



Speech by

GARY FENLON

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (6.20 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to support the amendment moved by the member for Gladstone. I wish to paint some of the background to the issue that we are debating in the House tonight. I wish to put it on the record and make it very clear for the parents in my community. Prior to the June election this year, the Queensland education system was teetering on the edge of a very dark abyss. Indeed, we were ready to fall into it.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr FENLON: This is the view of my school community. It is a sad irony that the former Minister was not aware of this.

Mr Purcell: He thinks it's funny.

Mr FENLON: He takes pleasure from that. The education system in this State had a very proud history going back over 100 years of equitable service provision across-the-board for all schools in the State. It has been a fine system. Those principles have generally been adhered to by successive conservative and Labor Governments for over 100 years. In the past year we have seen a turnaround in that approach and a move that has taken us to the edge of the abyss—a move diametrically away from the system we had enjoyed for over 100 years, which saw an equitable basis for funding across our schools, to one premised upon the creation of inequality. That policy was framed to deliver inequality across our schools. We have heard the Education Minister's announcement that that system was suspect; that the funding for schools was not distributed equitably across electorates. We have seen the way in which the so-called Leading Schools fell more into conservative electorates.

We have been taken to a very dangerous stage. The education system that we have had is one of the most powerful, wonderful and great parts of our democratic institutions in this State. Parents can take their children to any State school and expect a consistent range and quality of services. That fundamental tenet was being undermined by the so-called Leading Schools system—a disastrous system based on poor public administration. Why is that so? That is because it undermined the Westminster tradition. It undermined the ability of each successive Government and even the Government of the day to change its own policy. That is so because the system merged together two things that should not be merged—an industrial relations agreement and a policy initiative. Regardless of whether we agree with the policy initiative, it was fundamentally unsound as a principle and contrary to the Westminster tradition. That unsoundness can be illustrated in a number of ways.

The only opportunity that a Government had to alter fixed policy initiatives contained within an enterprise agreement was to formally amend the agreement. That is a cumbersome and time-consuming process and it impedes efficient and sound public administration. Secondly, policy initiatives that are fixed within the enterprise bargaining process do not permit the flexibility and responsiveness that is required in a dynamic school environment. Further, the linking of management ideology to school management invariably provides socially unacceptable outcomes. I was president of my P & C when this was put to the vote and parents—mums and dads—said, "We do not agree with this. We are being blackmailed, but we'll take the money."

Time expired.
