



Speech by

DESLEY SCOTT

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (12.32 p.m.): I would also like to offer a welcome to the students and teachers of Kingston College.

This bill holds a promise to electorates such as Woodridge—a promise of more commitment and flexibility, of a real effort to have our youngsters stay at school and to ensure that they leave with sufficient education and training to give them a bright outlook for the future. However, it also offers great hope for the many youngsters who have already dropped out of the system. Statistically, Woodridge has a high youth unemployment level. Visit my schools and you will immediately be impressed by the dedication of the teaching staff, the commitment to excellence of the principals and administration, and the vibrant enthusiasm of the students.

There are many great things happening in education both in my primary and high schools. Last year, Woodridge High received an award for excellence. This year, it was Mabel Park High's turn to win for their POWER Program, celebrating inclusive education. Kingston College was a finalist in the Rock Eisteddfod.

I would like to pay a tribute to the Logan Diggers Club, which this year has launched a scholarship program for Logan youth. I was privileged to sit on the judging panel. The applicants were very impressive. This year, \$12,000 was granted to six students in the categories of academics, sport, performing arts and citizenship. My congratulations go to Francine, Angela, Samuel, Jason, Christie and Steve—all fine young people. Next year the scholarship fund will increase to \$18,000. I thank Pam Shelton and Joe Kelly from Diggers for initiating this great program, which I am sure will offer an incentive to many students and financial assistance to many worthy winners in years to come. It is a great club.

However, there are far too many of my young people included in that 10,000 who are out of work and out of school. This bill offers not merely benchmarks and lofty goals but practical means of re-engaging young people and many options whereby they may receive education, training and apprenticeship or life skills so that our young people have a chance to reach their true potential. I must pay tribute to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, which has delivered real jobs to 1,047 people in my electorate, many of them young people. The minister, the Hon. Matt Foley, has been a tireless campaigner for this most worthwhile initiative. I have been privileged to officiate at many graduations from this program and I know the effect that having a real job has on individuals, especially those who have been unemployed for some period of time.

The bill before the House has many aspects which set it apart and which I believe will ensure that we offer the best possible opportunities to our young people. It will require students to remain at school until they are 16 or have completed year 10 and then that they continue in education, training and apprenticeship or a combination of these, or that they be employed for 25 hours or more per week. I attended an ETRF forum some months ago for the Logan/Beaudesert area, and I sensed that at that time there was some uncertainty and a sense of anxiety amongst a few of the teachers. Facing change is not easy for each individual. However, now that more of the details are known, and particularly with the Gold Coast/Logan-Beaudesert regions being a trial area, I am sure that these uncertainties will be turned into eager anticipation.

There are a number of aspects of this bill which are very important. Firstly, it will be compulsory for every student, unless there are very extenuating circumstances. This entails a degree of responsibility on parents. May I comment that the vast majority of parents and their children have a great attitude to education. That is very evident as I visit school functions, P&C meetings, school festivals and the like. However, every child deserves the best from our education system. These days, employers are seeking a far greater competency level and a higher degree of education and training in their employees. For those who attempt to defy the system, there are penalties.

One question that was often foremost in the mind of educators was: how do we keep track of students? We live in a very mobile society. Thus the student account was devised. Student records will be kept by the Queensland Studies Authority and will record results and qualifications. State and non-state schools, as well as distance education and home-school students, will all have details recorded. Flexibility will be encouraged to maximise the outcomes and to follow the most appropriate course of study or training, given the background interests and subject strengths of the young person.

We are all aware that no matter how much flexibility we may offer, there are some young people who simply cannot have their needs met in a regular school. In my electorate I am very fortunate to have a number of options. Through our community renewal program, several years ago a community access school was set up at Kingston College. Their program now takes on far greater significance. They offer a second chance not only to young people who have not completed their schooling but also to people of all ages who wish to return to school to complete years 10 or 12 to gain entrance to university, TAFE, a traineeship or apprenticeship or simply to gain confidence, computer skills and pre trade subjects to give them a better chance in the employment market.

Kingston College's Community Access School, now under the leadership of Mr Bob Topping, has established a remarkable record of graduating many hundreds of students who have reclaimed their lives and gone on to more challenging careers than they had ever thought possible.

Mr Mickel: That's exactly right.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: It is a great school. Centre Education is another facility for at-risk young people and, under the leadership of Mr Dale Murray and with support from the Christian Brothers and the Silver Lining Foundation, is accomplishing great things for its young students. The Education Minister, Anna Bligh, has accepted an invitation to officially open its new facility later this month. It has converted a very drab, inadequate old house into a bright, roomy school with many new classrooms, a recording studio, a basketball court and so on. This will signal to those students that we value them and we want the best for them. I must thank the minister for a contribution of \$300,000 towards the rebuilding program. It will be an investment in the future for these students. I pay tribute to the commitment and dedication of the teachers both at Centre Ed and Kingston College Community Access School. They have that extra ingredient which is able to reach sometimes troubled youngsters and reignite—or indeed light for the very first time—their love of learning.

A further aspect of the education and training reforms which will be invaluable is the intensive nature of assistance and mentoring that will be available to engage young people. The Logan, Beaudesert and Gold Coast areas have been selected to trial the new reforms. I have recently spoken to Kerry Holtz, the chief executive officer of the region, and there is a real sense of anticipation and excitement with the plans that are now coming together. The Logan area is in a unique position. Through the Community Renewal Program the various levels of government, and in particular the Logan City Council, government departments and community and service organisations, have learned what will be a very valuable skill: how to form meaningful and effective partnerships. Plans are well advanced to roll out a number of programs to engage young people, to give them a fresh start. Organisations already involved with the trials are Kingston College, the Logan Institute of TAFE, Beenleigh High, Beaudesert High, Flagstone Community College, Youth and Family Services, the Department of Families, BoysTown, the Munanjali Housing and Development Corporation, Greening Australia Landcare, local service clubs and so on.

One proposal is to engage 12 young people over a 10-week period for two days a week in such activities as fine arts, landscaping, concreting, carpentry, literacy, numeracy, mechanics, counselling, and rock and water features. Positive relationships with various ethnic and cultural groups will ensure that their youngsters are not overlooked.

These plans for our educational system, along with the preparatory year initiatives and the middle school reforms, will change the face of education in Queensland. Our focus will be to have each of our students supported and nurtured right throughout their 13 years of schooling, to customise a plan of study or training to suit each student and to ultimately see every young person realise their goals. I applaud the commitment of this government and ministers Anna Bligh and Matt Foley to our youth and believe there is no more important work than to ensure that our young people are well educated and trained and grow up to be the workers and fine leaders our world needs for tomorrow. I congratulate the minister, her department, departmental workers and also the many teachers, principals, administrators, support workers, volunteers and partner organisations who will help to implement these important reforms.