macklin's office over the past few weeks. I met her about 11 days ago when I was in Adelaide. We had a discussion about her plan—the “no school, no welfare” plan. That is still under discussion between my office and her office.

Mr M. McGowan: Robyn McSweeney rejected it.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: No. We are looking at a whole range of things related to attendance, just as the former minister did. One of the things that I am particularly keen to do, to balance, if we go down that route of “no school, no welfare” —

Mr E.S. Ripper: So the minister is not opposed to the trial?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The decision has not been made.

Mr M. McGowan: She said, in the public arena, it has been made.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: There was a mistake in the newspaper report some weeks ago because we had been communicating through that period of time. As well as looking at more punitive approaches to this, my office is looking at programs that provide incentives to parents and to kids. Over the next few weeks we will be finalising that plan and continuing to discuss the plan that the commonwealth government has put forward as well.

Mr M. McGowan: You have a different view from her? You must do.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I do not know who “her” is.

Mr M. McGowan: Robyn McSweeney.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I am very concerned about “no school, no welfare” because often it is targeting the most vulnerable people in our community. That is why I am very hesitant about it and looking overall at the whole area of attendance. There are a couple of incentive programs being demonstrated in schools at the moment. I am investigating those and, over the next few weeks, we will be able to make that decision.