



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 19 August 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Literacy Benchmarking

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (10.11 a.m.), by leave: Queensland has taken an historic lead as States and Territories across Australia moved to adopt nationally comparable literacy and numeracy tests. My colleagues the Honourable John Aquilina, New South Wales, the Honourable Malcolm Buckby, South Australia, the Honourable Phil Gude, Victoria, and the Honourable Bill Stefaniak, Australian Capital Territory, have agreed to move to nationally comparable literacy tests. Queensland students will participate in the common testing program. This will replace the national benchmarking process insisted on by the Federal Education Minister, the Honourable David Kemp.

Let us not mince words. The process advocated by the Federal Government, which involved different States administering different tests to differing demographic populations of children, asking different test questions in different interlocutory formats, then getting a panel of judges to guess what they thought each group of children should have got, and then averaging the judges' guess results to agree at a benchmark for the purposes of drawing up a league table had one or two things wrong with it. Most States and Territories are already testing or moving to test students at Years 3 and 5 to provide parents and teachers with additional accurate and comprehensive data about children's progress and assist in the targeting of extra assistance to students identified as having poor literacy skills.

This year, Queensland has increased its literacy funding by \$17m by diverting Leading Schools money primarily to one to one literacy education by teacher aides concentrating in the early childhood years of education. In recent months officers within my department have been working with other States and Territories to ensure a better basis for comparing their current literacy tests to allow for meaningful comparability.

Under the new agreement, New South Wales and South Australian students will continue to undertake the same basic skills tests in Years 3 and 5 in August. Victoria will include common items from the test for its learning assessment project tests, which have been moved from March to August so that students sit the tests at the same time. For 1999, the ACT has moved its testing program from March to August and has included common questions in the program.

This process will allow parents, teachers and State and Territory Governments to monitor, report and act on common student literacy performance and standards. Previously, States and Territories used different testing regimes which made meaningful national reporting difficult. The new cooperative approach by the States and Territories will provide parents, schools and relevant Governments with meaningful information compared to the previously unviable national literacy benchmarking process. Using common testing items will assist in creating a legitimate measure of student achievement and better ensure consistency of standards.

This agreement will address most of the concerns raised by Ministers at the meeting of the ministerial council on education in April this year. The processes undertaken by my department and those in other States have been about getting comparable, open and accountable results in the hands of parents, teachers and students across the nation.