



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

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AIRCONDITIONING SCHOOLS, NORTH QUEENSLAND

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (4.56 p.m.): In defending the government's record on airconditioning north Queensland schools this morning, the Minister for Education highlighted some statistics about the number of schools airconditioned in the last couple of years and those airconditioned under the previous coalition government. In defending her record, she only told half the story. Half of the story that she forgot to tell was that there would be no airconditioning in north Queensland schools if not for the coalition. The National-Liberal Parties coalition put airconditioning schools in north Queensland on the agenda. In 1995 during the Mundingburra by-election it was this side of the House which in fact started the ball rolling by promising to aircondition schools in that part of the state. As a result of winning the Mundingburra by-election, that program was put in place.

But of course the minister would have us believe that it is simply a matter of rushing to Harvey Norman, buying airconditioners and putting them in schools all over north Queensland. Unfortunately, she should have looked to her department to find out the real reasons for the delay in moving towards airconditioning schools. We did not want to waste the money being handed to Education Queensland. There needed to be standards so that people knew exactly what was expected of them when they put up money to aircondition schools in that part of the state. There was a study commissioned and, if I recall correctly, an expert from James Cook University headed the investigation. That brief was to find the best way in which schools could be airconditioned in north Queensland.

The reality was that we needed to ensure that there was an ideal learning temperature and a program to achieve that in an economical way. We had to consider such things as building design and construction, orientation, the shade available, if insulation could be used, the model and capacity of airconditioners needed and, equally importantly, the capacity of the power supply in the schools to meet the extra load needed when the airconditioners were installed. The findings were that the power supplies in just about every school in north Queensland were not up to scratch and, if airconditioning was installed, the wiring would melt and the schools would catch fire.

Before we could even think about putting airconditioners in, the first thing the department and the government had to do was embark upon a massive electrical upgrade of just about every school in north Queensland because of the extra load that airconditioning would place on the electricity grids in those areas. There were also passive measures to be considered, such as shade, insulation and reflective paint. All of those things were considered and put into the program as well, because in the long term they save money in terms of the cost of running the airconditioning units and save money in recurrent costs in terms of replacement. As many members would know, there are lots of ceiling fans in north Queensland and there needed to be an arrangement with the airconditioning and fans to produce the optimum temperature in which children could learn. There was also the fact that we had to install airconditioning into new schools and new buildings at existing schools. This was not something that could be achieved overnight. It took a long time. This morning the minister by omission gave half the story, as she usually does, in order to defend the inept record over the past 12 months.
