



Speech by

DESLEY SCOTT

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

Hansard 12 November 2003

EDUCATION [GENERAL PROVISIONS] AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (9.04 p.m.): The Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2003 is basically designed to uphold and support the authority of school principals and CEOs of Education Queensland as well as the non-government sector. This bill will ensure that schools are safe places where our children are protected from unauthorised persons who may enter school premises for unlawful reasons. However, it also gives principals the authority to exclude for a period a person who is exhibiting threatening or disruptive behaviour. Students must be protected at all times. However, our principals, dedicated teachers and staff also deserve to be treated with respect and to carry out their duties free from any duress or threat.

It was once said to me in jest that all parents are perfectly logical people except when it comes to their own children. I do not believe that, because I think that most parents and guardians have the best interests of their children at heart. A wise parent will understand if their son or daughter requires some disciplinary measure at school and support it. But I know that sometimes disputes in neighbourhoods can start because of disagreements between children who, left to their own devices, would in all probability work things out. But enter some angry parents and the dispute can suddenly escalate into some pretty ugly scenes.

Today, teachers and principals grapple with behavioural problems, and sometimes children with medical or mental health issues may be difficult to handle. Medical conditions such as ADD and ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome, autism and the like can make for a volatile student at times. All of those factors can place extra pressure on teachers. There are times when a child may hurt another child, who then retaliates and a circle of anger is set up. Teachers need to have very skilled mediation methods and sometimes have to remove one child from the situation. It is in this context that our behavioural management specialists are so important. I would really like to commend the schools in my area, because I think that they have set up very worthwhile programs to deal with problem children.

Should there be a parent or guardian who believes that their child has been bullied or injured in some way and is volatile, with little understanding or wish to work through a situation, a teacher or principal can sometimes find themselves threatened. This scenario is one that I hear from time to time. I am very pleased to see this bill giving real powers to school principals. It empowers the principal to seek the name and address of any unauthorised person on school property. The principal will also be able to direct a person to curb their offending behaviour and, if required, to leave the property and not return for 24 hours. That can give valuable cooling-off time and often result in a far more rational individual to deal with.

Unfortunately, we have some hotheads in society and some of them are parents. It is sad that they are such poor role models for their children, who may also grow up to be very angry individuals. For those who insist on continuing their negative behaviour, the principal may refer the matter to the CEO of the regional office of Education Queensland, who has the power to exclude the person for up to a further 60 days if warranted. If necessary, the CEO then has the power to apply to a magistrate for total exclusion for a period up to 12 months. This can, if need be, apply to all state school institutions. Penalty points also apply, which will result in substantial fines for breaches of these orders. The legislation applies similarly to our non-government schools.

It is a sad comment on our society that there is a heightened degree of anger out there. Our children are a very precious gift, and those who are entrusted with their welfare on a daily basis need to have protection and the ability to ensure that our schools are safe, protected places. I applaud this legislation and I thank the minister for acting on these measures. I commend the bill to the House.