



Speech by

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**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

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Hansard 25 August 1999

### **SCHOOL UNIFORM BILL**

**Mr LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (9.40 p.m.): I am delighted to make a contribution tonight to this debate on school uniforms and the Opposition's proposed legislation, which purports to legislate for the wearing of school uniforms.

One thing that just about everybody in this House agrees on is the fact that the wearing of school uniforms is a good idea and a positive idea. Where we part company, however, is that members on this side of the House and, I understand, a number of members opposite, agree strongly that the issue of school uniforms is totally inappropriate to be decided by legislation. So, basically, just about all of us agree that students should be wearing school uniforms; it is the manner in which that is to be achieved on which we disagree.

It should be noted that for many, many years in Queensland we have got by with the existing legislation. Unfortunately, only recently, due to a decision of the Ombudsman, some doubt has arisen about the ability of schools to enforce a uniform code. That means, therefore, that we need to address this issue in the most appropriate manner and in the manner that provides the most appropriate flexibility.

Queensland is a very diverse and decentralised State—from the tropical heat of the Torres Strait and far-north Queensland to the coolness of Stanthorpe. It has a very broad diversity of requirements, needs and situations, just as it has a very broad socioeconomic diversity. That is why the proposal by the Minister for Education is the best and most appropriate proposal for the needs of our State—not the one-size-fits-all, sledgehammer to crack a walnut proposal suggested by the Liberal/National coalition, but a policy that is designed to achieve the desired outcome. And that outcome is to maximise the wearing of school uniforms and to give parents—who should have the ultimate say—the final say in relation to the wearing of school uniforms by their children.

I believe that it is important to discuss in some detail why I believe that the wearing of school uniforms is important. Throughout my travels within my electorate, people are saying to me loudly and clearly that they believe that State school parents believe that it is appropriate for students at their schools to be wearing school uniforms. They are concerned about the trend in society for people to say that State schools do not have enough discipline. I totally reject that argument. But they say that they believe that if it is appropriate that school uniforms be worn in our society, then that is the appropriate policy, regardless of whether one is enrolled at a private school, a State school or, indeed, any school. They do not want this to be an issue of distinction between students who attend Government and non-Government schools. They are saying to me loudly and clearly that they believe that the wearing of school uniforms is appropriate.

Some of the arguments put forward in favour of the wearing of school uniforms are very, very compelling. For example, some tragic incidents have occurred in our State and, indeed, in other parts of Australia whereby trespassers have gone onto school grounds and committed criminal acts, sometimes—unfortunately—with great injury to school students. The wearing of school uniforms is one of the most important ways in which we can identify who is a legitimate person to attend a school and who is not. Indeed, most teachers in schools these days actually wear identification tags to make sure that they are delineated.

When I went to school, I was taught by the Augustinian Fathers. They wore a uniform, too, which was a brown habit—not that those are common in society any more. The fact is that school uniforms are a very, very important way of ensuring that the young people on the campus of a school are the ones who have appropriate business to be there. That is in the interests of their safety as well as any other interests.

Another aspect of school uniforms is that they introduce egalitarianism. The member for Greenslopes, in his excellent contribution to this debate, made the point clearly that, when a student wears a uniform, it is the same uniform for everyone in the school regardless of what their mother or father does and whether they are from the wealthiest family in the school or the poorest. In these days when clothing is everything to young children, when someone can afford the best Nike runners or the latest and flashiest tracksuit top or something like that, and they are in a situation where they can turn up at school and differentiate themselves from the other students, that is what leads to problems with self-esteem. At least when all students wear a uniform, all are equal before the education system and the system that provides them with their nourishment and their intellectual nurture. That is a very important reason why the wearing of school uniforms is appropriate.

I warmly congratulate the Minister on the way in which he has made it crystal clear that part of the Government's policy in relation to school uniforms is the fact that it will be fundamental that no school that adopts a school uniform policy—and I imagine that would be the vast majority—will be able to do that without ensuring that an adequate supply of uniforms is available for those families who, due to whatever financial reasons might confront them, are unable to supply uniforms for their students. That is another very important reason to ensure that no-one is discriminated against because they cannot afford a school uniform. Often, we might have a situation in which families move around the State for various reasons, and they may not be able to afford a uniform.

**Mr Schwarten:** That is the commonsense approach that you allow principals to make that decision and local communities to do that. That is what Leading Schools was supposed to be about.

**Mr LUCAS:** The Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing makes an excellent suggestion. He is 100% correct. It is a commonsense approach that takes into account the needs of people. If a family does not have the resources to be able to afford a uniform, and if the school is able to supply them with a uniform, their children are treated equally to other children. That is very important.

Another thing that a school uniform does is to instil corporate pride in one's school. I sponsor a trophy between the Wynnum North State High School and the Wynnum State High School. Last week, I was delightful to be at Memorial Park at Wynnum with the two Year 8s of both schools who were cheering on their schoolmates in their distinctive school uniforms and colours. I have to say that, these days, school uniforms are a lot more comfortable than the ones I used to wear when I was at school. It was great to see those students taking pride in their schools, showing school spirit, competing in solidarity with their school friends, but at the same time respecting each others' individual schools. That was very important.

Discipline is an important part of one's character formation when one is young.

**Mr Mickel:** Like values.

**Mr LUCAS:** Like values, as the member for Logan accurately points out. When children are developing in society, they need to learn that society imposes rules. They may not particularly agree with some of those rules, and they may not know the reasons for them, but it is essential that they understand that those rules are to be obeyed. We might not always like the rules that society sets, but it is important to understand that we must respect them. If a child sees its parents slanging off at the police or behaving in an inappropriate manner towards the police or teachers, that can affect a child's attitude. That is why school uniforms are also important.

The Minister's policy is the accurate one. I give full credit to the Minister. He has said, "What's the problem? Let's address it, and let's address it sensibly"—not like the Opposition: whack a Bill into Parliament and try to run a press release to grandstand on it.

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr LUCAS:** No. They were in Government for 32 years, and it did not seem to be an issue on which they had to legislate then. This Minister has given this issue priority. I warmly congratulate him on that, and I look forward to his and this Government's encouragement of students to take pride in their communities and to wear school uniforms.

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