



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

Hansard 24 November 1999

PERSONS CONVICTED OF OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.45 p.m.): I am delighted to participate in the debate on this motion tonight. I congratulate both the shadow Attorney-General and the Attorney-General on their bipartisan approach to this important issue. It is important to realise that tonight we are trying to build on existing legislation and to add additional protections to the processes that involve our children.

Those members who said that there are obligations on employers are correct. I point out that over the past couple of years legislation has been introduced into this Chamber that has improved the reporting and detection mechanisms for those undesirable people whom we do not wish to have around our children. In about 1996 or 1997, those members who were here would remember that pieces of legislation were introduced that concerned changes to the Board of Teacher Registration. In that legislation, significant amendments were made that really gave the board additional and quite strong powers to both detect and strike from the register those undesirable teachers who transgressed on a number of issues.

The first amendment related to where teachers were evading their name being struck off the register by simply resigning from the board and walking away. That prevented the board from launching any investigations into their behaviour. Through that amendment legislation, teachers can no longer do that. The second amendment was more important. At that time, the Wood royal commission in New South Wales was investigating a whole range of criminal activity. The Department of Education in New South Wales was enmeshed in that investigation. It was found that a range of undesirables in that profession were in schools in New South Wales. Acting on that sort of information, it was agreed nationally that we ought to do something.

I am pleased to say that Queensland, through changes to the BTR legislation in 1997, was the first State to put in place really rigorous processes that were designed to detect and weed out those undesirables from our teaching work force both in State and non-State schools. It had the support of all the employer organisations. As I said, it was really groundbreaking legislation. It required employing authorities to report to the board any teacher dismissed for serious conduct. It also ensured that prosecuting authorities advised the BTR automatically if a teacher was committed for trial or convicted of an indictable offence. Under those changes, the BTR was then required to seek, through the Police Services, the criminal history records of all applicants for registration. The existing penalties were increased significantly for those teachers or applicants who failed to disclose any of those convictions.

I believe that that really sent a very strong message to the community that this Parliament was serious about putting in place additional legislative measures to protect our children. Those two pieces of legislation enjoyed the support of the whole House. I am quite sure that, as a result of this motion tonight, when further legislation comes to the House, that prospective legislation will also enjoy the support of the whole House.

Over the past couple of years, Education Queensland has dramatically tightened up its reporting mechanisms in terms of the child protection policy. It now has a very comprehensive policy of which all teachers and employees of the department are aware. Principals are no longer given any discretion with regard to reporting suspected child abuse. Since early 1998, principals have had an automatic obligation to do that. A whole range of training packages has been put in place in schools to

ensure that everyone within the school environment understands what their obligations are in terms of reporting suspected child abuse.

The proposals as outlined in the motion will come back to this House in the form of new legislation. Many members have quite rightly voiced concerns about some of the implications of that legislation.

Time expired.
