



Speech by

ANITA PHILLIPS

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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EDUCATION [QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY] BILL

Ms PHILLIPS (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.05 p.m.): I am delighted to speak in support of the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Bill 2001. The objectives of this legislation are commendable. I congratulate the Minister for Education on developing them. One of these is to improve, through increased retention, the social cohesion and the social and human capital of Queensland. Attitudes to schooling are formed at a very young age, often from the first time a child steps inside a school. Sometimes it is even younger, when they hear stories brought home from older siblings. Therefore, our goal of increasing retention needs to be started at the primary school level, developing positive attitudes to school and education.

In Thuringowa, I have five very good state primary schools that are all trying to pursue this objective. Kirwan State School, where Doug King is the principal, has about 800 students and is in an older part of my electorate. The parents have a very active P&C under Les Searston, which is always working hard to obtain extra facilities for the school. I recently presented them with a cheque from the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund, which they have already used to construct shade sails and landscaping outside the junior classrooms for years 1 and 2 so as to have a lovely outside learning environment.

The Bohlevale State School has a new principal, with Derek Hedgecock moving into another area of Education Queensland after a long and successful career at this school. I wish him well in his new position. We worked together in obtaining improvements at his school, in particular the new senior boys ablution block. Norm Hart is the new principal, coming most recently from Ingham; he has been at other schools around our area for many years. I welcome Norm. I am sure that his football playing skills will be greatly appreciated by the school team.

The Weir State School is one of the oldest schools in Thuringowa, and Townsville for that matter, although only one historic building remains as a testament to those pioneering days when it was on the bullocky trail from the coast to the timber hinterland. Kerry Linwood is the principal of this large and highly successful school that is eager to take on new and innovative programs. The Willows State School is one of the newest in our region and has Carol Buchanan as the very capable principal. It has a well-deserved reputation for providing modern, up-to-date education in line with its physical image. This school is located in one of the fastest-growing suburbs in Queensland, with houses being constructed in new estates at an incredible rate.

Kelso State School is located at the southern end of my electorate, close to the Ross River Dam. It is a smaller school and is very much part of the semi-urban community that surrounds it. Nev Horn is the hardworking principal at Kelso. The P&C has been working very hard on fundraising for airconditioning and has done remarkably well for a small school in a lower socioeconomic area. It is delighted that the minister has announced that it is on the list to have the necessary work completed during the next financial year, and I thank the minister for this announcement.

Rasmussen State School is in an outer suburb with higher than average public housing. Typically, then it suffers from many of the problems of outer suburban areas, such as social isolation and limited transport options and infrastructure. About 40 per cent of the children at the school are indigenous. So I am pleased that last year the area was designated by this government for community and urban renewal projects. The school, through its principal, Jan Metcalfe, other teachers and the P&C, particularly Christina Salmon, has worked very actively and is very much involved in the renewal

program. We are working together with the rest of the community and the local council to achieve some wonderful outcomes which will benefit everyone, and I wish to thank the Minister for Housing for his encouraging support for the project.

I also have three Catholic primary schools in Thuringowa, including Good Shepherd at Rasmussen with Paul Cosgriff as principal and St Anthony's at Deeragun with John Nuttall. During last year I was honoured to represent the minister at the opening of classrooms at both schools that had been funded to a total of nearly \$800,000 by our non-government schools capital works program. The other Catholic primary school is the junior part of Ryan Community School. In addition, the Minister for Education has recently announced another \$1 million to be spent this year on capital works for all these Catholic schools.

There are three state high schools in Thuringowa. Kirwan High School is the largest high school in Queensland with around 2,000 students. Principal John Livingstone has also ensured that the school's size is matched by its success. There is not one area of the curriculum that Kirwan High School students do not excel in, be it information technology, literature, art, science or music. Individual students won state awards in all of these areas last year—and that is not all. There are eight current or recent Kirwan High School students in the Cowboys Rugby League Young Guns squad which has been so successful in national level competition. The school also provides for students who are not high achievers. A couple of months ago I represented the minister at the opening of their brilliant new special education unit, which includes state-of-the-art facilities.

Thuringowa High School is a much smaller school, but it has a disproportionately highly successful performance. Jan Meehan, the principal, is extremely dedicated and committed to achieving positive outcomes for every student at the school, be they academically brilliant or challenged. The school's annual theatre restaurant is a social highlight for all the Townsville area and is always sold out well in advance. While a thoroughly entertaining evening—even if as the local member I have been the butt of some of their jokes—it also gives a wonderful experience to students in every facet of the performance.

Northern Beaches High School is a relatively new school, with its first year 12s graduating at the end of last year. It is in the rapidly advancing coastal strip to the north of Thuringowa. Gail Kirkwood is the very capable principal at the school who is determined that her students will receive the best possible education despite being out of town. This year the school will open a wonderful new music centre, built with a grant of over \$750,000 from our government. As with all the schools in my area, I am always delighted to visit and am very pleased in particular to have been asked to address the female students and staff on the occasion of their International Women's Day breakfast in early March.

The Catholic high school in my area is the senior school at Ryan. Ernie Christie, the principal, is also doing a great job. Ryan will be hosting the regional schools' constitutional convention in Townsville next week, about which the minister spoke this morning, and I have been asked to be a speaker. During the day, representatives of all high schools throughout the entire area will debate aspects of the Queensland and Commonwealth constitutions.

Another aim of this legislation is to provide a seamless development of syllabus across the compulsory years of schooling and into the post-compulsory years. I have another school in my electorate that is trying against all odds to implement this principle. In some respects I think I have saved the best till last. Shalom Christian College is a non-government indigenous school with over 300 students. The primary children are principally from the local Townsville-Thuringowa region, but the secondary students come from 26 Aboriginal and Islander communities throughout north Queensland, the cape and Torres Strait. Students come from disadvantaged island and western gulf communities which have delayed literacy achievement compared with mainstream Australia. Most of these communities do not speak English as their first language. In fact, at least 37 languages are spoken in the students' homes, including Torres Strait Creole and Aboriginal English.

Rob Mehigan, the secondary principal at Shalom, has been part of a team motivated to find alternatives to literacy teaching following low results for the school's students in the year 5 and 7 state wide testing program. They came up with a possible solution, the Scaffolding Literacy Program, which has been developed in consultation with Professor Brian Gray of the University of Canberra. It has proven to be very successful with indigenous students as it enables teachers to successfully engage students with a wide range of literary experiences. The school introduced this program last year. The program is highly supportive of student learners and has a strong oral component coupled with explicit teaching of written English. To ensure its success, the whole Shalom school community was engaged in the program, including the community board, the principal, teachers, the liaison officer, teacher assistants and tutors.

Results of the program at the end of the first year of its introduction to primary students have been very encouraging to the school community. From a base level of very low literacy levels—many students in year 7 were reading at up to six years below their class level—the achievements of the students have been quite remarkable. Within one year all middle and upper levels in the primary school

now have a majority of students reading at or above their class text level. Quite apart from the critical results, student literacy standards have had an enormous boost, and teachers report that teaching is becoming much more manageable. As students experience success in their reading, their interest and enjoyment also increase. As teachers observe the positive effects of the program they are motivated to continue with renewed vigour. The outcomes of the program show an increase in year 1 classes from 100 per cent non-readers at the beginning of the year to 71 per cent reading at their chronological age at the end of term 4. In year 2 students also went from no-one being able to read to 71 per cent reading, and in year 3 from 21 per cent to 74 per cent. This trend was followed in all classes. These remarkable results contributed to the school being nominated by Education Queensland for a National Literacy and Numeracy Week award in 2001, which it subsequently won.

Shalom Christian College has recently undertaken a strategic planning exercise and developed two principal objectives, one of which is to increase the literacy level of all students, primary and secondary, to their chronological age. I would like to congratulate all those responsible at Shalom for their foresight and total commitment to improved educational outcomes in line with our government's objectives. The state government's recurrent funding to this school at the highest possible level is helping it to achieve those goals. Shalom is also working on other important objectives: to increase average attendance to at least 160 days a year for all students; to increase the total enrolment to 500 students; and to improve its capital infrastructure. I will be working with the school to identify areas of assistance and funding that might help it to achieve these goals.

This government's Queensland State Education 2010 strategy provides a powerful big picture of the future of education in our state. As can be seen from what I have outlined, the achievements of all the schools in Thuringowa are consistent with this plan and encourage them to persevere until they reach their goals. Finally, I congratulate the minister on having the tenacity and determination to bring this bill to fruition, and I commend it to the House.