



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (4.54 p.m.): I thank the member for Charters Towers for his very gracious remarks. In the short time that is available to me, I will refer to two issues only. One of those was raised by the honourable member for Merrimac in his qualifications to the committee's report. The other was also raised by the member for Merrimac in his remarks to the Chamber just a moment ago.

In his report, the member for Merrimac said that by 8.30 on Thursday I was supposed to have provided answers to two questions which I had not provided at that time and that this was less than 24 hours before the Estimates hearing commenced. This is actually not true. Although the honourable member managed to get this mentioned in the newspaper, it remains untrue. The honourable member is a very clever man who is capable of pulling the wool over the eyes of journalists. However, the Sessional Orders which this Parliament agreed to on Thursday, 22 June relating to the Estimates hearings said that the Minister shall provide answers to the questions referred to at least 24 hours prior to the hearing. Most of the answers I provided were provided on the Wednesday night, which was well over 24 hours before. Those that were provided a day before were provided more than 24 hours before, that is, before lunch that day for a hearing that started at 2 o'clock the next day.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr WELLS: No. The hearing started at 2 o'clock, or it would have if the member had turned up on time. I wanted that point of view noted in the Hansard record.

The other matter that the honourable member referred to was a proposition to the effect that, in respect of certain unit costs in the Education Department's statistics, some of those unit costs had gone down and, because the unit costs had gone down, the students covered by those columns of unit costs were getting less service by way of education. This is a proposition which is one step better than numerology. However, let me demonstrate to the Chamber exactly how it does not follow. The honourable member has said that the amount of money we had expended on literacy remained the same. Consequently, unit costs went down because the number of students actually increased.

The fact is that the number of students requiring literacy intervention went down because our policies have succeeded. The previous year, we increased the amount of money available to the school system by \$17.5m. We took it out of the Leading Schools magic pudding and applied it to literacy in Years 1, 2 and 3. The consequence of that was that we had a 4% improvement in literacy outcomes in the Year 3 tests between 1998 and 1999. The consequence of that is that schools which were previously having to apply that literacy money to students in Year 3 who were having difficulties and who had been identified in the Year 2 net were able to apply that money to early recognition of these kinds of cases. Therefore, we are actually succeeding in cleaning up the problem that was generated by the cuts to literacy funding introduced under the previous Government.

I will give the Chamber an instance of how the real issue is in fact the outcomes we achieve. The unit costs per student per area are an interesting accounting statistic, but they do not have the direct relationship to outcomes that the honourable member imagines. That adequately refutes the whole of the honourable member's speech. It was all based on some proposition about unit costs. It does not matter which area of the department is being looked at. It does not matter whether one is

looking at the area of primary, secondary, tertiary or special education. The unit costs will indicate the amount of money that is being spent per student, but it is only a fraction of the whole story.

In order to understand the rest of the story, one needs to understand such things as the entire culture of the system—a system in which morale has improved significantly over the past two years as a result of a completely different approach, a system which now has a sense of its own destiny as a result of the 2010 program, a system which now sees that good things are being done, a system which sees that each and every child will be treated as an individual. No longer do we have the one size fits all mentality that used to pervade Education Queensland. We now have an individual, child-centred educational system.
