




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

MOTION: SALE OF PUBLIC ASSETS

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (6.05 pm): It says a lot about this government that it does not see schools for their value to a community, it does not see schools for their role in educating children, it does not see schools as an investment in the future of Queensland. It says a lot about a government when it looks at a school and sees only the land underneath it. It tells you everything you need to know about this government when it looks at schools and sees dollar signs. Of course, governments need to manage schools appropriately to ensure that they meet changing demographics and demand. Some schools close as others open. That is proper planning. But it is abundantly clear that this government is not concerning itself with appropriate education planning. The plan to sell off as many as 55 schools is in direct response to the Costello Commission of Audit, recommendation No. 89. It is not part of a plan to appropriately manage the state school sector, to identify future needs and demographic changes.

During the last term of the previous government, I was outspoken against my own government and demanded that it rethink the mothballing policy to ensure that the process was equitable and provided a degree of certainty for the school communities concerned. I threw my support behind local schools, firstly, Bartle Frere State School and then Bellenden Ker State School, to successfully lobby for those schools not to be closed. Schools like those are the centre of a community and their worth should be measured in more than just numbers on a piece of paper. I understand that it is not possible to have small schools everywhere in Queensland. It would not be workable from a resource or operational point of view for the government. But I was concerned that decisions were based on numbers and resources alone and there was a great deal of confusion as to why some schools were on the list one year and not the next.

But under this government, the issue is less about school viability and more about how much it can get for any particular school. I think this government is taking the axe to schools as an excuse to prop up its bottom line. The Newman government must identify the 14 schools in Far North Queensland on its list of closures. Those schools should be told today if they are going to close their doors. Nothing is more sacred to a local community than its school. It plays an essential role in the community. The school is more than just a school; it is a true community hub.

I spoke earlier about appropriate planning. The previous government appropriately managed education needs by building the new Innisfail State College and afterwards made the decision to sell off the unused old site of Innisfail State High School. As the local member, I worked closely with the department of education to make sure that the transition to the new college was managed appropriately. I worked with the local community and set aside part of the old Innisfail State High School land as an environmental reserve. But that sort of proper planning will not happen under the current government. It will be flogging off the land to the highest bidder. That land will go to LNP developer mates and the community will not see any benefit.

In Far North Queensland, we have not seen any plans from this government to build new schools. The previous government had a fully funded plan for a new special school in Cairns. It would

be under construction right now, ready to take students in 2014. However, this government has dragged its feet and at the moment just a planning study is underway and that is only because it was embarrassed into announcing it. Thanks to this government the people of Cairns will be waiting a lot longer to have a dedicated special school for children with a disability. This issue is a concern, because this school was a fully funded election commitment from existing resources. It was all about having \$32 million set aside within the existing budget. What happened to that? In contrast, this government has made unfunded election commitments and it is now regarding state schools as a cash cow to cover for its own mistakes. This government has sucked demand out of the Queensland economy by cutting too hard too fast. It has made its own mistakes by firing public servants, cutting grant funding and cutting the wildly successful Skilling Queenslanders for Work program.

I heard the Treasurer talking on radio about the fact that, when it comes to public servants, they are not running an employment program. They are not running an employment program; they are running an unemployment program. They are axing people left, right and centre. That is in stark contrast to what the previous government was about, which was about job creation. These decisions have sucked the life out of the Queensland economy which was the second fastest growing state in the country—

Government members interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr PITT: They are very sensitive, Madam Speaker. Obviously the last two days have actually played on their mind in a big way. These decisions have sucked the life out of the Queensland economy which was the second fastest growing state in the country when this government took office and is now languishing in the economic doldrums brought about by the decisions of this Treasurer, this Premier and this government. The children of Queensland and their families should not be forced to pay for the mistakes of the Newman government. They should not have their schools sold from under them. If schools are going to be on the table then nothing is sacred under the Newman government.