



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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GRAMMAR SCHOOLS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.58 p.m.): The Grammar Schools and Other Legislation Amendment Bill has the objective to act on recommendations from the Department of Education's 2002 public benefit test report that found section 6 of the Grammar Schools Act 1975 to be anticompetitive. It also has the objective to provide for the protection of the grammar school name and to provide greater clarity in relation to the minister's powers in the event that a grammar school experiences serious financial difficulty.

The Toowoomba Grammar School is located in my electorate. It is one of the fine grammar schools of Queensland. It was established in 1875 and provides a wonderful education for some 900 boys. That school has been part of the consultation process and it is grateful for that opportunity. One of the important things for the Toowoomba Grammar School was the policy objective of protecting the integrity of the grammar school name so that when it applies to those schools that have it, or to those schools who want to have that name at any time in the future, that name brings with it that integrity of what the schools were set up for way back in the mid-1800s and the ethos that has been maintained in those schools.

Toowoomba Grammar School makes a wonderful contribution to Toowoomba. The school has always had a very strong ethos of providing education for boys. All of the respective headmasters have had a strong commitment to that. For the past 10 years, Mr Hugh Rose has been a magnificent headmaster and brought a very strong direction to the school. That was typical of Hugh's experience at other schools that he taught at and his own personal commitment to life and to high standards.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mr HORAN, continuing: Prior to the luncheon adjournment, I was talking about the importance of the Toowoomba Grammar School in my electorate of Toowoomba South in providing quality education to young men. The school now has some 900 students. The school was established back in 1875, so it has been an integral part of our city for well over one and a quarter centuries.

Recently the school expanded, with the establishment of Toowoomba Grammar Junior, which has now been expanded even further to provide for junior students right through from years 1 to 7. I think this is a good move. It has provided parents with a choice in sending their children to Grammar Junior and it is almost a seamless education going through primary school and Grammar Junior through to secondary school.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Toowoomba Grammar School with the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. It was a good occasion and a proud moment for the school to host the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, who addressed the boys. He also had the opportunity to meet with some of the boys who live in his electorate. We had a large group of year 12 boys who came from rural areas which John Anderson represents, and that was a good chance for him to meet those boys. I think it demonstrates the wide range of areas around Toowoomba—not only in south-western Queensland, central Queensland and northern Queensland but also interstate and overseas—from which students come to Toowoomba to board.

The school provides a great range of activities. It has been noted for many years for its academic activities. Recently some very good science laboratories have been constructed at the school. It also provides wonderful sporting activities. It has one of the best locations for a school in a provincial city you could ever imagine. The Margaret Street entrance of the school is a beautiful

entrance. It takes up an entire block and overlooks the city. As I said, the school has wonderful sporting facilities as well as good academic and cultural facilities.

I commend the school for its involvement in the community. One thing that strikes me every year is its involvement in the Anzac Day ceremony. The school has traditionally placed great importance on its old boys who have served our nation in the various wars. The school has always taken part in the Anzac Day ceremony and usually in the changing of the guard at the Mothers Memorial. The boys at the school are encouraged to take part in many charitable collections that occur around the city. They take part in doorknocking for various good causes. Last year when we had quite severe bushfires around the city, particularly on the eastern side of the city, the school was opened up to provide facilities for people to be fed and to be a staging point for some of the operations to take place.

The school is one of eight boarding schools in Toowoomba. The city is quite well known for the educational facilities it provides. There is a total of 15 secondary schools in Toowoomba and some eight boarding schools, being one primary boarding school and the others secondary boarding schools for girls and for boys, and a coeducational boarding facility at Downlands College. The city certainly provides a wonderful mix with regard to education.

I think the boarding schools provide a great opportunity for children from western Queensland. That was why most of the boarding schools were originally established. I have spoken to a number of headmasters and parents about these boarding schools. Whilst I think we would all like our children to be with us for all of the years that they are at home before they leave to go to uni or work, it is important that they have a quality education. By going to a regional city like Toowoomba, I think many of these country children still feel comfortable because it is not a big capital city but it is a large regional city. There is a sufficient mass in the student body to enable them to be involved in various cultural activities, music and stage productions and sporting teams and to compete with all the schools involved in that city.

A good example of that is the Darling Downs regional athletics championships, where all of those schools and some high schools outside the Toowoomba area come together. There is a large mass of schools providing very good competition for the young students. It provides these young people with good opportunities. Nowadays there is sometimes the opportunity for weekly boarders, but generally speaking many of these boarders come from long distances. I spent a couple of years coaching football teams at Downlands and I remember we had players from as far away as the Gulf Country and Cape York Peninsula. It took them a long time to get home once school broke up. They spent two or three days getting home and then another two or three days getting back to school. They were a long way from home.

I know the schools in Toowoomba have all sympathetically looked at the fee structure. If there is any increase in fees at Toowoomba Grammar School, it is usually announced at the parent body at the speech day at the end of the year. I know that the board of the school, under the leadership of Glen McCracken, looks at this very carefully, particularly in view of the drought in recent years. I know the member for Cunningham spoke about the cattle slump that occurred during the seventies and how difficult it was for families in those five or six years to send their children away to school. I know all of the boarding schools in Toowoomba during periods of drought, particularly in the nineties and particularly in the late eighties during the high interest rate period, had to in many cases look very carefully and sympathetically at how they handled the fee structure and how they provided assistance, particularly to big families who had a number of children at the school.

This bill changes the oversight or the purview of the transport of students with disabilities from the Department of Transport to the Department of Education. That seems to me to make good sense. It is wonderful to see the way in which students with disabilities are being assisted to have every opportunity to receive a first-class education. I know that during the nineties under a principal called Mike Norris the Glennie School brought in children with disabilities. It had not happened before and the school found there was an enormous number of things it had to do. I do not think it realised, in that old timber school with different levels, the number of things that it had to do. There were some young women with spina bifida, and a lot of adjustments with ramps had to be made. It helped the school community and the students themselves to realise the importance of providing access and equitable assistance to those with a disability. It certainly helped the young women at the school to realise they may be fortunate in that others have a disability that needs consideration and care. I congratulate all the schools in Toowoomba which have been working very hard to provide those with a disability every opportunity.

In particular, Centenary Heights State High School in my electorate was virtually a pioneer in providing disability services to students, particularly to deaf students. Being an older high school, it had the difficulties and problems with steps. It did not have buildings on the ground. It had to make a number of adjustments with new buildings. The dedication of the staff at Centenary Heights State High School was quite outstanding, as were the efforts that they put in to provide quality education for those with disabilities. Likewise, I had the opportunity to visit the Harristown State High School unit last year. I

was quite overwhelmed at seeing the care and commitment of some of those teachers to their students who had a disability.

We are supporting this bill. It is a good bill. If it can maintain the high standards that we have seen at magnificent schools like the Toowoomba Grammar School, and particularly maintain the integrity of the name 'grammar' for grammar schools and the other principles of the bill, then I am sure it will enhance secondary school education in our state.