



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Motions

14 September 2017

SCHOOL MAINTENANCE

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (12:51pm):

I am certainly committed to public education, having taught in some of the toughest public schools in New South Wales for 18 years. I support the motion moved by my good friend and colleague the member for Shellharbour. Public schools across New South Wales, but particularly in my electorate of Wallsend, have continued to lose out under this Government. In the Wallsend electorate the total maintenance backlog exceeds a whopping \$10 million. That is totally unacceptable. The five schools struggling most with their maintenance backlog are: Glendale Technology High School, with a backlog of more than \$1.1 million; Waratah West Public School, with more than \$750,000; and Callaghan College Wallsend Campus, Lambton Public School and Beresfield Public School, which all having backlogs exceeding \$600,000.

When I visit schools—which I do as often as I can, and particularly public schools—I hear from teachers, principals and parents who are concerned about the maintenance issue. There is a massive \$775 million maintenance backlog statewide. It is unacceptable that students and teachers work in classrooms that are run down and dilapidated. I know this because I have taught in schools and classrooms like that. It is impossible to teach and it is impossible for students to learn in demountables that have no blinds or windows and that are hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. How can teachers teach and how do students learn in those environments?

At current rates, some schools will be waiting more than 20 years before their growing maintenance backlogs are cleared. This will not happen unless the Government provides a much-needed cash injection into our areas. What sort of Government would allow public schools to deteriorate to the point where parents and carers must chip in to fix the air-conditioning in the children's classrooms? It is not acceptable for this Government to have allowed this backlog to balloon to such drastic levels. The Wallsend and Shellharbour electorates need a commitment from the Government on basic infrastructure, including a committed plan to address the maintenance backlog at all our local schools. There seems to be a lack of planning to address this problem.

Our children deserve the best possible education, and that means providing the best possible learning environment. It might not be flashy, but it is absolutely necessary. Just ask any local kid who has to try to learn in a classroom that is a refrigerator in July and a sauna in February. The Government has failed to restore the funding that it cut in its 2011 budget, when \$270 million was slashed from school capital works funding. It is appalling that this Government continues to wield the knife and to slash the Education budget. Only a Labor Government will invest properly in our public schools. I urge the Government to provide the cash injection that our schools urgently need so that students have well-maintained facilities that provide the best learning environments for all our children.