



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (4.18 p.m.): The really disappointing thing about the Beattie Government's third Education budget is that it will have about 300,000 students worse off than they were last year. The big losers are students in primary schools and special and distance education, who account for more than 60% of all State school enrolments. The Government has actually shaved per capita funding by \$22 per primary school student, \$428 per special school student and \$72 per student in distance education. That amounts to approximately \$6m for primary schools, about \$4.5m for special education and \$300,000 for distance education.

The only winners will be the high schools, which have had an increase of about \$34 per student, or \$5m in total. However, the majority of students are now significantly worse off. The argument being advanced for that is one that I have not heard before. It is the argument about economies of scale. I will tell members what that is code for in Education: it is for larger schools, larger classes, more classes up to the maximum limit and a real reduction in programs and services. Those are the only ways in which we can have economies of scale in Education. So for the Minister to say, "Yes, we acknowledge that there has been a reduction in per capita funding in those areas, but it is all due to economies of scale", those are the outcomes.

If members want to see economies of scale at work, they should go up to Morayfield East State School, which I understand the Minister has visited. That primary school has over 1,000 students. It is on a cramped site and has more modular buildings than it has permanent buildings. As more students come into the school, the Government keeps piling on the moduls. That is economies of scale at work: a new school is not built, because that puts more overheads into the system. Economies of scale mean larger schools, more classes up to the target size—whether that is 20 or 30—and/or a real reduction in services and programs for students. So it is a nonsense to say that this Education budget will not disadvantage any student. There will certainly be some disadvantage and schools will start to feel the pinch.

Another area where economies of scale are at work is in numeracy and literacy. The budget for those programs has not moved. It is still \$114m this year; it was \$114m last year. However, the enrolment numbers, particularly in the primary schools, have increased by some 3,800. For those students, that means less money per capita being spent on numeracy and literacy programs. That is the economies of scale argument coming back again: the same amount of money, more people in the programs or fewer programs.

I want to touch on a couple of areas that are dear to my heart. Firstly, I refer to school cadets. I understand that, although the amount of money for schools cadets has not changed, the number of students in the program will increase. I acknowledge that. However, there is enormous demand in the secondary schools for school cadets. I would have thought that it would have been a tremendous boost for that program if the Minister could have at least doubled the funding for it. After all, \$700,000 out of a \$3 billion budget is not a lot of money at all. For the number of kids in high schools who desperately need to get involved in programs, this program is of enormous value to them. I think that we underestimate its value in our schools. I think that it is very regrettable that this Budget has not given that program a substantial increase in funding. I understand the background, but the blame lies at the Minister's feet. He has to accept it as he is the Minister. However, it is regrettable.

Another area in which I think the lack of funding is also regrettable—and it is not part of the Minister's program—is police in schools. My understanding is that there has been no enlargement of that program this year through the Police budget. That is another extremely worthwhile program. We ought to be expanding it in our schools as rapidly as we can. After all, the reports and the evaluations of that program are similar to those relating to cadets in school. They have been very positive in terms of the improvements that have taken place in the students who have been involved in those programs.

Time expired.
