



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 22 October 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Literacy and Numeracy

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.45 a.m.), by leave: On 26 August 1998 I tabled the 1995-96 report on literacy and numeracy in Queensland by the Queensland School Curriculum Council. Honourable members will recall that that report identified a dramatic differential between the performance of boys and girls in respect of literacy. I said that the underperformance of boys should have set alarm bells ringing for the previous Government, which not only failed to table the documents but did not even make them available to the board of management of the Education Department.

I now table the council's latest report, entitled *Statewide performance of students in aspects of literacy and numeracy in Queensland 1995, 1996 and 1997*. The report indicates improvements in performances in all aspects of literacy for all 1997 Year 6 students as compared to the performances of the 1996 and 1995 students. There is an improvement in performance in the measurement and space aspects of the numeracy test. There is also an overall improvement in the performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in some aspects of the tests as compared to the 1996 results.

However, the report confirms the findings in the 1995-96 report on literacy and numeracy presented to the previous Minister—a report, I might add, to which he did not seem to pay any particular attention. It confirms the differences in performance between boys and girls, and it confirms the extreme differences in performance between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It identifies significant disparities between the performance of urban and rural children. Interestingly, the schools west of the Great Dividing Range did worst under the previous Government's *Leading Schools* policy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continue to perform substantially below all other students in all aspects of literacy and numeracy tested. The Government will implement strategies designed to improve the outcomes for these students and enhance their ability to operate successfully in the 21st century.

Throughout the State, boys performed below girls in all aspects of the literacy test. In reading and viewing, the performance of the boys was markedly below that of girls, and when one looks at the results for writing, the gap is even wider. The results for numeracy tell a different story. The results for both groups are similar except for the questions on space where boys performed better than girls.

Despite this, the boys' performance in literacy lags behind that of girls. This underperformance of boys in literacy is dramatic, and requires a dramatic response. The approximately \$5m annual increase in literacy funding that is a feature of this Labor Budget will help. However, even more than that needs to be done. There needs to be public debate about this issue. The minds of the entire education community need to be engaged so that we can work together towards collective solutions. The education system needs to be refocused, and the Education budget needs to be reconfigured to target this critical problem. I will advise the House of my department's response to this report in the near future.
