



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

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PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.38 p.m.): It is a matter of public record that the Minister for Education is, at best, somewhat accident-prone. He was the first Minister in this Government to miss a parliamentary division, the first to be caught misleading the House and the first obliged to apologise for doing so. His tangle-footed performance epitomises the Beattie Government's can't do approach to public administration.

Mr WELLS: I rise to a point of order. The proposition about misleading the House is untrue, offensive and contrary to the report of the Privileges Committee, whose time the honourable member wasted by sending the allegation there. I ask that the allegation be withdrawn.

Mr QUINN: If the Minister finds it offensive, I will withdraw. The Minister still had to apologise to the House, and he did it in the shortest possible time. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it was the shortest apology on record.

It is almost a year since the Minister froze Education Queensland's progressive transition to school-based management through the Leading Schools program. It is almost a year since he abandoned our blueprint for reform in favour of his own pale imitation. It will be a year to the day before his watered-down model of school-based management finally takes effect on 5 July. Under his administration, time has effectively stood still.

The Minister has tried to conceal this hive of inactivity by announcing an all-new, whiz-bang talkfest extravaganza called The Next Decade—2010 and Beyond. Those of us who were around in the mid 1980s will recall the Education 2000 project, which basically sank without trace. This is a carbon copy. The issues canvassed in the Minister's glossy little brochure have been around for more than a decade.

The last thing that our 1,300 schools and 460,000 students need is more talk. They want to know what the Minister is doing for them today—not tomorrow, not next year, and certainly not 10 years down the track. Talking about taking action is not the same as taking action. Talking is not doing. Our schools and students want to know what the Minister is doing about literacy and numeracy today. They want to know what he is doing about school discipline today. They want to know what he is doing about classroom computers and learning technology today. The answer is—precious little!

As if that was not bad enough, it has become increasingly clear that this Minister is hell-bent on destroying the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. He has thumbed his nose at all the other Education Ministers in Australia who are working to develop national benchmarks by which we can assess the success or otherwise of what we are doing in the classroom. For some reason or other, this Minister does not want us to know how Queensland students are faring compared with those in other States. Like the rest of his can't do colleagues, he is full of excuses, excuses, excuses. According to the Minister's revisionist version of history, Queensland should never have agreed to national benchmarking—and it is all my fault! It is the fault of the coalition Government. If the Minister is going to hide behind excuses, at least he should make sure that they are good ones.

The odd man out is not me, it is the Minister. He is the only Education Minister in Australia who has gone totally to water on this task. The Minister also seems to have suffered from a severe memory loss. Just a few months ago, the Minister was an enthusiastic supporter, an enthusiastic advocate, of

the national benchmarks. This briefing paper from last year's Budget Estimates committee hearings makes repeated references to the national benchmarks, along with top testing priorities for both numeracy and literacy in 1998-99. These are the Minister's own notes prepared on his authority by the Queensland Schools Curriculum Council. There are nine separate references to the national benchmarks on this one piece of paper, and all of them are positive. The Minister knew the hurdles and the challenges of national benchmarking as well as every other Education Minister in Australia. So his whingeing and whining is just good old fashioned camouflage.

We all knew that each State had different entry ages, different starting times, different curricula, different tests, different testing timetables and different reporting formats, just to list some of the complexities. Nothing has changed. However, all the other Ministers are sticking to the task, because they know how important it is that each State be able to report nationally and compare their progress against the national average so that we know where we are. We cannot have policy without data, and this national benchmarking exercise is designed to provide the data to the States so that they can make sure that they target their resources. Without the data, we have blind Freddy leading the group.

Time expired.
