




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 30 October 2018

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Kirwan State High School

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (2.31 pm): This speech is very special for every single student at Kirwan State High School, which tomorrow night is holding the first graduation ceremony in its very own hall. I want to give a shout-out to each one of those students, their proud parents, teachers, staff and to my wife, Amanda, who will be there also. How apt that Amanda, being a Kirwan High graduate herself, will be representing me tomorrow night. I would have dearly loved to have been there when they hold the very first graduation ceremony in the Labor built, \$7.2 million Excelsior Hall. I am sure there will be plenty of other community representatives and councillors attending this very special event.

Today I proudly inform the parliament of our journey to deliver that hall. In 2015 I gave my maiden speech. I spoke of Kirwan State High School and the fact that it was not good enough in 2015 to see some 2,300 schoolkids and staff seated on the grass for an hour in the hot sun as the school conducted an Anzac Day ceremony. Nor was it good enough to see the state's second largest high school spend thousands of dollars each year in fees to hold their graduation ceremonies at a private school, Ignatius Park College. As the local MP I sought to change that as this was not a good enough situation for our North Queensland school.

As a new MP I requested funding in 2015 for the new hall but I was not successful. Many in here will know that I do not take no for an answer. I was going to fight every step of the way to deliver this mighty hall. I set about on a cunning plan to join forces with the Kirwan High P&C and I acknowledge the role each member of the P&C played, especially the president, Mr Des Morris—the broader school, the incomparable executive principal, Ms Meredith Wenta, teachers, staff and students, as together we conducted a 12-month petition gaining over 1,000 signatures, which I tabled in this House in 2016. Then I would simply not stop lobbying then minister for education Kate Jones at every single opportunity. I even gave her a laminated A3 photo of those 2,300 students seated on the grass on that day when I visited in my first formal capacity as an MP in 2015.

Eventually we were successful. Not only did we receive the funding for the new hall they will proudly sit in tomorrow night—and I say hello and congratulations to each one of those graduating students—but also we received \$2 million for the covered quadrangle, which I joined the education minister, Grace Grace, earlier this year to formally open. Kirwan High is worth every cent. The work the students and staff do in the community is truly exceptional. I have spoken in this House before of the charity The Cure Starts Now. Kirwan State High is integral to that charity.

The fight did not stop there. Together we challenged the builders and the department—and I thank them all—to include and construct a commercial kitchen as the school has an excellent hospitality course. We know that this will be more than a school hall; it can become much more than that and an asset to the broader Kirwan community by hosting other events that can now be catered for. The icing on the cake was to air-condition the hall—and we got that too!

The hall has aptly been named Excelsior Hall. The name came internally from the school and we thank one of the staff, Mr Rob Hamilton, for coming up with it. 'Excelsior' means onwards and upwards and is linked with excellence. I thank the team from Paynter Dixon for building the hall in record time. It is truly a quality product and a testament to the 100 local tradesmen and builders involved in this 12-month project.

No more will the students of Kirwan High—home to the mighty Kirwan Bears where former and current NRL greats have come from, such as Sam Thaiday, Jason Taumalolo and many others—be seated on the grass in the hot sun in humid conditions. No more will students at Kirwan High hold their graduations at other schools. I have been a passionate supporter of all schools in Thuringowa. Kirwan High is special in many ways. They know that I would have dearly loved to be there tomorrow. I have literally walked every street around Kirwan to gain support. I wrote to every single parent who supported this to thank them. Together we did it.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, this is very special to me. I met the former executive principal, Mr John Livingston, in the oncology ward at Townsville Hospital in 2014. He sadly passed away with brain cancer, hence the school's charity The Cure Starts Now. His legacy lives on though. He told me that day, 'You look after my school and you build them a bloody hall.' John, 'Mr 110 per cent', I listened and heard. We heard those words clearly. Be proud, Kirwan State High School. With a Labor state government we did it. I want to keep delivering for all the schools in Kirwan and Thuringowa.