



Speech by

Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (5.32 pm): I rise in support of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill and in particular to note the effect of the bill in amending the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2002 to enable the Queensland Studies Authority to develop and administer common national tests in literacy and numeracy. The common national tests will be a positive step forward in creating greater consistency across all state jurisdictions. The results will provide us with more meaningful comparisons when looking at how Queensland performs against other states.

I believe that consistent comparisons between education systems and indeed schools are very necessary for the improvement of the education of all Queenslanders and Australians. However, comparison between schools is meaningless unless a level playing field exists. On that point I must place on record my very real concerns about the lack of a genuine level playing field for schools. My concerns are the result of a decade of inappropriate policies foisted upon our nation by the Howard government. While that page has been turned, as a number of my colleagues have already mentioned, I am concerned that an education revolution will not necessarily deliver a level playing field for schools.

My concerns and thoughts on these fundamentally important issues were encapsulated by one of my great local educational leaders. I have had reason in the past to quote the principal of Mount Alvernia College, Mrs Vicki Ward, in this place, but on this occasion I will not be referring to the leader of that particular school with its great Franciscan tradition but will be referring to the principal of our largest state high school, Wavell State High School. At last year's Wavell State High School speech night, Mr Jeff Major made some very astute remarks about the funding of our education system. He noted that the community finds the split funding arrangements between state and federal governments very confusing. He noted further—

Unlike the United Kingdom and the USA, Australia has no truly independent schools which are fully funded by parents. We have government schools like Wavell and government funded private schools.

He continued—

The checks and balances placed on the government school sector ensure quality curriculum and transparent and accountable outcomes while the non-government sector has limited accountability and often no transparency. This will continue to ensure that the community rely on the quality of schooling provided by public schools like Wavell.

He critiqued the approach of the Howard coalition when he commented generally—

Government policies and grotesque non-government school funding allocations have allowed open slather on opening non-government schools with little in the way of accountability.

Most significantly, Mr Major highlighted that—

There is no social or community obligation attached to the funding provided to these non-government schools which enables selective intake and rejection of resource intensive enrolments, including those students with disabilities and challenging behaviours.

My electorate is served very well by a variety of outstanding schools, both government and non-government, that provide tremendous educational opportunities for local students, but broadly across the system state schools are not on a level playing field. Locally my experience is that state schools are providing equal quality education with the broad offer of non-government schools on the north side of

Brisbane. In that context it makes one wonder about the efficiency of some of these non-government schools which clearly have more educational resources and fewer educational challenges.

I would implore the education minister and the new federal Deputy Prime Minister to consider some form of community service obligation as a component of future funding regimes for non-government schools. However, these funding issues are quite socially marginal in comparison with the biggest concern that Mr Major identified. His biggest concern is the effect of segregating students into a range of different categories from a variety of religious and other special interest groupings. This compartmentalisation is already occurring, he says, in some southern states. The effect of an open-ended schools policy has the high probability of creating a class compartmentalised society which, in the long run, will breed contempt and intolerance.

I concur with Mr Major's comments when he asks is this the sort of Australia that we want, is this the sort of Australia that our egalitarian society has traditionally encapsulated and encouraged—particularly in the context of the need to maintain a diverse multicultural society that lives in harmony in a prosperous, peaceful society? I call on the education minister and, indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister to consider these issues in the context of future discussions around the funding proposals and support for education. I most particularly commend the bill to the House to support the amendment of those areas to allow for good, solid, national testing to allow our education systems to be compared appropriately.