



Speech by

**GARY FENLON**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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**GRAMMAR SCHOOLS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr FENLON** (Greenslopes—ALP) (2.51 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Grammar Schools and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. I want to spend a short time talking about the significance of grammar schools in Queensland. I first became aware of the singularity and the significance of these schools when I was studying for a Diploma of Education at the Adelaide University. Readings in education philosophy and history went to great pains to talk about institutions such as the Rockhampton Grammar School and other grammar schools in Queensland and the fact that they were significant in a number of respects.

They were significant, first of all, in terms of their timing in that they were established so early in the development of this country and state. Essentially, these schools of excellence were set up to provide a very sound education, particularly in what might be described as the classical education curriculum. The way that they did that and how they were governed and set up at the time are particularly significant. In the latter half of the 19th century Queensland was a very young state and was still a fairly wild and undeveloped place. For instance, at that time there were fundamental concerns in Brisbane with regard to its articulation of water and sewerage, ensuring that the place did not burn down and that it was safe to live in. The fact that these major secondary schools of excellence in education were established while at the same time those very basic concerns were being addressed is quite an achievement.

Whilst the establishment of these schools was seen in those times as a very advanced concept, we have come full circle in that the conclusion of the minister's second reading speech refers to the continuation of the productive private-public partnership in respect of these schools. In that sense, the structure of these schools being a joint collaboration between private interests and the state government foreshadowed what is seen today to be a very desirable approach to the world. That is, we have provided a facility within our state school system to allow for private-public partnerships to be established. I understand that there are a couple of those already being trialled, and I wish them well. It is a very advanced concept and a great concept, because these institutions have shown that they have worked well under that combination of governance and funding. That is testament to the strength of that structure and that system of governance. I also understand that the sites on which these schools are established are predominantly deeds of grant in trust properties, and that provides a specific character to that relationship with the government.

The concept of these schools is very interesting in terms of the form of curriculum and the fundamental characteristics under which they operate. They can be summarised very briefly as a philosophy of excellence in preparing the whole person to contribute productively as a member of civil society through scholarship, aesthetic appreciation, sporting achievement, self-awareness and community service. They provide a non-discriminatory secular education that is tolerant to a diversity of religions and cultures. The word 'secular' is very interesting in that it comes from a Latin derivation referring to the world as opposed to the church. It can also be referred to as non-ecclesiastical, non-religious or non-sacred. That does not deny the pursuit of interest in the study of religions or any other exposure to religions.

It also encompasses well-developed systems of governance, which I have already mentioned; a strong reputation for the provision of a first-class educational experience; financial security afforded by government guarantees, et cetera; a strong market presence; and successful and influential past student bodies that give the status of those schools great carriage. These certainly are unique

institutions. I congratulate the minister for bringing this legislation to the House, because these amendments will ensure the continuity and safety of these institutions, that their financial status is stable and guaranteed and also that their accountability to the wider community is guaranteed. In that regard, they have two principal spheres of accountability: to the public—that is, the many past, present and future students and families who will have involvement with these institutions—and also to the government in the sense that they employ government resources on a recurrent basis as well as have use of very significant pieces of land which are of great value in today's market on which those schools are located.

Previous speakers have covered the content of this bill very well. All of those matters bring this very important piece of legislation regulating grammar schools in Queensland up to date. It is a very timely review which recognises the realities of today's environment. I commend the bill to the House.