



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

12 November 2019

WALLSEND ELECTORATE PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (18:28):

Glendore Public School has been broken into four times since January 2019. The total cost of these break-ins, accounting for damage and stolen goods, has reached more than \$150,000. In the face of these crimes our wonderful school community banded together and, after a petition was circulated and the matter raised multiple times in this House, we were able to secure a promise from the education Minister that, at long last, a security fence will be built at the school—hooray! This demonstrates how important school infrastructure is, how pressing the matter of proper infrastructure can be for a school and our community, and how quickly we can solve these problems if we sit down and work together. The story of Glendore Public School's security fence has a happy ending, but it is a symptom of a bigger problem.

New Lambton Heights Infants School recently applied for a grant of \$27,000 not to establish a new program for their students, but to build a retaining wall to ensure that the children's play area had proper drainage. The grant application raised concerns about land movements and the risk of collapsing structures without sturdy foundations. Shortland Public School asked for \$25,000 to fix a kitchen at the school that had fallen into a state of total disrepair. Located in the school hall, the kitchen has broken doors and handles, and no floor covering. It is unsafe. I spent many years as a teacher in some of the most impoverished schools in the State in places like Walgett and Kempsey. I know how important adequate school facilities are—I really do.

I know how disruptive rundown or poorly maintained school facilities can be to students, teachers and to teaching. I am very concerned that local public schools are forced to compete with non-government community groups for grants to fund necessary infrastructure upgrades and maintenance. We are not talking about luxuries: We are talking about the basic infrastructure required to keep schools functional. These works should be paid for by the department, not by grants. It is unacceptable that P&Cs are begging for money to get the works done so that kids at these schools have access to basic facilities. Making sure that play areas are not flooded every time there is a rainstorm and that school kitchens meet basic safety standards should not be optional extras. These are the basics we should expect for our schools.

When local P&Cs are successful in getting a grant or raising enough money for a project they are then faced with the extraordinary costs of having the project managed by the Department of Education Asset Management Unit, which in most cases charges double for projects when compared to the private sector. An example of this problem from the Wallsend electorate comes to mind. A local school managed to get money to upgrade its canteen facilities, but when it went to get the works done it discovered that the Asset Management Unit was charging 50 per cent more than the quotes from other builders that it had received. Costs spiralled from \$45,000 to \$70,000. This is simply not acceptable. Our public school students should not have to be in substandard facilities.

When school communities raise the funds needed to upgrade or fix school infrastructure they should not be slapped with extra costs. I have mentioned the cases of Glendore, Lambton and Shortland, but a number of other schools also need help. I believe in the importance of working productively to achieve outcomes for our local schools. I know it is really important that we work together. I do not want to score political results, I just want good outcomes for our public schools in Wallsend. They deserve the best.