

Question on Notice
No. 1809
Asked on 15 September 2010

Ms Davis asked the Minister for Education and Training (Mr Wilson) —

QUESTION:

With reference to maintenance inspections in all schools in the Aspley Electorate—

- (1) When was the last inspection conducted at each school (reported separately) and what problems were identified (reported separately)?
- (2) Was any unrecorded asbestos containing material identified (reported separately)?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for her question and her interest in schools in the Aspley electorate.

The Department of Education and Training's (the Department) highest priority is the safety of staff and students, and accordingly, the Department has thorough and transparent maintenance and asbestos management programs.

QBuild undertakes a maintenance condition assessment of each school annually on behalf of the Department. In addition to this inspection, there is a specific asbestos audit inspection undertaken every three years.

According to QBuild advice as at 15 September 2010, dates of the most recent maintenance inspections and asbestos audits conducted at the seven schools in the Aspley electorate are in the table below:

Site	Condition Assessment Inspection Date	Asbestos Audit Inspection Date
Aspley East State School	7/10/2009	15/11/2007
Aspley Special School	18/02/2010	13/05/2008
Aspley State High School	3/08/2010	5/08/2008
Aspley State School	15/02/2010	3/06/2008
Bald Hills State School	21/07/2010	12/08/2008
Craigslea State High School	24/08/2010	17/09/2008
Craigslea State School	9/12/2009	2/06/2008

A range of items were identified for consideration at the most recent annual maintenance inspections including: external finishes and repainting, floor covering upgrades, grounds improvement, and light, louvre and downpipe replacements. From these annual inspections a detailed and thorough report is produced which the Department uses to prioritise maintenance work under a range of different programs.

Any safety hazard is made safe and rectified as soon as practical. Other maintenance work is prioritised by the school community and Regional office, and systematically carried out through school based maintenance funding and other special maintenance programs.

Queensland state school asbestos registers were first compiled by the Department of Public Works during the 1990s. In 2006 the Queensland Labor Government mandated a new three yearly asbestos audit regime. All state schools have now undergone their first round of this new audit process, and the second round is underway.

The purpose of this audit is not only to assess the condition of all recorded asbestos containing material in schools but to ensure that all materials that may be suspected of containing asbestos are included in the current Asbestos Register contained in the Built Environment Materials Information Register (BEMIR).

The Code of Practice allows organisations to have generic presumption statements in asbestos registers. One of the aims of the three yearly asbestos audits is to increase the accuracy and detail in the schools asbestos register, particularly after sample testing has been undertaken in a specific area. In response to further sample testing, new entries in BEMIR may be required to provide the necessary description and results.

The Department has placed BEMIR online, which allows parents to view the status of asbestos in their schools. The register is updated quarterly and is available online at <http://education.qld.gov.au/asbestos/register.html>.

QBuild advise that as a result of the initial three yearly audit process, four state schools in the Aspley electorate have had additional items included in the Register as being presumed to contain asbestos. These schools are Craigslea State High School, Aspley East State School, Aspley State School and Aspley Special School.

Buildings constructed prior to 1990 are presumed to contain building products and materials that may contain asbestos, and therefore appropriate precautions are taken when undertaking any work. All surfaces are tested to see if they contain asbestos prior to work commencing. The Department can then ensure that only contractors with the relevant skills and certification are engaged to conduct any work, following documented Safe Work Practices and in accordance with National Codes of Practice.

Asbestos containing materials are removed every week in Queensland state schools as the State and Federal Governments spend millions of dollars a day on building programs. Additionally, the Department has a dedicated removal program. \$18 million has been allocated in the 2010–2011 Budget for this. Between 2005 and 2007 this Government also replaced all 919 asbestos containing roofs in Queensland schools.

Five major reforms in asbestos management have been undertaken in the last 12 months as we continue to enhance our program:

1. A Chief Asbestos Safety Advisor was appointed to review, investigate and provide advice about asbestos management.
2. A Chief Asbestos Health Advisor was appointed to provide advice to the department, schools and parents.
3. The DET Asbestos Expert Advisory Panel and Asbestos Stakeholders Reference Panel were formed to help inform best practice in ongoing asbestos management.
4. Contractors found to have contravened asbestos regulations in Queensland schools are dealt with severely, including possibly being banned from future work.
5. The asbestos register (BEMIR), previously available in hard copy at schools, was published online for all to access. Queensland is one of only two states to have done this.

The Bligh Government's long term objective is for all Government controlled buildings to be free of asbestos containing material. Until this is achieved we will continue our removal programs and will continue to monitor any existing asbestos containing material in schools, so that any hazards identified are immediately made safe and scheduled for removal.

It took a Labor Government to take action on asbestos in schools. The Liberal National Party continued to use asbestos products in Queensland schools for 15 years after they were first notified of its dangers in 1974 and amidst continuing public concerns.

There were calls for bans on asbestos related products, for asbestos hazards in buildings to be registered and regular inspections carried out — but they continued to ignore these calls. Unions led multiple campaigns to have asbestos use stopped and multiple health reports were provided to the Liberal National Party (LNP) — but they did nothing.

The Bligh Government did not put the asbestos in our schools, but we are removing it. The Bligh Labor Government is cleaning up the LNP's mess with an annual building maintenance inspection and asbestos removal program and the progressive safe removal of asbestos containing material from Queensland state schools, as we invest millions of dollars into education infrastructure.