



Speech by

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EDUCATION [QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY] BILL

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (2.52 p.m.): I am pleased to contribute to this debate on the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Bill 2001. This bill seeks to establish a single statutory authority that will subsume the functions of three existing authorities. One of these is the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority which was established in 1990. TEPA is to be congratulated on the excellent work it performs in assisting Queensland students to define pathways from school to tertiary education. TEPA has an extensive program of regional visits to ensure that students across the state can access this advice.

Among other things, the bill provides the new authority with a specific function to advise the Minister for Employment and Training on relevant vocational and educational matters. The involvement of this minister and the Minister for Education sends a clear message that the government is determined to ensure that every possible opportunity is provided to young Queenslanders to complete 12 years of schooling or its equivalent in the training and related sectors. Membership of the authority covers representation from state, independent and Catholic sectors, as well as education unions, parent bodies and special education providers. A manageable but representative number was achieved because of the commitment of the sectors and the stakeholders.

Testament to cooperation between schools is a program in my electorate which has had a great deal of success with the three Rs. It is an alternative school occupying space at the Tallebudgera Beach school, provided with the assistance and support of Allan Rafton, Tallebudgera Beach school principal. Students who do not fit into mainstream schools, because of their behaviour or other problems, and may be facing—or have experienced—expulsion are referred to the alternative school by their current school. It is funded by other government schools on the southern Gold Coast as a pilot program. Mr John Graham is the coordinator of the three R program and his commitment to the continuing education of three R students is inspirational. To date, the results have been astounding.

Current methodology has determined that there is a lot more to preparing our children for adult life than the achievement of basic skills. The three Rs in this school do not stand for reading, writing or 'rithmetic. In this case the three Rs now stand for retrieve, resilience and reintegrate. The aim of the three R program is to reintegrate students back into the mainstream school. It targets the social, behavioural and academic needs of at-risk students between the ages of eight and 14. As to retrieving the students from their situation of difficulty, often this means removing children from schools that do not have the time nor the expertise to provide these children with a path to learning. These students cause serious disruption to their fellow students, causing immense pressure on parents and teachers who may not be able to stop the escalation of disruptive behaviour. Resilience provides the students with the resilience to cope more effectively. This means providing skills to enable the children to respond appropriately in the classroom, improving their social abilities as well as their learning abilities, setting guidelines and working with the children both individually and in small groups to teach them the value of team work, consideration and learning.

As to reintegration, the whole purpose of the program is to enable children to return to their own schools and resume their education with the ability to actively participate in school life. To this end students will usually spend some time each week at their own school in order to retain their contacts and focus on their ultimate goal of returning full time to their own classes and succeeding there. The focus of the program is flexible and allows for the different needs of the students. Some students may be able to return to their own school on a full-time basis within as little time as a term. Others require a

longer period of assistance. The education, social and behavioural needs are addressed through involvement in a diverse range of activities where the emphasis is placed on cooperative, meaningful, experiential learning. It is considered essential for the students to accept from their earliest days that their involvement in the program is temporary.

The school is set right in the middle of one of the most beautiful parts of my electorate, on the site of the government's \$18 million redevelopment at Tallebudgera Outdoor Recreation Centre. I visited the school recently and was impressed with the dedication of the teachers. These teachers are on nonstop duty from the beginning of the day to the end. There is no opportunity for a break from the demanding work, but teacher-in-charge Veronica Buhner told me that the rewards outweighed their personal inconveniences.

The value of the three R program can be seen in the reactions of the parents, many of whom are driven nearly desperate by the time their child is referred to this alternative school. The pleasure they receive from the improved behaviour of the child is profound. They are amazed and delighted that their children can develop such an enthusiasm for learning and such worthwhile social relationships. The school currently undertakes to assist a maximum of 15 students at any one time. They have to work carefully to ensure that they have a mix of students who can work together and develop a sense of team which is one of the bases of the program. The three R program focuses on the ideals of a supportive school environment. Positive outcomes have not only been noted in the individual student but also flow on to the whole class at the student's base school. Many schools have reported that the returning students are not only no longer a disruptive influence on the class but that they have become an extremely positive one.

As I said earlier, this alternative school is based in the grounds of the Tallebudgera Beach school. Children from all over Queensland come to the beach school for a week or two to immerse themselves in a curriculum which includes team and individual sport with established rules, outdoor activities that promote teamwork, confidence, respect for surroundings and trust. The school's position at Tallebudgera is ideal because it provides terrific activities on the doorstep. The children can walk around Burleigh headland, swim, snorkel, fish and sail in the ocean. They also enjoy such activities as archery, athletics, rock climbing, karate and boxing. School was never like this in my day.

Education for all is a responsibility of government. We need to ensure that we offer a relevant curriculum to students with a variety of needs. Student satisfaction with curriculum has been found to be an important ingredient in school retention rates. The new authority will provide this in the development of syllabuses for students. Resources and services for the professional development of teachers will support the implementation of approved guidelines and syllabuses. Under this bill the Minister for Education will have a strategic role in the oversight of the authority and its systems and processes. This bill is a significant step forward in our determination to improve the number of young Queenslanders completing 12 years of schooling or the equivalent. I commend the bill to the House.
