

Education; Special Needs for Mallee – 5th June 2008

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (14:49): My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Children's Services. Why has the government not provided adequate resources for the delivery of special needs education to the children of families in the southern Mallee region? Parents in southern Mallee towns have been forced to choose from several unpalatable options to access adequate and appropriate education services for their children with special needs. Those choices are:

1. Keeping the child in a local under-resourced school.
2. Providing daily private transport to and from very distant schools, or prevailing upon others to do so.
3. Placing their children daily on buses as early as 6.30am and returning at 5.30pm.
4. Placing their child into voluntary foster care (which I find abhorrent) in another centre—which one family has had to do already.

These alternatives place extra stress on the children, increasing their anxiety and compounding their learning difficulties. The last alternative is to relocate the entire family to another centre. This is problematic for the parents' employment and severely disrupts the families' social networks which are very important for these families.

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH (Adelaide—Minister for Education and Children's Services, Minister for Tourism, Minister for the City of Adelaide) (14:50): Clearly, the honourable member is relating an issue that reflects a challenge for a family in his electorate. I do not believe that children are taken into foster care under those sorts of circumstances. I have never heard of a situation such as that occurring.

Mr Pederick: There is one in Murray Bridge. You should get a report.

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH: I would be happy to look into those allegations. Generally, the education department would offer the best options for children. It would offer support in terms of access to transport. It would offer support in terms of SSO hours and suitably trained staff and it would offer options. Clearly, there are issues where parents want mainstreaming of children or they want their child in a particular location. To my knowledge extraordinary effort is always put into giving the parents the best service for their child. If there is a particular issue which the honourable member would like to discuss with me, I am happy to investigate the matter. On the face of what the honourable member has told me, I think the actual details seem extremely unlikely.