



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 16 November 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection in Schools

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (10.01 a.m.), by leave: Honourable members will recall that in 1997 and 1998 a series of initiatives were put in place to enhance child protection in our State schools. These initiatives included the development of a child protection policy, with associated training for staff and a telephone hotline that gave current and former students the chance to report incidents in a confidential manner. That hotline has identified some cases that have led to disciplinary action by the department and convictions in the courts.

Every one of these incidents must be treated with the utmost seriousness. Given the time period covered by the calls and the number of staff employed by Education Queensland—currently approximately 55,000—incidents of this type are statistically rare. This can be credited to the professionalism of Education Queensland's work force and to the controls instituted by the department and the Board of Teacher Registration.

The welfare of students requires our constant vigilance and a willingness to ensure that our systems are overhauled regularly to maximise their effectiveness. Consequently, I have asked my director-general to establish a task force to review the department's code of conduct, child protection policy and investigation procedures. I have asked that the task force consult with a reference group from the Queensland Teachers Union, the Queensland Public Sector Union, principals, teachers, parents and district office personnel. I have also asked my director-general to work closely with the CJC in undertaking this review.

In addition to developing approaches to further improve child protection systems, I have asked the Director-General of Education to include a reference for the task force that specifically addresses the issue of inappropriate relationships between teachers and other school employees and students. Inappropriate relationships do not always constitute a breach of law but they can represent abuse of power by a person employed in a position of trust.

The director-general has also issued an instruction to Education Queensland's Learning and Development Foundation requesting that it cooperate with the task force towards improving staff training in the areas of ethical behaviour and appropriate conduct. Clearly, the Board of Teacher Registration has a critical role to play in screening the teaching work force. I am writing to the board seeking advice as to how those screening functions could be improved through legislative change and improved administrative practice. These initiatives will start immediately and I will be in a position to advise the House of outcomes from them in the first half of next year.
