

Mr BROCK (Frome) (12:32): By leave, I move my motion in an amended form: That this house strongly urges the state government to investigate and implement Auslan as part of the education curriculum in South Australian schools and that Auslan become an optional language for students from preschool upwards.

Late last year—that is, 2012—a very dedicated father of two children, Mr Dallas Schmidt, spoke to me in my office regarding his concerns about people who have a hearing disability not being able to communicate with others and, in particular, young children with their peers. Dallas has a hearing disability, but with the aid of suitable hearing aids he can hear sufficiently to hear what his children are communicating to him and to communicate with the outside world.

I must also mention that Mr Schmidt's children have very good hearing at this stage. However, when Mr Schmidt removed his hearing aid while he was having a shower one day, all of a sudden it dawned on him that he was experiencing total silence, and hence his concern as to how people with a hearing disability, no matter how small, can communicate, especially if they have not learned sign language. As a result of these discussions, Mr Schmidt arranged a petition signed by 1,937 people, which was presented to this chamber late last year.

I have endeavoured to ascertain the number of children in South Australia who are affected by impaired hearing, and the only information I can get at this stage is from 2004. That report stated that there were approximately 800 children suffering from known hearing impairment. I must emphasise that it is 'known', and I will elaborate on this a bit further. Of these, it was reported that about 72 per cent of children under 17 years with hearing aids had a mild to moderate loss in their better ear. It is okay for those people who are fortunate enough to be able to, firstly, afford to have their hearing aids, but what happens to the 72 per cent of those people who may not have that ability and have no hearing in their other ear, as was mentioned in this 2004 report? Children starting school have to cope in a strange, new situation with lots of other new children and new rules to learn. Self-esteem in the primary school years depends on how well children manage the learning tasks of the school, how well they do at sport, how they look, how they feel and making friends with other children. Young children's self-esteem can be affected by their physical and hormonal changes. Most importantly, how they look and how they think affects how they finish up in their life.

Whilst the parents of these children will go to whatever lengths to allow their children to be able to hear some form of conversation, it does not substitute the joy of being able to communicate with other children and also with adults. Parents and caregivers play a major role in working with school staff to

develop educational programs for their children. It is very important that you take the opportunity to contribute at all stages of your child's education, although you can choose if and how you would like to be involved.

People might ask: what could a parent possibly offer trained teaching staff? The answer to that is they can make a very significant contribution. They know their child better than anyone. They spend more time with their children and have the opportunity to observe them in a greater variety of situations than any doctor, teacher, psychiatrist, counsellor or therapist. Their views about their children's development are vital. They also know if their child is not hearing adequately, although their child may not be making that public.

Even before your child enters school, you have had years of experience as your child's first teacher. Prior to school entry, many of the skills a child has developed since birth have been taught by parents and caregivers. The parent will be the most consistent teacher of that child, as schoolteachers will come and go. The parent is a valued and essential member of the educational team.

The rate of children's speech and language development can vary, depending on the child. Some children will develop certain skills quicker than others and some children will be slow to develop certain skills compared to their peers, even if there are no related problems.

It appears that most of the schools in South Australian that teach Auslan are located in the metropolitan areas and there are very few in the regional areas. I will elaborate later about how well a school in my electorate has done.

We, as a state and also as a country, state that education is very important to every child in Australia. Now, the federal government is placing greater emphasis on a new generation of educational standards. I certainly agree that the educational curriculum is a major issue that affects every child's success later in life.

There would be numerous young people who may have a slight hearing impairment and the teachers may not be aware of the issue because of embarrassment to the child and/or the parents. In the meantime, this student will go through the course of education and not be fully able to hear and understand the subjects, which may result in insufficient learning to be able to enjoy the opportunity for fruitful employment.

They may also feel isolated from society and turn to behaviours that may increase their chances of facing legal issues further in life. If Auslan or sign language is made available to those schools who have students with this issue—and that could be at any school—and the schools that have teaching

facilities are promoted, then that child will have an increased opportunity in life.

I would just like to make a comment on one of the schools in my electorate which brought this to my attention—the Crystal Brook Primary School. I was there recently at the launch of a BER for their gymnasium. We sang the national anthem, which is usually sung by voice. On this particular occasion, every student—and I reinforce, every student—at that school did the national anthem in sign language.

I found that very intriguing because you go to other schools and there might only be one class that is actually being taught and understands sign language. I congratulate the teacher at this particular school. That teacher had the whole school understanding and communicating with everybody. They have five or six students in that school who have some issues and, certainly, every one of those children know Auslan and sign language.

I would also like members of this house to close their eyes and try to understand how isolated a blind person feels; that is, being able to hear but not see. We really cannot understand that. If a person with a vision impairment closes their eyes, it is the reverse; they can still hear. A person with a hearing impairment does not hear all the words and they cannot communicate with anybody. For a person who has impaired hearing, it is the opposite; they may be able to see, but cannot hear.

We as a country encourage our students to learn a foreign language which may or may not be of benefit later in life; however, we appear not to strongly encourage our students to learn sign language, which I believe is more productive in our own community's wellbeing, and provides a better future for those affected with this disability. This is an issue which a lot of people put at the back of their minds; however, I strongly believe it is time that we look more deeply into issues that may be experienced by a minority section of our communities.

I also believe that, as a state, we need to offer this service to people who are experiencing this sort of disability and residing in rural areas more so than we are now. We cannot and will not be able to implement this sort of assistance to these people immediately, and no-one is asking for that; however, we can provide financial assistance or resources. We can put money into these issues, but above all, we need people to be able to carry out the services.

This means we need to start training people who will be able to deliver this service, and that will need to start well and truly before we will be able to offer this language to people who may want to take up this service in the future. I would strongly ask that serious consideration be given to commencement of this, with a view to train people who will be able to provide this service on a wider offering at a later date.

The Hon. J.M. RANKINE (Wright—Minister for Education and Child Development, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:41): The government is happy to support the amended motion that was put forward by the member for Frome. We agree that it is important that students are able to communicate with one another, regardless of their first or even second language.

The decision about which second language is taught in South Australian government schools is a local one, and is made by the principal, in consultation with the governing council, staff and the wider community. The background languages of the students are usually taken into consideration when making decisions about which language is chosen.

The South Australian government supports the diversity of languages offered in our schools, including Auslan, and the rights of local school communities to choose which language is offered according to the needs and interest of students. The broad range of languages taught in South Australian schools addresses local community and national priorities for language learning.

South Australian languages policy schools follows the Australian Curriculum: Languages, due to be completed by December 2013, which provides flexibility for students to select the language taught locally. Auslan is recognised as one language within the Australian Curriculum: Languages, and is included in the list of languages likely to be developed, but not yet approved, in the third phase of language-specific frameworks.

Final recommendations regarding which languages will have their own framework or specific curriculum are still to be made by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority for endorsement by ministers of Education across Australia. Even if Auslan is not developed as part of the Australian curriculum, government schools will still have the option of offering Auslan curriculum under existing state guidelines that recognise the rights of local school communities to choose which language is offered according to student need and interest.

The department currently provides a range of opportunities for the teaching and learning of Auslan that are exemplary in comparison with the other states and territories. Klemzig and Brighton primary schools have a Centre for Hearing Impaired and teach Auslan to all of their mainstream students as a second language.

The Centre for Hearing Impaired at Brighton, Elizabeth Park and Klemzig primary schools provide weekly Auslan classes for interested families and community members, and Auslan is taught at Windsor Gardens Community College, where it is offered as a subject within the South Australian Certificate of Educate (SACE) in years 11 and 12. In 2012, there were nine students

enrolled in SACE Auslan. The centrally located special education resource unit provides additional support across the state for children and students in preschools and schools who use Auslan as their first language and the language through which they learn.

Of the total number of students with verified hearing impairment receiving support from the department's regional support services, only 67 students use Auslan as their primary means of communication. I will be very pleased to ask my department to provide the member for Frome with details on Auslan, how it is included in the South Australian education curriculum and if that might be expanded. I am also happy to ask my department to remind schools that Auslan is an option for their second language program.