



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): It defies belief that the Labor Minister for Education would claim that there is no money to keep faith with Queensland schools when he has just agreed to award principals an unsolicited pay rise of 5%.

Mr WELLS: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House. I never made any such claim.

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

Miss SIMPSON: In common with my colleagues on this side of the House, I believe that our dedicated principals do a great job. However, I cannot endorse a pay rise that is paid for by our students and our schools. The interests of students must come first. If the Minister cannot afford to give schools what they are already entitled to under existing arrangements, he cannot afford to hand out gratuitous pay rises, either. Nor can he afford to be launching a new funding initiative next month.

The truth is that his pay rise to principals is nothing other than a cynical sweetener to help them swallow the bitter pill of funding cuts to their school grants. Sure, some schools are better off this semester and some will also be better off next semester. That is to be applauded. I am certainly not going to criticise any Minister for putting more money into schools, and tonight's motion from the coalition does not seek to do so. Our objective is to ensure that no school and no student is worse off.

I can assure the Minister that his public pronouncements have already struck fear into many schools and school communities throughout the State. More than 60% of the 6,000 school students in my electorate of Maroochydore already attend Phase 1 or Phase 2 Leading Schools. It is they who will be disadvantaged if the Minister and his union cronies have their way. It is they who will pay the price for the Minister's pay rise to principals. It is they who will pay the price for the Minister's new funding initiatives next month. That is simply not acceptable.

The parents and teachers in my electorate want to know why the Minister has enough money to spend \$160m on Labor promises but not enough money to honour existing guarantees. Some of those schools are a little better off now, but they will all be worse off later unless this House supports our motion. Anyone who votes against this motion will have to explain why. They will have to explain why they supported less funding for school grants from next semester onwards. They will have to explain why they supported a new funding formula that immediately disadvantages some 57% of State school students throughout Queensland. They will have to explain why they allowed this Minister to betray the trust and goodwill of 400 school communities across the State—

Mr WELLS: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. That remark is offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Miss SIMPSON: I withdraw whatever the Minister finds offensive.

They will have to explain why they have allowed this Minister to betray the trust and goodwill of 400 school communities across the State from the New South Wales border to Thursday Island and out to Mount Isa.

Mr WELLS: I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker, I still find it offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn again.

Miss SIMPSON: I withdraw whatever the Minister has found offensive.

We are not talking about a few years down the track, when all schools will be worse off; we are talking about next semester. Let me assure the other side of the House and those who stand with them tonight that they will be asked to explain. Some members will be asked to explain tomorrow, some next semester and some at the next election; they will be held to account. The Minister might like to start by explaining his plans for the 840 students at the Kaluin State School in my electorate, the 1,350 students at the Maroochydore State High School, the 500 students at the Mooloolaba State School and the 970 students at the Mountain Creek State School. That is more than 3,600 students who will be worse off next semester—60% of all State school students in my electorate.

I am sure that they and their parents will be very interested to know why the Minister wants to rip them off. I am sure that their teachers, principals and other school staff would also like to hear his explanation. I am sure that they would like to know why he wants to rip thousands of dollars out of their school grants next semester, and I am sure that they would like to know why his Labor colleagues feel the same way.

The motion is perfectly straightforward. It simply seeks to enforce that the existing guarantees are honoured, that no school and no student will be worse off should those guarantees be buried. What is the Minister's problem? I remind the House that the relevant enterprise bargaining provisions also provide numerous safeguards on other important matters such as class sizes and staffing. This debate is not just about money; it is about important matters of principle and the future of our schools. It is about keeping the faith and doing the right thing. I commend the coalition's motion to the House.
