




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNELL

Record of Proceedings, 21 April 2021

MOTION

Schools, Free Meals

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (5.05 pm): I move—

That all words after 'acknowledges' be omitted and the following inserted:

- (a) the Palaszczuk government's ongoing commitment to non-government organisations across Queensland supporting young Queenslanders in our schools, including in the provision of free healthy breakfast and lunches; and
- (b) the important role that P&Cs and school communities play.

Having moved this amendment, all I can say is that of course all in this House, including the members for Bundaberg, Mackay, Mansfield, Townsville, Algester and any other former teachers in the House, would agree that it is very hard to teach children if they do not have a full stomach. Children can concentrate more on their work when they have a full belly. That is why we have wonderful programs in our schools right now. I am scratching my head a bit as I try to sort out the exact problem that the Greens are trying to solve here. Their \$374 million spend is on a take-up rate of only 30 per cent. If everybody were to take it up, we would be talking about \$1.16 billion a year. That is what the Greens are talking about in this motion, yet over 720 schools are already providing free access to breakfasts and lunches. Schools will continue to expand those programs where required.

I can put my hand on my heart and say that—maybe unlike the member for South Brisbane; I do not know—I have visited many schools throughout Queensland. I am sure the regional members and other members in this House have also witnessed firsthand the excellent programs that are being delivered in our schools right now. They are being delivered. Schools are working in consultation with their communities. The school community comes together on this. They can choose to operate a breakfast program, or to provide meals for families in need or to any kid who arrives at school without breakfast or lunch. I can almost guarantee that. I cannot imagine any school community, any tuckshop, any P&C group or any teacher denying a child a meal. The member for Mansfield, who was a principal at a large school here in Brisbane, would know that that would be available to them free of charge. They would be fed in accordance with their needs.

School breakfast programs can operate in a variety of ways such as through extended tuckshop hours, facilitated by school support staff and in partnerships with the community, YMCA, Foodbank, Eat Up Australia, Cereal for Coffee and Life Education Queensland. They do it through Indigenous programs such as STARS at Clontarf, which I visited with the member for Thuringowa. Schools provide a welcoming facility where children can go, where they feel at home and where they can have breakfast and lunch. I have seen it firsthand.

Basically, we are trying to solve a problem that does not exist but that will cost \$1.6 billion. The Greens have not given one skerrick of evidence to suggest that this affects children in schools today—and I see the member for Cook—even in Indigenous areas. Wonderful programs are being run in

Indigenous communities to feed our children every day, including in Yarrabah, Woorabinda, Kowanyama, Cherbourg, Mornington Island—I visited their breakfast club and had one of the best coffees that I have had in Queensland, which shows how sophisticated they are; the coffee machine was incredible—and Aurukun, just to name a few.

I support—I am sure we all do in this House—the notion that we do not want to see any child going hungry. To come up with this half-baked idea of a 30 per cent take-up, on trying to fix a problem—we will expand our program wherever it is needed. People are already receiving this. I do not know of one school community that has come to me in relation to the Greens' policy. I recommend the amendment to the motion. We are doing a great job in this area.

(Time expired)