



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (12.11 pm): I acknowledge the minister's intention to streamline early childhood education to a universal high-quality system that advantages all Queensland students. The pre-prep program at 35 schools approved by the minister in Indigenous communities for children older than 3½ years allows children to be registered in the program and provides a foundation of literacy and numeracy in the prep year. The prohibition of the term 'prep' in any presentation by child-care providers will remove the assumption that child-care providers are able to provide formal prep-year education.

Pre-prep is probably one of the biggest issues that will ever come our way. When I was first elected as the local member I was made aware of the concern about the lack of pre-prep places in the Charters Towers region. At present it is heartening to see some private schools involved in rectifying the problem. At times up to 60 families have children on the waiting lists. Hopefully, those problems will be resolved.

Education is one of the most important issues that will ever come our way. In noting educational issues, it is important that good legislation is debated in this House to bring about good education outcomes and initiatives. As an example, the Lions International foundation runs a school based program called Lions Quest, which has met with huge success wherever it has been introduced. Those who have implemented the program state that the students involved became engaged, valued and nurtured. The program is geared at instilling in students a sense of self-worth and direction, steering young people to a future of self-discipline where they have the ability to make good choices and judgements and show respect for themselves and others. The program covers all school years from kindergarten to year 12. It imparts life skills that will enable students to function successfully in a complex modern world.

Because the world we grew up in has changed dramatically, our approach to education must similarly change to embrace the added responsibilities that we have to nurture our children and help them to handle situations that we never had to confront in our youth. The Lions Quest program is producing spectacular results in children's lives. I fully support its introduction into schools that choose to participate in it. The Atherton Lions Club is deeply passionate about introducing that initiative into schools. I often hear about the innovative programs that schools have implemented. I see the outcomes of those initiatives reflected in many schools that encourage students to excel in public speaking, that develop programs to assist those needing or looking for direction and that hold positions in Lions and Rotary clubs. The students of such schools become involved in all manner of activities while still at school.

It is encouraging to note that both children registered in the pre-prep program and children with disabilities who attend special education facilities but who are not prep students will benefit from the protection that this legislation provides to other students. I am familiar with children with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida and short stature. Those children are vulnerable, but they are capable of achieving academic heights and/or strong life skills, and they can make a major contribution to our community.

In Charters Towers both state and private schools have a long-held reputation for excellence in education, especially for students with disabilities. A special education unit is located at Charters Towers State High School and another is located at the Central State School. It is very important that students with

special education needs receive support and assistance, for example, through increased teacher aide hours and so on. We definitely want to include those students within our schools and within our communities.

Last night when speaking on these education bills many members spoke with great pride about the schools in their electorates. The contributions that our schools make are a source of great pride. The schools form part of the social fabric of our communities. Only a few weeks ago, Blackheath and Thornburgh College held its 90-year reunion. I was proud to be the member for the former electorate of Charters Towers, before the electoral boundary change. The town is a hub for the education industry. It has three private schools—All Souls St Gabriels School, Columba Catholic College and Blackheath and Thornburgh College—and three primary schools: Millchester, Central and Richmond Hill state schools. In addition there is a high school and a school of distance education. In the surrounding areas of Charters Towers there is the Ravenswood State School, the Greenvale State School, the Homestead State School and the Pentland State School. This community has a population of 13,000 people and it is to its credit that that community provides such a wonderful foundation for those schools. We see that on Anzac Day when the children march down the street. There is an incredible atmosphere. It is wonderful that such a small town has so many schoolchildren who support that parade.

Children who live in isolated and rural areas, including Indigenous children, are in a special category of disadvantage. Many parents are unable to afford the substantial costs of boarding colleges and cannot conquer the tyranny of distance to travel to and from colleges. I would like to bring something to the minister's attention. I am not sure if this can be rectified, but for some people it has been an issue in the past two or three years. Many parents live in isolated areas and their children learn through the School of Distance Education. Some children have the opportunity to participate in distance education but are not allowed to do the prep program because they are a few months short of being old enough to enrol in that program. I believe there needs to be some flexibility here, because many of those young kids sit with their brothers and sisters and are taught alongside them. However, they are not allowed to sit in on the prep program because they are too young. I believe there should be some flexibility in that area. The minister needs to look at that issue.

I have huge admiration for families on the land. They have to face the question of educating their children, especially as those children reach secondary school age. The decisions are not always easy, but with true country grit those decisions are made and carried out with courage and determination. Some of the real heroes in education are the families who make sacrifices to ensure that their children are exposed to education excellence. I take my hat off to those families. It is very important that we support families and communities, especially rural communities, to provide appropriate education and that we acknowledge the difficulties involved with the tyranny of distance.

Some rural schools are very small. The Upper Barron State School had only 16 students and was mothballed about 18 months ago, or maybe a little less, to the great disappointment of the community. The school was almost 100 years old and was about to celebrate its centenary next year. That school was part of the social fabric of the community. Unfortunately, those children now take a two-hour bus trip each day to Atherton and Malanda and back. The Upper Barron State School had beautiful pine trees and lovely dairy farms surrounding it and, even though it was a relatively old school, it had a new undercover area and new buildings. I believe that this school needs to be reinstated so that those families can send their kids to that school.

We hear about the bullying that happens in many of the big schools, but it does not happen in those little schools because a lot of those kids are ostracised if they do bully. They are taught to support one another, encourage one another and support those values. The word 'bullying' does not exist in those schools, and those smaller schools provide hands-on support. Most importantly, the task of teachers on a daily basis is extremely important in providing the next generation of well-educated, well-adjusted young adults. This task must be appropriately rewarded through wages that at least match those of their interstate counterparts. Teachers who feel undervalued are likely to seek their rewards elsewhere. Every day in our schools should be 'thank a teacher day'. I wanted to bring these issues to the attention of the House.