



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (3.51 pm): I think one of the good aspects of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill is the Queensland Certificate of Education. I think it is essential that all children have the opportunity to go through to grade 12 regardless of whether they want to go to university, TAFE or into employment. It is most important that they experience secondary school right through to grade 12.

There are a lot of important aspects to secondary education. Young people learn to mix with their peers, learn to accept the discipline and rules of the school and learn to participate in the culture, music or sport offered by the school. They graduate to being school leaders in grade 12. All the grade 12s have to be leaders for the school. They may have the opportunity to be elected leaders if that is the situation at the school. They are given the opportunity not only to participate in sport and culture but also to maybe get selected in a local or regional team or state or Australian team. It is a real smorgasbord of life experience and preparation.

The most important thing is the core and basic elements of education within the school system so that young people can go into careers. Along the way it is essential that our young people are able to understand the basics. Whilst I recognise that so much is done electronically via computers it is quite amazing how many young people do not seem able to add up or quickly ascertain what something or a number of things is going to cost. Those things are important if they are going to move into business but are important for life in general.

I have always felt that a school based apprenticeships system is marvellous. It is important. It is essential that we develop a culture in our schools that each and every student is important—whether they are the dux of the school, someone doing a school based apprenticeship or someone trying their best to get through to the end of grade 12 and go out and be an achiever. It is about everybody being able to reach their potential while at the same time enjoying themselves and learning to work in a community. The young people help out with some of things that their school communities do. It may be being part of a Rotaract club or a fundraising drive on the weekend or going to visit people who are less well off than them. That is what school is about.

I think the Queensland Certificate of Education will be very good. At one of the schools where our boys went there were some fellows who just wanted to get back to the farm. It was a boarding school and they wanted to get out and get back to the farm. I think it is important that so many schools have been able to cater for those young people by providing cattle clubs and rural activities and providing those people with the skills that they might need if that is what they want to do. Along the way they could become interested in moving on to doing some form of diploma, certificate or degree that may assist them in doing things better given the challenging circumstances they will face when they go back to the farm.

I believe strongly in school based apprenticeships and spoke about them in this parliament two or three years ago. I could see a worrying trend. After that, everyone jumped on the bandwagon. I could see a worrying trend of kids being almost forced to go to uni because that was the only thing to do. They would get a degree and end up working in the drive-in bottle shop because there was no work for all those with business or arts degrees.

Some of these people would have been better off had they had an electrical or carpentry apprenticeship. With the building trade the way it is today and the mining boom it has become far more fashionable to do a trade. I was just mentioning to some of my colleagues at lunch time that 10 years ago we saw tradesmen driving around in old two-wheel drive Datsuns. Now they are all in Landcruisers and F250s. In a way it has a certain appeal for young people. There is an opportunity for them not to just become tradesmen but to actually become businesspeople.

We have seen some girls in Toowoomba win world gold medals for their refrigeration skills at the world skill olympics. For boys and girls there are wonderful opportunities in the trades and other occupations. There are also wonderful opportunities for those who want to go on to university.

In Toowoomba we have some 15 high schools. Members might say that that is a disproportionate number for the population, but it is one of the real education centres of Australia. Of those 15 high schools I think eight of them are boarding schools. Three are state high schools. Toowoomba State High School is in the Toowoomba North electorate. In my electorate there is Centenary Heights State High School and Harristown State High school, both outstanding high schools.

There was a wonderful development in the city led by Professor Frank Crowther from the University of Southern Queensland. He put together the Education Coalition. Where there is such a diversity of education—15 high schools ranging from state high school to Catholic schools to independent schools to grammar schools to church schools, the TAFE college system and the University of Southern Queensland—there is a great pool of talent amongst the teachers and school administrators. The great thing about our city is the way that they so openly and willingly share their knowledge and talents and thereby lift the overall standards within schools. The Education Coalition is a great model for other districts to look at self-improvement within their districts.

I want to pay a compliment to Wayne Beaston who is in charge of sport and recreation in our area. One of the great things for schools has been the regional sport program. There is such an array of people. So many young people in our primary and secondary schools go on to participate. For example, there is a Darling Downs athletics, squash, cross country, Rugby League, netball and cricket programs. There is a whole range of sports. The young people have the opportunity to go to state championships and then some of them to go on to the Australian championships. That sporting development within our primary and secondary schools is quite outstanding.

The thing that always impresses me is the number of physical education teachers and other teachers who give their time. Often it involves many hours after school. Often times it involves getting on the bus and going away for hours and hours to take teams to play at different venues. Often times it involves fundraising to help to get those teams away. It involves a lot of extra work for those people. The commitment is wonderful. It is great to see so many young people enjoy their sport or if they have a particular ability to achieve at a regional, state or national level. I think that is an excellent part of the education system right throughout Queensland. It really goes back to what I said about the QCEs. It is about the total experience at school. For that reason I am supportive.

I also want to mention the prep year, and many members have already spoken about this issue. In many cases parents work and therefore young people are involved in child care. There are definite ratios of one adult to a certain number of children required under legislation in order to care for them, because they are little people. At kindergarten a great amount of time is required for care and supervision of children, yet when these children go into the prep year there is only a part-time position for a teacher aide of up to 15 hours per week. That is a really serious shortcoming. If there is one group that needs the maximum support and assistance it is these littlies in the prep year. For many kids it is a difficult time. I know that they have wonderful classrooms and that the program they are going through is a play based program, so it should be an enjoyable year for them. However, it is important and one of the shortcomings is the lack of teacher aides, particularly when these children are coming from an environment where they have had the necessary number of people to look after them, and that should continue.

I want to pay a compliment to Mike Ludwig, the regional director in the area. The assistance that we get from him is just outstanding. It is the same with all of the other staff at the district office as well. We are very lucky to have those people. Phil Cook, who was the principal of Harristown State High School, is looking after the Toowoomba district now. We get great support from those people. Any little issues that we have are attended to immediately. I thank them sincerely for what they do in that regard.

I want to quickly mention a couple of issues, because I am limited in time. The Rangeville State School needs a new hall. I attend its functions at the beginning and the end of the year and it is only able to get the grade 6s and 7s into the hall. I know that it is difficult to cater for all schools, but schools like that do need an assembly hall which can get the majority of the school population into the hall. Another school that has a small hall is Newtown State School. I want to put on the record that Newtown State School has one of the most unique and special Anzac Day services that I have ever seen. It has been continued on as a tradition by the teachers. I give great credit and accolades to the teachers who have been able to maintain this. The little kids from Newtown school sing World War II songs and make little speeches, and the way

they do it is just a wonderful thing. I know that the returned servicemen and women of Toowoomba all make a special effort to get to Newtown school because it is such a very special ceremony. Ceremonies like this make us realise and understand how important schools are in our community and how important they are to young people because at the same time those young people are getting a good understanding of what Anzac Day is all about.

Most members who have contributed to this debate today have had something to say about this issue of history teaching. I strongly believe in it. Whether it is one's family, whether it is their town or whether it is their church, we all should know where we came from, how we developed, what the traditions are, what the hurdles were, what the successes were and how we can make things better. Australia has had such a short history but achieved so much in that short time when compared to other parts of the world that are thousands of years old. Look at what we have achieved since the first settlement in 1788 to become one of the leaders in the world.

There is nothing wrong with knowing the facts of our history. The facts are the truth, and that is what made us. We should know the facts of the pioneers and the facts of the discoveries of the great explorers. People today should drive over Cunningham's Gap and think about how on earth earlier generations got over there with horses through that jungle and bush to find what was west of the Great Dividing Range. How did people discover the north? Then there is the isolation of some of the early families and the difficulties that people faced. We should learn to understand about the different people who have come to Australia—the early days of the Irish making their way in Australia, the early days of the brothers and nuns who came out from Ireland and other parts to provide education to people and to develop the great Catholic education system that we have today. We should learn about the Greeks and the Italians who came here and built things like the Snowy Mountains scheme. We should learn about the Vietnamese who came here after the Vietnam War and all of that.

All of those things are what people should know. We should know our political history. It is so important that everybody who grows up knows and fully understands what happened in our nation in the 1700s, the 1800s, the 1900s and now so that they know who we are, what we are and what went before us and the great responsibilities and the great traditions and the great democracy and peace that we have—things which we should hold precious forever. We need to know and understand our history and know how different people came together, including our Indigenous people and the difficulties that they had with people taking over their land, if you like. That was how the world operated in those days. All of us should understand our history as much as we can, and that way we can continue to maintain and improve the precious values that we have.

The time that I have today is limited because of a meeting that I have to attend, but I do support the many issues that have been brought up by our shadow minister. In particular, this secondary qualification of the QCE will allow our secondary students to feel comfortable at school, to enjoy school and to be able to succeed and reach their potential.