



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Wednesday, 30 November 2005

TEACHING ALLOCATIONS, CHARTERS TOWERS

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (8.41 pm): Tonight I want to raise a serious issue in relation to cutbacks in teacher aide and teacher allocation at the Charters Towers State High School and the Charters Towers Central State School Special Education Unit. In August 2004 I wrote to the Minister for Education raising concerns from parents of disabled children about the changes to the allocation of teacher and teacher aide time for these students. In the minister's response I was assured that students with disabilities were set to get a better deal from the state government to boost inclusive education in Queensland schools. This better deal turns out to be a disaster with cuts of up to 60 per cent of teacher aide allocations and teacher allocations despite increases in disabled student numbers.

I am very disturbed to find out that Charters Towers Central State School Special Education Unit has near a 40 per cent increase in student numbers yet a 20 per cent to 25 per cent decrease in teacher and teacher aide allocations. The teacher allocation has been slashed from 3.4 teachers to 2.7 and the teacher aide allocation has been slashed from 84 hours per week to 62 hours a week despite the increase in disabled student numbers. At the Charters Towers State High School the teacher allocation has been reduced from 3.6 full-time teachers in 2005 to a mere 1.4 in 2006 while teacher aide hours have been slashed from 90 hours per week to 32 hours a week. This will mean that teacher and teacher aide positions will disappear and others will have their hours reduced significantly. Not only are the students missing out but the teachers will lose their jobs.

At the high school there are a number of very highly dependent students who require maximum assistance at all times, and under these cuts it is impossible to manage and provide the best educational outcomes for these students. There is a genuine fear that the remaining students will be forced into mainstream classes without the assistance they need. Parents are very concerned that integration into the mainstream actually means exclusion from the specific educational programs students need. I fear that Treasury has overridden Education Queensland. These special education units are faced with a massive 66 per cent cut in funding. The outstanding management by the dedicated staff is commendable and they treat these students like their own. This has been a significant factor that has ensured the units' functioning effectively in 2005.

However, in 2006 it will be impossible to manage these special education units by this inadequate resource allocation. This is a serious issue and there are understandable concerns from teachers and parents that the most vulnerable children will not receive the teacher and teacher aide allocations they need to fully benefit from the programs on offer at the schools. This is a dreadful situation. It is unbelievable that this government can blatantly remove the hours from the students and families who require the most support and assistance. I call on the Minister for Education to repeal this decision and restore the educational opportunities that these students currently experience so that the rights of every disabled student—the most vulnerable—are maintained.