




Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Tuesday, 13 November 2012

MOTION: EDUCATION, FUNDING

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.40 pm): I second the motion moved by the opposition leader. For many years now Queensland has been undergoing educational reform like no other. Under Labor, we saw the introduction of the prep year, our learning or earning strategy and the transition of year 7 to high school. Under Labor, Queenslanders were benefiting from a strong education system with a government that was genuinely committed to the ongoing improvement and strengthening of the education system to give our kids the best possible start in life.

Unfortunately, those opposite have not continued this great legacy and are instead doing what they do best: stripping away social support and investment in the future. When they make these decisions, they see only dollars and figures on a page rather than the greater social benefit and the affected individual students. As the Queensland Teachers Union has pointed out in its response to the Newman government's first budget, the budget papers claim 270 additional teachers, teacher aides and support staff to support growth. The Department of Education, Training and Employment indicates that an additional 837 are needed to meet the growing demand. To make up the shortfall, the QTU points out that the government is stripping teacher positions from other areas to try to plug the gap. The government is scrapping key teacher grants and allocations that support and allow for vital professional development to occur, cutting the secondary resource teacher allocation and scrapping the long held rounding-up principle, which provided an extra teacher if the number was a fraction.

What is more concerning is that the additional staff that the government is promising is mainly made up of its election commitment to provide additional teacher numbers for prep classes. That does not address the core need to ensure growth in educators right across the sector. These cuts will have a dramatic effect right across the educational sector, but none more so than in rural and remote schools. Queensland is Australia's only truly decentralised state, which means that schools located in rural and remote areas may have only four or five teachers, some with fewer. But with the reduction in secondary resource teacher allocations, these schools will be faced with an even greater challenge of providing high-quality education with one fewer teacher. Losing one teacher from a large city school will still hurt, as it strips resources out of that school community, meaning that services will be reduced or covered by other means, such as increased class sizes. But in rural and regional schools, losing a teacher will not just hurt; it could be catastrophic as it is even harder to try to cover the gap. It could be the difference between the survival of that school or closure. It could mean the difference between a child receiving an education and going on to contributing to society or letting a child slip through the system, hurting that child in the broader community if they are not provided with a quality education in their formative years. What is deeply concerning is the fact that the minister is not being upfront and open about his plans. He is robbing Peter to pay Paul by redirecting teachers from one area and allocating them under a different heading as alleged new teachers. Like all government departments, the Department of Education, Training and Employment has been tasked to find savings and efficiencies, which is another example of how those opposite have one thing on their minds and no sense of balance. The consequences of this could be far-reaching and long-lasting.

Another decision that will have long-lasting impacts—all negative—is the dismantling of the Indigenous education unit within the Department of Education, Training and Employment. This unit, under the excellent leadership of respected educator, Ian Mackie, was involved in groundbreaking initiatives to help close the gap in Indigenous educational outcomes. The unit was helping schools across the state implement programs to provide support mechanisms and structures to Indigenous children and give them a better chance of success. What has been the Newman government's approach to the issues confronting Indigenous children in Queensland? It axed the division within the department that drove those programs. It cut 16 of the 32 full-time positions dedicated to implementing those programs and stripped away the advocacy for Indigenous children. Those programs assisted schools to deal with issues, such as one that was recently related to me involving two boys: one in year 5 and one in year 2. One morning they came to school at 6.15 am because their house had been the location of an all-night party. The boys, who had not eaten, were understandably grumpy, as I guess we would all be if we had gone without sleep or food. Cases such as that cannot be dealt with by using traditional methods. They require an individualised response tailored to the specific children. That was what the Indigenous education unit was doing. It was more than just an expense on the balance sheet.

We on this side of the House value the importance of education. You only have to look at our track record to know that we mean business. As the opposition leader just said, education is the cornerstone of our society. With a good education, individuals are empowered and equipped with the knowledge to take on all challenges in life. I encourage those opposite to put aside their ideological views and commit to providing adequate funding for both state and non-state schools to ensure that high-quality education is provided to all Queensland children regardless of their background or socioeconomic circumstances. Today's young people are our leaders tomorrow. That is why it is important to provide them with the tools now to have a flying start in life.