



Speech by

**Mr J. HEGARTY**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Hansard 22 October 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Committee (Cognate Debate)**

**Estimates Committee F**

**Report**

**Mr HEGARTY** (Redlands—NPA) (3.53 p.m.): Although I did not take part in Estimates Committee F, I am interested in the subject matter of the committee. I take an interest in the State and non-State schools in my electorate, as I am sure the honourable member for Rockhampton does. I congratulate the Government on maintaining the level of spending on education that was set by the previous coalition Government. For the first time, we now spend up to the national average. The Government has maintained that level of funding and has, in fact, exceeded it. It should be commended for its interest in the education of children in Queensland.

The information technology initiatives, Schooling 2001 and Connect-Ed, are very important to bring children into the 21st century through the provision of state-of-the-art education facilities and give them the skills that they will need in pursuing their roles in life. I am a little concerned about the impost that is placed on schools in providing information technology. Schools will have to maintain equipment, look after programming and do all of the things that one has to do with new technology. However, the funding for that is not sufficient. Many schools are forming clusters whereby one full-time technician may be employed by several schools in order to maintain and upgrade information technology equipment. I highlight that problem for the Minister, although I am sure that he is aware of it. Provision will certainly have to be made for that, not in the distant future but very shortly, because several hundred schools are on line and are utilising new technology.

Some communities that have not yet been connected to the Internet are concerned at the possibility that the provision of fibre-optic cabling may not be continued but will be downgraded to a copper cable, which would be cheaper. It could prove to be a retrograde step in the long term if short-term expediency and savings take precedence. I certainly hope that that is not the case. The issue has been raised with me when I have visited school communities in my electorate, so I raise it with the Minister today.

The provision for 685 extra teachers is very welcome. Most of those teachers will go to secondary schools, which of course desperately need them. However, I highlight the problem of some of the small primary schools throughout the State, many of which have only part-time administrative assistants. The principals have to do most of the duties that principals of larger schools have to perform, yet they have a shortfall in the administrative support that would only be fair and reasonable for them to receive. We have to look at the ratio of administrative staff to student numbers, which cannot always be calculated using a simple formula.

The Government will not proceed with the coalition's Leading Schools initiative. We look forward with anticipation to finding out what will replace it. Some of the schools that went into rounds 1 and 2 of the program made commitments on the basis of the funding that was promised. Another \$15,000 is due to them in the first semester, and that funding is supposed to be ongoing. I certainly hope that that is the case, because there is a degree of scepticism in the community on this issue. The Minister would be wise to keep his commitment for next year's funding and ensure that it is ongoing as promised.

The Building Better Schools program will provide \$80m for primary schools and a further \$10m for backlog maintenance, which is very important to schools throughout the State. A number of schools in my electorate have outgrown their administration block facilities as the student and staff numbers grow and as deputy principals and other staff are appointed. Many schools do not have the room to provide extra accommodation.

To cite another problem, \$158,000 worth of maintenance was identified as being needed at one school, yet only \$11,000 was allocated for this year.

Another area of concern is the Special Needs Support Group. Shailer Park High School in my electorate is the only school in the Logan/Beaudesert district that does not have that vital support. That school takes students from a low socioeconomic area and they need that sort of vital support. I wish to highlight the fact that all the schools in my area——

Time expired.

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