

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
Fadden Electorate: St Stephen's College
Chaplaincy Program

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (9.42 a.m.)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, how pleasant to be in the same chamber. I rise this morning to acknowledge some of our great school captains and school leaders within the schools in Fadden, the fastest growing electorate on the Gold Coast. From St Stephen's College, let me acknowledge prefects Amber Forbes, Ryan Hunt, Jessica Law, Monique McCurdy, Matthew Beddard, Katie Chae, Nicola Demler, Jaiden Kennedy, Melanie Maclure, Katya Oldfield, Lyndon Pforr, Michael Schmidt, Bridgitte Yap, Melissa Nikolich and Tara Trezise; house captains Robert Cozier, Jackson Vilic, Amber Forbes, Joshua Te Tai, Kara Vaughan, Damien Yates, Ricky McGuinness, Lara Perkins, Jenna Blackbeard, Tahitia Chang, Justin Erasmus and Jessica Law; the sports captain, Ryan Hunt; and cultural captains Paige Edwards, Alexander McLachlan and Monique McCurdy. Our children are 100 per cent of our future. I acknowledge and support these great leaders and look forward to following their journey as they progress through their school years.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the House the issue with respect to the chaplaincy program, which the government is proposing to change come 1 July this year. The chaplaincy program was implemented as a faith based program. It was not there to replicate the role of the state in providing social work; it was to provide pastoral care and chaplaincy. The federal government is now looking to change that to a more secular program. When the chaplaincy program was implemented, the then Prime Minister John Howard said:

My assessment of the Australian community is that whatever its view about formal and religious adherence, it does hunger for additional ways of looking at the spiritual and pastoral side of life.

Education Minister Gillard's office has confirmed that the program will be changed into a secular scheme when current contracts expire—a chaplaincy program changed to a secular scheme. It is the role of the states to provide social work and support, not the role of the federal government.

Australian Education Union state president Mary Blewett, clearly in a state of depression, rolled out:

The overwhelming majority of government schools didn't go near the program.

She continued:

Given the multicultural mix in many ... schools, to go down the path of the chaplaincy program would have been incredibly divisive.

Clearly no-one has told the union movement that 2,630 schools took up the program in 2007. The program also allowed for schools to choose the role, faith or denomination. It appears that the federal government may be going down the same route as the Queensland state government did when they tried to amend voluntary religious education to allow any faith or secular group to come in, including spiritualists and witches, to teach children. The level of public outrage was, of course, huge, and the state government of the time backed down. I would hope that the federal government sees sense and realises that it is a chaplaincy program, not a state based social program, and backs down from the lunacy of changing chaplaincy to something secular based.