



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

Hansard 8 December 1999

EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (12.57 p.m.): The Opposition will be supporting this legislation. It is mainly technical in nature, as it applies to a number of Acts clarifying certain particulars where the previous Acts, which were amended when I was the Minister, may not in fact have been precise. Some measures in the legislation also reduce the bureaucratic processes within schools and other measures are aimed at making some of the decision-making processes of the director-general more independent than what they would be if the legislation were not passed.

In terms of the amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act, I think that the amendments relating to the memberships of school councils are just plain commonsense. We now have in our schools a range of professionals and paraprofessionals such as nurses, chaplains and police officers who I think ought to be considered for membership of school councils. Many of these people are integral parts of schools and have a vital role to play in terms of putting forward their views in forums such as school councils. So I think that is an updating of the previous legislation.

In terms of exclusions, the amendments also make the process fairer. They may have been oversights when, as Minister, I introduced the principal legislation a couple of years ago. The amendments in this legislation to the remaining allocation of semesters of education are also streamlining mechanisms, and I think they are commonsense. When the former coalition Government introduced that piece of legislation, it was groundbreaking legislation in Australia and has been widely acclaimed for its fairness. Members will recall that at that time the department was embroiled in some legal actions by parents of students who wanted to keep their children in special education past the age of 18. Although we recognised the valid concerns of those parents, legal issues had to be sorted out. The legislation that the former coalition Government introduced received wide acclaim from other parts of Australia in that it treated all students fairly. I think that was a great step forward for students with disabilities in that it recognised their needs and it gave some discretion to principals to extend the number of semesters of schooling that those students could undertake and, under special circumstances, to allow them to do the semesters again. As I said, that was groundbreaking legislation. The amendments contained in this Bill streamline that legislation.

This Bill also amends the Education (Overseas Students) Act. The director-general has sought some powers to create committees to provide advice to him and, in effect, remove him as part of the decision-making process. I think that is fair and reasonable. In relation to the amendments pertaining to the school curriculum P-10 legislation, the director-general has sought—

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mr QUINN: As I said before the luncheon recess, the Opposition will not be opposing the Bill. Most of the amendments are commonsense and technical in nature and provide for some streamlining in the processes. I mentioned the amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act, the Education (Overseas Students) Act and the Education (School Curriculum P-10) Act. The amendments to the Education (Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority) Act, the James Cook University Act and the Public Sector Ethics Act are pretty straightforward. We will be supporting those as well.
