



Speech by

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EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (5.30 p.m.): The object of this bill is to establish a system of accountability and regulation applying to all non-state organisations offering schooling that protects the public interest, the standard of schooling, the safety of children and the provision of formal certification by the school with respect to the expenditure of state funds whilst at the same time ensuring state support for diversity and choice and a framework that ensures public confidence that minimum standards are met. Under the current requirements with respect to new non-state schools, there is a two-part procedure prior to the appropriate status being obtained, thus leading to funding. Firstly, new non-state schools need to obtain a planning approval that demonstrates that it is being established in an area of population growth and/or that it offers a significant element of choice to the community. Thereafter, such schools could apply for approved non-state school status.

Under section 3(2) of the 1989 act, for a new non-state school to obtain approval, the minister must be satisfied of things such as adequate facilities and efficient and regular instruction. In order to satisfy the minister, new non-state schools had to supply details of educational programs, facilities, financial and staffing resources, proposed enrolments and legal and organisational arrangements.

It transpired that a significant number of applicants were refused planning approval. But of those schools that obtained planning approval, under the legislation none had failed to gain non-state school status. The effect of the legislation was to combine an assortment of criteria with respect to standards and quality with considerations relevant to demography, choices and viability. As well, there existed schools that either did not make the grade or alternatively chose to remain outside the system undergoing no government control whatsoever other than being subject to the power of inspection.

As a result of the Auditor-General's concerns in 1998, which related particularly to the absence of a mechanism for monitoring state expenditure in non-state schools, the government established a commission under Professor Webb, Vice-Chancellor of Griffith University, to review the accreditation and accountability arrangements for non-state schools. The bill before the House reflects the recommendations of the Webb review and it seeks to implement them by establishing a statutory board to assess the capacity of a school to meet appropriate criteria, a five-yearly review mechanism to ensure that standards are maintained, the formation of a subcommittee of that board to determine eligibility for government funding, and, importantly, it will be illegal for a school to operate at all unless it is accredited.

The bill reflects the present awareness of the duty to protect children from harm. To that end, the bill provides that a director of a school's governing body is deemed to be carrying on a regulated business under part 6 of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000. In effect, that means that considerable employment screening procedures need to be undertaken to ensure protection for the child and to promote the child's wellbeing.

However, honourable members should be aware that under that act the commissioner, when deciding whether a suitability notice should be issued, may have regard to complaints, investigations and charges not resulting in a conviction, thus curtailing severely the rights of the individual. I note that that provision contrasts with provisions contained in division 4 of part 2 of the bill, which refer to actual convictions as opposed to mere charges. It will always be difficult to balance the rights of the child to be protected from harm as against, for example, the rights of a teacher who may be the victim of unproven malicious allegations made by a bitter ex-spouse or a student malcontent.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the non-state schools in Toowoomba, particularly those in my electorate. Before doing so, firstly I make mention of the only state high school in my electorate, which is Toowoomba State High School.

Ms Bligh: A great school.

Mr SHINE: I take that interjection from the minister. It is indeed a great school and is led by an outstanding principal, Mr Murray Wright. Recently this school, which operates on two campuses, Mount Lofty and Wilsonton, was recognised for exceptional parts of its curriculum. The music education program has received numerous accolades at eisteddfods and in the community. Their vocational education program has enjoyed similar success, being embraced by students and the community as a worthwhile program in which to participate. However, most importantly, the school is renowned for its special education unit. This unit provides opportunities for students who might otherwise be lost within a normal classroom. Those students are learning skills and becoming better equipped to work in the wider community. Two weeks ago the minister, the Honourable Anna Bligh, delighted these young people by meeting with them and inspecting their work.

Might I also mention two primary schools in my electorate: Harlxton, which celebrated its 100 years on 1 September—and which, in fact, is the alma mater of the honourable member for Beaudesert—and Meringandan, which this week will be 125 years old. May I also express the gratitude of the people of Toowoomba North to the minister for paying personal attention to the schools of their electorate. Since becoming the minister, she has visited Rockville State School, Toowoomba State High School, Wilsonton Campus, Wilsonton State School, Toowoomba Grammar School and Mater Dei Convent. Of course, in June this year the Premier visited Rangeville State School in Toowoomba south.

Toowoomba is unique in that its proportion of private schools vis-a-vis state schools is the reverse of the state's proportion. Approximately 60 per cent of children in Toowoomba attend private schools, and I would like to mention some of them. Downlands College is an independent Catholic coeducational day and boarding college owned and conducted by the missionaries of the Sacred Heart. It is renowned for the musical talents of its students. The college musical always proves to be an extremely professional yet fun production. This year's musical was called *In Your Dreams*, and 15 per cent of the school participated in its production. Downlands is also fiercely proud of its sporting history, in particular its principal sports for male students, rugby and cricket, and for female students, netball, softball, hockey and touch football. Members of this House who attended Downlands College include the Honourable the Minister for Transport and the members for Keppel and Warrego.

Fairholme College was founded by the Presbyterian Church in 1917. It is one of Queensland's leading independent girls schools. The school consistently enjoys remarkable academic success. For example, in 1999, 92 per cent of year 12 students proceeded to tertiary studies, with the rest either going on international exchanges or entering full-time employment. Forty-two per cent of 1999's year 12s finished in the top 20 per cent of the state with their OPs. The school also is remarkably talented on the sporting field. Recently, for the ninth year running, they won the Chronicle Cup at the Toowoomba Secondary Schools Athletics Carnival by a considerable margin. This school also has a primary school.

St Ursula's College is also situated in the electorate of Toowoomba North. It is a Catholic girls day and boarding school and it will celebrate its 70th anniversary in October. Its achievements and activities in all areas of curriculum are endless. For example, a maths scholarship at the University of Southern Queensland was offered to a year 12 student; several students have been selected for a Swiss exchange program; students have implemented the yellow ribbon program—a program designed to develop a personal safety and support structure in the school—and August's cultural expo showcased the amazing and diverse cultural talent of the students. In its 70th year, St Ursula's has developed a strong community spirit around its school motto 'Serviam—I will serve'.

In recent years the Toowoomba Christian College was established on a campus near Highfields. It professes a strong spiritual ethos that has created a close-knit community. In particular, all students within years 10, 11 and 12 participate in vocational education training to prepare them to work in the wider community. Within this group, 15 per cent of the year 11 and 12 students are undertaking traineeships that provide on-the-job training.

Toowoomba North also has a number of Catholic primary schools or convents. The first that I will mention is Mater Dei Catholic Primary School, a coeducational primary school that is especially proud of its new 'No school captains' policy. Instead of having school captains, all of the year 7 students assume a leadership role. Recently six students received awards, which were personally given to them by the Education Minister, the honourable Anna Bligh, for the Save the Children essay competition. Students were asked to write about the rights of children. Two students read their essays to a school assembly, which I attended. The intellect and passion behind their words was inspirational and a credit to the school.

The Toowoomba Preparatory School is Australia's only independent coeducational primary boarding and day school. It is conducted under the auspices of the Anglican Church of Australia. The

school has a wonderful music program and places emphasis on providing students with an inspiring cultural life. For example, the older students of the school put together a musical each year. Currently, some 200 students are preparing to hit the stage next week for this year's musical, *Absolutely Everybody*.

Sacred Heart Primary School is a Catholic coeducational school catering for students from preschool to year 7. The emphasis of the school is on providing a rounded education for all grades. Its fun runs, eisteddfods, school concerts and the annual school fete are some of the extra curricula events that the students participate in. Invaluable teacher aides work within the school, providing strong support for both students and teachers.

Finally, the Holy Name Primary School is one of the oldest primary schools in Toowoomba. It caters for students from kindergarten to year 7. It prides itself on its good staff-to-pupil ratio, its successful instrumental music program and its computer education programs. It realises that the responsibilities of a school extend beyond 8.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and, therefore, has established an after school care program.

Situated just outside the Toowoomba North electorate, literally across the road, are two significant secondary schools that I will mention. The first is Toowoomba Grammar School, a non-denominational boys day and boarding school for years 8 to 12, and Grammar Junior, which caters for years 5 to 7. It is one of the oldest high schools in the state. The school is justifiably proud of its long sports tradition. It is a respected competitor in GPS fixtures and Toowoomba interschool competitions, including Rugby, cricket, soccer, chess, volleyball, tennis, track and field, swimming, gymnastics and cross country. It is one of Toowoomba's and Queensland's top performing schools for year 12 OP results. Recently, the Education Minister opened the Hugh Rose Centre, which provides an example of Grammar's commitment to providing staff and students with top facilities to work and learn in. The Hugh Rose Centre houses work areas for staff, music teaching and practice areas, tutoring rooms and improved facilities for boarders. Clearly, the \$260,000 in funding provided by the state government—in addition to the \$528,000 that was provided for continual renovations to other main school buildings—was well spent.

Finally, I refer to St Mary's College in Toowoomba, which is of significance to members of the Australian Labor Party. An old boy of that school, Frank Forde, was one of two Queensland Labor Prime Ministers. It is an all-boys Catholic school, catering for years 5 to 12. It was established in 1899 by the Christian Brothers. It has adopted a mentor program for the entire school to participate in. A mixture of students from years 5 to 7 meet in small groups each morning for prayer, discussion, counselling and the calling of the roll. Each mentor group is assigned a school house. The school is committed to giving boys as many opportunities as possible. On Friday of this week, the blessing and opening of the refurbished art block, which the Queensland government has contributed to, will take place. I will be pleased to attend that opening to represent the Minister for Education.

We have come a long way in terms of state aid for non-government schools. A change took place in the 1960s. Prior to that, governments of all complexions refused to recognise any responsibility for non-state schools. Although I cannot be certain, I think I am correct in saying that in the last Labor government prior to the 1960s, in the Gair government, of the 11-man cabinet 10 were Catholics. It has been said that it was no accident that the education portfolio was inevitably given to the non-Catholic member in order to avoid pressure with respect to state aid. Thankfully, those days are gone and the focus of this government is to ensure that all Queensland children receive the best possible education.
