



Speech by

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SCHOOL NURSE PROGRAM; SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (11.05 p.m.): Queensland schoolchildren of a younger age are increasingly finding themselves being confronted with society's undesirable social problems and temptations. Current research highlights that the temptations of drugs and alcohol are increasingly being experienced at a primary school level. It is also generally accepted that serious forms of mental illness, including depression, become firmly established during this vulnerable period. Consequently, to ensure their future wellbeing it is vital that we are able to reach these children with professional guidance and assistance before these problems progress and lead to tragedies in later life, such as addiction and suicide.

Our schools are at the coalface of these social problems and temptations. Therefore, it is very important that significant steps are taken to ensure that our state's primary schools are adequately equipped to offer guidance and counselling as young students encounter these problems for the first time. A significant step towards meeting these growing problems amongst primary children is to extend the highly successful School Nurse Program into primary schools. P&C associations in my electorate have approached me expressing their frustration at not having access to the services of a school nurse. School nurses are able to assist teachers by educating students in sensitive mental and physical health issues as well as human relations education.

The use of school nurses in high schools has had a very beneficial effect, with more than 10,000 students reported to have confided in school nurses last year alone. A second and equally important step is to make a firm financial commitment towards the chaplaincy program in schools and ensure that this service is rolled out to all state schools in Queensland. Currently, the school chaplaincy program is optional and not a financial responsibility of Education Queensland. State schools are forced to squeeze money out of already tight budgets or raise funds through the community in order to run this program.

The chaplaincy program has been hugely beneficial in my electorate, providing extensive counselling and guidance for students and staff. State government financial support would see this benefit extended to schools across the state. Access to a chaplain and nurse for even one day a week for school students would help to establish a comprehensive approach to student welfare in our primary schools. The two positions complement each other in that a chaplain can provide valuable life skills, emotional counselling and pastoral care, while a nurse can focus on educating and counselling students on health issues such as substance abuse, as well as providing general health care. Both positions would also be instrumental in implementing and teaching human relations at a primary level.

I urge the state government to take these important steps and deliver sufficient funds towards extending these two valuable programs in schools across the state. The future mental and physical wellbeing of young Queenslanders must be effectively secured. Proven programs that are implemented early in schooling life can reach out and protect children as they meet society's many challenges and many temptations.
