



Speech by

Hon. Rod Welford

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

State Schools, Enrolments

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (10.08 am): I am pleased to inform the House of a significant increase in enrolments of students in our Queensland public education system. Enrolments in Queensland state schools have grown by more than 5,400 students this year. These figures are taken from data supplied by schools on 5 February 2009 which is the traditional day 8 census date. As members know, on day 8 schools report their student population numbers so that staffing and resources can be allocated appropriately to our 1,250 state schools across Queensland.

I am pleased to confirm that this increase in student population will in turn have a positive effect on the employment of teachers. An additional 257 teachers and an additional 1,490 teacher aide hours per week will be allocated to primary and secondary schools in Queensland. This is more than 150 teachers in addition to what was anticipated prior to the start of this year. This is great news for those graduate teachers who are seeking employment as either teachers or as teacher aides, especially in the current economic climate.

The greatest enrolment increases have been in primary schools and especially in prep, where more than 1,900 additional enrolments have been received for the prep year this year in state prep schools. Also, strong increases have been reported in the upper secondary school years, with more than 750 extra students enrolling in year 11 and more than 1,000 students enrolling in year 12. These figures belie any suggestion that state schools are not seen as favourably as their non-state counterparts.

This growth, of course, underlies the fundamental importance to our entire education system—both state and non-state—of having a strong public education system that can respond to spikes in demand and can meet the needs of our population. While non-state schools can, of course, cap their enrolments and pick and choose who they receive, it is our public education system that provides the foundation underpinning the security and stability of our education system.

The Bligh government plans for the future and continues to monitor our regions that have high population growth. Members may have noticed that we have opened three new schools this year on the northern Gold Coast and an additional new school at North Lakes, between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. My department and Education Queensland is working hard to ensure that staff needs across the state are being met to match this enrolment growth and new schools.

Of course, there are still a number of vacancies, particularly in the areas of manual arts, maths and science. Maths and science teachers are in high demand and these are roles that have been traditionally difficult to fill in recent years because the skills are also transferable to jobs outside the teaching service. Demand slowing in some other sectors may help us see more of these skilled workers moving back into teaching and allow us to capture more science and maths graduates from university to come into teaching rather than going into other areas, such as mining or engineering.

As part of our strategy for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, my department is offering up to 40 graduate employment scholarships for high-achieving preservice teachers. These scholarships will be provided for specialist teaching areas, such as industrial technology and design—otherwise known as manual arts—as well as the higher maths level, maths B and maths C. Applications for these scholarships close on 27 February.

We are also providing scholarships for aspiring teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers into education by obtaining their degrees. For year 12 graduates, we are also providing scholarships for university education courses for rural and remote students who have chosen teaching as their first career preference at a recognised Queensland university. In that regard, yesterday I presented the Pearl Duncan and Bid O'Sullivan scholarships here at Parliament House for aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and year 12 graduates from rural and remote locations who also aspire to teaching careers.

I would like to welcome our new students and parents to the Queensland state school system and thank all of our school staff for their commitment and dedication in providing a quality education in our 1,250 state schools around the length and breadth of our state.