



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (8.41 pm): There are a number of issues covered in the bills being debated cognately. They range from the kindergarten and child-care stage right through to the university stage. They are very important bills. A lot of members have spoken about the education issues in their electorates. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill amends the Child Care Act, the Education (General Provisions) Act, the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act and the University of Queensland Act. The Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill deals with the terminology that can be used in relation to the term 'prep', excludes pre-prep years in Indigenous communities from the definition of the Child Care Act, provides that pre-prep in a state school must be free and makes a number of other amendments.

I will make some observations about these bills. There are issues regarding the development of syllabus or regulations that apply to the content or the type of education that is provided to children who are in kindergarten or pre-prep. The thought crossed my mind that I certainly hope we are still allowing these little kids who are 3½ to 4½ years of age to be children. We are talking about syllabus and regulations. When the prep year was brought in it was to be a play based learning arrangement. If we have children another year younger it should certainly be less demanding on the children.

Many of these kids would in normal circumstances spend a lot of time with their mothers at home and have that closeness with their mothers and learn that way. They then go on to prep or to year 1 at school. With the changing demographic and with many families faced with both the mother and father having to work, it has very often become the norm that children are spending time at kindergarten or pre-prep. It might only be 2½ days a week, but for the rest of the week they are often in child care.

These children need security, happiness and enjoyment so that they go into their prep year with confidence and like school. As a philosophical comment I make the point that I hope we are not getting too demanding and too structured with little children. At that age they have to go along to where they are going and be happy and enjoy life.

Certainly if there is an opportunity through a play based system to start out learning literacy and numeracy it could be an advantage. I note that that is mentioned in one of the second reading speeches, particularly with regard to those in Indigenous communities. We have to try to give them a good start in life so that they can handle the literacy and numeracy that they will come across in years 1 and 2 and so on.

Whilst on the subject of education and teachers, I point out that I recently asked a question on notice, which the minister has responded to, about manual arts teachers. Despite the fact that the minister said that there is no substantive shortage of manual arts teachers in Toowoomba, I am aware that throughout the state there is a real issue with manual arts teachers. This year Griffith University had to cancel the course it provides to train people in manual arts.

In about the year 2000 I remember speaking about this issue. We started to become aware that there are many kids at our schools who were pushed on to university to do arts or marketing or business

when they might have been better off doing any of the good trades that are around such as the carpentry or electrical trades. Consequently there has been a need to upgrade the status of trades within our schools.

I think that has been done through school based apprenticeships. Schools like Harristown State High School in Toowoomba identify in year 8 those people who have talent in academia and those who have talent in the trades. Hopefully when the trade students get to the end of year 12 they are only six months away from completing their apprenticeship. They need only six months and they are qualified. Likewise, the academic students should have done two or three units towards their degree. They are identified in year 8 and nurtured through the system.

The manual arts situation in the state is important. I have talked to some very experienced manual arts people who are very genuine in wanting to see that commitment to well-trained manual arts teachers. It is now a four-year course. Once if a person was a carpenter they could do six months and then move into teaching. It is important that we have well-trained manual arts teachers. I think it is important that they have a proper background in manual arts. We do have people teaching and relieving in manual arts in our high schools who do not have that proper background. I think it is something that the minister should look at because it is a very genuine concern amongst the experienced and dedicated manual arts teachers throughout the state.

The member for Toowoomba North mentioned our education system and industry in Toowoomba. We are very fortunate to be a true education city. We have 15 high schools in our area plus another three on the Downs. There are one or two others that go to year 10. Within the city of Toowoomba we see the opposite of the Australian average. In Australia about 34 per cent of people go to a non-government school. In Toowoomba it is in the order of 65 or 68 per cent because of the sheer number of boarding schools.

We have three wonderful high schools—Centenary Heights, Harristown and Toowoomba—within the city itself and 12 other schools ranging from grammar schools to Catholic schools to independent schools to Christian schools. A couple of years back a number of teachers and principals formed the Toowoomba Education Coalition which was an indication of how the secondary school education system within the city has always worked together for the betterment of education and the betterment of our pupils. It provides greater expertise and the sharing of knowledge, whether it is in education or in sport or in culture.

This year has been a tragic year in the city for four of the schools. Three boys were tragically killed in a car smash, another boy was tragically killed in a farm accident, another boy was tragically killed in a football game and another boy was seriously injured from the car crash I mentioned. For the students of the city who suffered devastating grief, they pulled together and supported each other. The girls' schools supported the boys' schools and vice versa and the parents, the P&Cs and the whole community pulled together because it was a tragic loss and young people feel it so keenly. The grief was amazing and many of those young kids in grade 12 will never forget it.

I want to compliment the son of the member for Condamine, Ray Hopper. Ben Hopper was elected co-captain of Christian Outreach College, a college that has come into my electorate with the redistribution. He is typical of many young Toowoomba children who take on leadership roles. Ben is a big, lanky country boy who is a good campdrafter and good at breaking in horses and he took on the role of co-captain in a wonderful way. When the boy at the school was killed after a football match, Ben stepped forward and spoke to the school. He is typical of many of the school leaders throughout the city. He demonstrated the maturity of these 16- and 17-year-old kids in year 12 who are able to accept responsibility and accept the new-found things that happen in life like grief and that he could look after and care for his fellow members. One of the wonderful things about education is that when our kids come out of school it is not just how well they do academically or how well they go at footy or how well they go in the rock eisteddfod and all the rest of it. If they come out of school caring for each other and looking out for each other, that is important and will stay with them for life. With schoolies week coming up, it is important that these kids can go away and think, 'We'll look after each other. We'll protect each other. We'll make sure we do the right thing so nothing goes wrong.'

I want to congratulate the Rangeville State School in my electorate which celebrates its centenary this year. It has been a magnificent school throughout that 100 years. Once upon a time it was on the outskirts of the city. It is a very big school and for many years has been in one of the main south-eastern suburbs of the city. It is a wonderful thing for it to celebrate, and it is a school that has developed a great tradition in music. Music in both primary and secondary school does a lot for schools in bringing boys and girls together and in getting kids through those difficult adolescent years because it enables them to stand up and perform and to develop new talents. I commend the music teachers of the state for what they do. Rangeville State School has had some very special teachers over a number of years and that school excels in its choirs, its band and its music, which really adds another dimension to it.

Much of this bill is about young children. There are little kids who board at schools in Toowoomba who are as young as prep age and certainly grade 1. Little kids have to leave home and board at school because their families live in rural and remote areas or their parents work overseas or because of family breakdown. It is wonderful to see the care that can be provided for these little children, because often times it must be tough on them and they must get homesick.

In terms of the syllabus for kindergarten and/or pre-prep years, it seems to me that it must be an incredibly busy time for parents with kids, particularly if both parents are working. They have to take their kids to kindergarten, which is 2½ days a week. They then may often have to take them to child care and juggle their hours around in terms of picking them up, bringing the kids home and taking them to child care and so on. One of the challenges for us as members of parliament or a government—whether it is this government or us aspiring to be in government—is to make that whole area as convenient as possible and as simple as possible so that children are able to access the opportunity to mix with other kids, the opportunity to learn to play and to be away from their parents for a little time. However, we also have to keep in mind that for many parents the juggling of work hours in terms of the husband's job, the wife's job and picking the kids up and taking them to child care is extremely difficult. That is one of the real challenges that exist.

I was appalled tonight to hear our shadow minister say that the system of funding that goes through to the kindergarten system means that those organisations that may be religiously based which provide for kindergartens are not allowed to have that religion mentioned in their title or their name.

**Mr Wilson:** That's a claim that has been made and it's not true and I'll explain it when I get the chance.

**Mr HORAN:** I hear what the minister is saying—

**Mr Wilson:** So don't assert that it's a fact until you know that it is.

**Mr HORAN:** I hope that the minister can address that in his response—

**Mr Wilson:** So don't repeat it as if it's a proven fact.

**Mr HORAN:** I hope the minister can address that in his response because it is what our diggers fought for. It is what Australia is about—freedom of choice and freedom of religion. If there is any restriction on what sort of title or names—

**Mr WILSON:** I rise to a point of order. There is no substance to the claim that was made earlier. I have had that checked out, and I will speak further on it. I do not want any members here to have any anxiety whatsoever about that claim. There is no basis to it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Minister, that is a not a point of order. I call the member for Toowoomba South.

**Mr HORAN:** I appreciate the minister's concern about that. As I said, I ask that he address that in his response. I hope that these changes that are being supported by the opposition go a long way to improving the quality of education, particularly for young people. With regard to education capital assistance, I would hope that in new schools that are being constructed we can start to look at proper set-down areas. At many of the older schools there is pandemonium in front of the schools which is quite dangerous, because times have changed radically from when many kids walked to school. Now they mostly go by public transport or are dropped off by their parents. It is essential that in capital funding of schools, whether they are state schools or whether they are non-government schools, there can be established a proper bus set-down area and a proper safe area where cars can pull in to drop kids off without being out on the road where all of the other traffic is, where kids are crossing the road and where mums and dads are trying to take the kids across the road in a panic while they try to get to work themselves. We have to ensure that in this day and age schools are supported in that area. As I said, I hope that all of the changes that are mooted in these two bills which we are supporting go a long way to assisting the education of our children, particularly in those very important and formative years of pre-prep, prep and kindergarten, and also in the area of child care which forms a part of that system.