




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

Record of Proceedings, 16 August 2016

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Ms DAVIS** (Aspley—LNP) (9.09 pm): I rise to speak to the Appropriation Bill and the committee report into the examination of the budget estimates for the Education portfolio. Firstly, I would like to put on record my utmost confidence and support for our teachers, our teacher aides and school staff who give tirelessly to the education of children across this state. I firmly believe that education is one of the most significant formative experiences in our lives. We should always be focused on providing the means for our young people to reach their aspirations and our teachers are right at the forefront of helping with that. They have the enormous undertaking of shaping young minds into the next generation of doers, thinkers, creators, leaders and entrepreneurs.

The estimates hearing highlighted that, despite record spending in the Education portfolio, there was a sense that the portfolio could do better or, more to the point, that spending more and more does not always mean achieving better results. It is what happens in the classroom that makes the greatest difference. Having great teachers equals great results. Despite this year's budget being sold by the government as a record spend in the Education portfolio, we discovered before the hearing had even begun that 14 key performance measures set by this government were not met—not one, not two, but 14.

It was disappointing to see the minister use the parliamentary estimates process as an opportunity to grandstand with an announcement of importance around reducing violence against teachers. The timing of this announcement was dubious. Prior to the hearing, non-government questions on notice were asked about WorkCover claims, specifically relating to assaults on teachers, and the next thing we see a glossed-up announcement by the minister. Violence against anyone is unacceptable and the minister's response to deal this issue was to print a glossy brochure and poster. There were 174 accepted WorkCover claims relating to assaults on teachers. These were accepted claims—the most serious—not the number lodged with WorkCover, nor the actual number of assaults that were reported to the department.

The violence by students against teachers was only the tip of the iceberg. Further questions were asked about the increased number of short- and long-term suspensions and the lack of planning to address the incidence of violence in our schools. I was disappointed and equally concerned at revelations exposed during the hearing that the Minister for Education was not advised of growing violence and safety concerns raised by locals in Aurukun in the months leading up to the rushed closure of the Aurukun school. Had this government taken an all-agency approach to the law and order issues challenging the Aurukun community, the issues around teacher safety could have been addressed and the school could have remained open for the children in Aurukun.

I know from my former role that Queensland teachers take very seriously their mandatory reporting responsibilities when suspicions of abuse and neglect of students exist. During the hearing, I simply asked the minister if she had an obligation to support this process, particularly following what

has been exposed of backlogged investigations occurring in Child Safety. It would have been reassuring to know whether the minister at the very least had at any time picked up the phone to her colleague Minister Fentiman to check whether teacher reports were not sitting as part of a growing list of backlogged investigations in Child Safety. This is a very serious issue and one of great public interest and concern following the hapless lack of attention by the child safety minister. The only clarity I was able to glean from Minister Jones in terms of obligations for the safety and protection of students where abuse concerns exist is that, once concerns are reported through to Child Safety, it is that department's responsibility, not hers. It is one thing for the minister to say that student welfare is her top priority, but it is an entirely other thing to demonstrate it.

Questions were asked about the level of accountability and reporting when it comes to delivering education supports to children who live in out-of-home state care. Achieving the desired educational outcomes for young people in care is generally more challenging and it is incumbent on the minister to ensure that more attention is paid to delivering effective education support plans to these children. It is vital for the minister and her government to be absolutely clear about the exact nature of the problems facing our education system. The education of our children is about securing the future of our state and so much is at stake. I conclude by thanking the departmental staff and the committee, along with everybody else who was there on the day for the consideration of this most important portfolio.