

# QUEENSLAND

## Children First

### A Policy of Family First Queensland

#### Summary

Our “Children First” policy is a \$900 million initiative over 3 years to make sure that every school child in Queensland emerges completely healthy, happy and fully prepared to face the next steps beyond school.

The Children First policy aims to ensure that every Queensland child who requires professional and personalised support with health and well-being problems will get it through school if they cannot get that help elsewhere.

Every Queensland school will be given funding on a per student basis to employ medical, fitness and well-being specialists who will work with all children at risk in that school.

Teachers still teach – there is no change in their workload. The professionals employed to work with children in these areas are new staff. Parental consent would apply.

The new staff are accountable to the school and school community at the local level. Part of the funding will also go toward providing service co-ordinators who can work with a group of schools to make expenditure more efficient.

There are hundreds of doctors who have left Queensland Health in the last 3 years and hundreds of experienced nurses who are likely to take the opportunity to assist schools make this program work.

The policy represents a tremendous employment boost with opportunity for local doctors, nurses, fitness trainers and other professionals (such as behaviour management specialists) to make that proactive investment in our future.

There will be freedom given to schools and the local community to assess their priorities and choose the programs and professionals to suit their needs, as long as core program objectives and criteria are met and as long as compliance with all other legal requirements is maintained. For example, in some schools ensuring that all children have a healthy breakfast is a major issue while in others a range of behavioural issues might be the priority focus as determined by that school community.

Regular “Health & Well-Being” reports will be issued for each student and families will be kept fully informed.

If implemented, it would be the largest preventative health and well-being investment for children in Queensland history. We believe that this kind of proactive investment is a very effective use of tax payer funds, especially when compared to current piecemeal efforts.

#### Why is this policy important?

Ever-increasing numbers of Queensland children are suffering from health and well-being problems such as obesity, dental problems, drug abuse issues (including alcohol), physical and sexual abuse issues and mental health issues.

This steady decline in health and well-being has serious implications for their future social progress and also their employment prospects. Every statistic and study available clearly points to it. As our children are our future then we are facing serious problems with our social harmony and workforce capacity over the coming decades that will be much bigger than the problems we already face.

This urgent problem cannot be fixed by more discussion summits, information brochures, novel web sites or surveys. Queensland children need urgent action now!

For those that would argue that the cost of implementing an initiative like this is high, we would simply challenge them to think about the future price that we will pay if we don't act now.



## Additional Detail and Explanation

Family First believes that this is the most effective way to reverse the current decline in health and well-being trends in children.

Family First estimates that a comprehensive three year roll-out could cost as much \$2 billion for Queensland so we will be seeking to fund that by allocating \$900 million from the Queensland State Budget over 3 years and challenging the Federal Government to fund the balance of an additional \$1.1 billion over 3 years to assist in development of dedicated facilities within schools to ensure that the programs are ongoing.

Family First believes that the state funding of \$300 million per annum for this program can easily be achieved through greater government efficiency. (\$300 million per year equates to about \$600 per child).

Queensland's future workforce will be in top shape. We will save on longer term public health expenditure.

Crucial to the success of our "Children First" is the requirement that government should fund the employment of hundreds (and eventually thousands) of health, fitness and well-being practitioners who will work in all schools in Queensland. They are there to work in conjunction with the school to identify the children at risk and facilitate specific programs for those children to put them back on track and keep them on track.

Parents can expect to have communication from their school about their child and school reports will contain new information and benchmark comparisons about their child's health and well-being.

The funding would be conditional on each school meeting certain basic criteria in terms of the programs they offer. The complete application of how each unique school community utilises their funding and support is a decision for that school, their community and their students at the local level.

While some children will not require help, the individuals identified as "at-risk" will have the opportunity to conquer their problems and enjoy stronger health and well being in the future. This will ensure that our future workforce achieves its maximum potential rather than the alternative of a state and a nation crippled by an over-burdened health system.

This proactive identification and treatment of problems will ensure that our young and developing children have the best opportunity to establish and maintain healthy habits and the highest possible levels of self esteem. Along with other measures, this will provide an effective counter against our appalling rates of youth depression and suicide.

We are not asking teachers to do any more than they already are. Teachers will still teach. Children will undertake a whole new program, managed by new and experienced professionals working in schools.

We're very confident that many nurses, doctors, fitness trainers and other appropriate professionals will take on roles to work with the school to implement this initiative program.

Illnesses and abuse issues do not distinguish between types of schools either. Neither will Family First and therefore funding will be made available to all schools, both public and private.

A Government should not legislate it's way into family homes but a Government with a genuine care for children and a political will to do the right thing for our current and future generations CAN do something!

Development of this program through an education system that provides the ideal time and place will ensure the best chance for success and participation. Every dollar invested into children in this way will bring a massive return for business and the community.

It's not a judgment on parents and it's not a safety net. It's simply an initiative that puts all Queensland children first and ensures that their future can be the best and brightest that it can be.

We welcome further debate and discussion on it.

