



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 8 September 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Literacy

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.51 a.m.): In the past year the Beattie Labor Government has provided \$114m to improve literacy and numeracy and that investment is even now showing dividends in student literacy outcomes. New curriculum support materials have been published to support early childhood teachers with student learning in spelling and using critical literacy text work. For a cost of over \$1m, teachers specialising in indigenous education were placed in 20 schools as part of an action research program with emphasis on literacy.

The Reading Recovery Program, providing daily one-on-one support, has expanded to reach more than 5,000 students. Of these, 86% caught up to the average reading level of their classmates within five months. We provided an extra \$17.5m for additional teacher aide time to assist teachers with intervention work with needy students identified in the Year 2 Net. Again, there are early indications of improved test results flowing from this investment.

Between 80% and 84% of Queensland's Year 3 students are now performing above the national benchmark standard for reading. This achievement is comparable with levels in other States and, I point out, is particularly significant given that our students have, on average, between 7 and 11 fewer months of formal schooling and, on average, they are one year younger than their interstate counterparts.

Between 1998 and 1999, writing performance improved, with the scores rising 4.4%. Spelling performance improved, with the scores rising 4%. 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.

My department advises me that the result is statistically significant and represents an educationally meaningful improvement. Indeed, the statisticians advise me that the probability is less than one in an imperial billion—that is, one in a million million—that such differences could have occurred by chance or by typical year-to-year fluctuations.

Even with these early indications of positive momentum and improvement, we are determined not to rest on our laurels. That is why an independent literacy review was commissioned earlier this year. It has involved consultation with over 2,000 administrators and teachers around the State and has reviewed the latest research in the field. I will release the results soon so that we can continue to approach literacy improvement in a futures-oriented, integrated manner, as recommended in Queensland State Education 2010.

We also need to identify those schools currently exhibiting best practice and support them in providing assistance to other schools. The basics of speaking, reading and writing remain key skills for lifelong learning, work and community life. But the literacy basics and the multiliteracy demands posed by the new communication and information technologies are also important. These new basics are an important foundation for active citizenship in the world of the 21st century. We have laid the foundations for 21st century literacy and we are still on the job.