

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 5 March 2008, Page 2018

SCHOOLS, TRUANCY

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:00): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Emergency Services, representing the Minister for Education and Children's Services, a question about truancy.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Truancy continues to be an issue of concern for parents and teachers. According to recent government figures, on average about 9 per cent, or almost one in 10 students, are absent from school on any given day. However, the situation was significantly worse in lower socioeconomic areas, with up to one in four students absent at schools such as Smithfield Plains High and Enfield High. I have been informed that in the eastern suburbs a school voluntarily implemented SMS texting, and in a 12-month period that school recorded 18,000 notifications—which averaged out to about 14 notifications per student at a cost of \$4,000 to \$5,000 per annum. That cost was borne by the school.

Under section 76 of the Education Act a child is required to attend the school at which they are enrolled on every day instruction is provided for them. Where a child fails to attend, each parent of the child shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a penalty of up to \$200. I note that under section 76(4) a recognised defence to this charge is that the failure of the child to attend school did not result from any failure of the parent to exercise proper care and control over the child. My questions to the minister are:

1. How many notifications were made to the Department of Education and Children's Services regarding parents failing to ensure their children attended school for each of the past five years?
2. What number of convictions have been recorded for this offence for each of the past five years?

The Hon. CARMEL ZOLLO (Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Correctional Services, Minister for Road Safety, Minister Assisting the Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (15:02): I thank the honourable member for her question. She has asked for very detailed information, and I will refer her questions to the Minister for Education and Children's Services in the other place and bring back a response.