



Truancy hitch hailed

By **CAROLINE SMITH**

UNITINGCARE West has welcomed the State Government's stalling of an income-linked truancy trial in Cannington, saying its implementation would push disadvantaged families further into the abyss.

"We're calling for the State Government not to sign this bill," chief executive Chris Hall said.

"Our observation is that this has been an ill-conceived and poorly thought-out idea - it's about finding a quick fix."

Mr Hall said any intervention which did not address the reasons underlying child truancy would be futile.

"You can't just have one solution," he said. "There's evidence in the UK and the US that single interventions have not been successful."

Mr Hall said there were various other practices that could fix the problem of truancy with families.

"There's a need for intensive help which is home-based, and parenting skills programs," he said.

The trial was to begin on January 1 this year and include 1050 parents in the Cannington area, who would face a 13-week suspension of

Centrelink payments in the instance of serial school truancy.

The legislation was introduced by the Federal Government in August last year, but needs a bilateral agreement with the States before it can go ahead.

The Barnett Government has agreed to a first phase, which covers income management, but is yet to signal how it will act on the second phase, governing school truancy, which was to come under Child Protection Minister Robyn McSweeney's jurisdiction.

"This is a complex issue and the new State Government is still to determine if the trial will deliver the desired outcomes for students whose families receive Centrelink payments in the Cannington district," Ms McSweeney said.

Opposition spokeswoman for child protection Sue Ellery has criticised the uncertain position of the trial, saying parents would be left unaccountable if the trial did not go ahead.

"The responsible way to proceed is to put the protocols in place to protect the children, allow the trial to proceed and make an assessment on the basis of the evidence from the trial," she said.