



Speech by

**Hon. D. WELLS**

**MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA**

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Hansard 21 June 2000

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

#### **Literacy and Numeracy**

**Hon. D. M. WELLS** (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (10.04 a.m.), by leave: I table the Literacy and Numeracy Report for Years 3, 5 and 7 from the Queensland School Curriculum Council. The report reveals the significant overall improvement in literacy and numeracy among our students between 1998 and 1999. I will refer to the Years 3, 5 and 7 test results separately.

#### **Year 3**

The performance of Year 3 students in 1999 showed improvement on that of 1998 in all strands of literacy and numeracy. The greatest improvements in literacy were in writing and spelling, while the greatest improvement in numeracy between the 1998 and 1999 cohort results was in number. Some students achieved at exceptionally high levels in both literacy and numeracy in Year 3, producing work that would do credit to Year 7 students.

The improvement made by the Year 3 indigenous students was the largest of any group. The improvement of Year 3 students in literacy was approximately 4% across-the-board. For indigenous students the improvement was in the order of 10%. Year 3 students with a language background other than English performed above average in spelling and measurement and data, although their results were slightly below those of students with an English speaking background in the other strands of literacy and numeracy. The overall result was that these students were about level pegging with the rest of the group, which suggests that our programs in this area are successful.

#### **Year 5**

The performance of Year 5 students in 1999 showed improvements in every strand of literacy but was slightly below in numeracy in 1999 compared with the 1998 results. The average results in 1999 indicated that the Year 5 girls once again outperformed the boys in literacy, especially in writing and spelling. Overall, the performance of Year 5 boys was slightly above that of girls in all strands of numeracy.

#### **Year 7**

This was the first year of testing of Year 7 students, but the pattern of gender differences in overall performance was evident in that the girls outperformed the boys in every strand of literacy, especially in writing and spelling, while the Year 7 boys achieved slightly higher results than girls in all aspects of numeracy.

I will now make some general comments. The Government has strongly supported literacy and numeracy programs in State schools and it seems that the injection of \$17.5m for early intervention programs that we have put into place from January 1999 is benefiting the young people of Queensland. To keep up the momentum I have asked internationally recognised literacy experts Professors Allan Luke and Sam Ball to examine and advise on our literacy teaching programs and our testing programs respectively.

The gap between the performance of boys and girls in literacy, which has been a feature of previous years' results, was confirmed this year. Although boys' literacy has improved, girls' literacy has improved even more between 1998 and 1999, actually leading to a widening of that gap.

Contrasting Years 3, 5 and 7 provides interesting information. Year 3 girls performed between 20 and 40 points better than Year 3 boys in all aspects of literacy, and in numeracy microscopically outperformed the Year 3 boys in two out of three categories of numeracy. But by Year 5, while the girls were still outperforming the boys in all aspects of literacy, the boys were outperforming the girls in all aspects of numeracy. By Year 7 the boys were further ahead in all aspects of numeracy and the girls were even further ahead in literacy.

Mr Speaker, this pattern of boys and girls being close together in respect of their performances in these two areas early in life and moving further apart with time is not the pattern that you would associate with a biological difference. It tends to show that the different performances of boys and girls in these two areas has nothing to do with the construction of male or female minds but has a lot to do with what we put into those minds.

The advantage of girls in respect of literacy is far greater than the advantage of boys in respect of numeracy. This tends to show in respect of our primary system that, although we need to emphasise both boys' literacy and girls' numeracy, our primary target should be boys' literacy.

I congratulate those many gifted teachers who are formulating literacy programs for boys, and I particularly congratulate those gifted teachers and enlightened school communities who were recently recognised in the Showcasing Excellence Awards in respect of their programs for boys' literacy.

Another very satisfying aspect of this year's literacy results is the outcome for indigenous students. While the Year 3s, for example, improved in literacy by around 20 scale points, the indigenous students improved by 60 points.

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr WELLS:** This is something that the honourable member needs to know. If the honourable member did not have this information, he would be totally unfit to govern the State and totally unfit to assume a position on this side of the House.

I was saying that the indigenous students improved by 60 scale points. Although these students remain well behind the rest of the group, the gap at Year 3 is closing. This appears to reflect positive outcomes from several targeted programs put in place last year. It is worth noting that the students in Years 3 and 5 performed well above the expectations of the judges, whilst the students in Year 7 performed below the expectations of the judges. This tends to show that, as the most recent group of students moves through school, we are likely to have fewer literacy problems than we have at present in the senior years of primary school and in the early years of high school.

The other day I launched a program called Teachers at Work which focuses on literacy and numeracy for students in the advanced years. I take the opportunity to congratulate the teachers involved in formulating that program, which will continue to be important for some time. This year's literacy results, however, indicate that such remediation programs may in the future be less necessary than they are now.

This year's literacy report is good news for parents, for Queensland teachers and for our students. I congratulate our teachers on their good work, and I urge all mums and dads to work in conjunction with the teachers to achieve even better results. Role modelling, such as fathers reading to their children and mothers doing maths with their children, will help our gifted teachers to achieve even better results.

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