



Speech by

**Hon. ANNA BLIGH**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Hansard 4 December 2001

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

#### **Wards of the State**

**Hon. A. M. BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.42 a.m.), by leave: The Beattie government recognises that, while access to high-quality education is the key to improving the life chances for all Queensland children, it is especially true for children and young people in the care of the state. Our government is determined that all children are part of our Smart State agenda. In this regard, the government owes a special duty of care to those children and young people who are in the care of the state to ensure every effort is made to improve their access to education and educational outcomes.

Earlier this year the Create Foundation released an *Education report card about Australian children and young people in care* that showed Queensland is the only state in Australia to start collecting comprehensive data to track the educational outcomes of these children. While this is a positive step, the results are alarming.

Education data in relation to children in care in years 5 and 7 shows that the average test scores of these children in reading, viewing, spelling, writing, number, measurement and space were below average for their school and below the state average; 52.3 per cent of children in care were in the lower 25 per cent of the state; and only 3.2 per cent were in the highest 25 per cent. These results are not good enough and I am determined that Education Queensland will improve its response to these children.

In many cases, the circumstances of these children and young people make it difficult to access the full range of educational opportunities. Children and young people in the care of the state face particular challenges. They may have suffered significant emotional and physical trauma, are often highly mobile and in some cases homeless and lack parental support and advocacy.

The right of children and young people in the care of the state to have access to education appropriate to the child's age and development has been enshrined in legislation in the form of the Charter of Rights for a Child in Care in the Child Protection Act 1999. Queensland was the first state in Australia to include this type of charter in legislation, and I am committed to ensuring that Education Queensland actively implements this law and meets its obligations.

I would like to inform the House that I have established a working group of my education caucus committee to develop policy and strategies which ensure the full access and participation in education of children and young people who are in the care of the state. The working group will be led by the member for Mundubberra, Lindy Nelson-Carr; the member for Hervey Bay, Andrew McNamara; and the member for Logan, John Mickel; assisted by officers of Education Queensland. The interest and commitment of these members will provide valuable assistance to me in this important area.

There will also be consultation with other government departments, especially the Department of Families, non-government organisations and agencies working in the area of child protection or other services to children and young people, professional associations and youth organisations. The working group will report back to me next year with recommendations as to how Education Queensland can better support children and young people in the care of the state and improve their educational outcomes. I look forward to receiving this report and acting on its findings to ensure that these children and young people are achieving smart outcomes like other children in the Smart State.