



Speech by

BRUCE DAVIDSON

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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NOOSAVILLE STATE SCHOOL

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (11.03 p.m.): All of us take our good health for granted and proceed to get on with our lives in an "it could never happen to me" atmosphere when we are confronted by ill health, and especially by people with disabilities. Fortunately, today we are all more acutely aware of those whose lives are impaired by disability. Only in this last week, the BSA released a document extolling an information kit on aiding the construction of housing for those folk who suffer from disability.

How easily do we all fail to recognise the needs of the very young who suffer the full spectrum of disabilities from birth and who have special needs in their most early and formative years—those who are so young that their disabilities, which may be varied and in moderate to severe status, are not specifically diagnosed until they are six or seven years of age—that age when they must be sent to their first primary school? How easy it is for Governments and bureaucrats to dismiss those vital needs because they do not really understand them and because they believe that a family, no matter how inadequate, is supplying the required special services to those children, so just let the status quo continue.

Such an apathy would appear to be apparent in my electorate of Noosa, where over 42,000 people now reside. In the midst of this rapid development is a mushrooming black hole in our education system as, year after year, my requests and the requests of the school principal and the parents of impaired children in our surrounding district for a special education development centre—a very special facility for very young children at the Noosaville State School—are pushed further and further into oblivion.

In January 1997, the principal of the Noosaville State School advised senior officers of the Education Department of the urgent need for an SEDC at Noosaville as there was no other facility available in the northern schools district. In April of that year, the department established, on a temporary basis—let me repeat that: on a temporary basis—an SEDC using a preschool room. That facility opened with seven very young afflicted children and babies with speech, hearing and other multiple disabilities which are not truly diagnosed until those small, brave youngsters are about six or seven years of age. At the temporary school in Noosaville, those children range from moderate to severely handicapped.

From 1997, when the school started with seven children, it advanced to 20 in 1998. And currently, 27 are housed in that temporary room. As of this date, there are 30 enrolments in that special unit for young children with moderate to severely impaired disabilities, all of which will swell the input into that inadequate and temporary premises. The 27 children and their parents come from as far away as West Eumundi over the highway, down to Coolumb, across to Pomona, down to Peregian Beach and back to Noosaville.

I stress that the parents—as that SEDC facility is a parent and children program, with special teachers and therapists who all cram into that temporary facility with their special education teachers—are very special people themselves. But in the year 2000, something is going to give. It will probably be the parents. It will possibly be the principal. And worst of all, it will probably be the children, if the Education Department does not find the funds urgently to provide a facility that was urgent two long years ago.

It is a pity that this Chamber does not have video facilities, so that every member in here could see for themselves the impossible task that is incurred on the special teachers, the therapists, the parents and especially the children who are condemned to labour under those most inadequate conditions. If this was the case, I can assure members that even the most hardened heart in this House would succumb to pressuring the Minister and his bureaucrats to find the funds as urgently as, indeed, they are required.

It is a great privilege to say that I had a meeting this morning with the Minister for Education. He and the previous Minister for Education, Mr Quinn, and I have been aware of the need at the Noosaville State School. The Honourable Dean Wells met with the parents and the school community at the Nambour Community Cabinet meeting and discussed this issue with the parents of those students. When I had my meeting with the Minister this morning, he was very much aware of that need. He remembered the meeting, he remembered the parents, and he remembered some of the issues that they raised with him. I am very pleased to say that, after all this time, and even during the years when the coalition was in Government and during the nearly 18 months that the Labor Party has been in Government, Mr Wells, as Minister for Education, has agreed to support the needs of those students. He has agreed to do whatever he can to ensure that the facility can be provided and, hopefully, construction can commence in the first six months of next year.

I pay my respects to him, as the Minister for Education, on behalf of those students, the school community and particularly the parents and teachers involved. I put that on the public record in this House, and I will go outside this House to the media on the Sunshine Coast and applaud the Minister's commitment to the requirements of those people in my electorate.
