



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Literacy and Numeracy Report

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: This is the third tabling of a Queensland Schools Curriculum Council report on literacy and numeracy in Queensland. On 26 August 1998, I tabled the hitherto unpublished 1995-96 report and on 22 October 1998 I tabled the consolidated 1995, 1996, 1997 report on literacy and numeracy in Queensland. I now table the council's latest report titled Statewide Performance of Students in Aspects of Literacy and Numeracy in Queensland 1998.

This report details the results of tests conducted in 1998 in aspects of literacy and numeracy and assessed performance of a sample of Year 3 students and all Year 5 students in participating schools. The 1998 tests show that, for the fourth year in a row, the girls continued to outperform the boys in all aspects of literacy. This is not the case in numeracy, however. In numeracy, the performance of boys and girls was generally close, except that the girls were above the boys in space and the boys performed better than the girls in respect of data, including measurement. In the previous year, the boys performed better than the girls in respect of space but at a similar level in respect of other aspects of numeracy.

Mr Borbidge: You'd know all about space.

Mr WELLS: Yes, it is between the member's ears. So we have a continued pattern over four years in which the differences between the performance of boys and girls in numeracy are minuscule and, if anything, reflect marginally better performance by the boys while at the same time and with exactly the same group of boys and girls, the performance of the girls in literacy is significantly and perhaps even dramatically better than that of the boys.

If we are seeing a developmental difference here, it is very odd that that developmental difference should be confined to literacy and not show up at all with respect to numeracy. As a matter of simple logic, either it is not a developmental difference at all but only a cultural difference or else it is a minor developmental difference which is not consistent across disciplines and which can be adjusted for by a cultural shift. The point is that either way we can do something about it.

Let me make something transparently clear here to all honourable members. The advances in girls' education which have been achieved over the past decade are not at risk by virtue of the fact that we identify this particular inequity. Gender equity can be achieved by bringing the low achievers up to the level of the high achievers. It is not a matter of cutting high achievers down to the level of low achievers. That is not what education is about.

We need, therefore, to think about the kinds of strategies which are going to generate a result that reflects equity in these circumstances. At the start of first semester this year, we put on stream an additional \$17m of literacy and numeracy money. This came from the reallocation of old Leading Schools money. That was targeted mainly to the employment of teacher aides, whose role is to provide one-to-one literacy opportunities for the children who were identified in Years 1, 2 and 3 as being at risk with respect to literacy. In many schools, that has achieved a positive outcome.

Recently, I visited Victoria Point State School. At that school they received an additional 30 hours of teacher aide time. They targeted that very precisely, using that teacher aide time only for literacy with their at-risk students. In 1998, the number of students requiring reading intervention at that

school was 37. In 1999, after less than six months, as a result of that program the number dropped to 19. The number of students requiring intervention with their writing dropped from 15 to a mere four. All of this was achieved in six months. That school attributes the outcome solely to that particular program. That school is only one of very many such success stories.

The 1998 performance of students from non-English speaking backgrounds continues a pattern evident in previous years. These students were close to the middle of the cohort, although in one aspect of literacy and two aspects of numeracy fine analysis shows them to be slightly below the State average. The difference between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the rest of the cohort was, however, dramatic and is of a serious concern. In all aspects of literacy and numeracy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performed very far below the State average. It is in response to this concern that I announced recently a three-year, \$3.6m action research project aimed at improving literacy and numeracy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and those whose first language is not English. This has been targeted to 20 schools which have high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Literacy is an extremely high priority of this Government. Literacy is not the beginning and the end of education but it is one of the fundamental building blocks without which it will be impossible to build the Smart State.
