



Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Education, Employment and Training Committee, Report

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (4.21 pm): As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for education, I rise to address the Appropriation Bill 2021-22 budget estimates hearings that were held on the proposed expenditure by the Palaszczuk state Labor government as examined by the Education, Employment and Training Committee. This year's Queensland state budget has an allocation of \$15.3 billion for the provision of education, including childhood education, in Queensland. What was clearly evident during the Education, Employment and Training Committee hearings is that the Palaszczuk state Labor government is losing control. Disturbingly and critically, Labor is losing control of teacher and student safety in our schools.

Queensland students, parents, teachers and school staff have every right to expect that when they enter a Queensland state school or Department of Education facility they are entering a safe learning and work environment. The manner in which the Palaszczuk state Labor government has treated the significant exposure asbestos incidents at Sunnybank State High School should concern every parent and teacher in Queensland. In March of this year when I questioned the Labor Minister for Education about the handling of this serious incident, the minister said that everything has been done according to the manner in which you deal with the serious issue of asbestos because that is the way that we deal with these issues on this side of the House. However, as per the RTI documents obtained by the Liberal National Party, it took a full 17 days from when staff at Sunnybank State High School raised concerns about an asbestos exposure incident to when finally a professional clean-up crew and hygienist were dispatched to clean and test more than 30 rooms. That was 17 days during which students and teachers were in a learning and workplace environment where asbestos exposure had occurred because of the Palaszczuk state Labor government and the way that it fails to ensure that our schools adhere to Department of Education asbestos management policies and protocols.

As the Labor Minister for Education knows only too well, there is simply no level of asbestos exposure that is safe and to know that there have been 19 school asbestos exposure incidents related to Labor's Cooler Cleaner Schools Program, 12 of which were serious enough to be notifiable events, again raises genuine concerns about student, teacher and staff safety in our schools. Further, it was revealed through the Liberal National Party's questioning that the Department of Education is unable to provide specific and comprehensive data when it comes to violence and workplace safety incidents in Queensland schools. If the Palaszczuk state Labor government is truly committed to student and

teacher safety and wellbeing, then surely capturing complete data of such incidents can assist in developing better strategies to deliver a safer working and learning environment. You simply cannot fix what you do not measure comprehensively.

Just as the 2020-21 estimates hearings for the education portfolio demonstrated, there is an absolute lack of government leadership, accountability and transparency coupled with departmental cultural issues that remain unaddressed by the state Labor government which continue to cost Queensland taxpayers each and every day. Nowhere is this more clearly evident than the ongoing saga of the selection process of a school principal at the Brisbane South State Secondary College and the ongoing delay of a satisfactory resolution for senior departmental education executive staff and the taxpayers of Queensland.

During estimates I also took the opportunity to ask where in the 2021-22 state budget there is a specific allocation of funding for a new school hall at Kenmore State High School. Not surprisingly, as with previous Labor state budgets, there is again no funding for a new school hall facility at Kenmore State High School, meaning that students, families and staff are not receiving the vital infrastructure needed to support the entire school community. This is despite the fact that over many years the school council, the P&C and the school executive have worked diligently on these matters to ensure that such infrastructure is included in its school's strategic infrastructure plan, which is formally submitted to the Department of Education.

Finally, the health, safety and wellbeing of our students and staff must be a priority of the Palaszczuk state Labor government. The growing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of all Queenslanders, particularly students and young Queenslanders, presents a significant public health challenge that requires urgent intervention and additional financial support from the Queensland state Labor government. As recently highlighted in the 2021-22 advocacy and policy priorities submission to the Queensland state government by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, our state of Queensland requires an additional significant investment of \$700 million per year into the system. I take this opportunity to implore the Palaszczuk state Labor government to provide additional support for the mental health of all Queenslanders.