



Speech by

**WARREN PITT**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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#### **BENTLEY PARK EDUCATION COMPLEX**

**Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.39 a.m.): During the Mulgrave by-election, I announced that approval had been granted by the Minister for Education, the Honourable Dean Wells, for construction to commence on a high school in the Edmonton area. Due to open for its initial year intake at the commencement of the 2000 school year, the high school is one more step in a process that was commenced in 1992, when I represented the seat of Mulgrave on a previous occasion.

The development of a genuine education precinct, catering for the lifelong learning needs of the rapidly expanding southern suburbs population, became the centrepiece of my determination to strive for the timely provision of essential infrastructure for the area. As a consequence, negotiations were commenced on site acquisition and a cane farm was subsequently purchased, with the construction of a preschool and P-7 school taking place some years later.

The completion of a P-12 education complex at Bentley Park, Edmonton will present a unique opportunity for Education Queensland, as well as the Edmonton community. I am delighted that the notion of building a new high school based on established design and on dated education delivery models has been rejected, both by the progressive educators within Education Queensland and by members of the local community. To fail to seize the opportunity to create a physical learning environment capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century in favour of construction, design and teaching methodology that is locked into the past would have been doing students, teachers and the community a huge disservice. The Bentley Park education complex will be one for the future, not the past. I have no doubt that, when completed, it will become a leader in a new era of delivering appropriate educational experiences to the whole community.

Significant consultation has been carried out already and further consultation continues in order to involve all stakeholders in developing a master plan for the development of the Bentley Park complex. Many ideas are beginning to take shape already and are being progressively incorporated into development plans. The complex will have the capacity to develop a strong community orientation with a joint school and community library resource centre and shared sporting and cultural facilities. The specialist facilities in the senior secondary school such as a manual training centre, a performing arts centre and music, art, business and computing, and home economics and catering centres will be designed for multiple use by private instructors, sporting groups, recreational interest groups and the general public. Links between the school and community will be strengthened through local business involvement in industry placement programs and work experience for students. It is anticipated that strong links can be established within the student body and local shopping centres in a number of vocational subjects.

The complex will have a definite futures orientation, with computer technology being used to enhance the teaching and learning process and the efficient management of the school. The development of the school's curriculum on the school's intranet will allow students to learn at their own rates. It will ensure that students continue to learn during periods of sickness or when they are away from school and it will encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning. The greater use of computer technology allows teachers to spend more time with individual students. In addition, it provides the opportunity for teachers to more readily integrate literacy and numeracy into their overall programs.

The Bentley Park complex will combine the efficiencies and benefits of a large school with the personal touch available in smaller schools through a subschool structure. The complex will consist of junior, middle and senior subschools. This structure will allow management and teaching to remain in touch with individual students, parents and families. Students will not be lost in the crowd, but will be known to teachers and administrators within their individual subschool. Each subschool will be separated from the others through soft boundaries and through architectural design, all being connected by walkways and optical cabling. In this way, the small-school feel can be preserved within a large complex.

The subschool structure allows a specific focus on middle schooling for early adolescents. It is clear that the education needs of early adolescents are different from those of very young children and young adults. It is during the years of early adolescence that too many students begin to fall behind in their education. In general, truancy increases, students begin to drop out of school, some are caught up in cycles of inappropriate behaviour, motivation decreases and grades start to fall away.

However, during early adolescence students are making important decisions about who they really are. Early adolescence is a time of rapid physical and emotional development for young people, requiring particular attention from those who shape their school and family environment. In this period of students' lives, education delivered through a middle school structure allows for the staged transition from the one-teacher class to students having exposure to a larger number of teachers over a period of four years. Smaller teaching teams allow students to be identified as individuals and treated as such. Importantly, it is more than likely that students will be supported by pastoral care through all middle school years. That teacher can become the most visible link between the school and the family as the student progresses through the middle school.

Having spent over 25 years of my life in the education of young people, the opportunity to be involved in the creation of an integrated education precinct at Bentley Park is of immense personal and professional interest to me. I see the opportunity to create a teaching/learning environment that is more in tune with the needs of students as they pass through recognised stages of development as an enormous challenge personally and for Education Queensland and the Edmonton community.

The Bentley Park complex offers an example of how Government and the general community can deliver benefits to a range of clientele without needless duplication. Already, the Cairns City Council has expressed an interest in the joint funding and development of library services and sporting facilities. Through sensible collaborative funding, the already stretched public dollar will be able to achieve much more. For too long schools have stood in isolation from the communities that they serve. The Bentley Park complex will enable the Edmonton community to access lifelong learning. It will become the focus of the community, capable of responding to its particular needs. To achieve this end, it is vital to involve the community at all stages of the process.

A representative consultative committee has been meeting regularly to define and refine the project in response to community input through a series of public forums. Community ownership of this project is a reality. I thank Mr Steve Miller, District Director of Education, for his leadership and enthusiasm. Far from being daunted by the need to rewrite the textbook as it were, Mr Miller has embraced the challenge and encouraged others to follow suit.

The principal of Bentley Park P-7, Muriel Collings, has a well earned reputation for the successful implementation of innovative educational service delivery. She brings to the group a current practitioner's perspective and a drive for excellence that is infectious.

Steve Garret, principal of the Woree State High School, has been seconded to oversee the delicate transitional period between concept and reality. Mr Garret is an administrator of excellence and is held in high regard by his peers. He has an earned reputation for getting things done with efficiency and attention to necessary detail.

Education Queensland project officer Det Fisher can in many ways be credited with sowing the seed that has resulted in many others thinking outside the square, with an eye to the future rather than the past. Mr Fisher's experience in the planning of educational facilities is widely recognised and he gives the committee a wealth of knowledge, providing challenging options for our consideration.

Education Queensland facilities manager Bob Fell has been involved with the Bentley Park school complex since the search for a suitable site was commenced. He is one of the first people I approached regarding the acquisition of a site. His understanding of details such as building design and construction scheduling is invaluable.

Ms Pat Hale, the regional manager of the Department of Sport and Recreation, is acknowledged for her experience in issues relating to the provision of community facilities. Her ability to embrace identified community needs and translate them into multi-use facility delivery will be an important skill as the project develops through its various stages.

The president of the Bentley Park P-7 Parents and Citizens Association, Ms Margaret Leary, represents the interests of the school community at Bentley Park and potential feeder schools. Ms Leary has already proven to be an excellent community advocate and she gives the committee a perspective that is both pragmatic and accepting of the need for innovation in the provision of learning opportunities for the whole community.

Cairns 1998 Citizen of the Year and respected businessman Lou Piccone provides a valuable link to the business community and the general community. Mr Piccone has a unique insight into community dynamics. His contribution to and asking of timely and challenging questions within the committee make for better decision making by that committee. I believe that the consultative committee is playing an invaluable role in the progress of this project. The success of the concept that is now taking shape as a reality will be due in no small part to the input of the various members of that committee.

Year 8 students will be enrolled for the first time in the year 2000 and the school will add one year level, 9 through to 12, annually. That decision was taken with the understanding that to take a large number of students out of the local school catchment area would do some damage to other high schools. The decision was made to start from Year 8 and work through gradually. By the year 2004, \$18m will have been expended and enrolments are expected to approach 2,000 students. The construction schedule has been carefully staged to ensure that the design and master plan deliver a vision for a school fitting for students in the 21st century. Therefore, it is important that we get it right. I am proud to say that I have played some small part in getting the education precinct at Bentley Park up and running.

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