



Speech by

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EDUCATION [ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS] BILL

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (4.43 p.m.): It is an absolute pleasure, as a member of the minister's education legislative committee, to rise in support of such an important bill. However, from the outset, let me say that it is my belief that we should see education issues in this country not in terms simply of public versus private. Our concern with education should be aimed at providing all of our children with the best quality and most suitable education. In short, we need to make sure that all of our children have the best opportunity to learn.

Sadly, the federal government has devoted a great deal of the past 18 months to creating disunity and discord within the education sector. Dr Kemp wants to cast the education debate in this country as one where public schools are pitted in a struggle with private schools; at the same time his government is working to make sure that federal spending on education is cut, then cut some more and then cut a bit further.

These days a child who is denied a decent and appropriate education is a child who is realistically being denied a fair start in life. With technology changing at the rate it is, it is absolutely crucial that all of our children are given the best opportunity to have a good education. This is not something that is new; in fact a compatriot of mine from Ireland, albeit in the 18th century, discovered this at that time.

Edmund Rice realised that the poor of Ireland were being denied an education and, as a result, were being denied a future. I did a bit of research just to make sure that I got my facts right and thought that I would highlight some points about Blessed Edmund Rice to the House. He was born in Callan, County Kilkenny, in 1762 and he died in Waterford in 1844. He worked for his uncle, a Michael Rice, a merchant and ship chandler. Edmund was a very good businessman and soon was running the family business.

Sadly, his wife died in an accident in 1789 and from this time onwards Edmund devoted a considerable amount of his life to prayer and charitable work, particularly with the poor and marginalised. He was drawn to the plight of the poor children whose parents could not afford to send them to Ireland's schools at the time, schools that people had to pay to attend. Later he opened a school—in 1802—and over the next 20 years a large number of people from many different walks of life joined him. Edmund Rice eventually formed the new religious congregation, as I am sure we all know, of the Christian Brothers. This was formally approved in 1820.

The provincial head of the Christian Brothers for Queensland and the Northern Territory is situated on Kate Street in the suburb of Indooroopilly, as is a wonderful Christian Brothers School, Nudgee Junior College. Nudgee is a school that has a commitment to values that I know a lot of members in this House share. Its full name is St Joseph's Nudgee Junior College—St Joseph being the patron saint of workers. I know that the principal, Mr Sean Gordon, and the assistant principal, Patrick Colley, are doing a great job, because I was there last Friday to present the school with the Queensland flag and to attend a year 7 assembly. I am continually amazed at how able and capable our primary school children are. I think back to the days when I was in primary school and cannot imagine being as capable of doing the amazing sorts of things that they are doing now.

I was very fortunate to be able to join the year 7 parents and the year 7s for a mass which was celebrated by Father Ray Brain, and afterwards for a morning tea. It was great to catch up with some of the students who performed the previous week at the school's spring concert, which I thought was

absolutely fantastic. Nudgee Junior has an absolutely fantastic choir at the moment and recently won the Catholic schools choir competition, which is an amazing achievement for a school that does not pick its choristers based on their voices. It is a 'roll up and join in' sort of show, which I think says a great deal about the quality of the teaching and training that the children get when they join that choir.

The spring concert was absolutely fantastic. It was compered exceptionally well by the school captain, Douglas Cowley, and the vice captain, Jo Walsh. We were entertained by not only the senior concert band but also the junior concert band, both conducted by Ms Eleana Gillespie. The instrumentalists really made the evening for me. We had Jonathan Williams, a year 6 student, on the piano. We then had a piano duet by Alex Robson and Thomas Peters from year 7 followed by a fantastic tuba duet which involved Matthew Hendry, and Mrs Gillespie also lent a hand.

When I went to school—and I have to say it was a Christian Brothers school—tap dance was not something that we would expect to find at a spring concert, but that is not the way these days. Nudgee Junior has an absolutely outstanding tap dancer in Nethaniel Hancock from year 6. He danced to the tune *Nice Work If You Can Get It*. It was a truly remarkable experience. I think what was best was the fantastic rendition of *Danny Boy* by the Nudgee choir conducted by Barbara Robinson. Coming from that part of Ireland, a tear always comes to my eye when I hear *Danny Boy* performed particularly well.

The evening was concluded by the percussion ensemble of Nicholas Howes, Daniel North, David Wijeyakulasuriya, Lorcan Rae and Joseph Hammer. They were followed by a clarinet ensemble with Sean Geer, Luke Johnston, Nick Lavan and Anthony McMonagle. Dylan Nagle played *Sunset Blues* on the piano and Chris Leaman and Max Rankine both played the saxophone for us before Lachlan Cook very ably played on the piano *The Entertainer*, which is an exceptionally difficult piece for a year 7 student and he should be congratulated. Before we walked to the next building and had a look at the art show, year 6 blue performed a drama called *Scream and Run Away*. What makes their drama even more outstanding is the fact that they had only seven days to prepare and rehearse.

But Nudgee Junior is not the only fantastic school that I have in my electorate. Holy Family, which is just up the road, also has a great tradition in the arts. Last Wednesday night they had their annual arts show. I should congratulate John Fitz-Walter, a teacher at the school, who did a tremendous job coordinating a large number of students on the night. They had a fantastic static display in the resource centre. They had fantastic music, but I think the best thing about the night for me was the amazingly decorated love seat.

All members would be familiar with the tree that we often find in a village on which people etch the name of someone. There is a bit of a tradition at Holy Family that has been going on for a long time. There is a particular tree on which names are etched. The school decided that they would create a piece of sculpted art involving the tree, which they have named *The Love Seat*. Every individual student in the school decorated their own tile and each tile was put onto this seat, which has been glazed and is absolutely beautiful. There are then three separate seats, each dedicated to a different aspect of love: family, friends and God. The children who contributed to that and also the teachers and parents certainly ought to be congratulated.

The liturgy that was held on the night was special for a number of reasons. Not only were the children in fine voice, but also it was the first liturgy for the school community that involved Indooroopilly's new Catholic priest, Father Leo Burke. Leo is now the new priest in residence on Fairley Street, Indooroopilly. He is formerly from the hospital. I have to tell honourable members that he is a lovely bloke and the community is very lucky to have him.

I would like to pay some special congratulations on another achievement of Holy Family, and that is for Laura Bittner, who came second in the Queensland Irish Dance Championships. Laura is off to Adelaide in October to compete in the national titles, and I am very confident that she will do very well.

The school also had some excellent results in the local regional athletics carnival. Grace O'Connell did very well in the sprints. Emily Lewis performed admirably in the 200 metres. Katherine Johnson and Gabrielle Wikman did particularly well in the shot-put. We wish them well at the regional carnival, which is coming up in October.

Holy Family is a school that has a great tradition of culture and sport. Honourable members might ask: what more could a school have? But they have more: they also have an excellent academic record. I had very great pleasure to be at the Tournament of Minds in Indooroopilly about two weeks ago. The Holy Family's Team 4 received an honour award for their presentation and their solution. Congratulations should go to them. For the information of members, the Tournament of Minds is not just for students from one year level; they have students from a number of year levels and they get no parental help at all. Kimberley Budgen from year 7, Priyali Wijeratne from year 6, Elliane Varghese from year 6, Hannah Pedrolini from year 5, Annabelle Paxton-Hall from year 4, Becky Rhodes from year 5 and Sharrula Ginige from year 7 deserve special congratulations.

While we are on the subject of Holy Family, I would like to invite all members to their annual jazz night on 27 October. The jazz night is a fantastic evening and one that I am sure all honourable members would like to attend. Tickets are available by calling the school office on 3870 9600.

Next door to Holy Family is another wonderful non-state school, Brigidine College, which recently had a very successful open day. They, too, performed very well in the Tournament of Minds. They also have a very active St Vincent de Paul group. They had students performing at the opening of the Goodwill Games. I would like to make special mention today of the opening and blessing of the Brigidine College refurbishment by Ms Leneen Forde on 12 August. It is always great to see a school like Brigidine that not only works so hard to provide their students with a great education but also is so much a part of the local community.

I would also like to mention the four entries by students from Brigidine College that were selected for inclusion in the 2002 desk calendar. They produced posters to commemorate Refugee Sunday and will find their artwork in next year's calendar. Petrina Hetherington and Bridget Preeo produced the picture for April; Rachel Milford for May; Carly Collins, Clare Nelson and Julia Carroll for August; and Tara Blackmore for November.

Across the road yet again we have another wonderful school, St Peter's Lutheran College, where I attended a trivia night last Friday. My team did not do as well as we had hoped, but that is only an incentive for us to come back next year and try even harder. The money raised from the trivia night is going to help pay for St Peter's performing arts centre. St Peter's has a great tradition in the performing arts. Earlier this year it put on a fantastic play, *Medea* which I think is a particularly great achievement for high school students.

St Peter's also had a delegation of year 7s visit Parliament House in the last sitting, and they were very impressed by the architecture of the building and also by the welcome that they received. St Peter's is a school that has been serving the Indooroopilly community since 1945 when it started with 56 students. Now there are around 1,700 students in its care. Its motto is 'plus ultra', which means 'ever higher'. The school believes that there are four things which would encourage parents to choose it: it is Christian, it is coeducational, it has a great curriculum and because of its commitment to its core values.

The Brisbane Montessori School is a school that is not regularly spoken of in parliament, but its idyllic setting alongside the river in Fig Tree Pocket creates a unique setting. It is also appropriate, because it has a fairly unique educational system. I attended a tree planting ceremony at the school a number of weeks ago which was organised entirely by the cycle 3 children. That is not something that happens at schools every day. The school, under the stewardship of Allen Kloeden, ought to be congratulated. The Brisbane Montessori School has 290 children and is always happy to talk to potential enrollees. It is growing all the time. It is a great place.

I also make mention of the non-state school that is most local to where I live, that is, Christ the King School. I thought it was appropriate to mention this school, because on NAIDOC Day the primary school organised a very special presentation. It held an all-day event where Aboriginal elders and Torres Strait Islander elders taught the children things like basket weaving. Uncle Ces Fisher told the children the story of why koalas live in trees and how the brolga got its name. There was also an excellent Aboriginal dance workshop, Aboriginal painting and Torres Strait Islander songs. The children could look at artefacts. This event was organised not only by the teachers but also by members of the community in the Indigenous Friendship Group, which involves a large number of parents.

I thank all of the local non-state schools for making me so welcome in the six months since I was elected as the member for Indooroopilly. I thank Sean Gordon from Nudgee Junior; Margaret Gallen, the principal of Holy Family; Madeline Sayer from Brigidine College; Sally Chandler from St Peter's; Allen Kloeden from Montessori; and, of course, John Wilson from Christ the King School. Each have unique schools. I think they all handle them particularly well.

I am very pleased to support this bill because it removes some of the uncertainty that non-state schools have had in the past. It also ensures that there will be a continuing high standard of education in non-state schools. The bill will maintain public confidence in the operation of non-state schools. It will foster educational choices. Importantly, it will enable non-state school governing bodies to become eligible for government funding, which we all know is very important. The bill is also significant in that it allows us to fulfil our international obligations under the UN covenant and the rights of parents to have a choice of schools for their children other than state schools. It is important that non-state schools conform to minimum education standards laid down by the state. This will provide parents with a great deal of peace of mind.

In concluding on such an important bill as this in relation to non-state education, it is worth noting that there is not one single member of the Liberal Party in the chamber. I would think that that is a crying shame.
