



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 7 December 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Special Education

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.54 a.m.), by leave: Staffing for students with disabilities is based on a process known as ascertainment. This process recognises that there are varying levels of special educational needs. These levels of special need are ascertained by expert educators working with principals and parents, and staffing is determined on the basis of those levels. This is different from primary and secondary staffing, which is based purely on enrolment numbers.

Over the last few years, in line with parent choice, there has been a significant shift of numbers of students with disabilities enrolling in local schools. Parents have been electing in greater numbers to send their children to mainstream schools rather than to special schools. There have been more or less constant complaints from teachers and parents that mainstreaming is not being accompanied by an equivalent shift of resources. The information technology now available to the department verifies that this proposition is, in fact, true.

It is unsustainable to argue that a child who is ascertained as having a certain level of special need in one setting should have more favourable or less favourable staffing resources at his or her disposal than another child ascertained as having exactly the same level of need in another setting. This Government is committed to ensuring that all students with disabilities irrespective of their school should, within the limits of human possibility, receive similar levels of teacher and teacher aide allocations based on their special needs. My department provides resources direct to special schools on the basis of ascertained students.

For students with disabilities in classes, units and mainstream schools, resources will go to districts on the basis of the ascertainment in that district. The districts will then work with the schools to make decisions about the level of resourcing provided for particular students with disabilities, depending on the individual needs of the child and their school. Despite claims to the contrary, we will be using the same ratio as the previous year.

The staffing allocations of this Government are based on the proposition that every child who is ascertained as having special needs will, as far as is humanly possible, receive the same level of support as another child with identical special needs, wherever he or she may be receiving his or her education. The staffing ratios used for students with disabilities are the same in 2000 as they were in 1999. There is no reduction in the Statewide allocation of staffing provided to students with disabilities. In fact, there is a massive increase in the staffing to special need students across-the-board. My department advises me that there are 125 more special education teachers than there were at the beginning of last year.

Of course adjustments will occur in some schools to reflect changes to their enrolment, as always occurs. Our staffing levels for students with disabilities in the year 2000 will be determined on the basis of enrolments and ascertainment levels at the start of that year. Also in 1999, students in some special schools had more favourable levels of teacher resourcing than similar students who are located in units, classes and mainstream settings.

Despite claims to the contrary we will, however, be using exactly the same ratios as in the previous year. This will now deliver an equitable level of resourcing across the State for students with disabilities. While there are some schools which will experience a decrease in resourcing, others will

receive increases. I repeat: overall, there is a massive increase in teacher numbers and in teacher aide hours—125 additional teachers and 3,458 additional teacher aide hours across the special education area. These resources will be shared among children with special needs on the basis that like cases will be resourced alike whatever school they are in and wherever they are in Queensland within the limits of human fallibility.
