



Speech By  
**Annastacia Palaszczuk**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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**MOTION**

**Education, Better Schools Plan**

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House:

- acknowledges the importance of education in providing equality of opportunity to all Queensland children;
- recognises that the federal government's Better Schools initiative will result in more funding for Queensland students;
- notes that the Liberal-led governments of New South Wales and Victoria have recognised the benefits of the Better Schools initiative and reached agreement with the federal government, as have the Catholic and independent education sectors.
- acknowledges that the Newman government has been more focused on closing schools and selling off land than securing a better outcome for our students.
- note that the government's failure to sign up to the Better Schools initiative will result in Queensland state school students being denied extra funding.

This was the motion that the opposition was hoping we would not have to move in this House. However, just 24 hours ago our fears that Queensland children would be left behind were fully realised when the Newman government failed to sign up to the federal government's Better Schools program. The 5.30 pm deadline passed and, once again, Queensland has missed out on joining a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve our education system. On the one hand, the failures of the Newman government and the education minister, John-Paul Langbroek, are not surprising. After all, they have always adopted a very negative attitude to the funding reforms put forward by the federal government. Both the Premier and the minister seem to relish the chance to engage in some good old-fashioned Canberra bashing, making wild claims that the funding would lead to a federal takeover of education and a sea of extra red tape.

I think most Queenslanders expected these two men, given their positions of high responsibility in the state government, to eventually overcome their partisan, parochial stance and get stuck into some hard negotiations with the federal government. Why did we think that? Because these reforms should have been above politics, and they are. That is evidenced by the fact that the Liberal-led governments of New South Wales and Victoria have signed up to the reforms. They have shown that conservative state governments can find a way to move beyond the politics and successfully negotiate a good deal with a federal Labor government. Sadly, Premier Newman and Minister Langbroek were either not up to the task or were prepared to put the interests of Tony Abbott ahead of Queensland state school students. Either way, our children and their parents rightfully should feel let down.

Queensland is the only jurisdiction on the east coast of Australia to miss out on the Better Schools initiative, the funding reforms inspired by the Gonski report. The irony of this situation is that, despite the abysmal negotiating efforts of the Premier and the minister, some Queensland children will enjoy increased funding from the federal government. That is because the Catholic and

independent school sectors have successfully negotiated a Better Schools funding deal. About one-third of Queensland students attend non-government schools, so more than 30 per cent of Queensland's children will benefit. However, sadly the other two-thirds, those who attend state schools, have missed out. Now we have the ludicrous situation in some cities, towns and suburbs whereby a non-government school on one street will receive extra funding and the state school just around the corner will miss out.

It has been reported that yesterday there was a hurried exchange of letters between the Queensland and Commonwealth education ministers as it finally dawned on the Newman government that time was running out. They had been shamed into action by the Victorian government, which successfully finalised negotiations on a deal at the weekend. I clearly remember Minister Langbroek being quite surprised that Victoria had reached this deal. Now what we have seen is that Queensland—

**Government members** interjected.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**Ms PALASZCZUK:** Queensland has fundamentally missed out while New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the ACT will benefit. I understand that the federal government was happy to take into account the Newman government's Great Teachers = Great Results scheme, despite the questionable benefits of this misguided policy. The federal government was also happy to guarantee that Queensland would maintain autonomy over its education system. However, unfortunately, the Minister for Education could not bring himself to make a counteroffer. Of course, during this time he was able to sit around the cabinet table and give himself a 41.9 per cent pay rise, but when it comes to the students of Queensland there was not much action at all.

Perhaps the minister had his hands full considering the closure of eight schools across Queensland without any substantive basis for his decision, as was revealed during the estimates hearing. Let us not forget that the minister's own Schools Planning Commission handed down its preliminary report about population trends and future school requirements almost three months after the minister was making the decision about whether or not to close eight schools. Instead of investing more in education, the Newman government is determined to save money by closing small schools—the sort of schools where teachers know the names of every student and students know the names of every teacher. In that process, the minister has raised anxiety amongst students and families of eight schools across Queensland that face the axe: Fortitude Valley State School, Nyanda State High School, Everton Park State High School, Old Yarranlea State School, Toowoomba South State School, Wyreema State School, Charlton State School and Stuart State School in Townsville.

This followed on the minister's decision last year to close the Queensland school for travelling show children. There is one main similarity between his decision last year and this year's move to potentially close eight more: his failure to consult fully. In fact, last year the minister actually breached his own legislation by failing to provide sufficient notice to the school community and the public about his intention to close that school. He is also pursuing a range of asset sales without a mandate by selling Education land worth more than \$100 million in 2012-13 and 2013-14. He has even tried to sell off school ovals at Balmoral State High School and Whites Hill and Earnshaw colleges. The LNP is prepared—

**Mr Johnson:** At least he's telling you what he's doing. You've never told anybody what you're doing.

**Ms PALASZCZUK:** Thank you very much, member for Gregory.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**Ms PALASZCZUK:** The LNP is prepared to flog off our children's future for the sake of a few dollars.

**Government members** interjected.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Order!

**Ms PALASZCZUK:** Madam Speaker, if they want to make some noise they can go and join the rally.

**Mr Johnson:** That's your rally. You organised that.

**Ms PALASZCZUK:** Anyone is welcome to attend. It is worth recapping how we have ended up in this situation where Queensland kids are going to miss out on the Better Schools reforms. The federal Labor government has a vision of lifting education standards in Australia over the next decade and has backed up that vision with significant extra funding. It has offered to work in partnership with state governments to provide this extra funding on a needs basis. That means that, for every \$2 in

extra funding that the federal government provides, states have been asked to provide about \$1. That two-for-one offer is unprecedented, particularly when it comes with a guarantee that funding for all schools will increase by at least three per cent each year, but somehow the Newman government cannot see value in those arrangements.

Overall the Better Schools Plan would require the Queensland government to contribute about \$1.3 billion in extra funding over six years. As I mentioned earlier, the federal government has indicated that it is even prepared to consider the Great Teachers = Great Results program. Clearly, the Premier and the minister are unwilling or unable to secure extra funds from Treasury for Queensland children. What that means essentially is that Queensland students will miss out.

Recent events have also highlighted that the Newman government's political posturing on this matter has backfired. Their resistance to federal Labor's offer could perhaps be interpreted as understandable given that the LNP in Queensland no doubt expects Tony Abbott to romp home in this year's federal election. But all that changed last week when the federal shadow education minister, Christopher Pyne, declared that a future Abbott government would honour the Better Schools agreements with the states. Regardless of who wins the federal election, extra funding for schools and students will start flowing from the Commonwealth coffers, but it will not be coming to our Queensland students.