



PUBLIC SCHOOLS
27 August 1998

Adjourned debate on motion of Ms White:

That a select committee be established to inquire into the funding of public school operating costs, and in particular:

- (a) The adequacy of Government operating grants paid to public schools;
- (b) Those cost items which should be met by Government and those costs which should be met from other sources, including payments by parents;
- (c) Those cost items which fall into the category of material and services charges; and
- (d) Existing arrangements including the current regulation for compulsory fees, the existing levels of voluntary contributions and School Card allowances.

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): A few weeks ago I spoke against another motion from the same member that also requested a select committee to be established. I believe that neither of these select committees would serve any practical purpose other than the one I believe the member has suggested them for, and that is to waste Parliament's time and the time of the hard working members of the Education Department, to prevent everyone from getting on with the productive activities that need to be undertaken if we are to work as efficiently and as effectively as we must, if we are to provide the best education for our children within the financial constraints imposed upon us all by the previous bad management of the member's Party when last in Government. The last thing anyone needs is an expensive, time consuming exercise undertaken to try to score political points.

The department is already supporting the work required by the Cox Committee into Local School Management, which intends to analyse similar issues, and this proposal would just be duplicating effort. The Cox Committee ministerial working party has representatives from school councils, unions, pre-schools and departmental people, and is well equipped to undertake this inquiry. In addition, the enterprise agreement process is also in progress and is absorbing a significant amount of departmental time outside of normal everyday activities. Perhaps the member would like to take away even more funding from actually teaching our children to employ more department staff so that yet another report can be produced, because it is obvious that existing departmental staff cannot do it all and their core activities would otherwise have to suffer.

If the member really is interested in obtaining the information she is requesting I wonder whether she has bothered to check the existing reports. Comparisons between States in relation to expenditure per student are reported and commented on through the National Report on Schooling in Australia, issued each year. The latest report issued is for 1995-96. The report shows that South Australian per capita expenditure for both primary and secondary schools is above the national average expenditure per student for Government schools. Interestingly, it is above the State of New South Wales and also Victoria in both primary and secondary schools. The student-teacher ratio is also better than that for New South Wales Government schools.

In addition, the Productivity Commission also reports on various parameters as they relate to schools. I understand the Grants Commission issues comparisons which are normalised for each State's individual differences and which show that we are above the population average grant expenditure because we are a small State with a significant isolation factor. It would appear that South Australia fares very well when compared with other States' expenditure on education, which is just as well, because we do not have the resources— thanks to the former Labor Government—to increase it. Certainly, we do not wish to spend any of it on more reports by select committees, particularly when the information sought is readily available from a range of existing sources, as I have indicated.

It is just a waste of time and resources because the two select committees that the member for Taylor proposes would use up funds that could be used for reducing school fees that the member indicates are of such concern to her. As a member with 74 education institutions of one kind or another in my huge electorate I know for a fact that it has been under the Liberal Government that we have seen the expenditure needed to make our young people computer literate, to provide new science laboratories and home science centres to replace those that were being used when I was at

school and to generally upgrade facilities that have fallen into disrepair under a Government that had no idea how to use taxpayers' funds prudently that have been entrusted to it. I believe there is nothing to be gained from such a select committee being established and I do not support the motion.