

Topic: [BILLS](#)

Subject: [Education Amendment Bill \(Serial 103\) - Presentation and second reading, debate adjourned.](#)

Date: [09/10/1991](#)

Member: [Mr STONE](#)

Status: [Education](#)

Information: Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr STONE (Education): Mr Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Education Act to enable full implementation of a standard devolution package as part of the Department of Education's estimates review strategy. Devolution is the means by which control and responsibility for planning and administrative tasks, both day-to-day and longer term, are transferred to individual institutions. In the Northern Territory, both school and college legislation provides for the incorporation of governing bodies, and for those bodies to become self-managing. It is recognized that strong regional and local differences exist in the Northern Territory and that the implementation of programs should take account of these differences.

The standard devolution package provides for management by schools of those matters best handled locally. The package does not include responsibility for the control and direction of curriculums or broad educational policy. These remain the responsibility of government which is advised by statutory boards and councils. Medium to large schools will accept responsibility for standard devolution functions. Regional councils will be established to service the needs of clusters of small rural schools and these will be assisted, with financial management and other devolved functions, by their regional offices. The standard devolution package will

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provide a foundation for school councils and the community in general to have greater input to and control of educational programs for their students.

Acceptance of the package by school councils will be optional but, where a school council does not exist or where a council elects not to accept the package, administrative responsibility will be devolved either to the principal or, in the case of small remote schools, to a cluster school council administered by the regional superintendent. Where an existing school council elects not to accept the devolution package or where, in the case of a small school, a lack of local expertise makes it necessary to form a group school

council to administer the devolution package, the amendment gives school management councils or group school management councils clear authority over an existing school council to exercise financial powers.

The bill prescribes that a school management council shall be constituted by the head teacher or another person appointed by the minister. However, like any other body corporate, the school management council will be able to co-opt expertise as required. The group school management council shall be constituted by a person appointed by the minister and, generally, this shall be the local operational superintendent.

The amendments ensure that the general functions of the school council are not merely advisory, but regulatory. The previous restriction on school councils in respect of employment of public service and teaching service personnel has been removed. Without this amendment, implementation of the devolution package would not be possible. The bill rationalizes administrative functions throughout the Territory in a manner consistent with regional needs and aspirations, and this rationalization recognizes the value of community involvement. I commend the bill.

Debate adjourned.

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Reference:

<http://notes.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/HANSARD6.NSF/0044d01ca7b2aec748255fcd0024659c/9cc49e5fd7ae37d3692565bd00175d86?OpenDocument>

Sixth Assembly First Session 12/11/1991 Parliamentary Record No: 7

Topic: [BILLS](#)

Subject: [Education Amendment Bill \(Serial 103\)](#)

Date: [13/11/1991](#)

Member: [Mr BELL](#)

Status: [MacDonnell](#)

Information: Continued from 9 October 1991.

Mr BELL (MacDonnell): Mr Speaker, this proposed amendment to the Education Act has been the subject of considerable concern in the Territory community and has been a matter of particular concern to existing school councils and to people associated with those schools which will be obliged to form councils. In essence, this bill is undemocratic and devolution is being forced on schools. This is a

dramatic change in government policy and one that this government has no mandate to carry out. The current minister's predecessor was always at pains to explain that the process of the devolution of responsibility for a variety of matters was at the discretion of schools themselves. The key difference announced by the minister in his second-reading speech was that schools are to have councils whether they like it or not, whether they want them or not and whether they are in the town or in the bush.

I refer honourable members to the minister's second-reading speech. He said: 'Acceptance of the package by school councils will be optional'. He went on to say: 'Where a school council does not exist, or where the council elects not to accept the package, administrative responsibility will be devolved to either the principal or, in the case of small remote schools, to a cluster school council administered by the Regional Superintendent'. If that is not compulsory devolution, I do not know what is. The minister's words are there in black and white. They were heard by the members of this Assembly when he moved the second reading of the bill in October.

I want to place on the record the dissatisfaction that the government has with the unseemly haste as well as the essentially undemocratic nature of ...

Mr Reed: It may be that the opposition does, but the government does not have any dissatisfaction with it.

Mr BELL: The government should have some dissatisfaction with it, and the opposition certainly has.

Mr Reed: Get your facts right. Remember where you are.

Mr BELL: These proposals are essentially undemocratic and their compulsory nature is something that the opposition abhors.

Mr Speaker, there are a number of comments that I want to make concerning this proposal. One is that a Labor government in the Northern

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Territory will provide an optional devolution package in line with that considered by the minister's predecessor. I refer the honourable minister to 'Towards the 90s Volume 2', the information paper of August 1988, in which the minister's predecessor stated: 'No school councils will be obliged or compelled to take control of their school's finances. Smaller schools especially, and those in isolated areas, may lack local expertise, and may wish to retain present departmental planning and control. Such wishes will be respected'. However, this minister has announced that nobody's wishes, apart from his own, will be respected. The degree of self-centred determination on the part of the minister to stuff devolution down the throats of unwilling school councils has been absolutely breathtaking and it is a matter of concern throughout the Territory electorate.

I have mentioned in previous debates in this House that the experiments with devolution elsewhere, particularly with compulsory devolution, have not met with anything like universal approval. I refer the minister to the experience in New Zealand, where volunteer staff on the school councils have had to work 60 hours a week on supervising contracts and so on. We believe that places an unreasonable imposition on persons serving on school councils. We welcome the proposal to involve parents and local communities in the educational programs, in policy-making in schools and in taking an active interest in a broad range of activities within schools. However, we believe that those school communities themselves should determine the rate at which those changes should occur. They should not be required to march in time with some changes that suit the minister's ego and his particular political program. The fact is that this minister is being forced by his Cabinet colleagues to make unpopular irrational decisions in respect of educational funding, and he is desperately trying to seek some educational rationale for doing so. His announcements about reordering priorities are not to be taken seriously. As I said in debate during the

last sittings, his idea of reordering priorities seems to be akin to that of a bull in a china shop.

We believe that the employment of teaching staff in schools should continue to be centralized. It is in this area that I want to take up a couple of comments, and indicate that there needs to be considerably more debate in that regard. I notice that interest has been taken in this issue in Victoria recently. I suppose I should draw to the attention of the Assembly my personal involvement of the employment of teachers, the terms of their employment and the question of leadership in education implied in the move away from inspection towards peer assessment in the Territory and in state education services generally. As a neophyte teacher in Victoria, I was involved in the move away from inspectors. I believed that a more collegiate process of educational leadership should apply and that that was a reasonable reaction. It seemed to me, and it still does, that the inspectorial arrangements that applied to Victorian high schools in 1971 were not dramatically different in shape or form from the inspectorial arrangements that applied 100 years earlier. They were designed to provide the kind of leadership that might have been appropriate when pupil teachers were employed at the age of 15. These pupil teachers had completed grade 8 and were then employed in a pupil/teacher arrangement.

I happen to be keenly aware of those arrangements. Both of my grandparents were involved in the teacher training exercises of the late 19th century and early 20th century, and I believe that they were appropriate to their time. It was a source of considerable irritation to me, as a university graduate, to have so little respect paid to that. It was a source of irritation to me that fellow graduates, who were working in

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other areas, seemed to be accorded a little more respect for their graduate status than those who were in the secondary division of the Victorian Department of Education. I must say that my decision to depart Victoria in 1974 and come to the Northern Territory was induced by the fact that the Whitlam Labor government had instituted a peer assessment program.

Mr Stone: Does this have anything to do with devolution?

Mr BELL: This has a great deal to do with devolution. I am pointing out that this bill will dramatically change the employment arrangements for teachers. What is envisaged with this bill is a removal of the current and traditional central employment of teachers and a movement towards the employment of teachers by school councils.

If the minister will bear with me, I will explain to him precisely where I am coming from in this debate. We are up to 1974 in this saga, and we have only 17 years to go. I want simply to contrast the inspectorial arrangements with the peer assessment arrangements. I do not intend to enter into a detailed explanation of peer assessment arrangements, but I will place on record that I do not necessarily believe that those peer assessment arrangements have it absolutely right. Having been through a very painful experience of having to express a judgment in a peer assessment arrangement, where my judgment was - and I am not going to go into details about it because I do not believe that is appropriate ...

Mr Hatton: If you find that difficult, what the hell are you doing in politics?

Mr BELL: I will pick up the interjection.

Mr Manzie: Don't encourage him.

Mr BELL: I will pick up the member for Nightcliff's interjection. One probably goes into politics with one's eyes wide open and one knows one will be subject to those pressures. When one is involved in the business of teaching children and maximizing the learning opportunities for children, one does not expect to be subject to the same kind of rigorous, personal and psychological pressures that one is in political life. What I am suggesting is that my experiences of peer assessment, even though they were not

necessarily representative, were not a bad proving ground for political life. I will simply say that.

I think that peer assessment has been an improvement, but I maintain that the question of leadership in education that has superceded the inspectorial system is not necessarily perfect. I have referred to this because I believe that such issues need to be worked out well before the minister simply devolves those particular powers to school councils. I believe that represents a threat to quality education for Territory children. That is what a Labor government in the Northern Territory will stand for and what this opposition will fight for, as opposed to these absurd privatization arrangements. In the committee stage, I will return to particular provisions of the bill that will increase dramatically the proposed powers over staffing. That is a matter of serious concern. A Labor government in the Northern Territory would retain a centralized arrangement for the employment of teachers, but it would examine a mechanism for increasing community involvement in that regard.

In relation to individual problems envisaged with this package, the opposition is concerned that emergency relief teacher time will be totally

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inadequate. The proposal for notional staffing of schools is a matter of concern in the context that emergency relief teacher time will not be available to the extent that it has been. Secondly, urgent minor repairs, repairs and maintenance generally, and cleaning etc are all reliant on particular schools having expertise to make those intricate decisions. It is a matter of concern that bush schools, in particular, may not have that expertise. Thirdly, this proposal will be a complete disaster in bush areas.

Let us concentrate our minds on the problems of turnover. We have problems with turnover in schools in Darwin and in Alice Springs. The capacity for schools to be disrupted, as a result of families moving much more frequently than is the case in capital cities elsewhere, means that compulsory and irrevocable devolution to those schools will create considerable difficulties. This has not been given sufficient consideration. The concerns expressed to the opposition by a variety of organizations have been considerable. Under these circumstances, the proposal to devolve has been very poorly considered and has more to do with financial expediency and shifting the burden of financial management from a central bureaucracy to the schools than anything else. It has absolutely nothing to do with quality education for Territory children. I have already referred to comments from the minister's predecessor and I want to indicate our concern that there has been this dramatic change in policy.

A further issue relates to the insurance aspect of the devolution package. I note that the Branch Manager of Alexander Stenhouse Northern Territory has expressed considerable concern about the proposals to move to councils, particularly since it is being done so precipitately. In a letter that has been made available to the opposition, the branch manager commences by pointing out that the Department of Education currently arranges workers' compensation, voluntary workers' personal accident and public liability insurance on behalf of all school councils incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act and the Education Act. He comments that these policies have shortcomings and are not adequate to protect school councils now, let alone when councils accept wider responsibilities under devolution. The department is aware of the need to review these policies, and most likely will do so before long'. I suggest that, before we go down the road of devolution that the minister referred to in his speech, those kinds of views should be given due consideration.

Mr Johnson went on to say that the evaluation of insurance requirements for schools is dependent on each school's current circumstances. He refers to professional indemnity insurance, directors' and officers' liability, fidelity guarantees, industrial risk insurance, engineering insurance and motor vehicle insurance. He said: 'We recommend establishment of blanket policies to minimize costs and to cover all schools. The suggestion that schools insure building-related risks for \$25 000 is impractical. That would be a first loss policy which the insurance market would find difficult to assess and therefore expensive to insure'. He went on to say: 'We are aware of a proposed amendment to the Education Act by inclusion of

section 71M. Although this will provide some measure of protection to council members, we feel there is a need for professional indemnity, directors' and officers' liability and public liability insurances as a backstop. The existence of section 71M will significantly reduce the premium costs but, by implication, will not remove the need for such insurance entirely'. I suggest that is a matter of concern for the minister in respect of his determination to compulsorily devolve.

Mr Hatton: Are you prepared to table that document?

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Mr BELL: Do you want a copy of that? Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table a copy of that letter.

Leave granted.

Mr BELL: Mr Speaker, in conclusion, this legislation is undemocratic and educationally irresponsible. We believe that the government is forcing school councils to take on compulsorily wide-ranging administrative tasks to save the government money. It is making community-minded volunteers responsible for running schools in their limited free time. I want to stress that Labor is not opposed to devolution in principle, but that we are opposed to compulsory devolution. A Labor government will provide a broad devolution package which school councils can draw on at their choosing. As they gain the experience they need, they can take on more tasks. If they want to give up power, they can do so. It will be entirely up to the community.

The Minister for Education is telling the community that it will have control whether it likes it or not. It appears that he is doing this so that he can get rid of 60 jobs in his department. The people of the Northern Territory should take a close look at the experience in New Zealand, where people are leaving school councils in droves because they are unable to fulfill their obligations due to the size of the workload imposed on them. This government is pursuing its philosophy of dumping education. It wants to privatize schools in the bush and it wants to divest itself of its responsibilities in urban areas by forcing parents and teachers to do the department's work. This legislation is once again an attempt to pass the buck for public education away from this government and throw it on the shoulders of people who are not in a position to provide the quality education that a Labor government would recognize to be a right of Territorians and not a simple optional extra that they should be forced to pay for.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH (Nelson): Mr Speaker, in rising to speak to this legislation, I will say at the outset that I have a grave concern. I would like to be assured that, with the work taken on by the school councils lessening the work for the Department of Education, the departmental personnel will decrease at the same rate.

Mr Stone: Guaranteed.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH: I hope it has decreased over the years at a certain rate.

Mr Stone: It has. I will show you a graph.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH: Good.

I cannot understand what all the fuss is about in regard to the establishment of more school councils. If my memory serves me correctly, the first school council was formed in 1979. The call then was for the parents to have more control over the education of their children. Prior to 1979, schools had been run by and for teachers. I am not saying the teachers made mistakes. No doubt, some of them did over the years, but it certainly put an extra load on their shoulders.

If parents take control of the school councils of the schools where their children are educated, I believe it will make for much better community feelings. It enables the parents to see how their children are

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being educated. With the great changes in education over the years, especially in science education, many parents cannot relate to the education their children are enjoying these days compared with the education they had themselves. It is either over their heads or outside their recognition. As a result, they cannot assist their children or relate to their children's education. Being an active member of a school council would bring them so much closer to the education that their children are enjoying.

Prior to 1979, parents were asking for more control over the management of their schools. Initially, this was given to them in the form of control over funds for libraries and stationery supplies. That is how it has progressed from 1979 until the present. That is a period of nearly 13 years. I believe that is long enough for parents to be able to accept responsibility now for the management of the schools where their children are educated.

With regard to private schools - and I am not talking about elite private schools, which seem to raise the ire of so many socialists these days, but about small private schools ...

Mr Ede: They all send their kids there.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH: That is true.

I am talking about the small private schools in the Northern Territory. All of these schools have boards of management, school councils or some other management body which controls what occurs in the school. To say that parents should not control the education of their children is a bit like the federalism argument that is before us now. One could say that the government's active encouragement of the devolution of powers to the school councils is to its credit because, in the 12 years since school councils have been formed, there have been many different ideas about how the children in those schools should be educated. While they have the same core curriculum throughout the Northern Territory, the variety that has been adopted by the school councils in the management of their schools reflects community attitudes, and that is to be applauded.

For all wild birds, there comes a time when the young have to leave the nest. The fledgling birds are tipped out of the nest by their parents and they have to fly. I think that is pretty much the situation for schools that do not have school councils. They are not really fledgling birds because they have been observing other school councils for the last 12 years. However, they have to learn to fly on their own. I do not think it will be a disaster for them or for the Northern Territory. I believe the Department of Education will still extend help to them and any new school council that wishes advice will be able to obtain it from other school councils.

Mr STIRLING (Nhulunbuy): Mr Speaker, in 1988, I was on the Educational Advisory Council as the Trades and Labor Council representative. At the time, the 'Towards the 1990s' documents were provoking quite a bit of discussion. It was very clear from those documents that devolution was to be non-compulsory. That was very clear.

Mr Stone: It still is!

Mr STIRLING: Well, go and speak to the school councils. If the school council will not take it on, you will force it down the principal's throat. What is optional about that?

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Mr Hatton: It is optional for the school council.

Mr STIRLING: If the council cannot take it on, it goes to the principal. That leap, from optional to compulsory, has never been explained or debated. There is no doubt that devolution is a very good idea for some schools - schools that are in affluent communities, schools where the expertise is in the community and where interested and committed parents have some knowledge of and ability in financial matters. If we take a school such as Nhulunbuy Primary School, we are talking about considerable sums of money that have to be administered. That is fine for Nhulunbuy Primary School or for Nhulunbuy High School because there are parents who have the necessary expertise. There is also interest and commitment from the community to do the best by the schools, the school councils and the students. They are able to generate considerable self-help from within the community for school projects, repairs and maintenance and thereby save some money.

However, that does not apply in respect of all schools, and that is the point. There are inequities between schools at the moment. There are schools that are well-off and schools that are under-resourced. These proposals will widen the gap considerably between those schools that are able to look after themselves and do very well out of devolution, and those schools that are currently under-resourced and do not have the expertise from within their community to be able to benefit from devolution. It is a question of equity, and it is very worrying.

The proposal comes wrapped up in a theory that there are educational advantages that will accrue from this process of devolution. That is totally unfounded. There is no evidence at all that forcing responsibility for financial administration on to a local school will do anything for the educational outcomes of the students within that school. How will it make students learn more efficiently? How will it make teachers teach more efficiently? There is no relationship at all between financial administration arrangements, whether they are central or regionalized, and the quality of educational outcomes for the schools.

A couple of local issues arise from that. If we look at schools in east Arnhem Land, there is a considerable freight component on everything that is landed there. These supplies came previously freight-free for government schools. If we look at ex-Darwin freight to Gove, the costs can be around 40%. I will give an example from the Nhulunbuy High School in relation to grounds maintenance. A pallet of fertilizer from Darwin costs \$800 and the Perkins freight cost is \$256. The cost to transport it from the barge to the school is about \$55. That is a total freight bill of \$311 or 39% of the cost of the pallet of fertilizer. If it has to be fork lifted on and off the barge, the cost may be considerably higher than 40%. The schools need to know whether those costs will be taken into account in the funding arrangements because that has not been made clear. Those costs need to be built in for plant and equipment, cleaning contracts, grounds maintenance and contracts for all schools in these remote areas.

Repairs and maintenance and minor repairs may be a cause for concern. Nhulunbuy High School is now 11 years old. Up to the present, maintenance costs have been relatively low because it is a fairly new school. If the funding for repairs and maintenance and minor repairs is based on historical data, there is no doubt that it will be under-funded and the repair bills ...

Mr Reed: Why could you assume that?

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Mr STIRLING: If it is taken on the historical data, repairs, maintenance and urgent minors at Nhulunbuy High School will be relatively low because it is a relatively new school. Costs in this area will increase commensurate with the age of the school. Once again, there is no way of knowing whether those factors have been taken into account.

Major unforeseen damage is another issue. The primary school was vandalized the other week. The

carpets were ruined when the school was broken into and the taps were left on. That has still to be covered. Will major unforeseen damage, storm damage or vandalism, be covered centrally or automatically? It is not clear to school councils. In relation to legal costs, if a school council found itself involved in a legal battle over some matter within the community, who will cover the cost of that? Does the school have to make allowance for such contingencies? The result of all this is that school councils concentrate enormously on considerations of a financial nature at the expense of what is occurring educationally within the school. It amounts to less emphasis on the quality of educational outcomes within the school compared with considering whether the school has enough money to get through the next term.

With notional staffing, the trend to greater power for school councils in relation to staffing matters continues. It has been explained to me in terms of the salary cap for a football team. In theory, school council flexibility to rearrange funding to employ an extra specialist, a resource teacher or an extra teacher to allow smaller classes or release time is fine. However, the reality is that, in many remote areas, there is no such flexibility because trained teachers are not available, or certainly not available for short-term work. If we look at it in terms of a salary cap, does it mean that school councils can place teachers on a transfer list if they are not wanted next year or next term? That would not be fair and it would be of great concern to teachers. I understand that a school council representative will now play a role in the selection panel for the principal, and I support that idea. However, once again, it pushes school councils closer and closer to becoming employing agents. Some school councils argue that they should be the employing body now.

In 1986-87, I was a parent member of the Driver Primary School Council. The member for Palmerston was in the habit of writing letters to students at the Driver Primary School when there was reference to them in the school newsletters or school notices as receiving commendations or certificates of merit or whatever. If the letters had been posted to the students' homes, that would have been fine, but those letters were taken to the school and the teachers were asked to hand them on to the students. I suppose that was fine too. However, one teacher refused, on principle, to hand the letters on to the students in his or her class. It was a contentious issue with the school council because some school council members wanted to have that teacher dismissed or transferred. Clearly, at that time, the school council did not have that authority. However, that is the type of situation that can and will arise if school councils become the employing body. The matter had absolutely nothing to do with the qualities of that teacher with respect to educational outcomes for the students.

Teachers must continue to be employed by the Northern Territory Teaching Service on a centralized basis. The trend towards pushing more and more responsibility on school councils, particularly in respect of employment, is one that the government needs to be very wary of. The other point is the issue of devolution being compulsory or optional. The opposition supports some aspects of devolution, but only on an optional basis.

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Mrs HICKEY (Barkly): Mr Speaker, I will speak briefly on this matter because my colleagues have covered most of the areas that are of concern to me. However, I want to address a couple of issues that are pertinent to this debate and to my electorate. In my electorate, there are many single-teacher schools. These schools will be seriously disadvantaged by the package that the minister is now proposing. Of necessity, these schools will come under a cluster system that will be administered, no doubt, by somebody who will take less than a direct interest in each school because of the time constrictions.

In some of the larger bush schools, the same problem will occur. The school at Ali Curung has a principal of not many years experience, a principal who is struggling to act also as tutor to Aboriginal teachers, and one who has no experience of administrative matters. His school council is very willing to involve itself in the educational life of the children, but lacks experience and the kinds of skills that will be needed with the full implementation of this devolution package. In other words, if these parents feel that they are unable or do not wish to take on devolution themselves, this task will fall to an already stretched principal who is

very reluctant to take that task on, because he feels that he is inadequate to do the job justice. That is no reflection on the principal concerned, but on the amount of work that he will be required to do. It will take him out of the classroom and it will require him to be an administrator, whereas his real role should be that of teacher and as mentor to Aboriginal teachers. This school at Ali Curung has suffered considerably at the hands of the Department of Education over the years. The school has been severely disadvantaged by having had very many principals in a very few years, and it has not received the support that is due to it as a remote school.

Nevertheless, the minister wants to make this a compulsory devolution package. In one way or another, schools have to take on devolution. If the school councils will not do it, the Department of Education will do it for them. There is no educational rationale for this. It will not improve the educational outcomes for children. The government is merely trying to save itself money and, in the process, to shed some 40 or 60 positions from within the Department of Education.

Mr Hatton: Look at the track record around Australia.

Mrs HICKEY: That is little comfort to employees in the Department of Education, Mr Speaker.

My colleagues have outlined how a Labor government would approach this matter. We support devolution as an optional package. We support the notion that parents wish to be involved, at varying levels, with the educational life of their children. Some parents feel able to take on a great deal and some a little. People should be encouraged to contribute whatever they can and to bring to the schools whatever skills they feel they have the time to commit. However, it is totally unreasonable to expect parents to take on what amounts to a second job. Even in the urban areas, and even if they have skills to provide this level of support to schools, as well as doing their normal work and raising their children, it is too much to expect them to take on what is the task and the responsibility of government. This is why we have a state education system, but of course the minister's agenda is a very different one. The minister's agenda is one of privatization, of devolving responsibility away from his own department and on to the parents, or to church groups or to whoever is willing to take it on. It is a very insensitive and ill-advised policy.

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In relation to the individual problems in the package, we believe that emergency relief teacher time is totally inadequate to meet the situations that arise. I am sure that the minister is aware that many schools suffer as a result of outbreaks of epidemics of one kind or another, especially during the wet season. Gastroenteritis is rife at certain times of the year. This means that many teachers are absent at the same time and this will swallow up much of the emergency teacher time that is available to them.

Urgent minor repairs, maintenance and cleaning etc are all reliant on the school having expertise to take intricate decisions, and such expertise may or may not be available in bush schools. By and large, urban schools have taken on this devolution process and urgent minor repairs. I was Secretary of the Tennant Creek Primary School Council at the time when devolution was first mooted. We successfully negotiated and organized \$0.25m-worth of improvements to the Tennant Creek Primary School, but let me indicate that it was not an easy process. Certain members of the Department of Education wanted us to expend the money in a particular way. It took a great deal of negotiation and numerous meetings with the then minister - I cannot remember which one because there have been so many - to effect a change of heart in the Department of Education.

This resulted in burnout for the parents because they were unaccustomed to that kind of thing. They had not nominated for the school council to have confrontations with the minister or to have to draw hard lines. Their aim was to improve the educational outcomes for their children, yet they found themselves in confrontationist situations, having to issue press releases and having to politicize the process. This discouraged large numbers of parents who felt unequal to this task. They were happy to assist by raising money through raffles and other activities and by acting in advisory capacities, but they did not have the

expertise to commit to the devolutionary requirements nor the will to combat the flak that they were receiving from the Department of Education because they were not following the path that it wished them to take.

At least at that time, the Department of Education had a view on how the parents should behave within the school and what they should do. By the time this minister has finished dismantling his department, there will not be many advisers left who will be able to have some input. It may be open go for the schools and, if that is the case, God help them. Whether the parents wish to take the advice or not, there has to be some informed opinion at the top in the Department of Education.

I conclude by saying that the opposition believes that this package will be a complete disaster for the bush areas. That is not unexpected, of course, because quite clearly the minister is not interested in educational outcomes generally, and certainly not for bush communities or Aboriginal students in remote areas. After all, by and large, they do not vote in the electorates that the government holds so it is not really interested in furthering the educational outcomes for these people. However, let me assure the government and this Assembly that the opposition is and, when the Labor Party is in government, as it surely will be after the next election, things will change.

Mr HATTON (Industries and Development): Mr Speaker, I thought that this was a fairly straightforward amendment until members of the opposition started speaking. They have now managed to confuse everybody, not the least themselves. Members of the opposition have been talking about the wonderful things they will do when they get into government. I think the Minister for

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Education's son is safe. He will be well past university before that happens. Be that as it may ...

Mr Stone: If they had been in government, we would not have a university.

Mr HATTON: Mr Speaker, members of the opposition have been telling us that they will make the devolution package to school councils voluntary. This bill makes it voluntary. There will be no obligation on school councils to take up the devolution package. If they do not want the significant financial and other advantages that flow from devolution, for which I and many other members who have been actively involved with schools can vouch, that is their decision. However, many parents wish to become involved in their children's education and in the way the schools are being run.

Every step that we have taken over the years gradually to devolve authority to the schools, and to the parents in particular, has been opposed by the Labor opposition. They are the flunkeys of the NT Teachers Federation and are fighting a rearguard action to maintain power and control over educational policy and direction in the hands of the so-called professionals - the teachers. Parents want to have a say in education, and we are giving them a chance to have a say. However, this bill does not make devolution compulsory. If school councils do not wish to take it on, that is fine. However, the Department of Education will organize its affairs to deliver the services in an alternative way to that in which they are delivered at present. It will be done in a way that is much closer to the school rather than through the current centralized system. It will be done through the employees in the school or through a group of schools in the rural areas. Either way, it is patently clear that it is voluntary for the school councils. It is an excellent step in the right direction because it will provide the parents with more opportunities and allow them to recognize the savings to be had from school councils carrying out much of the work associated with schools.

Mr Bailey: Because of the way this is being implemented, the only savings will be to the department.

Mr HATTON: Mr Speaker, I know of a couple of school councils that have bank accounts containing in excess of \$1m at the moment. How many chook raffles would it take to raise such a sum? The school

councils never had so much say and access to so much money before this process of devolution began. This bill takes the process an extra step forward, and it is still voluntary. Members of the opposition cannot seem to come to grips with that, and that is a shame. It is one of the great difficulties we have. However, their continued inability to read even simple legislation like this gives us a significant sense of job security because we know that we will be sitting on the government benches for several parliamentary terms yet.

Mr CARTWRIGHT (Victoria River): Mr Speaker, the rhetoric surrounding the government's devolution package is an insult to the intelligence of everyone who is expected to swallow it. This rhetoric says something to the effect that the government will graciously give more power to parents and schools to control how the children are educated. The Minister for Education has barreled ahead with the scheme as though he has been given a clear mandate by parents and teachers everywhere to proceed with the devolution package. He has also implied that the scheme will not be compulsory for those who feel they are not ready to take it on.

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The minister does not have a mandate to carry out his proposals as they now stand. He has been given clear and definite signals by numerous schools that they are not happy with the package. Regardless of what the Minister for Education says, the devolution package will be forced on all schools. It will be compulsory, regardless of whether the school is Darwin High School or Amanbidgi School. What is not compulsory is for school councils to adopt the package but, if they decline, the school principal must take it on. For this reason, many schools have decided to adopt this package, under duress, in order to prevent sole responsibility for the scheme falling to the principal. Needless to say, this kind of reluctant adoption of the devolution package does not create a good climate in which to run a school. It is simply that the alternative is perceived to be worse.

Let us look at what devolution means. Ideally, devolution is about giving school communities the opportunity to have a greater say in how their children are educated. This should apply not only to financial management of a school or to how many rolls of toilet paper are ordered but, most importantly, it should relate also to educational matters such as class structures, curriculum issues and the employment of teachers. It is with regard to these kinds of matters, and not so much the toilet paper supplies, that many school councils are prepared and want to work with the Department of Education.

Parents and school councils are not particularly interested in taking on responsibility for the Department of Education's financial woes but, in effect, this is what is being asked of them. What they are interested in is seeing that their children's educational needs are being met. If devolution is about reforming the education system so that it is improved, what is the urgency about having it up and running by the first school day of 1992? Surely major reforms such as these take longer than 2 weeks, plus the generous addition of the mid-semester break when very few teachers were around to examine and comment on it. If this is a taste of the greater power that parents and schools will be given or indicative of the department's consultative mechanism, then the education system is in very deep trouble. Time has not been given for schools to consider adequately all aspects of the package. Implementation is being rushed to the extreme and this is because CLP-style devolution has nothing to do with educational reform. It is about cost-cutting and little else. Principals and school councils will no longer be people who provide sound advice on the education of children. Rather they will have to become business managers if they wish to keep the Minister for Education satisfied. The minister cannot deny that this has become an argument about economics. It certainly is not about the betterment of educational standards in the Territory.

Let me talk about small schools like Amanbidgi, Yarralin, Pigeon Hole, Timber Creek and others like them. Small schools such as these are to be clustered under the new scheme. However, the physical distance alone between these schools is considerable. In itself, this will create the need for resources such as vehicles, accommodation arrangements and so on. Teachers, especially in the smaller schools, already have a large administrative workload for which they receive very little release time. I will give an

example of some of the problems this can create. The Timber Creek School is closed today because of power problems. The school will also be closed tomorrow and Friday because the teacher will be in Katherine attending a conference about funding arrangements. There is no one to make up for shortfall. Children will miss out on 3 days of schooling, a situation that would not eventuate if the teacher did not have that administrative millstone around her neck. I point out that I am not

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criticizing teachers but rather the inadequately considered concept of devolution as it relates to smaller schools.

There is little or no expertise in bush areas to implement and properly administer devolution. Even though the minister will have powers to establish school management bodies, the huge areas involved and the lack of expertise permanently in the community mean that this so-called solution is not good enough. We are flat out teaching children now without the added responsibility of devolution. Educational directions are going out the window as they have been going for a long time.

The Labor Party does not oppose the concept of devolution if it is implemented thoughtfully and with sensitivity. The Northern Territory Council for Government School Organizations made the quite reasonable request that implementation should be deferred until there had been adequate in-servicing. Why couldn't this have been possible? A Labor government would have recognized and taken note of the views of those parents and schools who feel that devolution should not be compulsory and a Labor government would provide an optional devolution package to schools, with staff employed in the central office to take on the tasks that schools choose not to undertake. I and my colleagues oppose the Education Amendment Bill.

Mr BAILEY (Wanguri): Mr Deputy Speaker, once again, the government members are quite happy to sit here and throw interjections at the members of the opposition who are prepared to debate very important legislation. Other than a 5-minute commentary from the member for Nightcliff, not a single member of the government has risen to support this bill.

Mr Stone: We want to get on with the business of government instead of listening to your filibustering.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, this bill will affect every school in the Northern Territory, yet the Minister for Education says it is not the role of this House to debate the significance of this legislation.

Mr Stone: You are saying the same thing over and over again.

Mr BAILEY: In other words, the honourable minister is saying that he should present a bill and make his second-reading speech, but that there is no point in any other members putting their views on the record.

Mr Stone: We gave you all the information so that you could brief yourselves.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, in the short time that he has been an elected member, the minister has demonstrated to every person in the Northern Territory that he is the most arrogant, uncaring prig in this Assembly.

Mr FINCH: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! The member for Wanguri not only does not understand the words he is using, but he uses them most inappropriately. It is rather insulting to this House and to the minister for him to attempt to use such language so aggressively.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, the honourable minister has demonstrated beyond doubt to all members of this Assembly and to all people of the

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Northern Territory that he is the most arrogant, uncaring prig that has ever entered this Chamber. On many occasions, opposition members disagreed and debated with the previous Minister for Education. However, at least the previous minister, Tom Harris, was concerned about education in the Northern Territory. The current minister does not care about the future of public education in the Northern Territory. In fact, as he has pointed out at numerous meetings, he is concerned that he has to manage a Department of Education that is run by the government. In fact, his agenda is to give up all responsibility for a government education system as quickly as possible.

After taking his decision to try to dismantle the education system, we note the stages by which he proposes to achieve his aim. First, there was the decision to close numerous schools around the Northern Territory for no reason other than to disrupt the education of the students attending those schools. The second step is to hand these resources largely over to private educational institutions. It is the beginning of the dismantling of public education in the Northern Territory. However, I digress.

We heard the honourable minister outline what he hoped to gain from devolution. Schools, the community and interest groups were waiting until October 1991 ...

Mr Stone interjecting.

Mr BAILEY: Do you want to listen, you little prig?

Mr FINCH: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! I am not so sure about your ruling on the words that the honourable member is using. However, the aggressive and provocative way in which he is addressing them across the Chamber will not only get him into a little physical strife at some time, but ...

Members interjecting.

Mr FINCH: I think it is totally out of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member will resume his seat. There is no point of order, but I remind the honourable member that, when he refers to a member of this House, he will refer to him by his correct title.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologize for not referring to him by his correct title.

In October this year, barely 4 weeks ago, schools received the standard devolution package draft document. As has been mentioned already, it represents a total change of direction for the entire organization of schools. The member for Nightcliff said that many schools have had devolved powers for a long time and it has been a great idea.

Mr Coulter: We were the first.

Mr BAILEY: The member for Palmerston says that his area had them first. However, what is in the bill before us is in no way the same as what schools took on under devolution in the past. It is a total change.

Mr Coulter: It is better now than it was then.

Mr BAILEY: It is markedly different. Almost every group and school that I have spoken to have said that

they had so little time to respond to

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this document and that the information in this document was so vague that they were unable to make an accurate assessment.

The honourable minister sits there and asks why we have not read all the information. It is voluminous and was supplied only yesterday to members on this side.

Mr Stone: We run good courses at TAFE. We will even waive the fees for you.

Mr BAILEY: Dripstone High School is one of the most organized schools that I know of. It has taken on extensive devolution. It is one of the schools that currently have a large bank account and that is a result of its role in devolution. The response by Peter Lewis, the Chairman of the Dripstone High School Council, to the standard devolution package is ...

Mr Finch: Aren't you a bit violent tonight?

Mr BAILEY: Yes, I am a bit violent because I am very angry about what this uncaring minister is doing to education in the Northern Territory.

Members: interjecting.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Deputy Chief Minister has chosen to return to the Chamber at this time.

Mr FINCH: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! It is inappropriate for a member to reflect on whether a member is in or out of this Chamber or any other place.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is a point of order. The member for Wanguri will take note of that.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, for the benefit of the member for Palmerston, I will repeat the comment. It is fine for government members to interject and interrupt when a very important bill is being debated in this House. Unfortunately, other than the member for Nightcliff, who spoke for 5 minutes, and the minister who presented this bill, no government member has said anything.

Mr Coulter: Sit down and I will have a go.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, it is normal practice within this Chamber for interested members on both sides to alternate in speaking. We have been waiting for government members to contribute. Maybe that will happen.

I was referring to a letter from the Dripstone School Council to Angus Henry, the Chairman of the Steering Committee on Devolution. The opening paragraph stated that it had a meeting on 9 October to discuss the draft standard devolution package document. It said:

This council found it difficult to understand how such a vague document was allowed to be issued as a blueprint to an exciting and challenging period of council departmental relationships. The document left out so much data any school council must have, if they are to take on the legal responsibility of managing the school, that we found it difficult to respond to at all because there are no details of proposed formulae to respond to.

The council said it will be an exciting and challenging period. However, it said quite clearly too that the document was difficult to understand. It acknowledged that devolution could be very exciting and challenging but said that the document left out much of the data that any school must have if it is to take on the legal responsibility of managing the school.

A member: Table it.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table this letter.

Leave granted.

Mr BAILEY: As I was saying, 4 weeks ago, schools received the draft document on devolution.

Members: interjecting.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Speaker, the document is dated October 1991. It is now the middle of November. It was circulated 4 to 6 weeks ago. If the document arrived on 1 October, it was circulated a maximum of 6 weeks ago. However, I will give an indication that they were then given something like 2 or 3 weeks to respond to this document, at which time, barely a week ago, they were given the final document on devolution.

Mr Finch: It was before the break.

Mr Stone: At least 65 of the urban schools did.

Mr BAILEY: All the schools that I contacted made an effort to respond. They held school council meetings through the holidays. They had ...

Mr Coulter: What happened to page 2? Do you reckon that they simply ripped that out?

Mr BAILEY: Mr Speaker, if the honourable Treasurer will listen for a second, I will explain it to him. The document was tabled at a Dripstone High School Council meeting. The original letter had been posted to the department. The letter was left on the school's word processor. When a line was added, the printout for the school council meeting had about 2 lines on the second page. If you go to the third page, you will find that it is correct. I explain that for the benefit of the school because that document was tabled at its last school council meeting. I am quite happy for anyone to obtain the original document from Mr Henry to verify that what is presented here is correct. It was tabled at the Dripstone High School Council meeting for all school council members.

The issue is that schools were not given adequate time to react to this. The schools that responded to the draft document said that there was so little in it that there was nothing that they could clearly react to. There were many issues in it of concern to the schools, such as schools being responsible for the allocation of emergency relief teachers but not necessarily for emergency relief teaching itself.

As the Minister for Industries and Development said, many schools are quite interested in taking on aspects of devolution and can obtain benefits from it. However, this legislation is taking devolution a long way past what the previous minister, Tom Harris, ever tried to implement. It is a means by which this minister and his department are seeking to divest themselves of their responsibility to provide quality education to all

people within the Northern Territory. It is a way of cutting corners and saving money and it will enable him to make the schools, rather than himself or his department, responsible for those cuts and savings.

One example is in relation to emergency relief teachers. If they were prepared to look at the estimated recurrent numbers of teachers who take leave of one form or another that will be covered under the relief teacher allocations, it may be appropriate for the schools to have some say in how that time is allocated. However, that is not what the minister is trying to do. At the moment, the department has an obligation to supply relief teachers when teachers are away and an obligation to ensure there are sufficient teachers to cover all the classes that are being held in the school. This minister is saying that, with his devolution package, the school will be given fewer relief teachers than it is entitled to and it will be its problem to work out how the classes can be covered. The department will no longer be responsible for that.

I believe that the relief teacher allocation has been increased from the original draft devolution document which referred to 5 days per teacher per year. A circular, relating to the implications of the draft package, was issued to all staff at Dripstone High School. It stated: 'The proposed allocation for short-term emergency relief is 5 days per teacher per year. Our staff currently average about 9 days per year for this type of absence'. Even though the minister has slightly increased the emergency relief allocation, it is still well below what schools currently use or need. The decisions taken by the department, which could not be ignored because it had a responsibility for that function, will now be given to schools. The schools will be given far fewer resources than they ever had previously to do this.

Mr Stone: We got this idea from the ALP government in Tasmania, and it works very well.

Mr BAILEY: The agenda that this honourable minister has is to destroy public education in the Northern Territory. He is doing that by dividing the schools and by putting them in a position where they have limited resources to carry out activities for which, previously, the department had responsibility. I will give an example. Wanguri Primary School had some concerns about a carpet that was flooded during the last wet season. There was concern for the health of students and staff at the school.

Mr Stone: Why don't you cut the nonsense and say that we replaced the carpet?

Mr BAILEY: I was about to say that. The department decided to replace the carpet, and that was appropriate. However, under devolution, depending ...

Mr Finch: They get to choose it themselves.

Mr BAILEY: The honourable minister is so quick and so bright that he realizes that, under devolution, the school itself will have to choose.

Currently, problems of that magnitude are not expected to be borne out of the resources of a school and, depending on the cost, the school may not have to go to the department. That was a classic case of a decision that could have gone either way. It could have been, say, \$15 000 which is within the guidelines requiring the school to decide whether or not to replace the carpet. As it turned out, in excess of \$30 000 was spent.

Theoretically, the school could apply to the department for that. Currently, the minister has a responsibility for the health and well-being of students and teachers within his department's schools. Under these guidelines, he says that schools will make the decisions about the expenditure of funds. The school would have to decide whether it could pay \$15 000 to replace carpet that was a potential health risk. It could

obtain advice and decide what to do, but it might not have the money to do it, and that is one of the reasons why we have a central ...

Mr Stone: It would come and ask me and I would put it down.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Speaker that is why we have a central fund and central decision-making. Under this standard devolution package, the response from the minister could be quite easily that the school council should have budgeted for those contingent liabilities - and members know all about contingent liabilities.

Mr Hatton: You don't understand.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Speaker, I am quite happy to explain to the member for Nightcliff what contingent liabilities are. They can be any debt that it is known may occur, but that will accrue if certain circumstances occur.

Mr Hatton: Carpets wear out, and that is inevitability.

Mr BAILEY: The minister is so thick. The whole point I have tried to make is that the carpet had not worn out. It was contaminated. In other words, it needed to be replaced before wearing out. Therefore, it was a contingent liability which had not been allowed for.

Mr Stone: We were the good guys. We replaced it.

Mr BAILEY: Eventually.

Mr Stone: Not eventually.

Mr BAILEY: Begrudgingly acknowledged.

Mr Stone: I would have gone out and laid it myself if I had had to.

Mr BAILEY: The whole issue of this devolution package is a further indication of the way that this minister is operating. He tries to give the impression that he is talking to the community. In fact, he never does. He simply shoves through whatever he wishes. He circulates something and tells the schools that they have 2 weeks to respond on it. The document may be an inch thick and there is insufficient time for proper consideration.

This minister and his department have correspondence stating that all schools have made considerable efforts to develop their improvement plans. It was a standard form letter with the address altered for each school. The letter stated, in effect: 'Your plan has been considered, and I have pleasure in approving it. Please pass on my appreciation to all those who have contributed'. When the devolution package was ready, another form letter was written: 'As you are aware, one of the major initiatives arising from the Estimates Review Committee process is that the standard devolution package ...' It went on to say that, once the school had the documentation, it had 2 weeks in which to respond and that the final documentation would be sent about 4 weeks before the end of the school year. Following the finalization of the standard devolution package, the schools are required to

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vary their plans for 1992-93 and give thought to the first year of the next triennium. The revised plans have to be submitted to the operational superintendent by 29 November 1991. What an arrogant way to run a Department of Education!

Members: interjecting.

Mr FINCH (Transport and Works): Mr Speaker, I will commence by congratulating the honourable minister on his most considered approach to the question of devolution or, should I say, on the completion of what has been a 4- or 5-year program of transferring powers to school communities. In addition, I congratulate the officers of the Department of Education who have been most vigorous in making themselves available to explain the package to all who wanted to inquire and learn. They have worked hard on answering the numerous questions that have been asked. That applies also to the training programs which they are implementing to ensure that no school is disadvantaged and that all schools are able to maximize the opportunities offered by this continuation of a progressive attitude to education in the Territory.

When it comes to counting, the member for Wanguri has always had some difficulty. When he talks about a 4-week period for school communities to respond, I should remind him that the draft packages were sent to every school prior to the last school break. That was closer to 20 September and that is almost 8 weeks ago. That is a little longer than the 4 weeks mentioned by the honourable member, but let us not spoil a good story by introducing the facts.

Mr Bailey: It came out on 20 September, and comments were required by 11 October - 3 weeks later.

Mr Stone: We took later comments.

Mr FINCH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will lend the honourable member my calculator later. He has trouble with mental arithmetic. As I have said often to the Leader of the Opposition, when he and 3 colleagues of his own choosing want to pit themselves against myself at mental arithmetic, I will be more than happy to oblige, for a small carton on the side.

This package has been welcomed by most school communities with a great deal of enthusiasm because they realize that this will add to the opportunities that they have already. The opportunity to be rid of cake stalls, chook raffles and school fetes is welcomed by them. They ...

Mr Bailey: How long do they have in which to comment, Shane?

Mr Stone: 6 weeks.

Mr FINCH: ... recognize clearly the opportunities being offered to them to attain economic self-sufficiency.

Mr Bailey: How long did you give them for late comments? 3 weeks?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Honourable members will cease their continuous interjections across the Chamber.

Mr FINCH: They have the opportunity to have a greater say in their own destiny and also to make some money. That is welcomed by all of the school

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councils in my area. If the member for Wanguri wishes to return to the cake stall days, be it on his head.

Technical support has been offered by the Department of Transport and Works to each and every school community to ensure that they have the wherewithal to take full advantage of what is being offered to them. That commitment has been there since the beginning of this proposal. It is very interesting to hear the member for Wanguri arguing against school councils having the responsibility for maintenance in

schools ...

Mr Bailey: I did not argue against it.

Mr FINCH: He argued against their having that responsibility and the advantage of setting their own priorities. In relation to urgent minors, they will be able to pick up the phone and have a light switch fixed without having the delay involved in going through some bureaucratic process. There are distinct advantages for school communities. I find it extremely ironic that the member for Wanguri knocks the opportunity for school councils to have a say in their own destiny given that, on behalf of Tiwi Primary School, he argued that the Department of Transport and Works did not know what it was talking about in relation to planned maintenance, and that the school community knew better. He argues one way one week and the opposite the next, but he cannot have it both ways.

Certainly, there are matters in relation to which the Department of Transport and Works, as custodian of government assets, has a legitimate role to play and, in the main, this relates to the major components of buildings. One of the legitimate concerns expressed by school councils in the early days was that they do not have the expertise to handle complex technical matters. Air-conditioning was mentioned as an example of such a component. However, the Department of Education has agreed that the principal responsibility for those major units will be with the Department of Transport and Works, and so it should be. When it comes to the fire safety provisions, the Department of Transport and Works will continue to monitor and ensure that the safety of students and staff is provided for.

The setting of priorities for the minor works around a school, particularly using its own funds, can be of advantage to the school council. It may choose to handle these by means of working bees. In the early days of devolution at Wagaman Primary School, for example, a substantial amount of work was to be done under the Transport and Works system. However, the council seized the opportunity to do the works itself. It arranged for tradesmen to do the plumbing and the electrical works, but the school community became involved with the painting and curtains. That meant the council was able to save dollars to spend on other facilities at that school. That is what the system is about. It enables school councils to set their own priorities and offers them the opportunity to make a few dollars along the way.

In relation to relief teachers, a very generous offer has been made. It is 6.5 days per teacher, and that is excluding the event of a major illness or a catastrophe.

Mr Bailey: Talk to the schools about it.

Mr FINCH: Is the honourable member suggesting, for example, that it is reasonable that, across the whole school's staff, the average ought to be 10 days a year that teachers have off on short-term illness? What absolute nonsense! In my experience, teachers are far more dedicated and committed

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than that. They do not take days off unless they have an absolute need to do so. When we look at the average of what is involved there, the 6.5 days is more than appropriate, notwithstanding that, in areas such as special education, even more generous provisions are made. The school community obtains the benefit of the unused average sick leave provision. That is a most generous provision.

The flexibility offered to schools to set their own priorities in relation to part-time instructors is a big plus in this package. Across the board, this package has been put together with considerable thought. Certainly, it has been expedited. However, if we sit thinking about this for another year or so, we will have lost all the advantages it offers to the schools, to the department and to Territory taxpayers. That would be disappointing.

Those armchair socialists opposite wish upon us what happens in Victoria. They say that we should strive

for the lowest common denominator. We should not worry about outputs and the productivity that can come from an education system that allows people to use their initiative and to do better for their children. It is a good thing that we have a CLP government in power. It is a good thing that we have a Minister for Education who is caring and is progressive in his views. As far as I am concerned, he should remain Minister for Education for quite some time yet.

EXPLANATION OF SPEECH

Mr BAILEY (Wanguri): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make an explanation of a speech, understanding order 54.

The Minister for Transport and Works referred to comments I had made in my speech. He said that I did not support devolution. Quite clearly, I support schools having the right to devolution. I made that quite clear in my speech. The point at issue is that what is proposed in this legislation is not the devolution ...

Mr FINCH: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! The honourable member is not entitled to elaborate further on the points he attempted so poorly to make in earlier debate.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is a point of order. The honourable member cannot introduce any new matter nor interrupt any member. No debatable matter may be brought forward nor may any debate arise upon such explanation.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Minister for Transport and Works stated quite clearly that, in my speech, I did not support devolution to schools.

Mr Finch: You would never have known it.

Mr BAILEY: Quite clearly, I referred to Dripstone High School, its level of devolution and the support that had been given generally to schools taking over responsibility for decisions. I have no problem with that whatsoever and I stated that clearly in my speech.

Mr SETTER (Jingili): Mr Deputy Speaker, when is devolution not devolution?

Mr Bailey: When it is shoved down your throat.

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Mr SETTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I was tempted to say in my opening remarks that I have never heard so much garbage in all my life as that which came from the member for Wanguri. He prattled on for 30 minutes.

Members: interjecting.

Mr SETTER: I will not say that, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister for Transport and Works has made his quite controlled and sensible comments to this debate. However, when I heard the member for Wanguri make his explanation, I had never heard so much garbage in all my life. He just said that he supports devolution. The member for Victoria River said that the ALP supports devolution. Obviously, their version

of devolution and our version of devolution are different things.

The name of Tom Harris, the previous Minister for Education, has been raised in this debate. I can recall debating similar issues on a number of occasions. Members will recall the senior secondary college debate and the 'Towards the 90s' debate.

Mr Stone: Remember the university.

Mr SETTER: Exactly.

Mr Bailey: Remember the Alamo.

Mr SETTER: You were not here then, and you will not be here for much longer either.

On each occasion, the opposition, the NT Teachers Federation and, in some cases, COGSO opposed the introduction of those new concepts all the way along the line. The words that we have heard in this debate are almost exactly the same as those we heard when we were debating 'Toward the 90s' about 2 or 3 years ago, and the senior secondary college concept, some 4 or 5 years ago. In relation to the university, we had the same kind of debate. We have heard the same arguments tonight from members of the opposition. The reality is that they believe they are the only people who are entitled to promote social change. They think that education is theirs to control and that we do not have any right to develop it. I can tell them right now that we have more right than they do. The reason that we have more right than they do is because we sit on this side of the House and they sit on that side of the House.

It is absolutely disgusting how, over the last 6 months, they and others who share their political views have maligned the Minister for Education and his officers from the Department of Education, who are all very hard-working and dedicated people. Those people have enormous responsibilities and for them to have had to endure personal attacks and denigration, most of which has originated from within the offices of members opposite, is absolutely appalling. We heard the member for Wanguri carry on with the same kind of nonsense earlier this evening.

Whenever change in education is proposed by government, those people oppose it. They cannot produce any reasonable argument against devolution or any other change that we have instituted in education over the years. Of course, their agenda is not a genuine one that is based on better education for our students. Theirs is a political agenda. It is based on supporting their mates in the Teachers Federation and some of the people whom, regrettably, we find within COGSO these days. I can assure them that the government will not be deflected from its agenda of introducing positive

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educational change in the Northern Territory. Devolution will be introduced, just as the university, the senior secondary colleges and a number of other positive programs were put in place some years ago. As I pointed out earlier, we have heard the same rhetoric repeatedly from those people over the years.

People at Casuarina Secondary College today insist that the senior secondary college concept is the best thing that ever happened to secondary education in the Northern Territory. That is exactly the opposite to

what secondary school teachers were saying 5 years ago. There is a political agenda, and it is a great shame that the Teachers Federation has allowed itself to be sucked into supporting what the opposition is saying. It is very sad that the Teachers Federation is in such turmoil at this time. If ever it needed its resources and strength, it is at this time, when it could act to support the majority of teachers - and I am not talking only about members of the federation - who believe that this is an excellent concept.

When the 'Towards the 90s' document was proposed, I recall attending a number of meetings at schools in my electorate. The same concerns were expressed. Who is going to do the work? Who is going to pay for it? How much time will school council members have to put into this? We introduced that first phase of devolution at that time and, 12 months later, they reckoned it was the greatest thing that had ever happened.

The member for Wanguri spoke about the cost of a carpet and how it could be paid for. A few years ago, we managed to obtain \$30 000 for a carpet to be installed at a school in my electorate. It was a desperate matter. We could not get the money out of the Department of Education. It took that school over 12 months to purchase that carpet and have it installed. At the same time, that \$30 000 was sitting in a fixed deposit earning a very handsome interest. The school picked up well in excess of \$3000 interest on that money. It was closer to \$5000.

A couple of years ago, I achieved in excess of \$100 000 for particular ...

Mr Bailey: I think we should investigate it.

Mr SETTER: By the Public Accounts Committee? Why not?

About \$100 000 was devolved to a particular school. It had the responsibility to carry out some capital works. That \$100 000 sat in its account for well over 12 months and earned a very handsome rate of interest. It was in no hurry to have that work done. That is devolution. At the end of the day, the school council had the alterations done to the school and it also had the extra \$10 000.

Mr Bailey: And what did you pick up?

Mr SETTER: I beg your pardon? What did I pick up?

A member: He picked up a lot of votes.

Members: interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr SETTER: Mr Speaker, this is an exercise in misinformation. It is an exercise in politics. It is an exercise in upsetting people through

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misinformation. I have been to quite a number of school council meetings over the last few months and,

as is well known, I go to most school council meetings in my electorate. I have had to sit and listen to misinformation being fed to parents who really do not know all that much about education. They come to their school council meeting where they are very keen to help, and they are fed this misinformation. They become very concerned, and rightly so. Given the misinformation that is fed to them, they have a right to be concerned. However, that is all it is - misinformation.

Mr Bailey: You go to Wagaman and tell them that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No prompting!

Mr SETTER: We are talking about devolution, Mr Speaker.

We have heard a great deal from COGSO in recent months about how it opposed devolution. The President of COGSO has been running around to various schools. Recently, he addressed the Tiwi Primary School Council. However, I would like to quote from the latest COGSO newsletter Volume 3, No 6 of October 1991. On the second page, it states: 'COGSO is aware that some schools do welcome the prospect of devolution and we have no problem with that. It fits with COGSO's policy'. That policy is then quoted: '(2.1.6) The administration of school funds at school level by school councils should be encouraged and assisted'. That is exactly what this is all about. I predict that, when this legislation is passed, and the school councils have the money in their hands to do with as they will, they will love it. By the middle of next year, they will wonder what all the fuss was about. They will absolutely love it.

All the schools that I have been involved with in my electorate, both during the 'Towards the 90s' debate and in this debate, albeit with some concerns - and I must accept that - have embraced devolution. They responded to the department about the devolution package that was circulated a few weeks ago. I understand that all of those concerns have been addressed and they are quite happy. Thus, I do not anticipate any further problems with regard to the devolution package.

There is no doubt that it is a great concept. Once the present hype dies down, school councils, and parents in particular, will embrace the concept of devolution. It will offer them far more control than they have had in the past with regard to the operation of the school. I do not believe that the misinformation that has been circulating in the community in the last 6 months will come to anything at all. I support this legislation totally and I recommend that this House support it.

Mr STONE (Education): Mr Speaker, let me commence by debunking some of the myths that abound about devolution. The first myth is that devolution is new. The fact is that it has been evolving since 1979 - 12 years ago.

Mr Bell: Show us the bar graphs. I have heard about this.

Mr STONE: The bar graphs - 'the evolution of devolution'. Do you like it? It is a pity you did not acquaint yourself with this before you came into the Chamber because you would have been better informed. I have a copy for you that you might like to have. It is a little one.

Mr Bailey: That one is for the cameras, is it?

Mr STONE: I am glad to see the opposition is in good spirits, Mr Speaker, because it appears that words of information and wisdom have finally sunk through and they will go home happy tonight because, quite clearly, they have finally come to grips with devolution.

The second myth that needs to be debunked is that devolution is administration on the cheap. It is not. It is the maximizing of community participation in our schools, and that is a very important principle in any western-style democracy. The third myth to be debunked is that devolution is the passing on of onerous administrative responsibility to unpaid volunteer parents. The truth is quite the contrary. Schools have highly paid professional and administrative staff who can act as executives and support staff to school councils. A fourth myth - and it has been repeated here tonight - is that school secretaries and registrars are not up to the task of servicing the school councils and carrying out these new functions. Members in this Chamber well know that all employees of the Northern Territory Public Service have been through the JES and they will continue to be evaluated through the JES. School secretaries and registrars are no exception to that.

The fifth myth is the great lie which members of the opposition believe will come true if they keep repeating it: that devolution is mandatory. This fact simply cannot be grasped by members opposite. Devolution to schools is mandatory, but there is a choice as to whether the school council or the principal takes it up. I think that the member for Wanguri said that, unless these school councils march to the beat of this Minister of Education's drum, they will miss out. At any time, a school council can pick up the threads of devolution. At any time, it can approach the school principal and indicate that it has become more confident and is willing to take on devolution and give it a go. Any school council that embraces that challenge will not be disappointed. As I stated from the outset, evolution did not emerge overnight, but has been evolving for some 12 years.

Unfortunately, the opposition's comments in tonight's debate demonstrate a complete lack of confidence in the principals, the assistant principals, the teachers and the parents, all of whom are now managing the affairs of their local schools very successfully. It is a shame the opposition cannot give them a little credit for the job they have done to date. The real problem for the opposition - and for the ALP in this country - is that it has this idea that there should be an equality of outcomes for children. The ALP believes that it can exercise control over schoolchildren to the exclusion of the parents.

The best example of this emphasis on equality of outcomes can be seen in Victoria. One sees the lowest common denominator in all the curriculum and one sees excellence derided. As I said in question time this morning, a mere \$26 000 is spent on gifted children's programs for the entire state of Victoria. It is absolutely disgraceful! In Victoria, competition is condemned! South Australia is even removing competition from school sports at the primary level, because it is believed to be unhealthy. However, in Victoria, 51% is good enough. I hope that any Victorian-educated apprentice aircraft maintenance mechanic does not believe that 51% is good enough in relation to any plane that I may be travelling in.

Of course, we have heard some unbelievable comments from the member for Wanguri. He took a swipe at the Minister for Conservation and attempted to put on the public record that somehow my colleague had attempted to interfere politically with the schools in Katherine. He then backtracked

and said it was the party branch in Katherine that did it. Of course, it has been established quite clearly that there were a couple of members of the branch in Katherine who put a particular point of view. However, that all pales into insignificance when one goes to Victoria. In Victoria, one finds that one cannot obtain a promotional position unless one signs a piece of paper indicating that one will implement ALP policy through the curriculum in schools. That is a fact. It is absolutely extraordinary! I could not even tell members who had been appointed as the principal of a school until I read about it in the NT Government Gazette. That is the difference between places like Victoria, which are governed by Mother Russia, and life with the CLP government in the Northern Territory.

I will give an example that really takes the cake. The South Australian minister came along to the Australian Education Council, where we had many weighty matters to consider. The very pressing matter that the minister raised was preventing schools from taking up commercial sponsorships. We had to prevent schools from embracing organizations like Coles, which wanted to provide some computers for the use of students. That practice was considered to be unhealthy and it had to be stamped out. That is the kind of ideology or Fabian socialism that is expressed by members opposite continually. It is against that background that one comes into this Chamber to argue the merits of devolution and the maximization of community involvement in schools. We are talking about the Territory community's schools and the community's children. What really gripes members opposite and their mates in the Teachers Federation and COGSO is that they are starting to lose control.

The decision was taken in May this year, more than 6 months ago, that we would proceed to the next stage of devolution. Following the announcements in May, a steering committee and working party, on which teachers, principals and COGSO were represented, commenced its deliberations. It included all the main players in the exercise. What could be more representative than that? The steering committee produced draft guidelines for the standard devolution package which was distributed to schools during September. That was the document that the member for Wanguri was waving around. Public and school councils were invited to comment. There were more than 65 responses to the draft package, which was very much a draft in every sense of the word. It was not a final document that was set in concrete. It contained a great deal of unsorted information. The aim of the document was to generate maximum comment from the public and the school councils. We were not trying to put a predetermined position to them nor to influence them to a particular position. We were trying to be very fair about it, and most schools recognized that fact.

The financial devolution package, which I made available yesterday to the member for MacDonnell, is a very refined document when compared to the draft. It has been compiled on the basis of comments received from school principals, organizations and anyone who wanted to have input. All input was assessed on its merits. I repeat that devolution is the maximizing of community involvement in the schools. Let me stress that many school councils have had devolved responsibilities for some time. We heard the Deputy Chief Minister refer to the schools in his electorate. I interjected in relation to Batchelor Primary School. It is quite ironic that I have been criticized over this devolution package. I have been accused by a number of schools of not going far enough. They wanted the option of hiring and firing principals and staff and said the package was too weak. However, members of the opposition come into this Chamber and allege that it is too tough.

I will refer to the kinds of functions that have been handled by a whole range of schools throughout the Territory over some 12 years. School operational moneys include payments for power, water and for student books, stationery etc. This was referred to by the member for Nelson, who had considerable experience with the schools in her previous electorate of Koolpinyah. Cleaning, grounds maintenance, some salary functions, urgent minor repairs, program repairs and maintenance and new capital works have been undertaken. There is a legislative basis for this. Under section 71 of the Education Act, whether devolution to schools goes to the principal or the council is optional.

I propose now to set out the various heads of responsibility that fall within the devolution package to dispel some of the misinformation that has come from some members of the opposition, perhaps because they did not bother to read the documents or perhaps because they have fallen foul of the misinformation that has been peddled. The member for Nhulunbuy expressed concern about freight costs. If the schools within his electorate are unclear about it, I hope they will make the effort to contact their regional superintendent. I can assure them that freight costs are built into the allocation.

Let us talk about the letter from Stenhouse to COGSO that was quoted by the member for MacDonnell. I advise that the department does arrange workers' compensation. In fact, we were aware of the interest of Stenhouse and of its expertise. In fact, the department has retained Stenhouse as a consultant to work through the very issues that were raised in the first letter. The letter puts only half the story. There is another chapter to it.

Mr Bell: Tell us what it is.

Mr STONE: I have just told you that it has been retained as a consultant by the department to work through the very issues that were identified.

Mr Bell: You are still going ahead with it?

Mr STONE: We are working through Stenhouse and coming up with solutions.

Mr Bailey: You have about 3 weeks until the end of the school year, and you haven't even worked it out.

Mr STONE: No matter how many times I say it, you cannot grasp it. I told you that the first document was a draft. Once we had the comments, we acted on them. You are now criticizing us because we did exactly what you accused us of not doing. It is unbelievable.

Mr Bailey: It is 4 weeks before the end of the year. Do you call this good management practice?

Mr STONE: Put simply, the letter is out of date.

'School financial operations' is the first major heading under the new package. Most councils have responsibility for the day-to-day finances of their school. Management normally rests with the principal, registrar and school secretary and there is usually a school council finance subcommittee. Funds are provided on a student per capita basis for textbooks, libraries, excursions, consumables and furniture. Funds are provided on a needs basis for electricity and water which is assessed on an

historical basis. Grants for the above are paid twice a year in advance - in January and July - so the school council is free to invest those funds which will earn income, which it will decide how to spend on its school community. There is nothing hard about that.

The second heading is 'cleaning and grounds maintenance services'. In the package, councils can take over responsibility to provide cleaning and grounds maintenance services and many schools already do that very successfully. At least for 1992, all schools will receive an allocation for cleaning based on the indexed 1990-91 level of funding. How much fairer could we be? From January 1992, there will be no centrally-funded contracts, apart from major air-conditioning contracts, major power switchboard contracts, security system contracts, fire alarm contracts and PABX contracts - in essence, all items likely to exceed \$25 000 per annum in contract payments. That is another example of a suggestion that came forward from the school communities and which the department adopted. Schools with existing contracts will continue to be funded at the agreed level of the existing contracts. At the end of those contracts, the councils will be free to make their own future arrangements. Overheads incurred, such as wages, materials, taxation and insurance, are recognized in the allocation. There is nothing hard about that.

Urgent minor repairs seemed to preoccupy the member for Wanguri. These are the urgent minor repairs that are required for matters of health, safety and security. Councils controlling these funds can respond quickly and directly. Funds for urgent minor repairs are provided on an impress system, which is replenished when 70% to 80% of the funds are used. What more sensible operation could we put in place? Councils can invest these funds for short terms and also receive an administration fee of 2.5%. An average size Band 4 primary school can expect to receive an advance of \$15 000 upfront. This advance may well be larger depending on historical factors. There is nothing hard about that.

Let us turn to program maintenance. This includes items such as repainting a school, and funds for such projects can be granted to school councils. Funds include provision for all components of the project including preparation of specifications, scope of work, administration, quality control, supervision and other overheads. Some school councils have a facility subcommittee which manages such projects. In fact, all these subcommittees can be seen at Darwin High School. They have been established there for a long time and are all working very successfully. The money is in the bank. The proof is in the pudding.

Minor new works are catered for in a similar way to program maintenance items. The funding and administrative arrangements are similar. Concerns have been raised regarding the property maintenance area, which includes not only property maintenance but minor new works and urgent minor repairs. Concerns have been directed at the proposal to establish a property maintenance formula by which to fund schools. To extend the introduction period of the standard devolution package, the existing arrangements that I have just described for the property and maintenance will not be changed until mid-1992 at the earliest. That is another example of feedback from schools. They wanted more time and we were only too happy to cooperate. We are not trying to force this down their throats. We will see how they are going at the end of June 1992. That was a major concession on the part of the department and a direct result of representations by COGSO. It is disappointing that COGSO never acknowledges a concession when we make one or when we discuss an issue and resolve it. We hear only about the negatives. We never hear about the positives.

Let me assure the members opposite that there will be further consultation in the first part of 1992 on the development of a property maintenance formula. It is the formula and how it is arrived at that has generated concern among school communities. The department takes the view that the formula should be based on the area of the school whereas a number of school councils have argued that age and scope of the buildings should be the criteria. I would have to say that I find myself a little at odds with the department over this. I have a great deal of sympathy for what the school communities are attempting to argue in this regard. Again, there is nothing hard about any of that.

Mr Bailey: Will you implement it?

Mr STONE: Through their action plans for school improvements, school councils can identify any capital works needed at their school.

I will pick up the interjection. Let me reassure the member for Wanguri, and my departmental officers will bear me out on this. If I come to a view about something that is at odds with that of the department, I can tell him which view will prevail.

Mr Finch: The department's.

Mr STONE: The councils will be asked to make costed funding submissions for any proposal for capital and new works. Consultant fees for the detailed design documentation, supervision and contract administration of capital and new works should be bid for as part of the submission for new capital works. New capital works in existing schools would be a rare occurrence unless we were talking about construction of a new wing or the refurbishment of a building. Let me remind members that this government has spent \$46m on new schools and the refurbishing of schools over the last 5 years. The department is available to lend all the support that would be necessary to ensure that any new capital works program was run properly and economically.

The subject of relief teachers has preoccupied some members opposite. Let me say from the outset that I took the time to talk to a number of school councils and staff, in both Darwin and Alice Springs, about the number of relief teacher days that should be made available. One of the great lies that the member for Wanguri likes to run is that I do not go out and talk to the school communities or the staff.

Mr BELL: A point of order, Mr Speaker! The honourable minister should be asked to withdraw the word 'lies' in reference to comments made by my colleague in the Assembly.

Mr STONE: Speaking to the point of order, Mr Speaker, it was used in the figurative sense. I was not saying that he was a liar. I was not saying that, in fact, he was telling lies. I said he was trying to give some truth to the great lie.

Mrs Hickey: That was not what you said.

Mr SPEAKER: The honourable member will withdraw.

Mr STONE: I withdraw, Mr Speaker. I defer to your experience in this Chamber. Do I lose time over that?

Mr SPEAKER: Yes.

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Mr Bell: You have never deferred to anything in your life.

Mr STONE: I defer to my mother.

Mr Poole: Actually, Neil understands that.

Mr STONE: It brought a tear to his eye.

Mr Speaker, some schools have shared that concern regarding how the relief teaching allocation is to work. A lower figure was settled on initially, and it was not a figure that was simply plucked out of the air. The department keeps records. It knows how many days are lost as a result of sickness.

What I find interesting about the member for Wanguri is that he seems to be putting the proposition that a certain number of sick days should be available and that, no matter what, they should be used up. That is why this country has a problem. In many factories in the southern states, it will be seen that great pride is taken in a sign on the wall indicating the number of days that have not been lost as a result of industrial injury or sickness. I hope that schools will adopt the same ethic. One of the real problems that confronts this nation ...

Mr Bailey: By giving them fewer relief teachers to cover the times when people are away ...

Mr STONE: The honourable member probably does not understand this, but I will spell it out for him. This nation has lost its work ethic.

Mrs Padgham-Purich: interjecting.

Mr STONE: I am sure that the member for Nelson would agree with that. I am glad to have her support.

Each school will receive 6.5 days for a full-time equivalent teacher - that is, an assistant principal, teaching 50% of a full teaching load, would have an allocation load of 3.25 relief teacher days. It should be noted that the 6.5 is merely a formula by which a school's total number of relief teacher days can be calculated, and not an individual allocation to particular teachers. For example, a school with 5 full-time teaching staff would attract an allocation of 32.5 days. For any absence of an individual teacher exceeding 15 teaching days, the department will reimburse the school for any funds expended on relief to cover this absence. That was the very point made by the Minister for Transport and Works and I hope that resolves the concerns. Obviously, the honourable member was misinformed and I hope that clarifies the situation for him. Of course, if there is an epidemic, the department will step in and pick up the shortfall. The funding rate for each relief day is approximately \$135. Special schools, such as Henbury Avenue and Ludmilla Special School, will receive an allocation of 10 relief teacher days per staff member.

Mr Bailey: What is the reason for that?

Mr STONE: I will tell you how we arrived at that figure, Mr Speaker. It is another result of personal consultation by myself. I spoke to the teachers at Henbury Avenue school. They advised me to have another look at the averages because it is clear that the demands on teachers in special schools are greater in many respects than on classroom teachers. I examined

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the figures, took all other factors into account and arrived at the figure of 10 days. It is not a problem. We have been very reasonable about this.

Quite obviously, the department will exercise a great deal of common sense in fine tuning the arrangements for relief teachers, based on the experience in the first 12 months. The incentive for schools is to minimize days lost for the benefit of the school. We will not take the money back from them. The school council can spend that money in any way it chooses. That system works in Tasmania and it might work in the Northern Territory. Let us give it a try and see what happens. None of these arrangements detracts from the special leave provisions contained in the Northern Territory Teaching Service award. While that is not an automatic entitlement, it can be used for particular absences, such as bereavement, moving house etc, but it requires specific approval.

I come now to the employment of staff. The standard devolution folder contains a detailed chapter on employment of staff by school councils, and councils are currently able to employ cleaners, canteen staff, grounds men, clerks, after-care supervisors, janitors and business managers. These staff are employed under the provisions of the relevant private sector award. This was implemented previously as a consequence of the partial devolution of responsibilities to school councils in the employment area. In addition to the above, from January 1992 onwards, relief teachers, relief aides and part-time instructors and teachers may be employed directly by school councils.

An employer's handbook is designed to meet the specific needs of school councils in relation to employment, and that will be provided. The handbook deals with just about every contingency that would arise in an employment situation. It is recommended that school councils consider joining an employer organization, such as the Confederation of Industry, because that membership will provide them with up-to-date information on awards and other matters. It should be noted that the department will continue to recruit and deploy permanent, full-time members of the Northern Territory Teaching Service. That was what I was being roundly criticized over by some schools which said that I had not gone far enough with devolution. The notional staffing allocation, planned for introduction in the 1993 school year, will permit school councils to apply their own staffing concepts within the funds notionally available to a school of their particular population.

I turn now to the school council annual financial statements. Ideally, the financial statements of each council will be subject to audit by an appropriately qualified auditor. In fact, records throughout the Territory indicate that only 4 school councils have done other than appoint an appropriately qualified auditor.

Turning to the in-servicing of the standard devolution package, programs for superintendents, principals and school council members are already under way. Operational superintendents are responsible for the effective implementation of the devolution package across the schools within their region.

Reference was made to the action plan for school improvements. There is no doubt that the action plan for school improvements by each school council will have to be modified in accordance with the requirements of the package. This will apply particularly to the school council's budget and to submissions for any new capital works. In any event, schools should be looking to update their action plans and to improve their performance. The Minister for Lands and Housing, who has a very strong private sector

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background, will tell them that they will not survive unless they do that on a regular basis. Why shouldn't schools embrace that same degree of efficiency and economy of staff? They do that in any event.

Mr Bailey: interjecting.

Mr STONE: Mr Speaker, I have exercised great restraint and I am nearly there. I have not let the honourable member distract me, irritating though he is.

The introduction of the standard devolution package in its current form places the Northern Territory in the forefront of community participation in schools throughout Australia. While many states are adopting devolution processes and New Zealand has done so for some years now, it is in the Northern Territory - and I say it with a great deal of pride - that the process has been most gradual and most developed. It has been happening over 12 years and not overnight, as the opposition would have people believe. Together with the government's philosophy of devolution of responsibility to local decision-making groups, this package represents a clear opportunity for community groups to be fully involved in the development of their local schools to their fullest potential in line with community wishes.

The package also challenges parents and community members to be actively involved in the education of their children. For whatever reason, and many have been advanced, parents tend these days to abrogate their responsibility to teachers. Schooling, the development and socialization of children, is a shared responsibility and devolution reinforces and supports that view.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

In committee:

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mr BELL: Mr Chairman, with respect to the commencement of this bill, because of the depth of feeling expressed by those people who have made representations to the opposition, it is our view that the operation of this bill ...

Mr Stone: Are you arguing against the bill?

Mr BELL: Yes, I am.

Mr STONE: Mr Chairman, I move that the question be put.

The committee divided:

Ayes 15 Noes 7

Mr Collins	Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch	Mr Ede
Mr Hatton	Mrs Hickey
Mr McCarthy	Mr Stirling
Mr Manzie	Mr Tipiloura

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Mr Ortmann
Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Perron
Mr Poole
Mr Reed
Mr Setter
Mr Stone
Mr Vale

Motion agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Mr STONE: Mr Chairman, I move that so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent the remainder of the bill being taken as a whole.

Motion agreed to.

Mr BELL: Mr Chairman, because the government ...

Mr STONE: Mr Chairman, I move that the question be now put.

The committee divided:

Ayes 15 Noes 7

Mr Collins	Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright

Mr Finch
Mr Hatton
Mr McCarthy
Mr Manzie
Mr Ortmann
Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Palmer
Mr Poole
Mr Reed
Mr Setter
Mr Stone
Mr Vale

Mr Ede
Mrs Hickey
Mr Stirling
Mr Tipiloura

Motion agreed to.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is that the remainder of the bill be taken as a whole.

Motion agreed to.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is that the bill stand as printed.

Mr BELL: Mr Chairman, there are a number of specific issues that deserve to be debated in the committee stage. Since, due to the lateness of the hour, the Minister for Education has become a little tetchy after his performance in the last 30 minutes ...

Mr Stone: Cut it out! You did not propose a single amendment.

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Mr BELL: Mr Chairman, in answer to the interjection from the minister, in order to express views on particular aspects of the bill in committee, the opposition is not obliged to move amendments. It is quite reasonable to express views about particular clauses ...

Mr HATTON: A point of order, Mr Chairman! The question is that the bill stand as printed. It is quite clear from the honourable member's comments that he is not proposing to put any argument against that. He is straying from the topic.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order.

Mr BELL: Mr Chairman, I have no intention of wasting time. I have a point of view to express about the time when this legislation ought to come into operation. I have concerns about each of clauses 4, 5, 6 and 7. I had wished to speak to those individually.

Clause 4 relates to the school management councils and the group school management councils. It is clearly designed to set up these clusters or groups of schools, particularly in the bush. I have perhaps a better understanding of the way such clusters of school councils or even school councils within Aboriginal

communities, in particular, might or might not work. I believe that the group school management council, as it is proposed, will not work. Given the difficulties in the operation of school councils as opposed to community councils, this idea is an administrator's dream and will be nothing more. If the government wishes to involve Aboriginal parents in decision-making, it will have to work through the fledgling community councils. Let us remember for a minute how newly fledged they are. 20 years ago, we were not even bothering to ask Aboriginal people whether they wanted to run their own communities or not.

Mr Stone: When we do it at Yirara, you will not accept the decision.

Mr BELL: If you want to debate Yirara, I am quite happy to do that. However, that is irrelevant.

Mr Finch: What happened? Did you actually forget to put your amendments together.

Mr BELL: At this stage, Mr Chairman, I am trying to explain to the government why I have particular concerns about particular clauses. That is one of them. I have a particular view and understanding about the way those kinds of things might operate. For those reasons, I wanted to express my misgivings about clause 4.

Turning to clause 5, I note that the proposed subsection (5) gives the minister the discretion to set up a group school management council or a school management council. In his second-reading speech, the minister gave an undertaking that, where schools did not form councils, he would create them anyway and would make the principals responsible for them. I would like to confirm with the minister that that is his intention.

Proposed subsection (6) allows the minister to establish a council regardless of whether a school council has been established 'for the government school or any of the government schools'. I am not sure what is intended by that particular subsection. I presume that it envisages a recalcitrant school council that refuses to reconstitute itself in the way that the minister wants it to. That strikes me as a particularly odd provision.

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Proposed subsection (7) states that 'a school management council shall consist of the head teacher from time to time of the government school for which it is established or such other person as the minister may appoint in place of the head teacher'. I find it odd that it is envisaged that a head teacher alone should be required to constitute a school management council. Proposed subsection (8) states that 'a group school council shall consist of the person appointed by the minister'. That is also odd. I wonder what kind of administrative actions the minister envisages he will carry out. Proposed subsection (9) states that an 'appointment made under subsection (8) may be made by reference to the person from time to time holding, acting in or performing the duties of an office, designation or position in the Department of Education'. I would appreciate it if the minister provided some explanation of which particular officers he envisages effecting appointments under subsection (9).

Mr SETTER: Mr Chairman, I move that the question be put.

Mr Bell: Are you going to sit on your arse and say nothing?

Members: interjecting.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for MacDonnell will withdraw that remark.

Mr BELL: Mr Chairman, I withdraw with reluctance.

Mr Stone: You can sound as outraged as you want.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The committee divided:

Ayes 15 Noes 7

Mr Collins	Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch	Mr Ede
Mr Hatton	Mrs Hickey
Mr McCarthy	Mr Stirling
Mr Manzie	Mr Tipiloura
Mr Ortmann	
Mrs Padgham-Purich	
Mr Palmer	
Mr Poole	
Mr Reed	
Mr Setter	
Mr Stone	
Mr Vale	

Motion agreed to.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is that the bill stand as printed.

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The committee divided:

Ayes 15 Noes 7

Mr Collins	Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch	Mr Ede
Mr Hatton	Mrs Hickey

Mr McCarthy Mr Stirling
Mr Manzie Mr Tipiloura
Mr Ortmann
Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Palmer
Mr Poole
Mr Reed
Mr Setter
Mr Stone
Mr Vale

Motion agreed to.

Bill reported.

Mr SPEAKER: The question is that the report be adopted.

Members: interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER: The bill has been reported without amendment.

Members: interjecting.

Mr BELL: When the Chair puts the question, you will find out. You bastards shut up until ...

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for MacDonnell to unreservedly withdraw that remark without comment.

Mr BELL: Mr Speaker, I withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: The question is that the report be adopted.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 15 Noes 7

Mr Collins Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter Mr Bell
Mr Dondas Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch Mr Ede
Mr Hatton Mrs Hickey
Mr McCarthy Mr Stirling
Mr Manzie Mr Tipiloura
Mr Ortmann
Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Palmer

Mr Poole
Mr Reed
Mr Setter

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Mr Stone
Mr Vale

Motion agreed to.

Mr SETTER: A point of order, Mr Speaker! The division was not supported.

Mr Ede: One does not have to stand up to support a division.

Mr SETTER: I did not hear anybody say that they supported it.

Mr SPEAKER: The Leader of Government Business is quite right. I should have asked because the member for MacDonnell did call for a division and that call should be supported. It is only when the Leader of the Opposition moves a division that it does not need to be supported.

Mr STONE (Education): Mr Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Mr BELL (MacDonnell): Mr Speaker, I move that the word 'now' be replaced with the words 'this day 6 months'.

Mr HATTON (Industries and Development): Mr Speaker, I move that the question be now put.

Mr BELL: Mr Speaker, I believe that the performance of the government in respect of this bill has been absolutely appalling.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Industries and Development has moved that the question be now put.

Mr Bell: Division!

Mr SPEAKER: A division is called. Ring the bells. I had assumed, in the heat of the moment, that the member for MacDonnell would have been supported had I called.⁷ The question is that the question be now put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 14 Noes 8

Mr Collins Mr Bailey

Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch	Mr Ede
Mr Hatton	Mrs Hickey
Mr McCarthy	Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Manzie	Mr Stirling
Mr Ortmann	Mr Tipiloura
Mr Palmer	
Mr Poole	
Mr Reed	
Mr Setter	
Mr Stone	
Mr Vale	

Motion agreed to.

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Mr SPEAKER: The question is that the amendment moved by the member for MacDonnell be agreed to.

Amendment negative.

Mr SPEAKER: The question is that the bill be now read a third time.

Mr BELL: A point of order, Mr Speaker! You did not put my motion.

Mr SPEAKER: I did.

Mr Setter: Yes, he did. You were not paying attention.

Members: interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I do not want any further interruptions from either side of the House, otherwise I will take a very drastic action.

The question is that the bill be now read a third time.

Mr EDE (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, it would have been quite possible for opposition members to drag out unduly the passage of what is a very important piece of legislation. This legislation represents what is probably the most dramatic change in the structure of the administration of education in the Northern Territory that we have seen for many a long year. It is important that issues associated with this matter be fully and freely debated in this House. That is essential, not only for our own egos, but also if we are to perform the duty for which we were elected. That duty is one that I hold dear and I believe that other honourable members on this side do as well.

However, members opposite have continued to use their numbers to frustrate honourable members and

to prevent them debating whatever clause in the legislation they wished to debate. Obviously, that is akin to the member for Braitling slapping the member for Nelson around the ears, which I just saw happen and which I believe is rather disgraceful behaviour.

Mrs Padgham-Purich: I beg your pardon! I am over here!

Mr EDE: My apologies to the member for Nelson. It was the ears of the member for Brennan. It is not in keeping with the way in which a matter of this kind should be debated.

It is very frustrating to stand here knowing that matters will be resolved by a simple count of the numbers regardless of the fact that your arguments are correct. I ask honourable members opposite to understand the position of members of the opposition. I could have spoken for half an hour in this debate, but the points were covered by my colleagues. Therefore, I do not believe that my contribution would have added a great deal. A number of members of the opposition have restrained themselves from contributing at length so that this matter can be dealt with. In appreciation of the restraint exercised by members of the opposition, one might have expected government members to have been more honourable than they have shown themselves to be tonight.

Mr SETTER (Leader of Government Business): Mr Speaker, I move that the question be put.

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The Assembly divided:

Ayes 14 Noes 8

Mr Collins	Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch	Mr Ede
Mr Hatton	Mrs Hickey
Mr McCarthy	Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Manzie	Mr Stirling
Mr Ortmann	Mr Tipiloura
Mr Palmer	
Mr Poole	
Mr Reed	
Mr Setter	
Mr Stone	
Mr Vale	

Motion agreed to.

Mr SPEAKER: The question now is that the bill be now read a third time.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 14 Noes 8

Mr Collins	Mr Bailey
Mr Coulter	Mr Bell
Mr Dondas	Mr Cartwright
Mr Finch	Mr Ede
Mr Hatton	Mrs Hickey
Mr McCarthy	Mrs Padgham-Purich
Mr Manzie	Mr Stirling
Mr Ortmann	Mr Tipiloura
Mr Palmer	
Mr Poole	
Mr Reed	
Mr Setter	
Mr Stone	
Mr Vale	

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

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Reference:

<http://notes.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/HANSARD6.NSF/0044d01ca7b2aec748255fcd0024659c/a6d6d1007656e3134825617f002aad55?OpenDocument>