



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Hansard 12 November 2003

EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION [STUDENT PROTECTION] AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (5.01 p.m.): I must say at the outset that it is important, if not essential, to remember that teachers perform an essential service in Queensland. The majority of teachers perform that role to the highest level with the utmost concern for their charges—our children, the children of many members here.

I have to disagree somewhat with the member for Nicklin, who said that this bill is about raising the bar. I disagree, because I do not believe that it does raise the bar higher. The bar in Queensland has always been set very high. The majority of teachers who have taught in Queensland meet that exceptionally high standard. This is about improving the process to identify teachers who do not meet the existing high standards. This bill is about improving information sharing and information flow between agencies. For too long the mentality of silence that has built up in all levels of government has worked against child protection and has worked in favour of paedophiles. This legislation seeks to break down that mentality and improve information transfer between these important agencies.

It is also important to acknowledge that, unfortunately, we will never prevent child abuse. This bill is about improving communication and investigation systems to minimise the incidence of child abuse and to maximise the chance of identifying and catching any teacher behaving in an inappropriate way.

I pick up on comments of other members in relation to the fact that it is important to acknowledge that some complaints may be false. In my previous occupation as a serving Queensland police officer I and other officers were often frustrated with the CJC's failure to lay charges of making a false complaint against people who made false allegations against police officers. I was pleased to see in the most recent CMC annual report a number of examples of charges being laid against people who had made vexatious and false complaints against public office holders.

It is important to get the balance right. We need to encourage people to make complaints where they are justified, but we also need to take steps to discourage people from using this very good system, this public accountability mechanism, for inappropriate means—for cheap political points or to try and resolve personal vendettas. I believe that the CMC charging people, where appropriate, with making a false complaint is a step forward in terms of minimising the number of false complaints.

In conclusion, it is important to compliment John Battams and the members of the Queensland Teachers Union for being involved in the discussion process and for being active participants in the decision making process that led to this bill being brought before the House. I compliment the minister on her hard work. I compliment John Battams and the professional members of the Queensland Teachers Union for contributing towards that. I commend the bill to the House.