



Speech by

**Ronan Lee**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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## **EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) BILL**

**Mr LEE** (Indooroopilly—ALP) (4.36 pm): I am delighted to rise to speak in support of this bill. I want to start by putting on record my confusion about the comments made earlier by the member for Burnett. I do not think I am the only member of this parliament who, when they listen to the member for Burnett, are not entirely sure what he is getting at. I will explain what I think to be the nub of his comment about parents taking children out of schools. I think he said that parents were taking their children out of state schools because of a perception of a declining standard of education in those schools and that parents, of course, are the ultimate arbiters of whether children are getting a good education or a poor education.

I understand the important role that parents have to play in ensuring that their children get a quality education but, having grown up in rural Ireland, let me tell members that parents, as much as they understand what a good education or a bad education might be from their perspective, are not in all the circumstances the people who are best placed to determine whether an education system is delivering for their kids. I will give members an example. I remember speaking to a parent at a P&C function shortly after I was elected in 2001. This person was an incredibly hard worker in raising funds for her child's primary school. I think this person is now the president of a P&C or a P&F at her child's high school. That person is very involved with her kid and her kid's school. She cares deeply about her child and their education and would do just about everything she could to make sure that her child gets a good start in life. Every time this person turns up at her kid's primary school she is reminded of a comment she made at the end of her first year of hard work on the P&C. She said, 'Look, I'm not really sure I want to be involved to the same extent next year as I have been this year in raising funds for this school. All we do is spend money on computers. It's a fad. It will pass. I don't want my kid tinkering with computers all day. I want him getting an important education.'

That is what that lady thought at the time. While educators were saying that we really needed to embrace computer technology, there were large numbers of people in the community who held the view—caring parents, people who cared about their community—that computer technology was something that would pass, that it was a fad. I want to make it really clear that I do not agree with the member for Burnett that the ultimate arbiter of what is a good education or what is a bad education is what the parents say is a good education or a bad education.

I remember back in Ireland when my father bought a computer for his small business in the early 1980s. I think he was one of the first people in our county to have a business computer. I remember at the time people in the education sector in Ireland saying that this was a type of technology that we needed to embrace. I remember seeing my parents talking to people in the street about this whiz-bang new computer. Frankly, I do not think we could get the most out of because it was a new technology. But I remember people at the time thinking that it was nothing more than a glorified toy. People thought, 'Why are you stuffing around with that when you should be doing real things for your business?'

Educators could see what was going on because they were planning for the future. I do not think anyone would look at the Irish education system today and say that it did not plan well for the future. But there were people in Ireland in those days who held the view, as I am sure people in Australia did at the

same time, that the educators were wrong to embrace computer technology as something that would be crucial to the long-term education of people in their community. I want to say firmly that I believe that the member for Burnett is wrong when he suggests that we should use perception as the ultimate arbiter of whether an education is good or bad or of a high quality. I think children in Queensland get a great education. I think there is a very high standard of education in this state.

I want to speak very briefly about how grateful I am that we are not going to tinker too much with the religious education provisions in this act. I am very pleased with that, as are large numbers of people in my community. I think it is worth noting in the parliament today that Graceville State School is seeking to employ a chaplain. The primary school would like to employ a chaplain for a few days a week from next week. The school is raising serious amounts of money to make sure that things are done properly when the chaplain is employed, that someone will be paid to be there three days a week. I believe that the great work people like Selena Gomersall and others are doing at Graceville will provide a real model for primary school chaplaincy in the western suburbs of Brisbane. I would love to see the state government embrace this as a sensible and useful thing to do.

I know that the chaplaincy program that is operating at Indooroopilly State High School and also to an extent at Toowong College, supported by the Scripture Union and others, has done great work with the students at those schools. The chaplain there is a lovely young man. He is engaging and sensible and tactful, and he does a really wonderful job. One of the important things they do is provide a regular breakfast for the students. I think that is an incredibly worthwhile thing.

On a different matter, the adult education unit at the soon to be former Toowong College has a very important role to play in our education system in Queensland. A lot of people tell me that if you drop out of high school or for some reason do not get the sort of results that you want in high school it is incredibly difficult to go to TAFE and study if you do not fit into particular categories.

The Toowong College adult education unit, under the guidance of Di Read and Marg Berry, who is the principal of the college, has worked with at-risk kids. These are people who have various issues that make it very difficult for them to be raising the sort of money that they need to study at TAFE. They are also the sorts of students who oftentimes do not necessarily thrive in the educational environment of TAFE when studying year 11 and 12. These people often need a little bit more contact time with teachers. When I say a 'little bit', in some cases that means significant amounts of increased contact time.

I believe that adult education has a very important role to play in our education sector in Queensland. I would encourage the minister to make sure that we not only continue to resource adult education to the extent that we do today but also look at ways of expanding it. I think there are great opportunities to provide a year 11 and year 12 education to people who would otherwise be at risk of not getting any year 11 or 12 education at all. I think the way we can do that is through our adult education unit. With those words, I am delighted to support the bill.