



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 26 August 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Literacy and Numeracy

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.54 a.m.), by leave: I table a report into literacy and numeracy levels in Queensland schools that was buried by the former Government. The report by the Queensland School Curriculum Council is titled *Statewide Performance of Students in Aspects of Literacy and Numeracy in Queensland 1995 and 1996: Report to the Minister for Education*. This report was presented to the previous Minister for Education, the honourable member for Merrimac, in 1997. The findings are based on Year 6 literacy and numeracy tests taken in 1995-96.

Several disturbing trends have emerged. The report found that boys are performing significantly worse than girls in both aspects of literacy tested. The disparity was not as great in numeracy. However, some interesting differences were noted. The report also revealed that test results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were dramatically lower than those of other students. On a more positive side, the performance of children from non-English speaking backgrounds was not significantly different from that of the rest of the group.

This report, a document which clearly states that boys are consistently underperforming in literacy, should have set alarm bells ringing for the previous Government. The paper detailed a critical problem with literacy in our schools, yet nothing was done. When the former Minister received the report, the entire education community should have been alerted to the problem. This Parliament should have been informed. The community should have been told. The education system should have been regeared to address literacy levels. Instead it was never even made public and no action was taken. The Year 6 students who took this test in 1995 are now in secondary school. The problem has been effectively shifted into that arena unfixed. That is not good enough. The former Government buried this report. This document lay gathering dust on the shelf while the former Government continued to develop its Leading Schools program, a program which actually took teachers out of the classroom and involved them in administrative trivia instead.

In the near future I will receive the final draft of this report from the Queensland School Curriculum Council, and I will table it for the information of honourable members. In it will be the results after two years of testing. In the next report will be the results after three years of testing. The preliminary information I have from the next report shows that the trends are actually worsening. Urgent action needs to be taken in respect of numeracy and literacy, particularly with respect to the performance of boys and children from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

Poor literacy and numeracy skills are a prescription for poverty. This Government is committed to fostering an education system that will respond to the needs of children who experience these difficulties. We are committed to giving schools the resources to pull those children through and break the poverty cycle. The tools are available in the form of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and the suggested level of development it outlines for Years 1, 2 and 3. These strategies will help teachers to identify literacy and numeracy problems in the early school years. These tools need to be refined and extended to the later stages of primary school to stop the problem reaching a secondary level.

Because literacy and numeracy are intimately connected with operating successfully in today's world and because the lack of these skills is a key element in the poverty cycle, the information

contained in this report is of paramount importance. Those who leave primary school with inadequate skills are casualties of the system and lead less fulfilled lives. An education system should not have any casualties. In my view, a child should receive the help that he or she needs to become literate and numerate by the middle years of primary school or be assessed as having a disability and receive the help subsequently that he or she deserves. The tabling of this report will help this Government and the entire education community to pursue that objective.
