



Speech by

**Mr N. ROBERTS**

**MEMBER FOR NUDGE**

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Hansard 25 August 1999

### **SCHOOL UNIFORM BILL**

**Mr ROBERTS** (Nudgee—ALP) (9.10 p.m.): In October last year I called on the Government to examine the possibility of providing legislative support to schools that chose the compulsory school uniform option. I am pleased to say that that is exactly what the Minister has done. However, he has done so within the existing legislation without the requirement for passing new legislation. The Minister has provided a practical, straightforward way to deal with the confusion created by the Ombudsman's report last year. That is in stark contrast to the cumbersome, complex and confusing solution proposed in the coalition's Bill.

The interesting thing about this issue is that we are all talking about achieving similar outcomes. The difference is in the means of achieving that outcome. The Minister's approach is simple: firstly, he makes a declaration under section 84(1)(g) of the Education (General Provisions) Act; and, secondly, all that the P & C is required to do then is to pass a resolution at one of its monthly meetings adopting a school dress code. The uniform policy is then able to be enforced under the school's behaviour management policy. What could be simpler than that?

I support the right of schools to decide on the compulsory school uniform option for a number of reasons, most of which have been outlined in other speeches tonight and at other times. Firstly, uniforms are a great leveller. They remove the sometimes emotionally damaging contrasts that occur between kids whose parents can afford expensive clothing and those who cannot. They promote pride and self-esteem. They assist in maintaining standards of behaviour and discipline and assist in enhancing security in school grounds by allowing easy identification of students and visitors. Safety in school grounds is now a significant issue and the beneficial aspects of school uniforms cannot be underestimated.

The effectiveness of the Minister's approach can be assessed only by experience. My local high school has a uniform policy and that policy has been accepted by the students and enforced with the approval of the P & C. I am advised that this acceptance is particularly strong among the Year 11 and Year 12 students, who I am sure would have challenged the policy quite regularly if there were any doubt about its validity. But that is clearly not happening. Accordingly, it appears that the scaremongering of the Opposition is ill founded.

I am also not aware of any significant problems regarding the implementation of a school uniform policy in other neighbouring schools. And that was the case both before and after the much-publicised Ombudsman's report. The Opposition's opportunistic political ploy has been a fizzer. Its Bill would cause confusion and unnecessary bureaucracy within school communities and the Education Department. It would turn a simple decision of a P & C into a bureaucratic trail of regulations that would almost have no end—regulation to Cabinet and the Governor in Council, regulatory impact statements and possible disallowance motions in this Parliament. All that for a decision which rightfully should be left to a local P & C association. If this Bill were enacted we could see this Parliament debating such significant matters as the size of a stud that a student might wear in their ear.

The Minister's response in this case is sensible and is obviously working without any significant problems—much to the disappointment of the Opposition. Not many members of Parliament have constituents kicking down their doors demanding that legislation be passed to allow schools to adopt a

uniform policy. They can already do it. The sensible approach would be to allow the Minister's solution to work and evaluate it through experience in our schools. If it was such an issue that it needed a legislative response, why did the member for Merrimac not do something about it when he was the Minister? This issue is a beat-up. It is a pitiful attempt by the Opposition to create a storm in a teacup. It failed dismally on this one and, accordingly, I will be opposing the Bill.

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