



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGE

Hansard 18 November 1998

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (Minister for Education) (6.39 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words in Mr Nelson's amendment and insert the following—

'This House notes that some members report that they have experienced difficulties in approaching school management directly, and notes the assurance of the Minister that such a free flow of information is essential and supported by the Government.'

It is a matter of some concern that honourable members on the other side of the House have said that they have experienced some difficulty in approaching their school management directly. I invite those honourable members to go to their local schools to speak to the local principals, the teachers, the P & Cs and the school councils. Please do so freely. Honourable members in this House bear the mandate of the people who elected them. As such, they are entitled to make such inquiries as they wish to make. It is important that honourable members be apprised of what is going on in the schools in their local areas. They have a responsibility for those local areas and schools. I urge them to act consonant with those responsibilities.

Having said that, I should also mention that teachers and principals are public sector employees. As such, there are provisions of the public sector code of conduct that are relevant to them, and that prescribes certain ways of dealing appropriately with administrative problems. The question is: what is the first thing that teachers or principals do when they have an administrative problem? The first thing they do if there is a broken tap in the school is not go to their local member. The first thing they do is ring up and see whether it can be fixed. However, if having gone through that process they have some difficulty it is perfectly appropriate for teachers or principals to contact their local member, preferably with their P & C president—it is a community issue—raise the matter there and subsequently have the matter raised with the Minister. It is a question not of whether but of how one goes about doing that if one happens to be a public sector employee. In respect of members of Parliament, it is important that our liberties and capacity to seek information should not be trammelled in any way with respect to something as important as a school. I invite honourable members to exercise the mandate that they have been given by the people who elected them.

With respect to the propositions put forward by honourable members on the other side of the House, I wish to mention a few of the things that form part of this Government's record in its first few months of office. When I became the Minister, the first thing I did was end the confrontation between the Government and the teaching profession. I thanked the teaching profession for what it was doing for education in our State. I consulted with it as to the best way to achieve good teaching outcomes. As a result, we now have schools concentrating on educational outcomes rather than on defending themselves against assaults that may be launched against them by the Government.

We have a record budget for Education of \$3.46 billion. This represents the Beattie Government's commitment to education. This record budget has enabled us to deliver an additional \$5m per year for literacy and numeracy. It has enabled us to deliver an extra \$5m for behaviour management per year. Over four years there will be an additional \$42m for Cooler Schools, an

additional \$35m for Education for All, and an additional \$35m for inclusive education. There will also be an increase in the funds available for capital works and maintenance.

A great deal has been achieved in a very short time and it has been done in consultation with P & Cs—with the mums and dads—with the teachers and school communities. Recently, we completed a discussion with people in every single educational district, and that resulted in the document that all members have. An extra \$28m is being ploughed into schools for a variety of initiatives, including—and especially—literacy. This is a document which represents benefits to every school in every electorate. This is the best educational funding outcome that has ever been achieved in this State. We have education spending above the national average and we have school communities able to focus without distraction and constant confrontation on educational outcomes.

Time expired.
