



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Common Youth Allowance

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: The education system will shortly need to adapt to a new and severe stress. The Commonwealth Government has decided it will coerce a massive number of young people into attending school when they no longer wish to do so. From next year, the Common Youth Allowance will force young Queenslanders under 18 years of age who have not completed Year 12 or equivalent to be engaged in full-time education or training unless specifically exempt. If they do not do this, the Commonwealth will cut off the youth allowances, leaving some with no income.

The stated intention is to encourage students to remain at school until the completion of Year 12, thereby enhancing their ability to compete in the employment market. The real objective of the changes is to reduce the numbers on the unemployment list without actually effecting an increase in jobs. While improvement of the retention rate of young people who are interested in getting an education is highly desirable, this scheme will put unnecessary pressure and stress on young people, their families and school communities throughout Queensland.

Education is not something that can be forced down the throats of young people. It must be made attractive. You do not do that by making young people go unwillingly to school when they have no wish to do so. Civil conscription will not work; rather, school programs need to be broadened to appeal to students and provide realistic qualifications for employment. We should not be forcing young people to stay in school; we should be providing programs within schools that will encourage them to stay. While the department is making some moves in this direction, those efforts have shown how expensive it is to provide relevant vocational education for these students.

Recently, I visited Woree High School, where my department is funding the building of a construction court sufficiently large to enable manual arts students to actually build mini houses. But for such imaginative vocational education, we need funds—a call which seems to fall on deaf ears in Canberra. My colleague the member for Merrimac, when Minister, criticised the Federal Government for failing to provide adequate resources to make this move successful in Queensland. I take the opportunity to be bipartisan and repeat his call.

Education Queensland has estimated the cost to Queensland at \$7,000 per student at an overall cost to the State Budget of \$23m. The Federal Government has allocated \$42m over three years towards funding these extra enrolments. However, it has been suggested that DEETYA has sought funding of \$140m in its Cabinet submission. That would mean that the Commonwealth has provided only 31% of the required funding.

What is needed is a major boost in the funds provided by the Commonwealth or at least an easing in the way the ANTA funds are used. Schools need funds to provide adequate counselling, resources and relevant and appropriate curriculum. My department has advised me that 2,500 to 3,000 young people are likely to remain or return to secondary education in Queensland as a result of this civil conscription. Given the profile of these returning students, most are expected to enrol in resource-intensive vocational courses which require specialist staff. They may also require extra help with literacy and numeracy, vocational guidance and behaviour management.

The cost to Queensland, even with the paltry help being offered by the Commonwealth, is expected to be enormous. I am advised the Commonwealth will give Queensland \$4m over three years

as a pay-off for forcing these kids back into school. But this can be applied only to certain target areas through a program called the Full Service Schools for Students at Risk. This program may help those young people in target areas, but many more will not get any benefit from these funds—a particular problem in a State as decentralised as Queensland.

My department advises me that there is another problem with the proposal from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. They have not provided final guidelines on what kind of program qualifies as education and/or training. Many of these youngsters may have been alienated by traditional schooling but could develop their literacy and numeracy skills through alternative education programs. I have written to my colleague Dr David Kemp, the Federal Minister for Education, to set up a dialogue between the States and the Commonwealth to try to ensure that all children in Queensland have a chance to improve their ability to compete in the employment market and to be positive participants in society.
