



Speech By  
**Hon. John-Paul Langbroek**


**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

---

Record of Proceedings, 9 September 2014

## ADJOURNMENT

### State School Principals

 **Hon. JH LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Minister for Education, Training and Employment) (12.01 am): I rise tonight to pay tribute to the everyday heroes in charge of our state schools throughout Queensland: 1,233 principals and all of their staff. These individuals rise daily, aiming to run their schools to the best of their ability, providing a safe, encouraging environment for the 517,000 students in primary and secondary state schools. The journey is not an easy one. For every enthusiastic parent, there is a disengaged one or, worse, a violent one, or two involved in a custody dispute so bitter that their children become pawns and the schools the unwitting chessboard on which duelling parents stake their claim. Principals and staff are forced to become negotiators, counsellors, protectors and always advocates for the children in their care.

Tonight I want to pay tribute to the principal of a school on the Sunshine Coast, Gwen Sands. Last week a school newsletter went out filled with the usual advice about school activities and administrative information. Included in the announcements was one reminding parents that their children had been advised not to perform cartwheels or handstands without supervision. Now, this was not the fun police out to stifle any normal school ground hijinks or a draconian edict aimed at turning our children into risk adverse automatons. No, after one seriously broken limb and another facial injury, the school opted for safety first. A cohort of students, inspired by an extracurricular activity based on gymnastic cheerleading, had taken their newfound skills to the largely concrete playground. The injuries were the result. So with her students' safety in mind, the principal asked parents to remind their children about this issue. But what a response this triggered! Gwen Sands was held up to ridicule by the media, pilloried internationally as a perpetrator of crimes against children and derided as the worst of the nanny state officials. But most hurtful were the cowardly cyberattacks launched via Facebook and Twitter, many from parents of the students in her care. There were single lines and stinging rebukes sent without thought for the consequence or the power that words can have, even against adults.

Queensland leads the way in counterattacks on cyberbullies coming after our children. We stand up loud and proud against people who belittle and threaten students in our schools. We appeal to parents to help us spread this message and to understand the impact these cruel attacks have on young minds and spirits. Do we now need to start a campaign to protect our teachers and principals from the very people who should know better, the parents of the children entrusted to their care? These are the same parents who are quick to identify and expect protection from the childhood bullies in their offspring's classrooms, the parents who march straight to the principal's office demanding these measures for their children.

I spoke to Principal Sands and I told her I had her back 100 per cent because I support our principals to make the right decisions for their communities. I encourage discussion and debate within communities about these issues, but at the end of the day a decision has to be made.

*(Time expired)*