



Speech by

KEN TURNER

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—IND) (7.11 p.m.): A woman came to my office with her 17-year-old son, who had completed Year 12. Philip has drive and determination. He has just competed in the Australian judo championships, in which he came second. He is trying to obtain a job, but without any success. His goal is to join the Army. He is so keen to work that I wanted to help him, but Philip has a problem. He cannot read or write because he is dyslexic.

Mrs Lilian Malcolm, who teaches the Spalding method of literacy, comes to my office from time to time. She is currently conducting a course in the Spalding method for teachers at the James Cook University. I asked her advice about Philip and she offered to take him on free of charge, as his parents cannot afford remedial teaching.

She tested Philip and found that he was at Year 1 level in reading and writing. He achieved 2% in a spelling test. Two months later he has reached Year 4 level in reading and is able to write sentences. His spelling has improved greatly: he achieved 66% in his next spelling test. I question how a child can attend 12 years of school and not have his lack of literacy skills addressed. It would appear to me that our schooling system has wasted 12 years of this young man's life.

I publicly thank Lilian Malcolm for giving her time and efforts to someone she had never met, giving Philip a better chance of attaining his goal of joining the Army. Receiving help with his literacy skills, a skill most of us take for granted, is opening the world to Philip.

Philip's case is not an isolated one. There are at least 9,000 families with one or more children suffering from specific learning disabilities in Queensland schools right now. It would seem that teachers, school principals, educational guidance officers, doctors and occupational therapists are very often unable to recognise or even accept dyslexia, let alone knowledgeable enough to deal with it.

This appalling chain of ignorance must be broken. Our teachers must be taught to recognise learning disabilities in the children in their care. I do not want to add yet another responsibility to teachers, but they are in the most obvious position to do this. Educational guidance officers and occupational therapists need to have a basic understanding of dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Every child in Queensland should expect as their right to finish 12 years of schooling with the skills to be able to participate and compete in the adult world.

Time expired.
