



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Hansard 11 September 2001

EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (4.36 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill. This bill gives the people of Queensland an opportunity to compare and contrast the Beattie Labor government and the Howard conservative government. Our government identified a need to differentiate between funding and accreditation programs. We need to ensure the quality of the education of our children. This bill seeks to guarantee the quality of that educational experience.

Our government identified a need and reacted. Compare that to the negligence of the Howard government, especially the Minister for Aged Care Bronwyn Bishop. If the Commonwealth does not provide funding for an aged care facility, they do not require any minimum accreditation. Howard says, 'If we're not paying, we don't care.' Bronwyn Bishop does not care if they are using kerosene baths, eating dog food or being oversedated. If they do not pay, they do not care. The Beattie government seeks to protect our children, while Howard neglects the elderly.

This bill has widespread bipartisan support because it protects both the children and the reputation of non-state schools. The non-state schools in my electorate provide a high quality educational experience for the children. Sheldon College is a great institution, led by the famous Dr Lyn Bishop. Her efforts are well known in the electorate.

The Calvary Christian College, under the strong leadership of Mike Millard, is doing a wonderful job in Carbrook. I recently attended the celebration of Chisholm Catholic College's 10-year—

Ms Keech: Chisholm is a very good school.

Mr ENGLISH: It is a great school. I recently attended the 10-year anniversary of Chisholm Catholic College. They had a dinner to celebrate, followed by an open day the following day. It was great to see the educational experiences that are being offered to the children there. I saw some students preparing for a robotics competition and was quite impressed with their efforts.

Carmel College, a Catholic secondary college, is under the strong leadership of Faye Conley. I attended an art exhibition put on by the students of Carmel College. I walked away amazed at the ability of the students and their enthusiasm for art, which is being passed on to the students by an obviously very caring and concerned staff.

Faith Lutheran Primary School in my electorate is led by Lois Pfitzner. This school currently has an application pending that the bill will impact on. I have been working with Faith Lutheran School in relation to its application for a secondary college.

I am related closely to two Catholic colleges, one of which is St Rita's Catholic School, under the leadership currently of Rhonda Thornton, who will be transferred next year. St Rita's is my parish church. The school is certainly noted for its caring nature. It is a small school but it has very much a community feel to it. There are also a number of parents sending their children to St Matthew's Catholic Primary School in the electorate of Springwood. There is another secondary college, Kimberley College. I have had a lot of dealings with Kimberley College over the last few months and have attended its centre at Mount Cotton and have also been to look at the proposed new centre at Carbrook.

It should be noted that this bill puts criteria for accreditation on new non-state schools. The accreditation's focus is on the quality of that school. The criteria were developed over a two-year period in extensive consultation with representatives in the non-state sector. Arguably, they are the most

comprehensive set of standards for non-state school accreditation anywhere in Australia. The detailed criteria will be specified in subsequent regulations that will be made pursuant to this bill.

The Webb review, which has been spoken about previously, recommended the separation of the process of approval to operate a school from the process of determining eligibility for government funding—something that the Queensland government has been enlightened enough to pick up on but on which the Howard government has been dragging the chain. This bill proposes that separation of the process protects public interest in having access to as wide a range of providers and types of educational offerings as possible. Variety is the spice of life.

To achieve accreditation, applicants will be assessed on a number of points—their administration and governance arrangements; their financial viability; their educational and student welfare program; their school resources, including staffing, land and buildings and educational facilities and materials; and their process for improving their school. The assessment made against these criteria will ensure that all schools will meet acceptable minimum standards and will be engaged in a process of ongoing review and reporting to their own communities as well as by oversight by the new Non-State Schools Accreditation Board.

I need to hark back to Kimberley College, as it is a very important issue in my electorate. I have had a number of matters relating to this bill raised with me by Kimberley College. They have raised concerns about the status of their existing application under the previous planning guidelines. I have been advised that during the course of preparing to process this year's planning approvals certain legal technicalities emerged that had made it inappropriate to assess these applications until amending legislation could be passed by parliament.

I recently attended a meeting of 400 staff, students and parents at Loganholme to discuss the matter and to learn first-hand of their concerns. I have raised these matters with the minister and passed on their concerns. I understand that amendments will be introduced into the House at this sitting to address this issue for all current applicants and I commend the minister for acting so swiftly.

To remove any doubt about the reliability of previous decisions, the amendments will also retrospectively validate the earlier use of the guidelines and also the decisions that were based on those guidelines. The guidelines and the assessment processes have not changed and will not change because of the passage of these amendments—exactly the same criteria will be used to assess the applications as were used when those applicants prepared their applications earlier this year.

I have received an assurance that once this bill is passed all current applications, including Kimberley College's, will be processed as a matter of urgency. This bill is good for our children, good for responsible non-state schools and good for Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.
