



Speech by
Lesley Clark

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard Tuesday, 8 August 2006

EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) BILL

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (5.05 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to the Education (General Provisions) Bill 2006 that will underpin an education system that fosters innovation, excellence, choice and diversity to prepare all young people for the challenges of our changing world in the 21st century.

Having worked in the primary, secondary, TAFE and tertiary sectors, I have during my many years as the member for Barron River always taken a very close interest in education and the schools in my electorate. During that time three new schools have opened in Barron River with significant state government support and funding. They are the Kuranda State High School, Peace Lutheran College and, more recently, St Andrews Catholic College at Redlynch. It was with great pleasure that I joined Principal Mrs Loretta Graham, staff, students, parents and Bishop Foley at the opening last month of the latest facilities at St Andrews which take the school to year 9. The Redlynch valley is the fastest growing area in my electorate, and in June Minister Rod Welford came to Cairns to help us celebrate the development of the much anticipated \$16.4 million Redlynch State Middle School, which is under construction opposite the existing state school.

This school will open next year with an estimated 220 students in years 7 and 8. It will expand to include years 6 and 9 in 2008, with enrolments expected to peak at 570. The existing primary school will become a prep to year 5 junior school. The first stage, which is being constructed by Barclay Mowlem, will include 11 classrooms—four general classrooms and seven specialist rooms for performance, music, industrial technology, science and robotics, art and multimedia, technology and business studies, and food and fabric science. It will also include special education facilities and an administration building, which contains a temporary resource centre, amenities, staff centre, canteen and oval. I inspected it last week and can report that work is going according to schedule, and it is looking wonderful.

The Redlynch Middle School is just one project being developed as part of the Cairns Education Renewal Program—a \$24 million investment by the Beattie government in school facilities in the region. I would like to thank Deputy Premier Anna Bligh for her support of this major regional initiative in her previous role as Minister for Education. She was very receptive to our local representations to provide for future educational facilities that respond to the changing demographics of our region and ensure that Cairns families can access relevant and up-to-date education initiatives that meet the changing needs of students.

Following an extensive community consultation process with all school communities, a range of new and exciting initiatives have been made possible—in addition to the new primary school already planned and now under construction in the Edmonton area. They include, in addition to the Redlynch Middle School, the relocation of Kuranda District State School to the high school site to form a prep to year 12 school. Latest estimates put the cost of this work in the order of \$4.6 million, and work is currently underway so that the new school can open in 2007. The new amalgamated school will be known as the Kuranda District State College, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Chris Capra on his appointment as the new principal and to also thank past principals, John Baskerville and Stan Shepperd, for their hard work and commitment to the high and primary schools respectively. There will also be a new

student services centre for at-risk students located beside the Cairns School of Distance Education at an estimated cost of \$2 million and a community learning centre at Woree State High School at an estimated cost of \$1 million.

As part of the renewal program, the government invested \$1 million in upgraded facilities ranging across nine different state schools that enrolled students from the former Cairns North State School. Five of those schools were in my electorate and the minister included a visit to one of those, Edge Hill State School, when he was in Cairns. Edge Hill State School received \$270,000 to increase the size of several classrooms and upgrade the school's administration area. About 40 per cent of the students from Cairns North State School—31 out of 79—enrolled at Edge Hill State School.

An additional \$360,000 has been allocated from the renewal program towards the construction of an environmental science interpretive centre at the school. The funds are in addition to the \$359,000 allocated by the government under the statewide Smart Schools Renewal Program. The centre will be a wonderful addition to the school and to the wider community. I commend Principal Sue Darby and her team for the excellent standard of education at Edge Hill, which has been a leader in the use of the innovative New Basics curriculum program.

Freshwater State School has received \$78,700 for top-dressing, levelling and irrigating the oval, and new covered walkways to link the canteen with other areas of the school. In the last budget Freshwater received in excess of \$1 million for a new classroom block and music room, which was very welcome.

Machans Beach State School received \$50,000 to upgrade a classroom to support the use of information and communication technologies and to provide a landscaped outdoor learning area. Trinity Beach State School received \$18,400 to install air-conditioning units into classrooms removed from Cairns North State School. I hope that Trinity Beach will be a recipient of significant funds under the new \$1 billion refurbishment program announced in the budget.

Yorkeys Knob State School received \$11,700 to upgrade playground equipment, while at Edge Hill the minister also officially opened its new prep classrooms to accommodate the 25 new prep students this year and the school's expected future prep enrolments. The government has invested in excess of \$640,000 in two new classrooms, one upgraded classroom and minor works to convert two existing preschool classrooms, including toilet modifications.

Edge Hill is one of 25 schools offering prep for the first time this year as part of the phase-in before its introduction statewide next year. One of the features of this bill is the provision that it makes for the introduction of statewide preparatory education. This extra year of education will bring Queensland into line with other states and will mean that our students will have 13 years of education and leave school older and more mature, providing a better basis for success in their later careers. Prep, therefore, gives students a head start on their education and sets them on the path to become lifelong learners. I know that this major reform of our education system is not without its challenges and the government is working very hard to address concerns of parents. For example, I am aware there are some parents who feel their child would be better suited to have a year in prep rather than start year 1 and we are trying to accommodate these parents.

This bill also makes provision in one piece of legislation for the government's other major education reforms—earning or learning—for all year 10, 11 and 12 students, together with the increase in school leaving age. There are already some great initiatives occurring in senior schooling, including at high schools in my electorate. For example, Smithfield State High School will become one of five gateway schools which have been created in response to identified skill shortages in the ICT industry. Smithfield already has a great reputation for its innovative TAFE certificate level IV training programs in IT and as a gateway school its ability to offer early stages of training will be enhanced in the areas of GIS, multimedia and technical applications. Two teachers have been trained in Brisbane for the technical applications strand and the programs will be offered to students next year. This is a very exciting initiative for the school and the community.

The Smithfield State High School has also received a grant from the Smart Schools Renewal Program of \$1.3 million for a sports science project, which will include an upgrade of the multipurpose centre plus two modular buildings to be attached to the centre as well as gym equipment, computer equipment and new furniture. This initiative will enable collaboration with the ICU campus adjacent to the school which has just started a new sports/exercise degree program. The Kuranda State High School has initiated successful programs for students at risk of leaving school early and, along with Smithfield, has embraced opportunities for school based apprenticeships and traineeships.

As other members have indicated, there was a strong community campaign which raised concerns about the proposed changes to religious education in the draft bill. Although the changes were never intended to undermine the role of religious education instruction in our schools, I was in full support of the minister's decision to keep the existing sections in the act as they relate to this issue in order to allay any community concerns.

As I indicated at the outset of my speech, I have a strong personal interest in education. I am, therefore, particularly pleased that the Labor candidate for Barron River, Steve Wettenhall, whom I hope will succeed me, is equally committed to quality education programs and facilities for both the state and non-state sectors. He is vice-president of the Freshwater State School P&C where his children are enrolled and he has already pledged to lobby for Redlynch Middle School to be extended to senior years 10, 11 and 12. School communities will have a strong champion in Mr Wettenhall, who will work with parents and teachers to ensure that our schools have the resources they need to respond to the challenges of the future and prepare their students for life in the 21st century. Finally, I may not get the opportunity to speak on education legislation again before my retirement. So I would like to put on the record my sincere thanks to all the principals, teachers, administrators, support staff and parents with whom I have worked over my 15 years as the member for Barron River. It is due to their efforts and that of educational communities throughout Queensland that we have the great standard of education that we do in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.