



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 14 September 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

The Next Decade Discussion Paper

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: In April of this year, the Premier and I jointly released a discussion paper, *The Next Decade*, a discussion about the future of Queensland State schools. The discussion paper and the subsequent consultation will, in the historical perspective, be seen as a watershed in the evolution of the Smart State.

The discussion paper outlined a series of challenges that State schools face. They included—

- the growing number of children from poor families attending State schools;
- the increasing complexity of family and cultural backgrounds of school children;
- the rapidly changing world of work that students are preparing for;
- the enormous opportunities and challenges posed by the changes to communication and information technology; and
- the problems faced by diverse Queensland communities affected by the impact of exposure to global markets.

The paper also highlighted the threats to State education brought about by the ideologically driven attempts of other Governments to force change through increased competition and funding models that shift resources to non-Government schools.

The paper essentially posed the question of what sort of State education system we would need to build over the next 10 years to ensure that all our children, irrespective of their location or circumstance, would have the best chance for a successful and fulfilling life in a rapidly changing world. The discussion paper was used to facilitate discussions and seek the views of a wide range of Queenslanders on these matters—teachers, parents, students, non-school staff, other Government departments, employers, workers, community groups and key interest groups connected with education. All in all, at over 700 meetings around Queensland, some 10,000 people became involved in the process and over 250 submissions were received.

Today, I am pleased to table the report on the consultations. It outlines the views of those consulted on the future of Queensland State schools. The report has been published and provided to all schools and to those who were involved in the consultations. The report shows that we have a strong and positive State education system in Queensland. There are many teachers and parents who care passionately about the future of students and their schools. They give their time and skills unstintingly in the public interest. This social capital is the very underpinning of a healthy and just democracy. Given the chance through this process, teachers and parents have shown that they are not afraid to tackle the hard issues and openly and honestly discuss the best way forward. They have drawn attention to some critical matters. They included—

We need a greater proportion of our students successfully completing school so that they and our State will have a better future. They want broader study options in the post-compulsory years to suit the different destinations of students.

Schools need to be more flexible in the way they respond to the educational needs of diverse groups within the community.

The bureaucracy needs to add value to the learning relationship in schools more than it now does.

There should be a focus on the new basics that prepare students for the information age. Literacy and numeracy are fundamental but so, too, are new skills that will be essential for work and life in the next century.

State schools are a valued asset with an important role to play in ensuring a fair go for all and are a vital part of community and social development; and

Greater attention should be given to the early years of childhood. They want preschool services that suit the needs of working families and are better linked to other early childhood services.

There are many more messages worthy of consideration by Government outlined in the report. I commend it to members.

My department is now preparing a draft strategy for Queensland State schools for the next decade based on the comments in this report. There will be further consultations with parents, teachers, students and the wider community once that draft is available.

I would like to emphasise that the strategy we are developing has a 10-year time horizon. These changes will not occur overnight. The future of Queensland children deserves such a measured and considered approach and I commend it to the House.
