



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 28 April 1999

PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (6.46 p.m.): I would like to thank the honourable member for Maroochydhore for the great honour that she has accorded me by including me in the list of those members she moved to censure tonight. I would not want to have been one of the Ministers that the honourable member for Maroochydhore thought was okay.

In the history of Westminster Parliaments, there are times when the spellbinding oratory and the insightful analysis of honourable members on the Opposition benches has brought down Governments.

Ms Spence: Not tonight.

Mr WELLS: This is not such an occasion. There are Opposition members of Parliament whose calibre, tenacity, verve and fire has inspired nations and States. These are not such Opposition members of Parliament.

We have heard from the honourable member for Currumbin lines that have been fed to him by Federal sources. He was on about the national literacy benchmarks. He said that Queensland was the only State that did not go along with it. Sure, we stood alone against the rest of Australia in a national literacy benchmark exercise that would have discriminated against Queensland children. Why is the honourable member for Currumbin miffed about this? Because he signed up for it.

Mr SPEAKER: It is Merrimac, Minister.

Mr WELLS: I am sorry, Merrimac.

Mr Borbidge: Is Merri upset, too?

Mr WELLS: No, she is a wise and insightful member of Parliament.

The member for Merrimac signed up for a national literacy benchmarks exercise that sent in Queensland's seven-year-olds to compete against eight-year-olds from the rest of the Commonwealth. He signed up for an exercise in which, in some jurisdictions, the Catholic schools were in and in some they were out; the independent schools were in in some jurisdictions, and in some of them they were out; indigenous children were in in some jurisdictions and in some of them they were out. In this national literacy test, the same questions were not asked. Maybe that last one could be accounted for by some statistical device. However, that national literacy test did not even ask the same questions in the same way, or different questions in the same way. Sometimes the test had short answer questions, sometimes it had open-ended questions, sometimes it asked students to choose between one and three, sometimes it asked students, "How do you spell?", and sometimes it asked, "What is the correct way of spelling it? This way, this way, or that way?" They were different sorts of questions. They were guaranteed not to get answers that could be standardised across the Commonwealth.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr WELLS: I am sorry, I hate to interrupt the honourable member for Merrimac.

Mr Quinn: Why do all the other States think they can do it and you think you can't?

Mr WELLS: The other States are in a different position from Queensland. Most of them have Liberal Ministers for Education who are perfectly capable of being talked into something by David Kemp. I am not afraid to stand up to David Kemp. I am also perfectly prepared to cooperate with him on occasions when we have a joint interest. However, I will not see Queensland's children discriminated against by some shonky, half thought out exercise in national benchmarking. We are committed to national benchmarking, but only if it is done on a fair basis and does not discriminate against

Queensland children. We will not cop it. We will not accept what the honourable member for Merrimac signed up for.

The honourable member for Merrimac raised a few interesting questions. He said that people want to know what we are doing about literacy and discipline in schools. I can tell him: \$17.5m extra has been provided in the current budget for literacy in schools. When the honourable member for Merrimac was the Minister, he actually cut literacy funding to Queensland schools. We have increased that funding by \$17.5m for one-on-one education by teacher aides.

Do members know what the honourable member for Merrimac did when he received a report from the Queensland Schools Curriculum Council that showed that there was a crisis in literacy as far as boys were concerned and that there was a dramatic difference between the literacy levels of boys and girls? He lost it! He did not even give it to his department.

Mrs Edmond: He put it in his too-hard basket.

Mr WELLS: It was probably in the too-hard basket. The very best colour that we can put on it is that he lost it. Maybe he even hid it. One way or another, it did not even get to his department. We acted on it.

Time expired.
