



Speech by

**Mr R. QUINN**

**MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC**

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Hansard 26 August 1998

### **SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT**

**Mr QUINN** (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House welcomes the Education Minister's commitment to continue with the implementation of school based management and calls on the Government to—

- (1) protect the interests of students, teachers and schools by honouring the guarantees on School Based Management in the Department of Education's current enterprise bargaining agreement;
- (2) give a binding commitment that any change to the current agreement does not disadvantage any school in any way;
- (3) acknowledge that teachers and parents have a legitimate right to formal participation in the strategic planning and decision-making processes in their own schools;
- (4) encourage and support schools to establish school councils, including provision of financial assistance for establishment and training; and
- (5) ensure the continuation and enhancement of a quality assurance framework which enhances school accountability to parents and the wider community."

Tonight's motion is a last-ditch effort to ensure that our 455,000 State school students are not disadvantaged because of this Government's intention to rip the funding out of Leading Schools. Make no mistake, if the Minister reneges on his department's funding commitments under its enterprise bargaining agreement, more than half of those students will be worse off within a few short months. They will be worse off this financial year and they will be worse off every year thereafter.

The Government's policy to abandon the notion of Leading Schools has nothing to do with its spurious rhetoric about equity. Under the coalition's carefully phased implementation schedule, 90% of all students would have been covered in nine months and 100% over the next couple of years on an entirely voluntary basis. Our 400 Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools already account for some 260,000 students, or 57% of the entire State school student population.

Contrary to Labor's silly propaganda, this was not an elitist program. Nor is tonight's motion unreasonable: all it seeks to do is to ensure that no school and no student are unfairly disadvantaged if the Minister presses ahead with his plan to amend last year's enterprise bargaining agreement. It does not prevent the Government of the day from implementing its own policies and it certainly does not prevent the Minister from enhancing the existing arrangements. This motion is simply intended to keep the Government honest.

Prior to the recent State election, Premier Peter Beattie and his Labor colleagues gave repeated assurances that the ALP was committed to making all schools Leading Schools. This is what Mr Beattie said on radio 4BC back on 4 February this year after releasing Labor's education policy—

"We do not believe that some schools should be second rate schools and others should be leading schools, we believe that all schools should be leading schools."

When asked where he would get the money to pay for his education commitments, Mr Beattie said that all policies had been carefully funded and—

"David Hamill, our Treasurer has worked very closely on it. We will be promising nothing that cannot be properly funded."

Mr Beattie repeated these commitments throughout the State.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Would the honourable member refer to members by their title or by their electorate.

**Mr QUINN:** The Honourable Premier mentioned these commitments throughout the State. Never at any time did he suggest that Labor would rip money out of the existing Leading Schools if it was elected to Government, nor did any other Labor member.

As recently as last month, the Minister for Education was still peddling the same line. The headline on his media release of 5 July was, "State Government to make all schools Leading Schools." In that media release, his opening sentence was—

"The State Government has taken the first step towards making all Queensland schools leading schools."

In the fourth paragraph he states—

"We are determined that all Queensland schools will be leading schools."

Elsewhere he states—

"... we are committed to making all schools leading schools."

The Minister did not say in his media release that he planned to raid the Leading Schools cookie jar to help pay for Labor's \$1.5 billion worth of unfunded election promises. Even on the most conservative estimates, Labor has to find \$160m over four years in education alone. The only way the Minister can access that sort of money without sacking thousands of teachers is to raid the funds set aside for the Leading Schools program of \$56m a year at full implementation. The Minister has already revealed that his 1,300 Leading Schools will receive just \$20m a year. In other words, he is going to siphon off—

**Mr WELLS:** I rise to a point of order. I ask the Minister if he could explain how the \$56m is set aside—in what form and where.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr QUINN:** In other words, he is going to siphon off \$36m a year of Leading Schools funding within the term of this Government. That is the difference between the coalition's \$56m and his \$20m. Contrary to the Minister's silly rhetoric on this matter, that \$56m was not some mythical figure written on the back of an envelope; the bulk of that money was to be delivered through our legally binding Budget guarantees under the Education Queensland enterprise bargaining agreement with the QTU and other unions. The Minister cannot claim that it does not exist and then in the next breath say that Labor intends to announce funding for new education initiatives in its September Budget, which is what the Minister said in yesterday's Courier-Mail. The dollars are there all right, but he wants to spend them on his own pet projects.

The Minister's excuse that he cannot afford to honour school funding guarantees under the department's enterprise bargaining agreement has about as much credibility as saying that he cannot afford to pay some 30,000 teachers their next pay rise. It is nonsense! In fact, yesterday's Courier-Mail told us that the Minister has so much money to throw around that he plans to give principals a nice pay rise of 5% over and above his legal obligations. With on-costs, superannuation, annual leave and such things, we could guess that this figure might come to about \$3m a year.

Let me make it very clear that I have the highest respect for our many dedicated principals and have no problem at all with their receiving an unexpected windfall if Treasury is going to provide the extra money. However, I reject absolutely the proposition that their pay rise should be funded by our schools and our students. The Minister cannot claim that he does not have enough money to pay our 400 Leading Schools principals their legal entitlements under enterprise bargaining and then hand out an extra \$3m a year to principals when there is no obligation to do so. That would be a breach of another enterprise bargaining commitment guaranteeing that staff pay rises would be fully funded by Treasury and not paid from school budgets.

This is what the Queensland Teachers Union had to say on that particular point in a letter dated 5 March this year—

"The Union has negotiated throughout the enterprise bargaining process on the basis that increases should be fully supplemented rather than requiring counter-productive trade-offs of staff, conditions or the resources available to teachers and students in Queensland state schools. Indeed, the Union's approach to enterprise bargaining and the concession by Government at no cost offsets in the offer of 4% per annum is specifically acknowledged in the decision of the Industrial Relations Commission."

The Minister's plan to redirect funding from school grants to principals' pay packets totally repudiates that commitment. The QTU's apparent complicity in this proposed breach of its own conditions is yet another measure of its breathtaking hypocrisy and lack of regard for the welfare of students. So much for its major campaign this year to stand up for State schools!

However, on this occasion the real villain is the Minister; the QTU is just his self-interested accomplice. I take this opportunity to remind the Minister of the key funding guarantee in his own department's enterprise bargaining agreement, which is—

"In terms of the budget allocation, Education Queensland reiterates its commitment to the provision of additional resourcing for the implementation of school based management initiatives. This increase will be a base allocation of \$30,000 plus \$11.00 per student to a maximum grant increase of \$50,000."

That is the provision and the commitment this Minister is seeking to avoid. But on what basis? There is no mention of the Leading Schools program in this provision or in any other provision in the Budget subclause. The Minister has already reaffirmed that Labor is committed to the progressive introduction of school-based management, and that was the precise basis upon which this funding guarantee was agreed. In other words, there is no credible reason for repudiating its intent or extent.

The Minister's precious rhetoric about equity and abandoning the notion of Leading Schools is nothing but a cynical ploy to rip off our 1,300 schools and some 455,000 students. The extra \$3.9m that he is tipping into the bucket this year over and above the coalition's Budget allocation of \$16.1m is nothing but tactical camouflage. Make no mistake, most of our 1,300 schools will be worse off within a year as a result of this subterfuge and most of our 455,000 students will be worse off within months.

This semester the Minister has sent out \$11.7m to 645 schools—an average of some \$18,000 each. That leaves only \$8.3m to be sent out to 1,300 schools next semester, at an average of \$6,000 each. One does not have to be a mathematical genius to work out that there will be a lot of losers, and the biggest losers will be our Leading Schools. These are the schools and school communities that have worked the hardest and done the most to earn a place in the program. They are the schools and school communities that have totally committed themselves to improving education standards and student outcomes. These are the schools that the Minister is targeting for the biggest and most immediate funding cuts in just a few months. Our best guess is that their total losses next semester will be in the order of some \$3m, or an average of \$7,500 per school. The full impact in 1999 is likely to be much worse. In my view, that is simply unacceptable. I commend this motion to the House.

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