



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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KINGSTHORPE STATE SCHOOL

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (11.09 p.m.): I raise an issue concerning the Kingsthorpe school, just west of Toowoomba. Because of varying circumstances, the days required to be worked by the female janitor/groundsman, who was doing a top job looking after that school, have been cut from five to three and will very soon be cut to one. That is because student numbers have dropped to just under 200. There are reasons for that.

As is the case in a lot of country towns, the school area itself is large. Quite obviously, the school needs help to keep it neat and tidy, and it does a top job. I pay credit to Mrs Karen Allen and Mrs Donna Barnes of the P & C, and to the principal, staff and students, who all work together. Credit should go to them because they have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps under very difficult circumstances.

I remember visiting that school in 1992, when I first became member for the area. For 30 years I had driven past. Anyone who has been past it on the Warrego Highway knows what a beautiful area it is. The school is in very lovely surroundings. If members went to the school, as I did then, they would realise that problems exist there. They would not know about those problems unless they went and found out.

I talked to the staff and could see that morale was low and that they had some problems. The school is in a low socioeconomic area and the difficulties that come with that need to be overcome. Without going into detail, they overcame those problems. It is all due to people at that school and in the district who recognised that they had a problem and lifted their game. The working days of the janitor/groundsman should not be cut. The area should be rewarded by having those days at least maintained at three.

We cannot keep putting people and schools down in this way. The morale, which was so low, has been built up. Problems have been recognised and overcome. I think it is a great pity if in this day and age we cannot use a little bit of flexibility and show compassion to areas that deserve it. I am not blaming Education Queensland in Toowoomba. It has rules to abide by. However, if there is any flexibility in its rules and guidelines, then that flexibility should be used in order to maintain the three days of work currently undertaken by the janitor/groundsman every week. Quite frankly, I do not think that is a very big ask. I think it is a very small ask for people who have lifted their game and have done the job for the whole town and district. They are encouraging more and more students to attend that school. I know that, in time, the school will make it.

I think that everyone has to pull their weight in these circumstances and I believe that the Minister could get involved. I would like the Minister to intervene, as he has done before in certain circumstances, in these sorts of instances. The Minister would not know about these instances unless we brought them to his attention, because there are a lot of schools in the State. If we see that people deserve some recognition, encouragement and support, then we should try to provide it. I am sure that the Minister would see it my way.

As I said, this is a school in a low socioeconomic area. There is rental assistance and there are people from broken homes. If we are going to keep putting these areas down, then things will only get worse, and that is the last thing we want to see. I believe that people should be rewarded for the effort they make. If the flexibility is there, then it should be used. If there is no flexibility, then the Minister can and should intervene. I believe that he would. As I said, it is not a big ask. This is a plea to the Minister

to intervene to help Education Queensland in Toowoomba to make a decision that will improve the lifestyle of people in the area and recognise the effort that these people have made over a number of years to overcome the difficulties they have faced. They are building that school into something of real value. I appeal to the Minister. I will certainly be talking to him. As I say, the people of the district deserve credit. I believe that most members in this House, if they knew what that school has been through, would support what I am saying.
