



Speech by

CHRISTINE SCOTT

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard 11 September 2001

EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT (Charters Towers—ALP) (6.32 p.m.): I rise to support this bill which relates to the quality of non-government schools. It is important to have quality schools for all our children. I can vouch for the quality of the independent schools in my electorate, and none of them are rich schools. As the product of a state school, I am very proud of our state schools and, at the same time, a strong supporter of our independent schools because in my area, if you want an education at all past year 10 and you happen to live in Richmond, Aramac, Jericho or a host of other small towns, then a boarding school is the only way you can receive an education, and the state does not yet have any boarding schools.

The independent schools do not always have an easy road to travel, and I would like to mention to the House one example of difficulties experienced and overcome. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you were to ask me about the industries in my electorate I would tell you they are mainly mining, grazing and education. Education is vital to maintaining jobs in our city and is one of our major employers.

Today I would like to tell parliament about the fighting spirit of All Souls' St Gabriel's School in Charters Towers—a school that exists today only because the people of our community said, 'No, we are not going to lose this community asset' and demonstrated how people power can work to achieve outcomes previously thought unlikely. Two days before Christmas in 1999 the Anglican diocese of north Queensland announced the closure of All Souls & St Gabriel's School in Charters Towers. They cited declining enrolments and increasing debt levels as reasons for this drastic action. In making these decisions, what was not appreciated by the hierarchy was that in closing this particular school they were not taking on just the school and its community but indeed the city, the state, the nation and our links across the world. Shoulder to shoulder with many people of differing beliefs, I fought to help save the school, and I pay tribute particularly to my colleague the Honourable Dean Wells, the then Minister for Education, who travelled to our city to sign a new licence in time to allow All Souls' St Gabriel's reopening for the 2000 school year.

In an example of what can be achieved if the will of the people is strong enough, the land and buildings were purchased by the Dalrymple Shire Council and the Charters Towers City Council and then leased back to the reborn school. At the commencement of the 2000 academic year, the school reopened virtually debt free, but with a major task ahead to halt declining enrolments, restore community confidence and re-establish the school in the hearts and minds of their clientele. I am absolutely thrilled to be able to tell parliament that the decline in enrolments has been halted, with forward enrolments for 2002 showing an increase.

We have seen many changes to the school, including the establishment of a junior dormitory to provide a halfway house between home and senior boarding for new male students. With a new and invigorated school council, management and staff have seen fit to invest heavily in computing facilities, the employment of a sports and recreational officer and a complete reorganisation of the operations of the boys and girls boarding houses to make them quieter, better organised and more pleasant places to live. New subjects have been added to the curriculum. Traineeships in areas such as horticulture, veterinary nursing and engineering have been introduced. Horse and cattle clubs with detailed learning programs have been reintroduced, instrumental music extended and the swimming pool revamped.

Indeed, I know exactly what their horse club is all about, having been its voluntary coordinator for over five years.

An extensive refurbishment program of boarding, kitchen and classroom facilities is scheduled for the near future. All of this has been possible only because of the wonderful efforts of so many people working together—staff, parents and students, both past and present, the local community and all levels of government. I am very proud of my community and the way it has worked together to save a valuable part of the educational history and economy of Charters Towers. There is still much to be done, but I have faith in what my community can achieve and knowing the people involved as I do, the future for All Souls & St Gabriel's School looks bright.

I ask the parliament today to honour the fighting spirit of All Souls & St Gabriel's School in Charters Towers and others like it across the state that have also risen from the ashes like the phoenix—the phoenix which indeed is the symbol of this great rural school which has been doing a fine job educating students since 1921. I commend this bill to the House.
