



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

Hansard 22 October 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee F

Report No. 1

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (3.01 p.m.): At the outset, I also place on record my appreciation to the member for Nudgee for his chairmanship of this particular committee and also the secretariat for the work that it did in putting together the final report. The Opposition has put in a dissenting report. I think the issues that were canvassed in the report are of general concern to interested groups within education itself. Basically, as I have said on many occasions before, this is the coalition's Education budget with some additional moneys in some key areas—and we have acknowledged that—where they are needed most.

As I said before, we do have some concerns in terms of the amounts of money that have been taken out of the local area networks, whether or not the additional funds for the airconditioning—the extended zone—will be sufficient over the longer term, what will happen to the discretionary grants now that the Leading Schools program has been abolished, and whether or not there is enough there for the longer term as well, and also the issue of funding for primary schools and preschools. I also note that other interest groups have raised the latter issue with the Minister and his department on a number of occasions and they have attempted to give those groups replies. Many of the answers have been contradictory, circulatory and not altogether believable, I might say, in terms of trying to satisfy their particular concerns.

I understand that some three weeks ago the QCPCA put to Education Queensland or the Minister's office a range of questions that it would like answered on primary school funding. It has yet to receive a reply, despite even prompting the department for an answer about a week ago. I would be very interested to see that request for further information answered as soon as possible.

Mr Wells: You could also put in an FOI application.

Mr QUINN: The QCPCA could also put in an FOI application, along with the 30 or 40 other people who put in applications to Education Queensland every month.

I would also like to canvass the issue of the report today by the Queensland Schools Curriculum Council and the graphs it contains about the levels of literacy and numeracy within our schools. I notice a great deal of play has been made about the gap between the cohorts and the various groups within the education scene, such as children from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids, boys versus girls and the need to put in place programs to narrow the gap. I agree with that. I think that that is a worthwhile cause and one that we should be looking at.

However, I do point out that Education Queensland has been looking at these issues over a number of years, along with every other State Government and Education Department in Australia, and has yet to find answers to these particular problems. I suspect that this is a problem that not only Australian systems but also other systems around the world are trying to grapple with. There are some problems in trying to come to grips with these particular issues. I do take heart from the fact that, overall, standards are rising within the systems both State and non-State, and that is clearly evident in the report. The challenge from now on will be to make sure that, in fact, these standards keep rising and that we do not plateau off or fall away.

One of the key issues there will be the ongoing commitment to provide additional funds for education over the next couple of years. I note with a great deal of delight that, when the coalition was in Government, for the first time ever, funding for education in Queensland passed the national average. I think that was a particularly important milestone in terms of education funding in Queensland. We need to be ever vigilant that it never slips below that average from now. We must make sure that additional funds keep flowing into the system and that they are well targeted and well used. It is not much use having the additional funds if the policy settings are not right and the money is frittered away and wasted. We always have to make sure that we focus on achieving better outcomes for kids, we improve our educational system and we do leave a lasting legacy to our children. This is one of the very few areas in which Governments can make an important difference in the longer term in terms of educational outcomes, expectations for further life, social cohesion and a whole range of areas in which education is so important.

As I said before, the coalition supports the budget, with some reservations, and I have instanced those. No doubt they will be areas of some debate in future, particularly amongst members in this Chamber, if not amongst the various interest groups.

Time expired.
