




Speech By
Steve Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

MOTION: SALE OF PUBLIC ASSETS

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (6.01 pm): I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the minister's amendment and to debate the strong reforms that the LNP government has implemented to improve education in this great state. As a member of the Education and Innovation Committee, which is working on many reforms, I can say that it is evident that education is central to the economy and prosperity of Queensland. It creates opportunities for every student. These reforms and legislation prove that we are committed to supporting schools and improving outcomes, which include providing state-of-the-art facilities and excellent programs.

This debate is in relation to concern raised about rationalising some school sites, which is common practice after a structured community consultation process. This has occurred regularly. During the terms of the Beattie and Bligh governments, those governments closed 89 schools. That is about seven schools a year. There is a need for the Department of Education, Training and Employment to monitor what makes one school more sustainable than another and then to make recommendations. Some of the factors taken into account in deciding which schools to close might include the size of the school's enrolment, which limits the diversity of the curriculum and the opportunities for students, if the school's enrolments are in decline, or if there is only limited growth expected in the future. That can happen for many reasons, including the movement of the workforce, development in the area, or the changing dynamic of the school's enrolments. Each year the department will consider the viability of schools in accordance with the established thresholds.

In terms of maintaining school buildings, it is noted that the Bligh government left a \$297 million maintenance backlog for this government and that we committed \$300 million to rectify the problem. The previous government left some of our schools in a poor and sometimes dangerous condition. This is what happens when you waste money, when you cannot control the budget and when you cannot prioritise your spending. This government inherited Queensland's school infrastructure in a state of disrepair. The parents and children of Queensland deserve better. Last year, the Treasurer announced \$200 million to address that maintenance backlog and, of course, recently a further \$100 million was announced, making a total of \$300 million. Schools can go direct to the market to get that maintenance work done. However, I am happy that all but two schools in my electorate decided to stay with the services provided by QBuild.

This is money that the schools do not have to give back. It can go back into their schools for other school improvements. This is significant, as I witnessed firsthand the waste and the 'use it or lose it' mentality driven by the previous government that our schools adopted. Schools that use QBuild are winning. Under the government's new processes and reforms, QBuild is working hard to provide better value for money and we are seeing efficiencies. I have no doubt that the reforms in the procurement sections have helped remove the burden of overzealous bureaucrats who all but destroyed this 150-year-old institution.

A key concept of QBuild's operations is the management of risk on behalf of client agencies. This management of risk is undertaken through QBuild on behalf of the Queensland government across a range of functions, including service maintenance, contract management, environmental

compliance, procurement management, safety management and a number of other building related works, including legislative requirements. The service maintenance of specific equipment and systems is mandatory by legislation. QBuild manage this risk on behalf of most government departments by identifying what equipment requires servicing, preparing technical specifications and calling bulk tenders. This ensures value for money and reliability. We welcome the contestability model that has been rolled out over the last year. QBuild has qualified staff to provide technical advice to both client departments and contractors. Mandatory reporting is also important for local governments with their plumbing services and for QFRS community safety.

It is with some concern that we are debating the issue of school sites when the previous government had no structured asset maintenance program. We saw predictions and allocations based on electoral boundaries. That is why I endorse the Newman government's considered approach to infrastructure management through the establishment of the Queensland Schools Planning Commission. The commission streamlines and coordinates the process for the planning, establishment and expansion of government and non-government schools across Queensland. It analyses the current infrastructure planning systems for schools and provides recommendations on how to increase their efficiency and help cut red tape. These are real reforms that the LNP has put in place. The appointment of Mr Bob Quinn, a former Queensland education minister and teacher, as the chair of the commission is a great initiative. The government will provide \$4 million over the next three years to fund the commission's operations. This is about putting schools where they need to be to provide outcomes for our children.

It is important that the Queensland education system supports small schools and one-teacher schools, schools in remote areas, multicultural schools and Queensland's 57,000 teachers to ensure that we deliver high standards in education. In closing, I support the minister's amendment and support this government's reforms in education.