



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 18 November 1998

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.28 p.m.): I think that members would agree that in the hothouse atmosphere of this place we sometimes lose sight of the big picture and what really matters to the community. When it comes to education, the judgment of how well the Minister is handling his portfolio is made at the school level. I want to tell members of this House that, in the schools in my electorate and in the other schools in far-north Queensland, the Minister's performance is judged very, very well. I can assure the House of the Minister's commitment to far-north Queensland. Since the election, he has been there three times. The Minister's commitment to schools in far-north Queensland is on the record. That is what we have to remember: what is happening at the schools, the facilities that are being constructed and the money that is being spent in schools to improve learning outcomes. That is what this debate should be about. That is what I am concerned about and that is what the community is concerned about.

The airconditioning issue is really important to far-north Queensland schools. I will be the first to admit that the previous Government brought in the Cooler Schools program, but the point is that P & Cs could not afford it. The subsidy that was available was insufficient and not enough schools could benefit from that program. Now the P & Cs can afford to aircondition their schools because of the increase in the subsidy. Previously P & Cs had to provide 33% of the funding required for airconditioning and now they have to provide only 20%. We doubled the subsidy that was available to those schools. That is just one clear example of the commitment of this Government.

In terms of information technology, we are continuing to prepare our students so that they can manage in the information technology age and we are assisting teachers with the professional development that they need. Funding of \$26m for information technology has been provided to State schools. We are continuing with the programs that will make a difference to the future of our children.

In far-north Queensland recently, two schools were opened: Kuranda State High School was opened on 15 October and last weekend the Bentley Park State School was opened by the Premier. Again, it is important to acknowledge that whilst those schools were built by the previous Government, the planning for them was done in the Goss years.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Dr CLARK: And it failed. As the member, I was able to identify finally the land that we needed and it was actually purchased under the Labor Government. Indeed, in the school in the Mulgrave electorate, Warren Pitt identified the land where the school has been built. That site had to be large enough for a preschool, a primary school and a high school. Naomi Wilson certainly worked hard, but let us remember who initiated the process. If elected, Warren Pitt will work towards completing his vision of having a high school built on the same site. Let us remember who did that in the first place.

All the schools in my electorate and the electorates of Cairns and Mulgrave are benefiting from the \$28m that has been provided to target literacy and numeracy, including funding to employ more teacher aides, flexibility grants, more primary deputy principals, more grounds care and more administrative support. Having worked as a guidance officer, I know the importance of additional teacher aide time to support teachers in classrooms with children with special needs. That is needed and we are providing it. We are putting the money where it needs to go, and we are doing that in response to consultations that we have had with schools and the community. We know where that

money needs to go and we are putting it there. All of the schools in my electorate will be benefiting from that.

The tertiary education sector is not usually considered the responsibility of the State Government. However, this Government is supporting far-north Queensland's James Cook University with a \$7.5m interest-free loan so that the university is able to get on with the job of constructing a new library. Eventually that library will be funded by the Federal Government, but not until the year 2000. Unless we had provided that money and the additional \$2m for the total cost of the library, it would not be built.

Time expired.
