




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2023

ADJOURNMENT

Burdekin Electorate, Schools

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (7.12 pm): With the end of the school year fast approaching, I want to acknowledge the efforts of staff, students and families during 2023. The role of schools in our community should never be underestimated. Our schools set our future generations on a path to achieving their goals. In some communities not only are they meeting those goals but also they are a central meeting point for parents and community members. Whilst schools in the south-east are all about growth, in regional Queensland we have schools where the enrolment numbers ebb and flow depending on a range of factors usually out of the control of schools, staff and leaders. This results in schools sometimes facing the threat of closure, a topic we saw raised by media earlier this year including a reference to schools in my electorate. At the time, I said that we must ensure wherever possible that we retain these schools for the existing students and for the potential they offer.

Last week I visited two schools in the electorate that over the years have faced the threat of either closure or drastic downsizing. I am proud to report that today both of those schools are flourishing. In 2015, Jarvisfield State School was home to 21 students, but just three years later the number had almost halved and the school's future was uncertain. Today Jarvisfield is attended by 30 students, with further enrolments forecast for next year, and it has a breath of fresh air about it. The school grounds feature a school hall—heritage-listed, I might add—that has hosted community events and school events for 80 years, right alongside new basketball courts. The school is led by the principal Lisa Bello. Back in 2015, Kalamia State School had just eight students enrolled but, under the leadership of principal Renee Cross, the enrolment has almost tripled and the school is in need of additional teaching space. The key similarity at both schools is a connection with the school community. Parents, staff and students all feel connected to their school, and that connection benefits the wider community.

I am a proud advocate for schools throughout the electorate. After all, they are the future. I have spoken in this place about the challenges that some of these schools face, and I certainly will not take a backwards step when it comes to calling for students in the Burdekin electorate to have the same opportunities as their city cousins. Make no mistake: some of those challenges still exist and the fight will continue for as long as necessary. Today I want to put on the record my thanks and my admiration for the staff of all of the schools in the electorate and to wish all students the very best for 2024, in particular all those graduating year 12 senior students from throughout the electorate as they go on to bigger and better things. I certainly wish them all well. I acknowledge all of the other little schools that are scattered throughout my electorate which do such a fantastic job. I look forward to catching up with them all in the new year.