



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 7 March 2007

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### MOTION: HEALTH OF QUEENSLAND SCHOOLCHILDREN

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.15 pm): The coalition has a positive approach to this, contrary to that outlined by the previous speaker, the member for Gaven. We believe it is possible to have a greater impact on the health of our children, and that is why we have this motion before the parliament. We believe that tackling childhood obesity can be achieved by mandating physical activity in Queensland schools. We also propose that Queensland schools should have an immunisation register providing information on the immunisation status of all attending children and that drug and alcohol education must be provided to all Queensland schoolchildren.

I understand that the education minister wants to amend our motion to endorse a 'review' of sport and physical activity in schools, among other amendments, and I wish to address that point first. A review of sport and physical activity in schools is just code for delay, because the evidence is already available to support the need for mandatory physical activity for children, and I will outline that in a moment. The previous speaker tried to tell us that it is too hard to have mandatory physical activity. The way he was painting it, the obstacles were too great. It concerns me that he was painting a picture of great obstacles, rather than one which we believe is full of opportunity. Even in schools where children are bussed in, as we heard from the shadow education minister, it has been possible to put in place physical activity programs for children. It is possible to do. It does require a positive approach and commitment. We are saying that a step further is to make it compulsory.

The shadow education minister's motion, seconded by our shadow health minister, is an example of the coalition's strong policy platform and our desire to continue to promote an alternative plan for Queensland, a proactive plan. It aligns with our Healthy Kids, Clever Kids policy, whereby we would require a minimum of 20 to 30 minutes exercise per day for prep to grade 3 students and then 150 minutes per week for grades 4 to 10.

Children need adults to guard their health and to help them develop healthy and strong bodies at this critical time of development. Obese children face a higher risk of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and cancer. However, environmental and social factors seem to be ganging up on our children, with childhood obesity for the first time threatening to reduce their average life span after hundreds of years of improvements. Children often cannot walk to school because of safety concerns, they are more likely to consume takeaway and processed food than their parents did as children, and they are more likely to spend more of their leisure time in front of computers and computer games. Forty per cent of children between the ages of five and 12 watch an average of two hours or more of television per day, according to a technology and physical activity report. Only 56 per cent of Queensland children are apparently involved in sufficient physical activity, which is lower than the national average, according to the Premier's own statement to parliament in 2004.

It is disturbing that after all the advances in modern health technology researchers are predicting that life expectancy could drop for the first time in 1,000 years. According to an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 18 March 2005, quoting the *New England Journal of Medicine*—

Australians could be eating themselves to an early death, with new research suggesting life expectancy will decline for the first time in 1,000 years due to the obesity epidemic.

However, the research also shows that it is possible to reverse these trends if the child gets back to a normal weight before adolescence according to the *Australian Doctor* magazine of 26 August 2005.

There are a range of chronic illnesses that will plague a child into their adult life if we do not take a more proactive approach now. I recognise that there have been moves to improve access to healthier foods in schools. We think that is commendable, but it needs to go far further and address physical activity in schools. That is why the motion before the House should be supported.

As to the need for drug and alcohol education for all Queensland schoolchildren, I find it interesting that the minister has not mentioned this in his amending motion. That is significant because we believe not enough is being done to address this issue. When we raised this previously the government used to say that school health nurses were doing the job. We believe the nurses do a good job but more is necessary as well as major programs with resources.

Time expired.