



Speech by

Dr Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard Tuesday, 6 October 2009

EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Dr ROBINSON (Cleveland—LNP) (4.56 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill and the Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. I note that the policy objectives of the legislation are to amend legislation administered by DET to remove redundant provisions, correct efficiencies or omissions and clarify existing provisions in several acts; to amend the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 with respect to the provision of pre-preparatory and preparatory learning programs and to give the minister power to approve an overseas school as a recognised school; to amend the Child Care Act 2002 to enable the publication of certain information about child-care services that contravene the act; to amend the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2000 with respect to various functions of the QSA; and to amend the University of Queensland Act 1998.

In general terms, I support the overall objectives of the legislation with respect to improvement in the education of our children. However, it concerns me greatly that, even with these amendments, the children of Queensland are not getting the very best education that should be afforded them.

Honourable members may recall me speaking in my maiden speech about the importance of education. I am grateful for the education opportunities that I have had—attending fine state primary and state high schools and three Queensland universities: James Cook University of North Queensland, where I completed a Bachelor of Science in marine biology and zoology; Griffith University's Nathan campus, where I completed a Master of Arts in international studies; and the University of Queensland's St Lucia campus, where I recently completed a PhD in cultural studies.

I note the amendment of the University of Queensland Act is one of the objectives of one of these bills. From my own studies I have learned the value of a good education. I believe that the good education and training of our children, from kindergarten to year 12, is critical to the future. It is also important that Queenslanders have further education and training opportunities, such as via the TAFE system, to enter into a trade, a university or a profession. Further, I believe that our children are best served by a system that allows for choice between public, independent, Catholic and other private options. I note that in the Redlands 60 per cent of children attend public schools and 40 per cent attend independent and Catholic schools. I am committed to standing up for the education rights of all of the children of Cleveland.

Sadly, this government continues to fail our children from kindergarten to university, providing them with limited opportunities to excel. It concerns me that this government has taken its eyes off the ball when it comes to the education of our children, delivering them the lowest quality education in Australia.

I am also grateful for the various opportunities that I have had at different times to work in the education sector as a tertiary lecturer, part-time TAFE teacher, researcher, tutor and chaplain. As a past educator, I acknowledge the importance of teachers in providing a good education for our children. As such, I am committed to the teachers of Cleveland and commend them for their service to our children. I receive regular inputs from teachers about the education of our children and their roles as teachers through visits to schools and delegations to my office. Unlike the current government, I do not blame

teachers for the low education standards of our children and I agree that they have not been adequately remunerated for their critical work.

My electorate of Cleveland is home to some excellent schools. I acknowledge the fine work of the principals, teachers and other staff of the kindergartens and schools of my electorate which provide the best possible education for our children. I acknowledge the primary and secondary schools of Cleveland State School, Ormiston State School, Wellington Point State School, Birkdale State School, Thornlands State School, Bayview State College—if the new name is confirmed—Dunwich State School and Secondary Department, Cleveland District State High School, Wellington Point State High School, Redland District Special School, Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School, Mary MacKillop Catholic Primary School, Ormiston College and Redlands College. I also acknowledge the schools neighbouring my electorate that are attended by children from my electorate, for example Carmel College and Faith Lutheran College.

In representing the needs of these schools and in the context of these two education bills, I want to make several points. Regarding kindergartens, I support the concept of the universal availability of kindergarten for all Queensland children. However, I am concerned that the rapid rollout that will occur to take our participation rate from 29 per cent to 100 per cent will be botched by this government. Second, some kindergartens are very concerned—and some in my electorate have expressed these concerns to me—about their future financial viability under the proposed changes. Their concerns originate from two aspects of the legislation. They are worried about potential competition arising from new kindergartens built on state school premises in close proximity to their current kindergarten. They are also unsure about the security of the DECKAS funding. Kindergartens from my electorate have expressed concern that they may lose funding critical to their survival in already very difficult times. One particular kindergarten is very concerned that the current changes may bankrupt them in the next 12 months. Third, banning the use of religion in the names of kindergartens in my view is an unwarranted attack on the freedom of religion in this state. What terms will be banned? Does the minister plan to ban or censor the word 'Catholic' or 'Christian'? How far will this go? I seek clarification from the minister on that point.

Regarding primary and high schools, the current levels of overcrowding of classrooms in Queensland schools, including some schools in the electorate of Cleveland, are unacceptably high. Despite the Premier's view that there may be good reasons for this, I agree with the teachers in my electorate that this is entirely unacceptable. Neither children nor teachers should be deliberately placed in such situations. The government needs to provide more teachers and better conditions for teachers to begin to resolve this problem. I note that in one report Cleveland District State High School, a fine school in my electorate, is set to have 45 classes that are oversized. Should this report be accurate, as it appears, that is completely unacceptable. I seek the immediate involvement of the minister to resolve the situation at this school.

This year's national literacy and numeracy report card confirmed Queensland's position for two consecutive years as one of the lowest achieving states when it comes to education. While the Bligh Labor government is in charge of education we are still floundering at the bottom of the class with little hope of recovering. That 100,000 students scored below the minimum standard is clearly unacceptable. Teachers also expressed concern that pressure applied from Education Queensland for students to do well in the NAPLAN test produced a temptation in some schools to teach to the test rather than to the curriculum. While our hardworking Redlands school principals and teachers are passing their test, the government has again failed Redlands students.

Teachers are hamstrung in their work when our schools are under-resourced and teachers are underpaid. The recent EB round has been painful for many teachers, and many teachers have expressed their dismay to me personally about the stinginess of the government. The government's poor treatment of our state's teachers has resulted in low morale amongst them and caused some to reconsider their career choice as a teacher. This is detrimental to the education of our children.

Many principals and teachers have also expressed concern that some of the stimulus funding for schools was poorly spent. Problems experienced included a lack of flexibility about what the funds could be spent on, resulting in low-priority items being built in some cases, and high administration fees being charged for some simply designed buildings.

My final point is that I am concerned about the future viability of TAFE programs in the Redlands. The viability of the Alexandra Hills TAFE—the only TAFE in the Redlands—is rumoured to be under the microscope. If the Alexandra Hills TAFE is closed down, where will students from all over the Redlands study? They will have to travel large distances and be unfairly disadvantaged. I propose that the government begin now to assess the establishment of a TAFE college at Cleveland in close proximity to the Cleveland railway line.

In summary, while I support the overall intent of the bills to improve the quality of the education of Queensland children, I remain deeply concerned about the failure of this government to deliver a decent education to our children.