



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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GOLD COAST, SCHOOL TRUANCY

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (11.46 am): After numerous calls for action on truancy from schools on the Gold Coast, last week I called a meeting of police, school principals, parents and commercial retailers to discuss strategies to get kids back to school. An independent report at Logan showed that up to 800 students were absent for a third of the year. This is a worrying figure indeed. But what are the minister and this lazy government doing about it? Not much, it seems.

I have written to the minister for education and the arts to ask him to consider funding a truancy officer to coordinate absenteeism for the entire region and to the minister for police and corrective services asking why the effective school based police officer program has been put on ice. My office was told that no further appointments were being made while the system was under review. Read 'cut funding'.

Truancy presents child safety issues with kids roaming. Recently we debated strengthening the child protection laws by prohibiting child sex offenders from engaging in specific conduct with children. A survey has shown that sex offenders are most likely to contact children in public toilets, shopping malls, parks, swimming pools, video arcades and movie theatres. Kids think they are invincible, but these predators hang around the very places they go when they wag school. Sure, parents have the main responsibility for their offspring, but this government could be doing a darned sight more.

Youth counsellors tell me there is little or no policy to engage students who are suspended or expelled back into schools. Many kids who are long-term truants are kept on the books at schools so that schools can keep funding and teacher placements. Education Queensland has an obligation to educate kids back to school. It should follow kids and ensure they receive an education, whether at TAFE or at high school. We have seen what happens to children in commercial accommodation where they are left just to play Xbox. I ask: how many kids on the Gold Coast are officially suspended right now? What were the reasons for these suspensions? How many of these kids were expelled?

To fail to do anything about truancy is to promote and breed the criminals of tomorrow. This is a tired and lazy government that is neglectful of young Queenslanders. Just like the Department of Child Safety, which has refused to produce figures on child sex offenders, Education Queensland cannot produce figures on truancy. Why is there not an audit?