



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 15 March 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Year 3 Literacy

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (10.09 a.m.), by leave: The results of the August Year 3 national benchmark tests, which I released recently, contain both good news and cause for concern: 82.4% of our students met or surpassed the national benchmark. This is less than the other States, but only a few per cent less, and remembering that our children are up to a year younger than students in other States, this is actually better than you would expect. Our students also had fewer months of formal schooling.

Closer analysis of the figures is even more encouraging in relation to the results from previous years. The availability of the 1999 results gives us the opportunity to compare them with the 1998 results, which was the first year of testing. The results were as follows: writing performance improved with the scores rising 4.4%; spelling performance improved with the scores rising 4%; and reading and viewing improved with the scores rising 3.9%. The overall general change as indicated by these results represents an improvement for all students broadly. The Year 3 test was not a census test done by all students in the State but was done by a representative sample. Nevertheless, my department advises me that the result is statistically significant and represents an educationally meaningful improvement.

What changed between 1998 and 1999 that might explain the improvement? Changes in the performance of something as complex as literacy will arise from a number of factors. Literacy programs introduced by my predecessors, such as the Year 2 Net and the preschool curriculum, will have had an impact, and I acknowledge the praiseworthy contributions of the members for Merrimac, Ipswich and Kedron. The main change from 1998, however, has been the commencement of a \$17.5m program to provide one-to-one teacher aide support to children who were having difficulties with literacy or were identified in the Year 2 Net.

This seems to imply that the program is working, and working extremely well—indeed, beyond expectations. Nevertheless, the fact that the Year 3 students performed at a level slightly below that of other students in other States is a matter for concern, even taking into account that our Year 3 students are up to a year younger than in other States.

Another concern is that, whilst the girls did well with 86.3% meeting or surpassing the benchmark, only 79.9% of the boys performed at or above benchmark levels. Of even more concern is the fact that just 66.7% of indigenous students were at or above the benchmark. Although this result compares favourably with indigenous students in other States, the indigenous students' results indicate the need for more work in that area.

However, even here there is some light on the hill. At a subsequent sitting of this House, I will table the latest Queensland School Curriculum Council report on literacy. This will indicate that the improvement in indigenous students' results is considerably greater than the improvement in the results of the rest of the cohort.

Clearly, there are two groups here, boys and indigenous students, who need to be given additional attention in order to bring them up to the standard of the rest of the cohort. In these circumstances, I have asked the Assistant Director-General, Professor Allan Luke, who is an internationally recognised literacy expert, to conduct a re-examination of our literacy programs. He will report back to me by the middle of the year. I anticipate that the outcome of this review will be a new literacy strategy for Queensland State schools.