



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (2.33 p.m.): I rise to join in this debate and, in doing so, underline words spoken by the Opposition Leader and the Leader of the Liberal Party. This Budget really is the coalition's Budget with a few minor changes. The two previous speakers from this side of the House outlined the dangers that they see in projecting the Budget forward. Subsequent speakers will be concentrating on various portfolio areas. I said before that, by and large, this is the coalition's Budget. On that basis, of course, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

In relation to the Education portfolio area—apart from additional funds being allocated, there is really not much change to this portfolio area in terms of policy direction and much of the detail. Of course, the devil will always be in the detail, and that will not be fully open to scrutiny until the Estimates committees are in progress. However, on first reading of the Budget documents, there seems to be very little change in terms of the direction of Education in Queensland over the next 12 months under this particular Government. As I said, some additional funds have been put into some policy areas. By and large, those are policy areas that the previous Government—the coalition Government—put in place. They were groundbreaking policy areas.

The previous speaker mentioned the airconditioning of schools. The coalition bit the bullet and decided to put in place the Cool Schools program. Previously, nothing at all had been done in north Queensland in relation to the airconditioning of schools, both State and non-State. There had been some programs in western Queensland, but nothing in northern Queensland. The coalition recognised that fact and allocated some \$73m over four years to commence the airconditioning of schools in north Queensland. This Government has allocated additional funds to extend the zone further south, as I understand it, and to adjust the subsidy program for P & Cs and school communities in the northern zones. So by and large, it is an extension. I recognise that it is also a welcome extension to the program. I agree with what the previous speaker said. Students should not be forced to work and study in oppressively hot conditions. That is why the coalition initiated that program several years ago.

Other programs which have received additional funds were also groundbreaking programs. For instance, the behaviour management programs that the coalition Government put in place have received some additional funds in this Budget. That will be welcome news in our schools. I see no mention of pulling back on the legislative underpinning of those programs. I believe that they were accepted by members on both sides of the House. Over the past 12 to 18 months or so, the schools and the parents themselves have accepted those new discipline regimes that school communities are putting in place within their schools.

I also mention the additional funds for students with disabilities and what this Government calls its Education For All program. That is wrapping up funds for students with disabilities and learning difficulties into a new program and rebadging some of the money. But to be fair, additional funds have been provided, and I welcome those funds because I believe that they will be targeted at students who most need them in our schools, both in terms of additional teachers and additional support services, whether by teacher aides or other professionals, such as physiotherapists, speech therapists and so on. Schools can always use those additional areas of expertise, and I am quite sure that those funds will be put to good use within the schooling system.

Several other areas received additional funds. The maintenance of school security is one area in which additional funds have been targeted. All members should realise that our schools have a large maintenance backlog. I understand that it is something in the order of \$100m. So any additional funds to eliminate that maintenance backlog will be well received in our schools. In the couple of months prior to the election, we were moving to substantially boost the maintenance funds to schools. All members of this House would be aware that they received some letters from the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing about additional maintenance in schools. My understanding is that \$6m was spent in that particular burst of funding. It is good to see additional funds being allocated for that purpose. There is no doubt that a \$100m maintenance backlog is a fair backlog to overcome. It will take ongoing increases in funds for quite some time to overcome it. That is also a welcome addition.

I am glad to see that there have been no changes made to the Youth Action Program. When the coalition launched that program, it was heavily criticised as being some sort of stunt. I am glad to see that cooler heads have prevailed, that the benefits have been recognised, that the Government has continued to fund it and, indeed, to expand it as we indicated that we would do. Another program that has received additional funds, although not within the Education portfolio, is the Police in Schools Program. Again, that was criticised by the Labor Party when it was launched. Now its benefits have been recognised and the Government has continued its funding. Additional funds have been allocated to literacy and numeracy. That is a key component of this portfolio. More money has been allocated to that project to build on the good work done by the previous Government. Of course, everyone is aware of the critical importance that these programs have within our schools. Any additional funds that we can find to support those initiatives are always welcome.

I am glad to see that funding has been maintained for the Connect-Ed program, which I believe is one of the most far-reaching programs to be put in place in the schooling system. Under that program all schools will be connected to the Internet and the departmental network. Access will be provided to students across Queensland. Funding has been made available for local area networks. We will explore the details of that during the Estimates committee hearings. Other noteworthy aspects of the budget are the additional funds that have been allocated to key areas of the non-Government sector, such as the provision of funds for airconditioning, students with disabilities, additional capital works grants and so on. I am sure they are welcomed also by the non-Government sector.

Overall, as I said before, this Education budget is the coalition's Education budget with a few welcome additional funds attached to it. One can understand that having additional funds available to the Government through the Commonwealth Medicare agreement, through the increase in electricity dividends and through forgone tax reductions allows the Government to provide those funds. It appears that education got its fair share of those additional funds, which I am glad to see.

Mr Hamill: You would expect that.

Mr QUINN: I would definitely expect that from the former Education Minister. Indeed, we will be looking forward to additional funds being provided through his personal generosity.

The capital works budget of some \$220m is not as high as it has been in the past. In the previous two coalition budgets, we had a higher Capital Works Program—some \$260m to \$270m to start with, tapering down to \$240m or \$250m. Under the previous budget, the figure fell back.

Mr Hamill: Some was an advance.

Mr QUINN: Some of it was. It fell back again to about \$206m. This Budget allocates some additional funds to bring that up to \$220m. That will be used well within the portfolio area, because the demand for additional accommodation, refurbishment of existing accommodation and new works within the schools is always greater than the Budget allocation. The schools will greatly appreciate any funds that we can put towards that.

By and large, we are pleased to see that the Government has kept the coalition's budget for Education intact. It has allocated additional funds to crucial areas. During the hearings of the Estimates committee we will be examining whether there have been any reductions in funding to any of those programs and other programs that are not mentioned in the Budget papers to ensure that the good work that the coalition has done over the past two years in getting education on track in Queensland is maintained. That fact that it is on track has now been recognised by this Government, because there is no major change in policy directions. There are no major reductions in the funding formulas for any of the key initiatives. It is all the same. Where money has been available, some programs have been enhanced. That is a ringing endorsement of what the coalition did in terms of education over the past two and a half years. We put education on the map, turned it around and got it doing. Now this Government is providing some additional funds to keep it on track.

Ms Spence: No-one believes it.

Mr QUINN: The Minister should read her Government's own document. She will see that everything that we had in our Education budget is exactly the same.

Mr Hamill: And more.

Mr QUINN: And more—I have already said that. I have already made that acknowledgment. In terms of the policy direction, this document is our policy direction. It is exactly the same. It is disgraceful that a Minister does not know exactly what is in her own Government's Budget.

I will mention Leading Schools, because it has been raised.

Mr Hamill: I have just been trying to defend you.

Mr QUINN: I appreciate that.

The move to school-based management cannot be stopped. Even though there is now a consultation period occurring within the school communities about the funding formula and the details, when one talks to school communities one discovers that they do not want to go back to the old system. They have had a taste of Leading Schools and the freedom, flexibilities, authorities and the additional resources that have been transferred to them. They do not want to go back to the old ways. There may be some changes made around the edges. There may be a new name. There may be some bits and pieces, bells and whistles, added or subtracted from it. However, by and large, this is a movement that cannot be turned back. Interestingly, this budget also recognises that. It allocates discretionary grants to schools on that basis. All this nonsense that the Government and the ALP have been going on with about Leading Schools for the past six or 12 months is just that: sanctimonious claptrap.

By and large, this is our Budget. It would be churlish if we were to stand here and criticise it. We do not seek to do that. We understand that the Government has maintained the general direction of education policy of this State. It has added additional resources where necessary. We will only too gladly recognise that fact.
