



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—ONP) (6.35 p.m.): Let me just put one myth to bed right now. The Leading Schools program was not confined to coalition electorates. The electorate of Tablelands was formerly held by a senior National Party Minister—the Minister for Mines and Energy, no less—but had just six Leading Schools among the 23 State schools in his electorate. The seat of Caboolture, formerly held by a staunch Labor member and won only recently by the honourable Leader of the One Nation Party, has nine Leading Schools from a total of 12 State schools. In fact, more than 90% of State schools in the former Labor electorate of Caboolture are already Leading Schools, compared with the comparatively small fraction in my seat of Tablelands, previously held by the coalition. So that is a complete furphy.

Let us leave the party politics out of this debate and focus on the facts. It is not my job to defend the former Government. It made its fair share of mistakes, and I will be the first to agree that the Leading Schools program was less than perfect. Since becoming the Education spokesman for One Nation, I have spoken to a number of teachers and principals who have expressed a range of views about Leading Schools. Many of them have condemned the industrial disputation associated with the program's introduction last year. Some blame the former Government, others blame the union, but most believe that they have had the pain and now they want the gain. The very strong message I have been getting is that they do not want to wind the clock back. They do not want to go back to the old ways of doing things when their schools were run from a central office, nor do they want to see their additional funding sucked back into the central office or consolidated revenue.

One Nation supports the original motion before the House tonight because it is fair and reasonable. It is a no disadvantage test for schools. It will ensure that no school and no student is worse off when the Government's new funding formula is developed. We do not support this motion to embarrass the Government; we do not support this motion to score cheap political points; we support it because none of our schools should have to subsidise Government policy changes.

We welcome the new Government's plan to extend the Leading Schools grants to all schools but not at the expense of other students already covered by the program. If the Government wants to accelerate the program's expansion, that is great and we support it. But we will not rob existing Leading Schools to pay the bill. We have already heard that students attending Leading Schools represent well over half of the total number of State school students in Queensland. How could One Nation or I, as the party's Education spokesman, support a plan that conspires against their best interests?

If the Government is fair dinkum about making all schools Leading Schools, it should put its money where its mouth is. I do not care which political party is in power; we cannot have a system in which one Government makes a deal with schools this year and the new Government welshes on the deal the next. The Government is fond of talking about equity, but what about fairness? Does Labor really think it is fair to penalise 400 school communities throughout Queensland just because it does not like the coalition's Leading Schools program? I do not think so! One Nation does not think so, nor do the students, parents and staff in those schools.

I might add that some of those staff could well lose their jobs if the Government cuts these schools' grants. I was speaking to a principal in a large school just the other day who told me that he

would have to put off an office worker if the Minister reduces the school's grant as expected. I thought that this Government was committed to job stability and job creation, not job destruction.

I read in the Courier-Mail the other day that the Education Minister had promised to maintain global funding and throw in an extra \$8m for good measure. If that was true, tonight's motion should not prove to be a problem at all. The Premier has repeatedly told the people of Queensland that he regards education as a key Labor priority—so does One Nation. We believe that our schools need more money, not less; more teachers, not fewer teachers; and a better deal, not a worse deal. This motion does not guarantee that all schools would be better off, but it does ensure that no school would be worse off—and that is a good start. I assure the Minister that One Nation will do everything in its power to help him secure more money for all schools, large and small, Government and non-Government. In the meantime, I commend the original motion to the House.
