



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard 22 October 1998

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (7.03 p.m.): I take this opportunity to call upon the Government to take the necessary action to support school communities that wish to enforce appropriate uniform standards. The 1997-98 Ombudsman's report has created an uncertainty on this issue that needs to be clarified at the earliest opportunity. It is my view and understanding that the establishment and enforcement of appropriate uniform standards are supported by the vast majority of parents, and also by the Queensland Teachers Union and the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations.

Australia has a unique history with respect to the wearing of school uniforms. Although steeped in the traditions of the old English public school, the practice in Australia has its basis more in egalitarian principles that sought to remove the contrast between children from families from different socioeconomic backgrounds. I support that principle. Uniforms also assist in maintaining discipline and in focusing the minds of students on their role and place within the school community. They also provide a significant contribution towards enhancing the security of students within school grounds. Easy identification of students, visitors or unauthorised persons on a school ground is a crucial safety issue for today's schools.

It is interesting to note that countries that have a long tradition of not making uniforms compulsory—for example, the United States—are now starting to re-evaluate their stance and examine the benefits of such a policy. In Australia, we have a longstanding tradition that has worked well and is worthy of protection. Any initiative undertaken by the Government should enable the decision on whether uniforms are to be compulsory to be determined by the local school community. Any other approach would be unsatisfactory. In this regard, I believe the Government should be examining the possibility of providing legislative support to schools that choose the compulsory uniform option.
