



**Question on Notice  
For 8th September 2009**

For the Minister for Education, Hon Jane Lomax-Smith MP -

How much has the Minister spent on ministerial travel in 2008/09 and in each case, what was the destination and purpose?

**Education Policy  
23 July 1998**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** I oppose this motion as I believe the specific areas nominated for investigation have been adequately addressed in a number of initiatives put in place by this Government that were previously ignored by the former Labor Government. I also believe that a select committee in another place looked into these issues and never brought down a report. I understand the committee was in place for four years, the terms of reference were similar and there was ample time for an interim report to be tabled. It would be a waste of time and money to set up another select committee to go over similar ground again.

In addition, I have found that the Minister has an open door, and specific issues can be discussed with him at any time. I know this, because I regularly take the opportunity to discuss with him the problems in my electorate, and the Minister has met with delegations from my electorate as well as visiting it, only recently over three days.

Excellent progress has been made in providing information technology to all schools in the State as a result of the EDSAS and DECStech 2001 technology programs. There are more than 70 education institutions in the electorate of Flinders and these programs have enabled the primary and secondary schools sector to increase considerably the number of computers available to students. Many of these schools are well on the way to achieving the target of one computer to every five students by 2001. Some schools have already reached this level and some are already looking to upgrade their older computers, many of which were provided by school parent groups and other community groups in country towns who actively fund raised in order to buy computers to ensure that their children were able to keep up with modern technology during an era of Labor neglect.

As a direct result of these Liberal Government initiatives, computer skills are being taught to students from reception through to year 12. Children as young as seven and eight are able competently to manipulate word processing, spreadsheets, publishing and animating packages. They are creating their own home page on the Internet with graphics and text, and displaying their school to the entire global village. Many students are talking via the Internet to students in other parts of Australia and indeed the world.

Children are familiar with CD-ROM and can have a story read to them while the words are highlighted, thereby helping them to identify the words as they are uttered. They can access and download information from intranet systems for school projects and choose from a wealth of information and graphics contained on disc.

Country students continue to face many challenges in gaining an education which their city counterparts do not. However, the funding provided by this Government which has allowed increased access to technology has alleviated some of the difficulties of isolation and inability to access information that country students have traditionally faced. I commend this Government's introduction of incentives to teachers to undertake country service. Eyre Peninsula faces constant difficulties in attracting and retaining professional people to the region. I applaud the introduction of inducements which encourage teachers to come to the country and make it attractive for them to stay. Once we can get teachers to come it is usually not difficult to keep many of them as they find that the lifestyle is congenial and the country people very welcoming.

Increased funding has allowed all the schools in my region to attend to urgently needed repairs and maintenance. When this funding was introduced most of the schools were in a very degraded and unattractive state. I believe this situation made it difficult for teachers and students to feel pride in their school environment and morale was low. Many classrooms had not been painted in decades, carpets were threadbare and furniture, fixtures and fittings were in need of repair. These are now being attended to and there is an increased pride in the schools. Children are thrilled with their new look classrooms and are very proud to show their parents and visitors around. Air-conditioning that is gradually being placed in libraries, resource centres, computer, science and other classrooms as funds are made available is greatly improving the learning environment, particularly in summer, in central Eyre Peninsula where the heat is not alleviated by a cool sea breeze in the evening.

Having attended to urgent repairs and maintenance, many schools are now undertaking outside projects, planting gardens and erecting much needed shade for eating and play areas. The Education Department emphasises duty of care towards their charges and I applaud these sun safe projects as a very necessary precaution against the increase in skin cancers in Australia. Several years ago country communities were ravaged by the combined effects of drought and high interest rates. There was a marked population drift towards metropolitan areas as farmers were forced to leave their properties and businesses closed as they were unable to meet extremely high interest payments. Despite a significant drift from Eyre Peninsula, the region has been relatively unaffected by school closures; in fact, I believe the last school closure occurred when the former Government was in office. Strategies have been put in place where possible to allow schools to remain open. Small schools have been annexed to larger ones in order to allow the small school to remain open, providing better educational outcomes and greater consumer choice into the bargain.

My electorate covers an area of 55 000 square kilometres. Many of the schools are extremely isolated and those schools which have been affected by falling enrolments and a subsequent loss of teachers are often reliant on the open access system to provide instruction in subjects for which a face to face teacher cannot be provided. I believe that this system, while not perfect, operates quite effectively and that some schools have year 12 students for the first time while others have increasing numbers, owing in part to the large range of subject options now available.

Vocation education training provides a means for the Government to focus on improving choices for our young people. Prior to leaving school they get some experience in their nominated field of work before gaining an apprenticeship or traineeship. This allows them to make an informed decision about their future employment and often has the result that students decide not to pursue a particular avenue. My observation of the schools in my electorate indicates that the many new initiatives have been very well handled and are providing excellent education outcomes for students. I reiterate that I oppose the motion as I believe an investigation by a select committee is unnecessary and both funds and time could be put to better use.