



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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SCHOOL UNIFORM BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.14 p.m.): Tonight I am pleased to support the School Uniform Bill, because it is a sensible and fairly simple Bill that will give some legislative support to an area where there is some conjecture and doubt at the moment, particularly since the Ombudsman's report was released. In contrast to the experience of the previous speaker, school P & Cs have come to me and said specifically that they would like the support and strength of a legislative base to enable them to provide a uniform code within their school and which would give them some certainty and security within their school community.

The other interesting aspect about tonight's debate is that there seems to be a general feeling of support in the House for school uniforms. However, on the other side of the Chamber that support tends to get a bit weak around the edges and a bit wobbly. We all agree that school uniforms help develop within a school a sense of pride and belonging and a sense of family and community. That helps a little with the development of discipline and self-discipline. It helps build teamwork and teaches students that, even though they might prefer to do what they want to do at times, they all have to accept some direction and a degree of conformity. Also, school uniforms are very often designed by the school community, and their level of interest in their uniform is a reflection of their school pride.

Although I am perhaps digressing a little, I point out that, when the Leading Schools program was brought in under the previous Government, in respect of the high schools in my electorate I noticed that people in the community took advantage of that tremendous opportunity and joined forces with their school to develop it to mirror what the parents and the school community felt about it. I am extremely proud of the two State high schools in my electorate. We have about 14 secondary schools in the immediate area of Toowoomba. Within my electorate there are quite a number—some seven or eight. The two State high schools—the Centenary Heights State High School and the Harristown State High School—are outstanding.

Interestingly, at the moment in Toowoomba the three high schools are undertaking a major marketing program through such mediums as television advertisements. There is an aggressive education market in the city. Non-Government schools may be seeking additional numbers because of their ethos, mission statement and their desire and need to provide a certain type of education. They also need to have a certain number of students so that the school can operate efficiently. However, the people from the high schools might take the view that the more students they get the more it will cost. To them it is a matter of pride. They are concerned about the level of education they are providing and the standard of their cultural, sporting, library and computer resources and their industrial and academic training. I admire the way in which the three high schools have developed so much pride in their school communities. In particular, I salute the Harristown State High School and the Centenary Heights State High School for what they have done in that regard.

This Bill will provide some certainty. It is a simple, minimalist Bill that will allow school communities to feel confident that this option is available, now that the Ombudsman has taken this view in his report, which he is likely to reinforce in his next annual report. It provides principals with protection against any form of action that people may want to take against them. Honourable members opposite may have felt certain about the issue before the Ombudsman made his comments. Our shadow Minister, who was the previous Education Minister, noted in his speech that, had he been

aware of what was likely to be in the Ombudsman's report, he would have paid more attention to legislating for some soundness and strength in relation to the school uniform issue.

What we are really getting from the Minister and the other members on the Government side is a degree of uncertainty and reliance upon a section of the Act. The Ombudsman has said that it simply does not stack up. Therefore, I think we in this House have a responsibility to stand by school communities that are crying out for leadership, strength and guidelines. That is why parents are making the decisions that they make about where their children go to school.

I have mentioned the high schools in my electorate. I have mentioned Harristown State High School. Its numbers are escalating year after year as people see the strength of that school, the pride that that school has developed. When they are looking for a school, people are looking for things such as school uniforms, strength of leadership and school management, and a welfare plan, such as they have at Centenary Heights State High School.

A lot is said about why parents are considering non-Government schools. The non-Government primary schools in Toowoomba are having to cap their numbers because they are going through the roof, and the same is starting to happen with the high schools as well. It is about letting the community be involved, as I said before in relation to Leading Schools. Honourable members would be surprised and amazed at what comes out of a community when it is allowed to be a partner and allowed to really get involved with a school. People do believe in their suburb, they believe in their town and they believe in their school. That is probably the greatest source of strength and enthusiasm and support for any school, be it a Government or a non-Government school.

I commend this Bill to the House. The comments that I have heard from the previous few speakers about this being a stunt belittles this House. We see plenty of Bills introduced by members on the other side of the House that we could equally say are a stunt or are just straight out wrong, immoral or incorrect. That is the nature of this place. There are divergent opinions.

Here we have a Bill that has been brought into this House by a shadow Minister who was noted as a very able administrator and Minister. He is also noted as being a person who plays a straight bat and as being a person of sincerity. This is a straightforward Bill which addresses an anomaly that was not there before and provides security for school communities, P & Cs, the school management team and the staff. It provides that legislative security that they need to deal with an issue. Whilst 99% of us support the wearing of school uniforms, there are often all sorts of fringe issues that have to be dealt with, for example, the amount of coverage needed to prevent sun cancer, the latest fashion fads, the modesty, colour and style of uniforms, and so forth. This Bill provides a degree of security.

I think that this Bill is a good, sensible Bill. It is no stunt. It is about supporting communities. I cannot believe that members on the other side of the House have not had people from school communities come to them and say that they want this, because we certainly have. I know that the shadow Minister has consulted widely with all the major non-Government and Government organisations, unions and associations and has unanimous support. This Bill should be passed. I think it would really show a degree of maturity in this House if honourable members opposite supported it, instead of digging their toes in and not wanting anything to do with it simply because it has come from this side of the House. I certainly support this Bill, and I commend it to the House.
