



Speech by

**GARY FENLON**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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Hansard 19 February 2002

**EDUCATION [QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY] BILL**

**Mr FENLON** (Greenslopes—ALP) (4.50 p.m.): It is a great pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Bill 2001, particularly because it is a smart bill. It is part of the Smart State strategy, because it really complements and fulfils the objectives of that great document, Education 2010. That is the blueprint for education in this state in the future. I am passionate about that document, and so is the majority of my school communities. It is not just an airy-fairy dream; it has been derived from the community. I feel very much a part of it and the rest of my community feels very much a part of it, because we were part of the original consultation process.

The Education 2010 blueprint came right from the schools in my community and other communities across Queensland. It is an intelligent document that sets the foundation for an education system in Queensland that will give children a strong and competitive future in this state and in the world economy. This bill certainly complements Education 2010, because the fundamental elements of that document ensure continuity through the school system from P-12. The document is about providing alternative pathways for children to find their way through the education system. Indeed, I am not just talking about children but also about young adults, because the implementation document refers to the need to support people until the age of 24 through the secondary school education system and prepare them for employment and/or post secondary education.

In educational terms, there is a great consciousness in the community of what I refer to as seamless education, that is, an education system that works smoothly from P-12 and in the way the Education 2010 blueprint dictates, that is, that our communities are interconnected and that our schools are no longer isolated islands. It is not long ago that the ethos of many people in our school communities was to have a barbed wire fence around their little domain. Those people did not have to connect with the rest of the world and they felt very safe and comfortable within that domain. I am very pleased to see that our school communities are supporting this great move to ensure that those days are long gone and that our schools interact with each other—primary schools interacting with other primary schools and primary schools interacting with secondary schools.

This move is manifesting itself in many ways. An exciting example of this in my electorate is the Whites Hill College, which is the amalgamated Camp Hill Secondary School and the Whites Hill Primary School. The Deputy Premier, the member for Chatsworth, and I have the privilege of representing that school. Although only the school ovals fall within my electorate, I still have a great interest in that school and many of my constituents have children who go to that school. This campus will become a P-12 school, with a lower, middle and upper school. That is a very exciting concept, because it is the embodiment of the fundamentals of the Education 2010 blueprint. It is an exciting concept in that not many of these schools operate in Queensland. Certainly, they have been operating to a limited degree in the private sector. But it really is an adventurous move in the secondary sector and I have every hope that it will work extremely well. There is a buzz of excitement in my local community about the school. The Xavier Special School will become a form of satellite campus to the Whites Hill campus, which is also very exciting.

The bill is indeed important, because it fulfils the exact requirements of the 2010 strategy by providing the requisite institutions that will support a smooth transition from P-12. It will provide all the relevant infrastructure in one place—what one might call a one-stop shop—for all of the relevant aspects of syllabus development, assessment, certification, and tertiary entrance in the P-12 context

with articulation to post secondary destinations. So it is certainly very logical and very timely that this apparatus be put into place. It is very consistent with that Smart State blueprint, Education 2010.

In my electorate, the fundamental direction of Education Queensland and the implementation of Education 2010 can be seen in AccessEd being established at the Coorparoo education precinct. This is a great venture. The government has spent \$9.2 million on putting Education Queensland's AccessEd into that campus. I tell my local education community that we have a nuclear power station of education curriculum material based in my electorate, with distance education and people who are at the forefront in researching and developing the relevant technology to promote computerised education in the future. This is a fantastic opportunity for my community. Also housed at that precinct are the main education teaching libraries and corporate libraries for Queensland. I know that the teachers in my electorate are making great use of this facility. The education community in my electorate is very excited about plugging into this power station of educational energy.

A couple of other elements that I would like to touch upon very briefly relate to the issues that this new body will be required to confront. One of those is the issue of assessment. That issue will continue to attract some controversy. Today, I have heard other members set out eloquently the progression of various reports in Queensland that have resulted in major shifts in curriculum assessment and the assessment of students over some years. I think it can be safely said that there is a tendency in education for the pendulum to swing very extremely in one direction and stay there. In some circumstances, that can be unfortunate, because I think that often we throw out good ideas and practices and tend to lose some balance.

In the future, I would like to see some care taken and some caution exercised in the way in which we swing that pendulum. In the past, the pendulum has swung away very extremely from assessment by final examination at year 12 to the continuous assessment system that is now dominant, especially within the realm of schoolchildren.

I do not think the debate is over and I would like to see some continuing debate on this topic. I am constantly exposed to the arguments put forward by very experienced and intelligent teachers who still see merit in balanced assessment systems or, indeed, in some further provision of choice in our education system. I refer here to a capacity within the education system to continue with final examination assessment as well as continuous assessment.

The final examination system is in place within my electorate at that excellent institution, the Coorparoo Secondary College. This is an exciting institution because it, along with its two sister secondary colleges in Brisbane, has the capacity to deliver secondary courses by way of single examination or continuous assessment. The continuous assessment system does not suit everybody. There is clear evidence that the final examination arrangement has been of great benefit to many people, especially to women and to other people who may have suffered some disadvantage in their lives or who have difficult living conditions which present problems in terms of attending for the regimented hours expected under the continuous assessment system. I have seen a lot of women return to study after being unable to complete their secondary studies for various reasons. I have gotten to know a number of these women who have fitted perfectly into the final examination requirements but would not have fitted so well into the continuous assessment. Those women have excelled and I have felt very proud to see them walk across the stage on speech night at Coorparoo Secondary College and receive their awards for excellence. In that context especially, I urge the relevant authority in the future to give close consideration to ensuring that that flexibility is provided.

The debate is certainly not over at the classroom level in terms of school-age children. This issue should be kept open for debate in the future within the educational community and the wider community. In the future, I am sure some schools will wish to revisit it and to provide exactly that flexibility for school-age children to proceed—where it is attractive to them or appropriate for them—through an examination system rather than a continuous assessment system. In this context, I will not go into the relative merits of the various arguments which exist in the educational community. However, I think it should be debated and it should be kept foremost in our minds because it goes to the heart of educating children. It also goes to the heart of the fundamental relationship between a teacher and a student. There is a very different relationship between a teacher and a student during a continuous assessment system as opposed to the final examination system. In the future, I would like to see it discussed more broadly within the community.

Finally, I will touch upon the issue of vocational education and training, which now falls within the purview of this new authority. The issue which will require close consideration by the authority and the minister is the way in which educational institutions, training institutions and the government in general informs itself about training needs. I refer here to the existence in the community of ITABs, Industry Training Advisory Boards. I know that other honourable members share my experience of hearing mixed views about the effectiveness of the current ITAB system. If one looks into various industries, one finds various reactions about the effectiveness and viability of their ITABs. Those reactions about the effectiveness of ITABs range from despair and negativity through to great confidence. I make it

clear that I am not tarring all ITABs with the same brush, but I believe this is an area which needs close scrutiny in future. I appreciate that there are federal dimensions to it, but it is an issue that the new authority will have to confront in terms of ensuring that it is appropriately and properly informed about training needs, that these ITABs are accurately representative of industry training needs and that they are doing a good job.

There are some major challenges ahead for this new organisation. I trust that it will be a body which connects with our local communities and engages in these major pedagogical debates. That must continue. They must be connected to the community. Our communities are increasingly vital to, interested in and articulate about these matters. In the future, it will be increasingly important that this authority recognises that and provides our communities with adequate opportunity to be heard on matters which affect all of its charter, particularly the matters I have referred to of student assessment and the assessment of specific training and education needs.

This is a very important development in our state education system. It is one which will certainly fulfil our needs in terms of implementing Education 2010. I commend the work of the minister in bringing these authorities together into a rational and functional body. I wish the new head of that body and its staff well in executing their duties. I commend the bill to the House.

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