



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard 11 September 2001

EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (3.43 p.m.): It is a pleasure to say a few words in support of the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill 2001. One of the principal aims of this bill is to maintain public confidence and the high standards already existing in our non-government school sector. At the outset, I want to congratulate the minister and the department, firstly, on the standard and the comprehensive nature of the explanatory notes. I have taken the time to look at the explanatory notes of a number of bills in recent years and I would say that these are an example that other departments and ministers should follow. They do provide a very comprehensive explanation of each aspect of the bill, which is not always the case with some other bills.

The bill is based on recommendations arising out of the Webb review, as a number of speakers have mentioned. That followed an extensive program of consultation with stakeholders in the non-government school sector and government departments and agencies. That ongoing consultation has occurred since the Webb report was produced and the quality of the consultation has resulted in a high level of agreement on the content of this bill.

Again, I want to place on record my congratulations to the minister, her parliamentary secretary and their staff and, indeed, the department and its officers on a great effort in producing a quality bill. Also, as has been acknowledged, we are grateful for the very constructive contributions of the many stakeholders. The member for Stafford mentioned Alan Druery. I also place on record my appreciation and recognition of the wonderful job and contributions that Alan made to the education sector during his many years of involvement in it.

A critical element of the Webb review was that the question of access to state government funding be treated separately from approval to operate a school. Although each issue was treated separately in the bill, in most cases decisions about accreditation will be tied to accessing government funding because one of the key accreditation criteria for non-government schools will be financial viability.

Two new bodies will oversee the implementation of accreditation and funding: the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board, which will have nominees from both the Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools, and the Eligibility for Government Funding Committee. One of the new provisions in the bill makes it an offence to operate a school without some form of accreditation. For the first time fines will be able to be imposed on schools operating outside that framework. That is an important provision which protects children and parents by ensuring that a school can operate only if its administration and governance arrangements, its education program, its financial capacity to deliver and sustain its education program and its basic facilities are sufficient and meet the standards set by the accreditation board. Accreditation can also be cancelled if schools fail to maintain the standard set by the board.

Under the transitional arrangements of the bill, a school that is operating under the old act—and that applies to all of the non-government schools in my electorate—will be deemed to be accredited under the new bill for the same kind of education that the school is currently offering. All in all, this is a sensible bill which protects children, parents and schools in the non-government sector.

In common with every other member, I make an effort to support all of my local schools whenever the opportunity arises. I am blessed with having a wonderful range of both government and

non-government schools in my electorate. As this bill deals with the non-government education sector, I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight the excellent job that the local Catholic schools in my electorate are doing in providing quality and caring education for their students. All of these schools without exception have wonderfully supportive parents and friends associations and have an incredibly high level of community support for school-based activities.

Today I want to take the opportunity to place on the public record a snapshot of the status of each of the five Catholic schools in my electorate. Firstly, St Dymphna's School, which is in Robinson Road in the Aspley-Zillmere area, is a school newly acquired to my electorate since the February election and the recent redistribution. The principal there is Peter Stark. I acknowledge the excellent work of the P&F association, the current president, Mark Wilcox; the Treasurer, Tony Woodbridge; and the secretary, Wendy Reyno.

St Dymphna's caters for students from preschool through to year 7 and currently has an enrolment of about 630 students and about 50 staff. It is situated in a prime position on one of the Aspley hills and is surrounded by beautifully maintained gardens, playing areas and sacred spaces for children and their families to enjoy. In addition to its classroom teachers, the school employs teachers from music, physical education, learning enhancement, LOTE and English as a second language programs. The school enjoys the services of a speech pathologist and also a school-home liaison officer. It has a well equipped and computerised library and classrooms equipped with at least one computer. Culturally, the school has two choirs, an instrumental music program and a speech and drama teacher, and children also have the opportunity to learn the piano. The school also offers a very good outside school care program, both before and after school, and also vacation care. All of the classrooms in this particular school are airconditioned, which makes it quite an attractive feature, particularly in the summer months.

St Flannan's School is in Beams Road at Zillmere under the stewardship of principal Doreen Bazzo. I again acknowledge the P&F executive—President, Sharnie Georgey; Treasurer, Melissa Conway; and Secretary, Melissa Brennan. St Flannan's caters for boys and girls from years 1 to 7 and is hopefully proposing to extend to preschool in the near future. The school is proud of its spacious grounds and picturesque surroundings. Along with newly refurbished classrooms, of which I had the opportunity to participate in the opening a short while ago, it creates a wonderful environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. The school places a heavy emphasis on broad curriculum delivery, as well as providing instrumental music, Irish dancing and tennis which are offered as optional extras. Teachers are continually undergoing professional development to keep up to date with every aspect of curriculum in order to ensure that a high standard of education is delivered at the school.

St Kevin's School is located in Geebung under the stewardship of principal Peter Stower. I again acknowledge the P&F executive—President, Gary Kelley; Treasurer, Scott Wilson; and Secretary, Vince Moynihan. The school caters for boys and girls from years 1 to 7. Its motto is 'Laborare est Orare', 'To work is to pray'. The school considers that that applies well to the many features that make it the great place that it is. There has always been a very strong community spirit at St Kevin's associated with both the school and the local parish. The school community is always very welcoming to visitors. I always receive a very warm welcome when I go there and it is very actively involved in assisting the school to offer the best possible education to its children. St Kevin's offers a broad curriculum covering the nine key learning areas. Japanese is offered in all classes from years 1 to 7. The school has specialist music teachers and physical education teachers. Children are encouraged to strive for the best in all of their endeavours, whether in the classroom, on the sporting field or on the stage. A year or so ago I was proud to be at the school when it opened a new classroom block which was partially funded by the state government in the presence of the current Prime Minister.

St Pius School is in Apperley Street in Banyo. I acknowledge the principal, Terry Grogan, and the current P&F executive—President, Maria Egan; Treasurer, Madonna Hoelscher; and Secretary, Carmel Spargo. Again, the school offers a broad range of impressive resources and opportunities for its students. It is situated right next door to the Holy Trinity Catholic Church. The school has an assistant principal for religious education who supports the teachers and the principal in the delivery of the school's program. It has a physical education specialist taking weekly lessons, Language Other than English taught by a specialist teacher in years 6 and 7 and a teacher librarian. The children have access during the day to private tuition in instrumental music. It has a wonderful six-lane 22 metre swimming pool, two grass play areas with an adventure playground and a parish hall which is used for weekly assembly, school activities, and of course is available for community use.

St Pius also has a number of other sporting facilities such as tennis and basketball courts, which are also used by the wider community. Every classroom has a computer which is attached to a network with Internet access. It has a spacious library with a bank of computers for research. In 1998 a number of renovated classrooms and other buildings were officially opened by the Premier. Once again, I was very proud to be in his presence when that great event took place. The school also provides an out-of-school care facility which currently provides after-school care and vacation care at reasonable rates.

Above all, the school rates its teachers as its greatest asset. They are all caring professionals committed to offering the best Catholic education opportunity possible to students in their care.

The only private secondary school in my electorate is St Joseph's Nudgee College. I acknowledge the current acting principal, Michael Senior, and the P&F executive—President, Mike Denning; Treasurer, Judy Hermant; and Secretary, Anne Hardy. Nudgee College was established by the Christian Brothers as a Catholic boarding school and took its first intake of boarders in 1891, with just 41 boarders on the roll. Some 108 years later, it now caters for 550 boarders and, in total, 1,400 students. The college is very well equipped with facilities. It has 14 playing fields, two swimming pools, two indoor basketball courts, a nine-hole golf course and an international standard athletics track which the state government provided half a million dollars towards a couple of years before the Olympics. That was quite a significant investment which was approved by former sports minister Mick Veivers with my full support.

As a result of that half a million dollar investment, the north side of Brisbane received an international standard athletics facility that children not just from Nudgee College but from all of the surrounding communities, including the local state schools, now get access to. It is absolutely wonderful to see kids from local state schools, Catholic and independent schools and sporting clubs accessing that world-class facility that, if it were not built at Nudgee College, would have cost at least \$2 million to \$3 million to establish on the north side. We are very grateful for that facility.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: As the member for Mansfield points out, both the Australian Olympic team and the American Olympic team trained there prior to the Olympics. Students at Nudgee College have access to the most up-to-date educational facilities which provide a great learning experience. One of the key features of the school is a special and well-resourced advancement unit which has three full-time staff to cater for the needs of the children with special learning needs and also for students who are recognised as gifted and talented.

Members would be aware that the Nudgee College community has recently experienced a terrible tragedy following the death of two of its students from meningococcal disease. The tragic loss of Daniel Laherty and Chris D'Arcy inflicted much pain and grief on families, friends and fellow students and staff—a loss that tested but at the same time strengthened the faith of many in the school community. On behalf of the parliament, I take this opportunity to publicly express our condolences to the families of Daniel and Chris and to the entire Nudgee College school community. I particularly acknowledge the heartfelt support offered to the college during its time of need from many thousands of Queenslanders. I acknowledge the leadership and compassion provided by acting Principal Michael Senior and Father John Gillen and their support teams. I also acknowledge and thank the officers of Queensland Health who, with compassion and professionalism, gave necessary support to the school community throughout this terrible crisis. May no other school community have to endure the pain and grief suffered by Nudgee College over the past few months.
