



Speech by

**Mr T. MALONE**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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Hansard 10 November 1999

### **SEPTIMUS STATE SCHOOL**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (11 p.m.): I would like to draw the attention of the House, and especially the attention of the Minister for Education, to the proposed closure of Septimus State School, which is located within my electorate of Mirani. Some members of the House may think that the future of the Septimus school and that of its present and future students is of little interest to them. However, it would be of vital interest to them because of the threat that exists in this State to so many small schools in both rural and urban areas.

My main concern is naturally for the Septimus State School and the other small schools which appear to be under constant threat of closure. I am concerned that there is an enormous chasm between the stated policy of this Government and the determination within the Education Department concerning school closures. I believe that the experience of the Septimus State School is typical of the experiences of many other schools throughout the State. The honest, hardworking people involved in this school are fighting an uphill battle to keep their school open. This is not just an isolated case. I believe that in more recent years there has been a concerted effort by some individuals or sections of the Education Department to close schools for no reason other than economics. Unfortunately, Governments have sometimes bowed to the so-called wisdom of these bureaucrats and we have seen valuable resources in the form of schools and people sacrificed to the detriment of communities.

During the term of the previous Borbidge Government, moves were made to close the Septimus school. I immediately made representations on behalf of the school and the community to oppose those moves, because I could not stand by and see a community robbed of a very important asset. The Borbidge Government recognised its community service obligations to rural communities and kept the school open with an assurance that it would remain open.

Quite obviously, the Education Department's brains trust has used the change of Government to again attack the students and parents associated with this school and, by doing so, has attacked the community at large. In essence, this is an attack on the small, proud and independent communities in this State. The department appears determined to get its own way, even though its policies appear to be totally opposed to the stated policy of the Government.

On 26 October this year, the Minister for Education issued a media release that said in part—

"This Government is not about closing schools in pursuit of some economic rationalist agenda."

I ask members to compare that statement with an equally clear statement in the report by the department's district director recommending the school's closure at the end of this school year. The district director said—

"Prime issues are the financial viability of the school not student outcomes."

It is a little frightening to think that student outcomes are not a consideration of the Education Department. This Government claims to be outcomes driven. It preaches outcomes. However, its outcomes appear to be dollar driven. People and quality of life do not seem to be in the equation.

Where is the encouragement for people to settle in rural Queensland if a Government department can place so little value on people and base its decisions on financial viability only? What

about the financial viability of the residents and small communities? What about the quality of life of the children and the parents in those communities?

On behalf of the Septimus State School and all other schools that find themselves in a similar position, I ask the Education Minister to tell his department which policy is to be followed. It is quite clear that this department makes recommendations by conducting some sort of financial audit. Students do not count. Parents do not count. Communities do not count. The only apparent measuring stick is the calculator on the finance officer's desk.

Another cause of serious concern is the apparent belief within the department that children attending small country schools are socially disadvantaged. This concern has been highlighted in the Septimus State School P & C Association's submission to the Minister. I sometimes wonder, even despair, at the academic attitude taken by some people in high places when they make decisions and judgments concerning small communities and their residents. I have not conducted any research into this matter, nor have I studied the findings of the so-called experts in the field. However, I am convinced that many students who graduate from these small rural communities are better balanced, less scarred and more mature than their counterparts who graduate from schools in larger urban communities.

The record of Septimus State School students, as they have progressed through higher education and into the work force, emphasises that they have not suffered from any social disadvantage. They can and have taken their place in society without any serious baggage being imposed by their environment. In fact, there may even be some room for claims that some children attending big schools in urban areas are more damaged by their environment than are their country cousins.

The record of the Septimus community in providing support to the local school is typical of so many small rural communities throughout Queensland. The local school is a major part of many local communities; it is not just a place where the kids go during the day.

Time expired.

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