



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Students; Selection of Subjects

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (10.13 a.m.), by leave: It is again that time of year when students in the middle years of schooling, and their parents, are attempting to decide what subjects to choose for Years 11 and 12. This is a critical decision which will impact on the students for the rest of their lives. Some students are being told to choose subjects that they are good at; others are being told to choose particular subjects because they count more than others and, by choosing them, they will do better. The students who are being told to play to their strengths are being given good advice. Students who are being told that some subjects count more than others are being given advice which is based on misunderstandings of the facts and of how the system works.

I recognise that it looks as if choosing some subjects gives a better chance of a higher result. Students taking some subjects have, on average, better OPs than those in other subjects, but appearances can be misleading. It is true that there are more high achieving students taking some subjects than others, but it is not true that these students are high achievers because they take these subjects.

It is obviously wrong to argue that, because our Olympic team contains good swimmers, one will become a good swimmer just by joining the team. There is a name for that kind of argument: it is called the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy—the "after this, because of this" fallacy.

The best students succeed in many ways. For example, our best mathematics and science students tend to do very well in the writing task component of the Queensland core skills test. Writing task markers do not know which subjects students have studied, so the fact that students taking some subjects tend, on average, to do better in this test than students taking other subjects simply tells us that that is what they have learned and what they can do, rather than it simply being a matter of which subjects they chose.

If one chooses subjects hoping to get an advantage just because of the choice of subjects, one is in for a big disappointment. There is no rule that requires the best students to take particular subjects. There are top students in every subject. Every student should select the subject he is good at and do his best. It is all about learning. The best reply to the question, "How do I get an OP1?" is to say, "In short, to get an OP1, you must be ahead of your competition. If the academic competition at your school is tough, you will need to be only just ahead. If it is not tough, you will need to be a long way ahead."

I urge honourable members to encourage their young constituents to play to their strengths when they are choosing their subjects. The system is designed so that one can achieve a high OP no matter what one's choice of subjects.
