



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (5.45 p.m.): I rise to support the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill 2001. As we have heard, it has two important aspects. The first is the creation of a comprehensive regulatory environment that will apply to all non-state schools requiring them to meet and continue to meet prescribed accreditation criteria. When this was announced in Cairns, it was widely welcomed. Discussions have shown that it has continued to be welcomed. Not only is there a recognition that it is necessary but there is also some surprise expressed that it was not already in place. Nobody in the electorate of Cairns has complained to me about our direction. Instead, it is welcomed as wise because, as members of parliament, we have a tremendous responsibility to ensure proper standards of education for students not only in the public system but also in the non-state system.

The bill is timely for Cairns and, I suspect, for other electorates around the state as there is a growth in the number of non-state schools and the kinds of non-state educational institutions on offer. Presently, I understand that about 70 per cent of Queensland students attend state schools. Therefore, nearly 30 per cent attend non-state schools. Only time will tell whether or not the growth in alternative non-state schools will lead to some changes in those proportions.

The electorate of Cairns has a large network of Catholic schools which have a long and proud history. They have produced some of the leaders of the Cairns community and other communities around Australia. They all have their own specialty and style. While they remain true to their faith, they have literacy, numeracy and other academic standards and social programs that nobody would call into question. Cairns has a variety of religious based schools, mostly of Christian denominations although there are some from other religions. Over the years, those schools have become established and they have been welcomed, although they may not be as well known as the Catholic schools which have such long histories within the Cairns region.

Other schools are developing that focus on alternative teaching styles and methods. Those schools are harder to assess. Therefore, it is appropriate that they should be accredited and monitored, as they will be through this bill. Some students need a different style of education. It is a fact that, for one reason or another, some students do not work well within our existing school network, state or non-state. We have certainly seen this in Cairns with the establishment last year of the state financed alternative campus school. Here, students mostly aged between 11 and 15, who have not been successful in standard teaching facilities, are achieving significant successes.

It is important, too, to recognise that there is pressure on schools of all kinds these days not just to achieve success in literacy and numeracy programs but also in the delivery of computers and information technology education. The pressure is also on to teach children values and behaviour, how to be members of the community and how to develop leadership skills. It is sometimes said that too much is expected of our schools in terms of that kind of values and behaviour education, and yet at the same time we recognise that too many of our children are not receiving that kind of education within their family and, therefore, that it does fall too often to schools.

Therefore, in striking the balance between academic and sporting standard forms of education and the social forms of education, it is important that we have proper scrutiny of these standards and proper regulatory environments to monitor them. With the growth of these alternative schools in

particular it is indeed timely that the responsibility falls to us to enact this legislation to ensure that appropriate standards are met and kept.

I am hopeful that a side effect of this legislation will be to raise awareness of the importance of this issue in the minds of parents right across the state and to raise their expectations of examining the schools that their children attend towards ensuring that they are appropriately accredited and that the standards so far as they can assess are being continually met.

A second important aspect of the bill is the provision for state government recurrent funding. This flows from the appropriate accreditation process, mindful of the standards that must be met before recurrent funding can be agreed to and mindful also of the geographic situation in which the new school that may be applying for accreditation and funding is situated, mindful of the number of choices and the access for children in those areas already to education and therefore mindful of not spreading our education dollar unnecessarily too far while at the same time maintaining the freedom of choice and access that is essential for a healthy society and a good education. I commend the bill for its accountability, fairness, transparency and timeliness.
