



Speech by

**RACHEL NOLAN**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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### **YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL**

**Ms NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.04 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the education and training reforms developed and brought to the House by the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employment and Training. A Labor government is committed above all else to equality of opportunity. We believe not that everyone could or should possibly end up in the same place but that a person should have opportunities to make their own way in the world, to realise their own potential for success and happiness regardless of the station in life into which they are born. This, at the core of it, is Curtin's light on the hill.

There are many points in life at which government can intervene. We have a public health system, albeit under threat from the federal government, which ensures that when people get sick they can be treated. We have a social security system so even those who are not working do not end up on the street. These things are safety nets. They ensure service provision regardless of people's station in life.

Education is different from these things. Public education is not a safety net. It is an opportunity to transform people's lives. Giving all kids a good education can ensure that all people, regardless of their background, can have a chance to make their own way in the world. Education, particularly public education, is the only way in which government can really intervene to get people in their formative years and not just to protect them from falling to the bottom of society but to give them an opportunity to climb to the top. That is why this legislation is so important. That is why it has been introduced by a Labor government.

There are a number of points in Australia's history at which the nation's direction has been fundamentally altered by education policy. When Australia was first colonised the colonial administration set about establishing some form of state education. For the first 150 years of the nation's history a debate raged about the state funding of church-run, mainly Catholic schools, with many thousands of children being educated in desperately underresourced schools as a result of government policy which refused to fund church-run schools. The decision eventually to fund church-run schools gave thousands of mainly Catholic children the opportunity for a good education and resulted in a great uplift in the circumstances of that community.

In 1972 the Whitlam government was swept to power and another fundamental change to Australian education policy was made. The decision to make university education free and hence open it up to people regardless of their background created one of the greatest social changes of the last 100 years. The thousands of people who were educated as a result of the Whitlam reforms have lifted their families up a class and are making a great contribution to Australian society today. Many of them sit among us.

These bills, to a great extent, continue the tradition of those significant reforms in Queensland schools. The bills increase the minimum age at which a young person can leave school from 15 to 16 unless they have achieved a Senior Certificate, a TAFE level III qualification or gotten a job. They fundamentally change the structure of senior schooling. They need to be viewed alongside the introduction of a prep year prior to year 1 and the fact that we have recently announced plans to reduce class sizes from 30 to 28 in years 4 to 10.

Together these changes form the greatest reforms to education in Queensland in living memory. Importantly, the core changes to the education system embodied in these bills are funded. Thirty years ago going on to senior was an option only for the minority of young people who were seen as academic. While senior schooling has gone through a great evolution in the last 30 years, it continues to be limited to some extent by its origins, being generally academic focused with varying degrees of a sideline in vocational education or school based apprenticeships.

This evolution has come a long way. Queensland now has more school based apprenticeships than all of the other states combined. The legislation stops that haphazard evolutionary development of senior schooling. Its premise is that senior schooling is for everyone and its structure will be altered to make absolutely sure of that.

The bills, as other members have discussed, will ensure that every student has an individual education plan in year 10 which sets out a pathway for the senior years. For some that pathway will continue to be predominantly academic. For others it will be a school based apprenticeship with some days spent at school or TAFE. For others it will be a predominantly TAFE pathway. The establishment of a plan will mean that the path a student takes through those senior years will no longer be a matter of chance. The measures to record the whole range of a student's experience on their Senior Certificate will mean that all of that learning and all of that experience is recorded as being of value.

The Ipswich and Corinda education districts are currently trialling the new measures. I am very pleased to say that Bremer High, the only state high school in my electorate, is leading the way.

**Mr Matt Foley:** I am not sure about that. Yeronga State School is doing pretty well, too.

**Ms NOLAN:** I am pretty confident about Bremer, Minister. In the last four years, Bremer has increased its retention rate through to year 12 from about 57 per cent of students to 70 per cent. The school has also pioneered the concept of school training and work being integrated. For some years now senior IT students have had the option of dropping their sixth board subject and instead spending their time doing a certificate II or III TAFE course in IT and doing real work on the school's computer network.

This program embodies the concept of integrating school, training and work that these bills formalise. Right now Bremer High year 10 students are having their individual education plans developed in preparation for the full-blown commencement of the ETRF trial next year. The school is developing the links it already has with local businesses which can provide work, work experience and apprenticeships and is developing much better links with the Bremer TAFE.

In addition to providing education and training options to suit all young people, these reforms also provide much better support to keep young people in school. There is an ignorant but widespread view in our community that young people these days somehow do not want to learn or do not want to work and that they all spend their time causing trouble. While there is no doubt that some young people do not respect their elders, the pressures that are placed on many of these young people are enormous. Family breakdown, poverty and extremely high rates of youth unemployment mean that many young people do not come from secure homes, they do not have strong ethical guidance through their lives and they are certainly not offered their choice of a job when they leave school.

Importantly, this package provides much better support for young people to stay at school. The Youth Support Coordinators Program has been extended, and the Ipswich district is developing a plan to provide educational options and support through a model like the Full Service Schools initiative that existed in Ipswich until the federal government axed its funding in around 1998.

Next year, when the Bremer students currently in year 10 move on to the senior school, we will really see what the new face of education looks like. Bremer is a great school with a supportive community, a diverse, energetic student mix and an extremely committed professional staff. The recent Bremer open day, to which all staff and many hundreds of parents and students turned up on a Saturday to celebrate and promote the school, was a wonderful example of the school's spirit.

Unfortunately, the school is built on shifting black soil and, while millions of dollars has been spent in recent years refurbishing the admin block, building a wonderful new performing arts and multimedia centre and repainting many areas of the school, some of the buildings continue to look run down. I take this opportunity to endorse some of the comments of the member for Ashgrove about the importance of school maintenance. I thank the Education Minister and the Premier for the huge changes that have happened at Bremer, and I want to ask for more.

It is my view that, with many of Queensland's schools like Bremer being old, there is a need for a significant ongoing maintenance program to rebuild and refurbish Queensland's schools. State schools provide an excellent education, but that aim is a lot easier to achieve in an attractive physical environment.

There are two principles that should underlie Australian education policy—excellence and equity—and they are not mutually exclusive. While the Beattie government is pursuing these aims

through these reforms, it is a tragedy that the federal government does not share our commitment to these values. The Howard government is the most ideologically driven we have seen in Australia, and its ideology determines that the market will give us excellence. There is not really any reference to equity. This ideological approach is placing Australia's education system under enormous threat.

Ideologically, the federal government believes that the private education system—the market—will deliver the best results, and so it is to private education, and particularly elite private education, that the Howard government's attention is focused. Since the Howard government, under former Education Minister David Kemp, changed the funding balance between state and private education, growth in Commonwealth funding for private education has far outstripped growth to state schools. The big winners have not been the Catholic schools. They have not been the ordinary private schools that many parents struggle to send their kids to. They have been the elite independent schools—the Joeys and the Kings of the world—that most people will never get anywhere near.

The approach is fundamentally inequitable. The danger is that it will create a system where government schools are the schools of last resort—the safety net in our education system. If this federal policy continues, it will mean that capacity to pay, not brains or effort, will determine young people's education and their prospects in life.

Similarly, the current Nelson review of higher education, if it is not significantly amended on grounds of equity, will have the same effect for universities. The federal government is threatening to double the number of fee-paying places in our universities and to increase HECS by 30 per cent. Again, it is making no effort to address the current level of Austudy, which is already well below the poverty line. I am very proud that the Beattie government is bringing in these reforms. They are all the more significant when we see them in light of the federal government's extremely hostile approach to equity in education.

These reforms have not yet entirely hit the decks in the community, and there are many people who are only beginning to realise the significance of what we are doing. I do not feel I can finish talking about these reforms without addressing the fact that there has been significant debate among teachers, both at a statewide level and in Ipswich, about their own capacity to deliver on the aims of these reforms and, importantly, about the government's willingness or capacity to support schools and teachers to do it.

There is among some a weariness of reform, a distrust of government's commitment to fund the changes we are talking about and a view that some kids are too tough and too disruptive to keep in our schools. While I do not want to dismiss these concerns out of hand, I do ask those who have the capacity to make or break these reforms to be committed and to be optimistic. The reforms are funded, with the government having made a commitment at the point of announcing these reforms to direct all of the additional revenue that flows from the GST to education.

This is not just another round of public sector reform. These are significant, indeed historic, reforms that fundamentally recognise that to build a Smart State and to give everyone a genuinely equal opportunity to reach their potential we must give them an education. One of the only things that can possibly defeat these reforms is a failure of optimism, a weariness of change, a lack of energy and a failure of spirit. Teachers and this Labor government believe in educating young people. At the core of it all, that is why teachers are there. These changes will fundamentally improve how we do that, and we must commit together to making sure it happens. I commend the bills to the House.