



Speech by

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (5.53 pm): It is my pleasure to rise, as many members have before me, to speak to the Education Legislation Amendment Bill. I note that the shadow minister, the member for Cunningham, has indicated our support for the bill. This bill amends the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005 to replace the term 'professional learning' with the term 'professional development' and the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2002 to give the Queensland Studies Authority functions in relation to the administration of common national tests in literacy and numeracy.

Any of us with children at school compare and contrast what teachers have to do now with what they did when we were at school. The demands placed upon them have increased immeasurably. When I look at the report cards and the various other reports that I receive about my children at a Catholic school on the Gold Coast and the other state schools in my electorate, and I look at the various reporting measures that teachers have to provide, it is very different to the little 7.5 centimetre by 10 centimetre report that I received at Burleigh Heads State School in the sixties. They are the report cards we had then.

We also see that many teachers start with a lot of enthusiasm. I have seen teachers come through who are young and keen when they are fresh out of teachers college or university and then after a couple of years they feel like they are doing the same old thing. Many of them have trouble maintaining their enthusiasm. That is why professional development is such an important part of the profession, as it is for any of the professions. My father was a teacher librarian in the public system until he retired. He did his masters degree and became a teacher librarian and he was always big on ensuring that he maintained his skills and improved them. That is a very important thing and an aspect of the 'development' terminology change from 'professional learning'.

I also want to speak briefly about the changes to the functions of the Queensland Studies Authority. I note what the shadow minister had to say about the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs agreeing that there would be common national tests in literacy and numeracy. That is going to occur in May 2008 in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. I understand that the functions of the QSA as outlined do not cover these proposed roles. So this bill amends the QSA act to allow the QSA to fulfil its role in relation to the common national tests. I see that clause 10 of this bill inserts proposed new section 10A, which expands the authority's functions to enable it to perform a number of functions related to common national testing in literacy and numeracy. These new functions include participating in the development or revision of the tests; implementing procedures for administering the tests by schools or authorities; marking the tests; analysing systemic information about the performance of persons who undertake the tests and reporting the results of this analysis to the minister, the chief executive, AISQ and QCEC; giving the principal of a school individual results of the school's students who undertake the tests; and giving a person who undertakes the tests their results in the test.

As I say, it is commendable that these changes are coming in. I noted on the front page of *The Australian* newspaper yesterday a column headed, 'Students trailing those of the 60s'. I think it is important for those of us from that era and later to read this article by Justine Ferrari and James Madden. It states—

Teenagers' reading and maths skills have declined over the past four decades, despite education spending per student more than doubling.

Most members here would be surprised to hear—

A study by Australian National University economists released yesterday suggests 14-year-olds today are, in learning terms, about three months behind their counterparts in the 1960s.

They suggest that—

... the piling of resources into creating smaller classes, at the expense of paying more for better teachers, could be to blame.

Andrew Leigh and Chris Ryan say the fall is not due to demographic changes, such as an increase in non-English-speaking migrants. In fact, the decline is even more marked after those changes are taken into account.

If there were other examples in our education system where we did not see an improvement following an increase in expenditure of 258 per cent—and that is what the study estimates; that real spending in schools rose 258 per cent—we would all be questioning how we were spending the money. That is why these new tests will hopefully lead to improvements in the system. The article goes on—

If productivity in schools is estimated as the money spent for each point on the literacy and numeracy tests, the researchers estimate that their productivity has fallen up to 13 per cent between 1975 and 1998 and by 73 per cent since 1964.

...

Dr Leigh said the findings suggested the boost to school funding over the past 40 years had been misdirected.

...

'I was surprised to see test scores haven't risen. There's a whole lot more money put into Australian schools and we don't seem to be getting more out of them in terms of literacy and numeracy.'

The newly announced head of the National Curriculum Board, Barry McGaw, agreed that trading teachers' salaries for smaller class sizes across the board was not the best decision.

As this article states, it is time that the education debate focused on improving the skills of our teachers and lifting the academic calibre of the profession. A better system of rewarding quality is part of the solution, as is better training and support for beginning teachers. As other members have said, if we keep supporting our teachers they will stay motivated and we will end up with better students and better members of the community. I commend the bill.