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## HRE COLUMN APRIL 2011

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**For immediate release**

### **LABOR'S YEAR 7 PLAN A SHAMBLES**

Well over 12 months ago, the Bligh Labor Government released its so-called *Flying Start* green paper on education, which included a goal of moving Year 7 students from primary school to high school by 2014. I have a number of real concerns and objections about this proposal and the impact that it will have on a number of schools in my electorate. I believe teachers and parents ought to give this issue serious consideration, given the importance of education for our young people.

Firstly, the Bligh Labor Government has woefully underestimated the capacity of our high schools to accommodate another whole year of students within their existing facilities. The *Flying Start* green paper suggested that Year 7 students could be accommodated in our high schools by 2014 for a paltry \$350 million of capital works across the entire state. What a joke. Overcrowding of students in classrooms would be a real issue for our high schools if adequate funding is not provided.

Secondly, there is very little in the *Flying Start* green paper that deals with the need to train and recruit additional high school teachers to instruct an entire additional cohort of students at high school. In addition, what are experienced teachers currently instructing our Year 7 students supposed to do when their students are sent off to high school? The issue is that the training to become a primary school teacher is quite different from that to become a high school teacher.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The problem of overcrowding at high schools would be in stark contrast to the impact this proposal would have on primary schools. I have more than 40 schools in my electorate. Many of them are small rural primary schools, some of which are already struggling with enrolments. I am very worried about what the loss of an entire cohort of students from these small rural primary schools would have on their long term viability.

Thirdly, I believe that Year 7 students play an important role in fulfilling student leadership positions in primary schools. This is a very important learning experience for Year 7 students. They are expected to be role models for younger students, leading by example in the school community. In addition, while many Year 7 girls may be mature enough to head off to a high school environment, given many boys mature later, I am not at all sure they are equally ready to go to high school.

I'm not necessarily against the concept of middle schooling. Indeed, a smoother transition from primary school to high school, as far as the curriculum and the teaching environment is concerned, is a worthy goal. However, I think there are enough practical issues and enough obvious shortcomings by the Bligh Labor Government in the planning of this proposal, for teachers and parents to ask if this is the best way to achieve such a transition. I for one am not convinced.

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