



Speech by

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (4.11 p.m.): I rise this afternoon to participate in debate on the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill 2003 and the Training Reform Bill 2003. It is certainly with a great deal of pleasure that I get to speak in this House about the major reforms that the Beattie Labor government is putting forward. As we have heard, the education and training reforms are certainly at the heart of the government's Smart State vision. We as a government have decided that looking after our young people as they go through the school system is one of the most important things, and we need to provide them with every assistance we possibly can so that they make the right decisions in their schooling and training so they have all the skills they need into the future and become successful businesspeople or successful in whatever profession they choose.

One of the important things about the reforms that we have introduced is the fact that we released them 18 months ago to allow time for consultation with the public. At the first couple of rounds of consultations that I attended there was a large amount of concern amongst parents and students about what these initiatives actually meant and what they would mean to them when they were at school. Of course, those young people will have left school by the time we implement these reforms in 2006, but the issues that they raised were listened to carefully by both ministers and were taken into consideration when putting the program together.

One thing that interested me when talking to students in years 11 and 12, particularly at the Beerwah State High School, was the fact that they were concerned that all of a sudden we were going to say that everybody until the age of 17 would have to stay at school and that was how they had read it in the short term. It was good for them to have the opportunity to hear the options available for young people. While students need to stay through to year 10 and then undergo a compulsory two-year participation phase and either complete year 12 or get a certificate III, that does not necessarily mean that those students will be in an academic course at school.

Many young students want to go on to university. There are also a large number of students who want to look at vocational careers who are interested in apprenticeships in the trades. There are others who, quite frankly, are not too sure what they want to do but know that they want to continue with their training until they make the decision as to where they want to be in their life. It is up to us as a government to provide them with all of those options so that they can get to the end of year 12 or the certificate III course and know that they have participated fully and been given every opportunity to obtain skills that will help them get employment in order to get on with the rest of their lives.

Another important aspect of these bills is the student accounts that have to be set up with the Queensland Studies Authority. I think this is a fantastic idea. When I was in year 10 and had to choose a range of six board subjects in case I wanted to go on to university, there was not a range of options available to me but there also was not the level of guidance and support where someone would sit down and say, 'Where is it that you'd like to be in five or 10 years time? What do you think the best career path is that will get you there?' Those people can then guide students as to the options that they have available to them.

This legislation will increase the way that students can complete up to year 12 with school based traineeships and apprenticeships, and I have seen some amazing results in that regard. Once again, the Beerwah State High School is certainly a leader in my area in dealing with VET education and received a minister's award earlier this year for the work it has done getting the community and young people together to work out their needs and how we can meet those needs as they go through their schooling. Sitting down and working out what kids will do in year 10, letting the Queensland Studies Authority know exactly where they are going to be and how they are going to achieve their outcomes will certainly help these young people map their course and come to a good outcome at the end.

The other part of the education and training reforms that we need to pay very close attention to are those issues that were raised with me by high school students—that is, the kids who do not actually want to be at high school, those who do not want to be stuck in a classroom and maybe they do not necessarily want to do that combination of apprenticeships and traineeships while getting a TAFE education. These are kids who often face a large number of difficulties in their life. In fact, there are two flexi schools in my electorate—the Sunshine Coast flexi school operating out of BADYAC and the Maleny flexi school. Kids at these schools are really doing it tough. When we talk about them getting an education, one thing we need to do before even looking at their educational needs is to look at their social needs. Some of these kids are homeless. Some of these kids have hopeless parents. They are struggling to eat every day. They are looking for support for drug dependence. Some of them have been sexually abused. There are all these problems that these students face which makes it difficult for them to fit into a normal schooling life, so we need to find alternative solutions. The flexi schools in my electorate are working flat out to help these young people.

At the Maleny flexi school there is David and Nell, the teacher and the teacher aide. Their focus is to combine the needs of the kids in terms of their social skills, to deal with their social and housing issues, as well as providing them with a safe and secure place to come to when they want to continue their education. The Maleny flexi school has had a bit of a chequered history over the last two years in that it has been situated in several different locations with no stability. Thanks to the intervention of Minister Foley, as of this term and for the next two years these students have a set space to go to. They will have rooms set aside in the heart of Maleny where they can turn up to school every day and know that that is where they are going to be. Their educational needs can be met, they can deal with the social issues that are going on in their lives and they can get themselves together and complete their high school education, which is just fantastic.

Likewise, the Sunshine Coast flexi school is doing the same thing with its students. I have been watching kids for the last four years go through the Sunshine Coast flexi school. I remember one boy in particular I will not name who, when I first met him, was entirely uncommunicative. He would not make eye contact. When he did talk, he would swear. He had difficulty doing his work. He even had difficulty understanding his work. With all of the effort that Michelle, Barb and Lucy have put in to working on his social skills and all the other aspects and dealing with his education, this boy has received his grade 10 education and is proceeding with his life in a much more holistic manner. With that support, he is achieving amazing things that we did not think would ever happen. This is the type of alternative education that we need to look at to ensure that kids like him do not slip through the cracks. Some of the kids in the flexi schools are among the 10,000 young people that Minister Foley often talks about who are out of work, out of school and out of training. We need to ensure that we provide them with the options to be able to complete their education and live their lives in a happy and holistic way.

I would like to acknowledge the flexibility built into these bills. I think flexibility is the key point that will make them successful. With the combination of VET opportunities, apprenticeships and traineeships and the wider communication we have with the community and getting the community to work with us, with Education Queensland and TAFE Queensland, we will see excellent results. The other day I was in the Mooloolaba district for the launch of the Youth Action Plan, a comprehensive document that deals with every aspect of high school, further training and community participation in children's lives. As we work through and start implementing these plans, I can see great outcomes for the students of the Glass House electorate.

I wish to speak briefly about the prep school trials. Maleny State School has been lucky enough to have been chosen as a prep school site for next year. It is over the moon. The school principal, Mark Ames, spent a lot of time working with the P&C and the rest of the community to work out whether this is a way they would like to go. He worked with all of the parents and asked how they would like to run the prep school trial. He put in a very comprehensive application and was successful. We are all looking forward to the start of next year, when we see the young students turn up for a full prep year and to see the outcomes from that. The teachers will have a very busy time ahead of them as they get across the curriculum and work out different ways of dealing with the young students in their charge. It is an exciting opportunity and they are really looking forward to it.

The middle years of schooling is another aspect of the employment and training reform package that Minister Bligh has been focusing on. That is very important as we look at the transition from state school to state high school. A lot of my schools are doing a great job. The cluster of schools based in Maleny—Conondale and Maleny State Schools—are working very closely with their high school to make sure that students going from year 7 on to years 8, 9 and 10 have a much easier transition. They are looking at the way the curriculum works across those areas. Once again, Beerwah State High School is leading the way. It is changing the way the years 8s and 9s do business. They are working in cluster groups rather than working in very strict subject areas. They are finding that is providing their students with a much better opportunity to learn and they are getting fantastic results. A lot of members have spoken about all of the schools in their electorate. I have 23 schools in my electorate, so I will not talk about them all.

An honourable member: Name them.

Ms MALE: I could name them and all of their principals. Tullawong State School desperately needs an SEU unit. It was top of the list last year, but did not quite make it. The provision of disability services to young people in our state schools is very important. Tullawong is a large state school, with 1,100 kids. The principal, Jim Kearney, is a wonderful, caring man. People flock to the school because of the good work and good leadership that he provides. I would be looking for that SEU or SEDC, whichever the combination is, to be introduced in Tullawong in the next 12 months to provide the parents of the area with an option for young people with disabilities.

Elimbah State School has had amazing things done to it over the last couple of years. However, it still needs an administration building constructed so the principal has a proper place for both him and his staff to work from. That would then free up classroom space for the rest of the school. Also, I always like to put in a plug for the Caboolture State School, which is a very old school and is looking a bit tired. It certainly needs a major upgrade. The staff there are fantastic. There is no complaint with the staff. They are the most brilliant staff I have come across. They are caring for their kids. The curriculum they are putting in and the literacy and numeracy planning are amazing. If we could get the buildings to look the same, that would be excellent.

I wish also to commend the cluster of schools in the hinterland—Peachester, Beerwah, Glass House, Elimbah, Beerburrum and Landsborough—which work together as a group to provide educational outcomes across those schools. They are all feeder schools for Beerwah State High School. They are working in nicely together. They are keen to see these education and training reforms come to fruition. We are certainly all looking forward to 2006, when we see the vast amount of this come together, and the community working in very closely with the education community. That certainly will be delivering the Smart State that we talk about on a regular basis. It gives young people flexibility. This is amazing work being done by the Beattie Labor government. I commend the two bills to the House.