



Speech by

Hon. Rod Welford

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Childhood Obesity

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts) (10.09 am): The level of obesity in Australian childhood is increasing at an alarming rate. It is an unfortunate fact that 25 per cent of Australian children are currently overweight or obese—and this is a big jump from five per cent in the 1960s. If we think the pressure on our health system is bad now, it will pale into insignificance compared with the effect on the health system arising from the chronic illness suffered by young people in the future if this continues.

As the Premier pointed out last week, unless we address this issue, the present generation of children is at risk of dying before their parents. Our government is stepping up to the challenge of making young Queenslanders healthier. Last Friday, as one of these steps I travelled to the Albany Creek State School, within my electorate, and launched two initiatives to promote healthy eating and physical activity in Queensland state schools. The first of these is the Smart Choices Tool Kit. This provides guidelines for our schools to help them implement our Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy, which will take effect from 1 January next year. From that time, it will be mandatory for state schools to supply and promote food and drinks that are low in saturated fat, sugar and calories, and to limit tuckshop items low in nutritional value. Many schools, such as Albany Creek State School, have already changed their menus and are offering healthy food choices to students with great success. I encourage other state schools to follow its lead. Do not wait until January next year. The original time line for the introduction of the Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy was 1 July this year. To allow schools more time to adjust to the new guidelines, we will now commence this new strategy formally in a mandatory sense from 1 January next year.

Last Friday, I also launched another healthy schools van. These vans are on the road visiting schools in Brisbane and Townsville to reinforce the message about physical activity and healthy food choices. They are staffed by a nutritionist and a teacher who will work with schools and parents to help them promote healthy eating and physical activity through local workshops and forums, and newsletters. The rate of childhood obesity in Australia is one of the highest amongst developed nations. I support the Premier's plan to hold a summit to find new solutions for tackling the problems of bad diet and insufficient exercise. Poor diet and obesity can affect students' academic performance, and children who make healthy choices now are more likely to carry healthier habits into adulthood. Initiatives such as our Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for Queensland Schools will ensure that our students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles at an early age.