

FOR MEDIA

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Truancy policy good for kids, no reflection on Logan

Today's landmark announcement of linking school attendance with welfare payments in Logan City is good for children and no negative reflection on the Logan community.

As the Federal MP covering most of the participating schools, I welcome the anti-truancy policy announced by families minister Jenny Macklin and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and congratulate them for their commitment to Logan.

I began advocating this very policy 3½ years ago, when I obtained disturbing figures on chronic school absences in Logan schools.

That analysis found that in 2006, 800 Logan high school students were absent for more than one-third of the school year and 200 missed more than half the year. Another 280 primary students missed at least one-third of the school year.

A deeply worrying finding of the same study was that a staggering 65 per cent of the chronic absences were condoned by parents.

Back in March 2006, I pointed out that, tragically, these children were often kept home by a parent who was abused, depressed or simply unable to cope, or by parents who just didn't care whether their kids attended school.

The policy announced today would cause Centrelink and other support agencies to engage with parents struggling to get their children to school. Without the policy, that essential support for families might not be forthcoming.

The researcher I spoke to about this in 2006 told me the problem was by no means confined to Logan but was widespread throughout Australia.

So the policy announced today is no negative reflection on Logan.

Quite the opposite, it's a reflection of the more advanced state of research in Logan and, as in so many other areas, Logan is leading the nation in taking on a major challenge.