



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (5.14 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on Estimates Committee C. In relation to the Education portfolio, I wish to canvass the issue of the rollout of the prep year and the need for full-time teacher aides in prep classrooms that was discussed by the committee.

At the commencement of semester 1 this year in my electorate of Hinchinbrook, two schools experienced difficulties in relation to staffing numbers and enrolments after the day 8 cut-off policy. Rollingstone State School and Feluga State School experienced difficulties after the day 8 cut-off for different reasons; Rollingstone because it fell just under the threshold to retain its existing number of teachers and Feluga because it had only just met the threshold to attract an additional teacher.

The loss of the third teacher at Rollingstone State School saw the student body consolidated into two classes, a prep to year 3 class with 20 students and a year 4 to year 7 class of 24 students. In the first instance, those are high numbers in a primary school classroom. Furthermore, the years 4 to 7 teacher is also the school principal who has extra duties and responsibilities to discharge in that capacity. There are significant age and maturity differences between prep students and year 3 students. I am concerned about the how those changes have impacted on the learning environment of students at Rollingstone State School.

Education Queensland initially declined the application by Feluga State School for a third teacher after enrolments increased for semester 1 2008. Enrolments increased such that Feluga had two multi-year level classes, a prep to year 3 class of 26 students and a years 4 to 7 class of 25 students. Again, those are high numbers in a primary school classroom. Again, the years 4 to 7 teacher is also the school principal, so that member of staff has extra duties and responsibilities to discharge in addition to teaching this large class.

As discussed during the proceedings of Estimates Committee C, there is a class size target for prep to year 3 classes of 25 students. This means the prep to year 3 class at Feluga State School exceeded the target. While I was pleased that Feluga State School's request was subsequently agreed to, I remain concerned that Education Queensland appears quick to withdraw staff when schools fall under enrolment thresholds, but seems to require schools to maintain enrolments above thresholds for a period before providing an additional teacher when schools meet those thresholds.

I think it is fair to say that there was significant disquiet surrounding the introduction of the prep year in Queensland state schools without full-time teacher aides being made available to prep teachers. I believe that with the introduction of the prep year, it is opportune for Education Queensland to reconsider its threshold staff allocation policy, particularly in smaller schools where there are numerous composite classes and the challenges of teaching multiple year levels are exacerbated by very young prep students.

The prep year is modelled on a play based curriculum. This is not easily compatible with the more formalised curriculum commencing in year 1. It complicates the responsibility of teachers in multiple year level classrooms that include prep students. The teacher's onerous task in those circumstances, despite their best efforts, will probably mean that both the prep students and the various year level students will not

be learning in the best environment possible, given that two separate curriculums are being delivered simultaneously.

What I would like to see ideally and in the first instance is full-time teacher aides provided for prep year classes and for multiple year level classes that include prep students. I also think that, given the introduction of the prep year and the complexities it introduces as far as supervision and the delivery of a play based curriculum is concerned, the state government and Education Queensland should seriously consider—especially if the state government is resolved not to deliver full-time teacher aides—a review of those staffing enrolment thresholds with a view to reducing them in smaller schools that regularly have multiple year level classrooms where these difficulties are no doubt exacerbated.

In relation to the local government portfolio, the report of Estimates Committee C mentions that the Orion report was canvassed during the proceedings of that committee. The Orion report outlines the financial circumstances of the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, which was created as a result of the amalgamation of the former Johnstone Shire and the former Cardwell Shire. I have spoken about this issue at length in the parliament and publicly. I am genuinely concerned about the future of the residents, ratepayers and communities in the Cassowary Coast region.

I do not intend to go into the details of the Orion report, save to say that it outlines some very serious problems faced by the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. The Orion report does include four recommendations that propose a way forward. I know that the Cassowary Coast Regional Council officially adopted the Orion report at its meeting on 24 April 2008 and it communicated this to the minister for local government to officially respond to the report. The question is, and I pose it to the minister—I am glad he is here today—has the minister officially responded to that correspondence, does the state government support it and is it committed to the four recommendations of the Orion report?