



Speech by

Mr P. PURCELL

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Hansard 11 September 2001

EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (6.06 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to support the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill 2001. The objectives of the bill are to support a regulatory environment which applies to all non-government state organisations offering schooling to young people; to see that the community can have confidence that all schools meet the criteria and minimum standards that parents these days require and demand that their children receive; to protect the public's interest in the standard of schooling and the safety of the children who attend those schools; to establish a five-yearly renewal process to make sure that the accredited school continues to meet that criteria; and also to establish a system of accountability so that the state funds expended in those schools are expended in accordance with the purpose for which they were granted. In addition, the bill contains an amendment to the Education (Work Experience) Act 1996 seeking consistency with the insurance requirements relating to work experience.

I will just reiterate the arrangements that this bill will be replacing. Under the previous arrangements in Queensland, the Commonwealth new schools policy operated to restrict the number of new schools established with a view to achieving efficient use of public funding. When the Commonwealth policy was abolished in 1997, a more flexible process also aimed at ensuring efficient use of public funds was established in Queensland by a ministerial decision with the support of non-state schools' authorities. The planning approval component required a proposed school to demonstrate that it would not have a significant impact on state or non-state schools in its catchment area in the next five years. To meet this requirement, a proposed school had to be located in an area of population growth or offer a significant element of choice to the community.

Applications were processed by a planning assessment committee from both the Department of Education and representative bodies from the non-state school sector. Proposed schools receiving planning approval could then apply for approved non-state school status. Applications were assessed by qualified assessors who reported to the Office of Non-State Schooling in the Department of Education. Proponents of schools which were unsuccessful in achieving authorisation to operate could apply again in another location or establish themselves without authorisation and without state funds.

The minister had no power to either close a school or to take action against an operator who simply chose to operate outside the realms of government regulation. This bill will rectify those weaknesses in the education process; that is, the fact that different approaches to approval processes has evolved in different districts and the absence of clear criteria for the assessment of schools seeking approval to operate. The government had no mechanism for monitoring state expenditure of non-state government schools and no formal requirement for non-state schools to account to the government for the expenditure of state funds. With a view to resolving these issues, the review of the accreditation accountability arrangements for non-state schools was conducted in 1999. The review committee was led by Professor Roy Webb and, after extensive consultation, published its recommendations for regulating the non-state school sector. These recommendations form the foundation of this bill.

After the consultation that has been undertaken by the Education Department with non-state schools, I believe that the result is one that will please all parties except for a very few. On that note, there are a number of non-state schools in my electorate, including three Catholic primary schools. St Peter and Paul's is located a block from where I live and is the school which my five children attended. That school certainly afforded my children a very good start in life by providing a good education in a loving and caring environment. St Peter and Paul's has just embarked on the first stage of a two-stage

building program. I am sure the minister would remember approving over \$700,000 for the first stage, which the school community was delighted with. There will be another application to the Catholic Education Commission and to the minister in the not-too-distant future for stage 2, which I am sure will be supported because of its need and merit.

Mr Barton interjected.

Mr PURCELL: Yes. This school will go from two streams to three streams, that is, from kindergarten to grade 5. As we know, many schools in the Catholic education system lose their boys to the boys' colleges in the area. St Peter and Paul's caters well for those people who want to send their children to non-state schools in the Bulimba district.

St Oliver Plunkett Catholic School at Cannon Hill services that area very well. I attended its fete last Sunday and, by the way, took along some of my relish to be sold. Fetes invite the community into the schools to participate, and Catholic schools do it very well. Fetes sell sweets and home preserves, or even hold jumble sales which enable the community to support the children and the school by partaking in the fete and taking a few goodies home. I bought some homemade cakes and biscuits at the fete last Sunday. You could not make the goodies for the price they were sold at. I can assure the House that it was very well done.

Mr Lingard: What clause is that that are you referring to?

Mr PURCELL: That clause refers to non-state schools, as the member for Beaudesert would know.

Another non-state Catholic school in my electorate is St Thomas at Camp Hill whose principal is Stephen Dunn. This school has just completed a fairly large building program which has certainly enhanced the school for those looking for a non-state school environment. I should say that Trish McMahon is the principal at St Oliver Plunkett and John Power is the principal at St Peter and Paul's.

Cannon Hill also boasts another independent school, the Cannon Hill Anglican College, with Greg Wain as its principal. That college has only been established in the last eight-odd years. It is a high school and a primary school. It is very well patronised not only by the Cannon Hill area but also attracts students from further afield. It has a very nice bush setting. A lot of thought was put into the design of that school and the buildings for students to study in.

One of the longer established high schools in my electorate is Lourdes Hill at Hawthorne on the river with Kay Herse as its principal. I think she is the first non-systemic principal to hold that position at Lourdes Hill. It is an all-girls school. It is also a boarding school which caters for girls from the country who do not have the chance for a secondary education in their own district. It is also the school my wife attended, as did my three daughters. So I have a fair few ties there. That school certainly did a great job with my girls. With those few words, I support the minister and the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill 2001.
