

**PEOPLE'S QUESTION TIME**

**THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND (FEBRUARY)**

**Transcript**

**Friday 26 February 2010**

**Panel:**

1. Anna Bligh - Premier and Minister for the Arts (PREMIER)
2. Geoff Wilson - Minister for Education and Training (G.WILSON)
3. Margaret Black - State President, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations (M.BLACK)
4. Mike Byrne - Executive Director, Queensland Catholic Education Commission (M.BYRNE)
5. Professor Claire Wyatt-Smith - Dean of the Faculty of Education, Griffith University (C.WYATT-SMITH)

**Moderator – Erin O'Brien**

MODERATOR: ... Queensland Government and broadcast by the Queensland University of Technology. Before we get under way I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Turrbal and Jagera people, the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today. While we're sitting here at the beautiful QUT Gardens Point Campus this webcast is being streamed live to the web and can be seen at [www.qld.gov.au/questiontime](http://www.qld.gov.au/questiontime). While this discussion is taking place the audience watching on line continue to submit their questions and we'd encourage them to do so. My name is Erin O'Brien, I'm from the School of Justice here at QUT and I'll be the moderator for this session. Our discussion today is on the future of education in Queensland and I'm joined by an esteemed group of panellists who will be answering questions that people have submitted online as well as a few questions from our audience that's here today. Our panellists today are the President of the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations Margaret Black, we have the Executive Director of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission Mike Byrne, the Minister for Education and the Arts Geoff Wilson, the Premier of Queensland Anna Bligh, and Dean of the Faculty of Education at Griffith University Professor Claire Wyatt-Smith. Would you join me in welcoming our panellists today?

[APPLAUSE]

MODERATOR: Before we start with the questions I'd like to invite the Premier to say a few words about why the Queensland Government is holding this People's Question Time.

PREMIER: Well thank you Erin and good afternoon everybody. Today Queensland takes a step into the world of e-democracy. With a state the size of ours, as decentralised as we are, this technology, webcast technology gives everybody a chance to talk directly to their government regardless of where they live. I look forward to today's session. I should say that we intend to hold these throughout the year and no doubt we'll learn as we go along. So those of you who are participating today will no doubt shape the process from here on in and I'm looking forward to seeing how it goes. So let the questions begin.

MODERATOR: Okay well we're going to dive right in to some questions that have been drawn from the Queensland Green Paper on education and the very contentious issue of moving Year 7 into high school. Now the first question comes from a teacher in Toowoomba, Denise asks: "With the proposed move of Year 7 to high school from 2014, there are a number of issues to be considered. How do you anticipate this will impact on already crowded facilities of some schools, for example on buildings, computers, specialist facilities and teaching staff? And do you really believe 11 year olds are ready for high school?" So we've probably got two questions there and I might direct the first question on the potential for crowded facilities to the Premier if you'd like to respond to that question.

PREMIER: Thank you. This is an important question and it's one that we'll have to work through at a school basis, school by school in every sector of schooling. I think though the most important thing is that we shouldn't let buildings determine what is best for our children, we should decide where they are best placed for their stage of intellectual, social and personal development, and then we should find a building solution for it. There are some schools that will need some very significant investments, others already have spare capacity. So it will differ from school by school and we'll put the budget in to make it work.

MODERATOR: Okay thank you Premier. Mike, from your perspective are you concerned at the amount of pressure this will place on schools?

M.BYRNE: Well as the Premier says I think the first thing is our students, the need of our students and we need to deliver the curriculum to them in the most effective way and care for them in terms of their social and emotional development. We need to get those two things right and then work out our structures to meet those. Every school will be slightly different in terms of how it can best meet those needs and we'll be looking at every school site, we'll be engaging with our parent community and our staff community to see how we can deliver those two things, curriculum and care for our students.

MODERATOR: Okay well obviously the second half of Denise's question is asking whether or not 11-year olds are really ready for high school and we've actually just had a question from Kelly, also from Toowoomba who says: "I believe that the current push to change the entry age to high school to Year 7 will put unnecessary pressure on our children. In this day and age it is already difficult enough for children to be children without expecting them to deal with the pressures of high school at an even younger age". And I might ask Margaret, from the perspective of a parent and representing a lot of parents, do you think that 11 year olds are ready?

M.BLACK: I think an important point here is that in 2014 they won't be 11, they will be closer to 13. I was a student that was certainly in high school in Year 12 and I can

assure you that we have, we obviously have some concerns that we need to take through but often we see a child in Year 7 who's treading water, waiting for that next burst in their life. And we are, as parents are really wanting to make sure whatever decision is made that it will be the best for our children's education because the bricks and mortar will just have to flow through however they will do. But we really need to look at our rural school and also our city schools, we would hate to see the schools capped in the city because of the extra numbers. So there's a lot of things to work through but they won't be 11.

MODERATOR: Claire would you agree with that assessment?

C.WYATT-SMITH: I think another important point is the timing here. We're in the context of national curriculum and if the focus is on learning and quality learning opportunities, we can rethink the relationship between pre-prep and Year 3 for early years, and then Year 4 to Year 10 to be a span of middle years with two defined stages in it, and then senior schooling. So the timing is optimum for this.

MODERATOR: Okay great. We actually have a question from the audience on this issue from Mr Junn Kato who is President of the Middle Years of Schooling Association, so would you like to ask your question?

JUNN KATO: My question relates to whether or not we can take this further in just an exercise in national alignment. What we know there's been lots of excellent research done in Queensland over the last 10 years and going back further which shows that it's the teaching and learning in classrooms which makes the biggest difference for kids, and particularly in the middle years of schooling which is roughly from around about ages 10 through to about 14. So my question is to what extent is the government taking into consideration the research and the evidence which gives us a lot of information about how to most effectively work with young adolescents and meet their very, very specific learning needs.

MODERATOR: Well perhaps the Minister would like to answer that.

G.WILSON: Yes delighted. That's a very good question and indeed so valuable has the research been to date around the importance of the transition years that around 250 I think schools, about a third state schools, two thirds non state schools, already have a transition method of delivering education for those middle years. So when we go through the careful consideration of how we would go about moving Year 7 into the high school setting, I think this is a key consideration that we will need to have a look at, the opportunity that it creates to strengthen the transition arrangements for children going in, going from the primary school setting into the high school setting. And I welcome the views that will come from organisations like yourselves and others about how we can strengthen the opportunities to build greater confidence amongst students and greater engagement of students in their learning experience during these transition years.

JUNN KATO: So Minister, Education Queensland has a middle phase of learning action plan, at the moment there isn't... For a number of reasons over the last three years there's been a significant diminishment of staffing and resourcing in that area, will we see a redeployment of resources and staff to that particular initiative or something similar to allow this particular transition to occur smoothly?

G.WILSON: This proposal, Year 7 going into high school creates an opportunity for us to have a fresh look at how we can make improvements in the education system generally, but in particular in the transition years into high schools. So we certainly come with an open mind about this question. What we do know is that the staff to student ratio for the middle years of schooling in Queensland are fairly competitive with the best in Australia, but we know that there are opportunities to strengthen the transition years in our education system. And this discussion, the Green Paper which it opens up the whole question to the Queensland community, we welcome the opportunity to see whether we can strengthen the transition years even more than we have so far.

MODERATOR: Okay thank you Minister. I'm sorry Premier, did you want to... You might like to comment on a logistical question after this one as well.

PREMIER: Okay just before we leave this issue which I was a bit worried you were about to do Erin, I really wanted to go back to the two questions from Toowoomba because I think they are the things that are really playing on mum and dad's minds in relation to 11 year olds. And Margaret was right when she said they won't be 11 in 2014, but I thought I should just briefly explain that. In 2007 when we introduced the prep year of schooling, we lifted the entry age of for first years of school so that it aligned with the rest of the country. And what that means is that those students who became our first prep children in 2007, when they get to 2014 they will be called Year 7's but it will be their eighth year of school and they will on average be seven months older than children now are in Year 7 and more than half of them will actually turn 13. For children who answer that description, they're currently in high school. So the question really is do we hold them back into primary school, which is what we'd be doing, or do we restructure our schooling system to match where they are developmentally, personally, socially and intellectually. So I just think it's really important, because I agree with the points, I don't think 11 year olds are ready for high school and that's why we're not talking about doing it this year or next year, we're not talking about it until those Year 7's are in fact an older group of children.

MODERATOR: Great thank you Minister. I've actually had a number of logistical questions to do with this transitional moves and the first one we've just received online is from Julie at Coomera who asks, she's just wondering what future there is for current primary teaching graduates with the current oversupply of graduates and undersupply of jobs, especially with the plan to move Year 7 into high school. I might ask Mike, is this something that teachers are concerned about?

M.BYRNE: I think so. There is huge workforce issues associated with this move and the benefit of us talking about it now I think gives us the capacity to plan into the future and to be able to encourage those teachers to be able to face those sort of challenges. Part of it I think is the debate we need to have is how are we going to deliver the curriculum to these now Year 7 students potentially in a secondary setting? Is it going to look like our current Year 7 classes, or will they have access to a variety of teachers? How do we care for them in a pastoral care way with someone who's looking after them much the same as a Year 7 teacher can integrate learning, to what extent do we take advantage of the secondary perspectives of various specialist teachers that will come and go within classrooms? So I think that's the discussion we need to have. And then once we've determined that I think, we can then talk about the workforce issues of how to train teachers for that particular role.

MODERATOR: Well certainly Desley from Upper Mt Gravatt has just commented on that issue of specialist teachers and wondering if maybe middle schools and current high schools might be appropriate to employ as she says "More specialist teachers in the Grade 6 and 7 to smooth the transition". I'm wondering if the Minister has an opinion on that.

G.WILSON: Well that is something that we would have an open mind to. The fact is that even now, different schools are working with different structures of their schooling in those early years of high school. In some schools the first year of high school might have only two or three or four teachers rather than the full range of specialist teachers, so that's not a shift so clearly from one teacher in the primary school to a vast array of teachers in a high school setting. So I think Mike's right when he says that when we have got a clearer idea about how that transition can be managed once they're in the high school and the different models in which that can be delivered, then we'll be able to have a clearer idea about what the workforce needs are. The bottom line here is that we want to keep our teachers. We want teachers to be assured that this is an exercise in restructuring the education system around the transition into high school to get the best education for our children. And we want the teachers who are doing that good work right now, we want them to stay with us. We want them to go with us on the journey of improving education for these young children.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We've had a number of questions submitted online about the issue of students in remote areas and parents particularly concerned about the costs of possibly an extra year of boarding school. And we have a question from Lorraine McGinnis who's the President of the Isolated Children's Parents Association of Queensland and she asks: "If the transition from primary to secondary school requires students to live away from home, what support will be offered to students and parents?" And before we get an answer on that support, I might just ask Margaret what her thoughts are on this issue.

M.BLACK: It's certainly paramount in our thinking, from somebody who lived in rural Queensland, educated my own children through need through to the bigger schools, our association certainly has a lot of questions around the Year 7, what support is offered would have to come from other members of our panel. But it's always difficult for a parent to send their child to boarding school, I was one of those, but I think it's important to remember that our children will be a year older. And through all of this I think, I know I probably have said it before but I keep coming back to let's really sit down and look at what's the best for our children.

MODERATOR: Great, and Premier perhaps you'd like to answer the question about resources.

PREMIER: Sure, Lorraine I'm really pleased you asked that question because it is important to recognise that for many families in rural and remote Queensland, sending your child to high school is more complicated because it means sending your child away to boarding school. And so for those families, what this move would mean is instead of five years of high school it would be six years of high school, and so that's six years of boarding school. And even if we agree that it's the right thing for children, it's six years of boarding school fees. Now both the Commonwealth and State Governments have support for families to assist them in those circumstances, but given it's an extra year it's certainly something I think we need to sit down with the Isolated Children's Parents

Association and work through what might be necessary to do that. But if we believe this is the right thing, right way to do it educationally, we certainly wouldn't want children who live in rural and remote Queensland to miss out either. So we need to structure it in a way that makes sure every child gets the opportunity.

MODERATOR: Great. Some of the panellists mentioned earlier that the move to Year 7 has a lot to do with changes in the prep year as well and the starting age for children. And Melinda from Emerald has a question about that, she says "Why would you think that by putting Year 7 children into high school would bring us into line with other states when our prep does not teach our children anything like the other states? Prep in Queensland teaches our kids how to socialise, cut out, glue and colour in. Prep in New South Wales and Victoria teach their kids reading, writing and arithmetic and is equivalent to our Year 1". And I might ask Clair whether or not you think that's an accurate assessment of prep in Queensland?

C.WYATT-SMITH: I think the prep years and indeed pre-prep are now recognised as key parts of a child's learning development, and that the opportunities in pre-prep and prep extend well beyond some of the opportunities mentioned in that message. So I think creativity and play are key in those years, but then often times those opportunities for creativity and play are directly tailored for opportunities to learning science concepts, interaction, communication strategies, so they're quite rich years. The alignment I think with the rest of the curriculum is really important so we get the smooth transition for students right across the years of schooling up to their exit point.

MODERATOR: Okay well we actually, on this issue of prep, moving on now from Year 7, let's talk about the early years. We had a number of questions of people concerned about the fact that prep is not compulsory, and Susie from Charleville asks her question: "Owing to the fact that prep is not compulsory, are we not going to have a bigger gap in our education system as you're going to have some children entering Grade 1 with 12 months advancement on the ones that have not attended. How is this gap going to be compensated for?" And I might ask Mike if you have any thoughts of how your schools are going to handle that?

M.BYRNE: Can I just clarify, we're talking about prep or pre-prep there in the question because the prep year, attendance rates is really something like 98%. So while it's not compulsory, practically every student who's eligible takes up the opportunity of doing prep.

MODERATOR: Okay well certainly we actually have another question on that from an anonymous questioner in Brisbane who says that: "For those children who aren't taking up that opportunity, or the parents who aren't taking up that opportunity", they say "I think it is totally unprofessional for a parent to be presented with a sheet of letters and told to teach a child to write". And I might first of all ask the Minister whether or not this is something that's actually likely to happen?

G.WILSON: Well I don't believe so. As Mike was saying, with the prep year it's one of the most fundamental innovations and reforms that we have introduced into the Queensland education system in the recent past. It truly does bring us into further alignment with the other states, and that means that children have that much more opportunity to take off into their educational journey into those schooling years so that we do end up ultimately with 13 year olds going to be we think in the first year of high

school. So the prep year is a very, very important year. And where we are making bigger reforms that are actually going to put another plank underneath what we're talking about in the Green Paper and having a wide discussion about is in the kindy years. And that's where we will over the next four to five years roll out up to 240 kindergarten services, we'll provide funding support to childcare services providing early childhood education for three and a half to four and a half year olds. And all of the research tells us that not only is the prep foundational but the, what we call pre-prep or kindergarten is the next big plank that we need to put in and that will make a big difference. So people are voting with their feet, parents are voting with their feet in saying "We want prep for our children" and I expect they're going to vote with their feet and say "We want kindergarten for our children as well".

MODERATOR: Okay Margaret would you like to comment on this?

M.BLACK: When the prep was first introduced, and we actually welcomed it in, the message from our members was very, very loud and clear. There was no debate about the fact that they wanted it optional and on top of that they wanted it play based, they did not want their children sitting at a classroom as they would in Year 1 and be drill taught. And we, as recent as yesterday we are still getting emails from our members stating quite clearly is "Do not insult us as parents that we do not know how to get our children ready for school and I will not send my child to prep and my child will be ready for school". So there needs to be that flexibility there and we would actually, our association would be quite strong in advocating against a very, very structured prep program.

MODERATOR: Okay, Premier did you have an opinion on that?

PREMIER: Well it's interesting, the issue of compulsory prep was raised at the first public consultation we had on the Green Paper which Geoff and I attended in Townsville. And I just cast my mind back to when we were introducing prep and it was a very big change in the system because it also changed the age for children coming into a school environment. So the children going into Grade 1 are older than they used to be but coming into prep it's younger than they used to come into a school environment. And there was a lot of genuine concern from mums and dads about if my child is born, wherever you put the cut off there's always a child born the next day, if my child's born the day before or the week before. And every child is different and you can have three or four children and one of them is just not ready at the same time as everyone else was and parents wanted the flexibility to say "If my child is really not ready for that, I don't want to be breaking the law, I want to send my child the next year". And so that's why we made it non-compulsory. But even those parents whose children are not ready in their view are then coming in the next year and starting with prep rather than missing prep if you like. But there is I think an opportunity through the Green Paper for us to rethink how we might look at that in the future. But Margaret's right and Mike's right, I think it's over 98, it's about 98½% of all children. And you find even though the rest of school is compulsory, in any one year you will find about 1% of children not enrolled for largely a lot of good reasons, the family is travelling or these all sorts of things reasons why that happens.

MODERATOR: Okay, we actually have a question from the audience, Melinda Miller from the School of Early Childhood at Queensland University of Technology has a question about kindergarten programs.

MELINDA MILLER: Thank you. The introduction of quality kindergarten programs for all children aged three and a half to four and a half years is a very positive step forward for early years learning. My question is to support quality kindergarten programs how will the government respond to the need for sustained work day professional development for teachers in before school settings, such as long day care, similar to that that teachers in primary schools undertake.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Before we get a solid answer from the government, I must ask Claire what your opinion is on that issue of training for kindergarten.

C.WYATT-SMITH: It's something that's certainly exercised us in the last two years as we've been introducing teacher preparation programs for these years. And we've been exploring the placement opportunities and recognition of those placements with the relevant authorities in the state. And we think it's key that in fact those settings are recognised as proper placement sites for pre-service teachers.

MODERATOR: Thank you, and perhaps the Minister would like to respond.

G.WILSON: This is a very important area and a great opportunity for us to do the planning now and take the appropriate steps needed to build a new workforce, a new workforce of early childhood educators for the needs that we will have over the next four to five years as the kindy program is rolled out. So there will be many job opportunities in this arena. But we already have existing within childcare setting and the kindergarten settings, people working and have been working for many, many years. We want to make sure that we create opportunities to recognise their experience and skills where they might not yet have formal qualifications. So work is happening with the department and talking to the universities about how we might recognise current competencies or recognition of prior learning, which is a very conventional approach in the training industry, so that workers already in the industry have the opportunity to identify training gaps where they can then train up and eventually become fully qualified. As well as this initially will create opportunities for early childhood specialising teachers coming out of the university setting going into this area. All of the research shows that the biggest impact of any education investment is in the early years, and of course a key to that is the teaching workforce and the quality of that teaching workforce. We have the big impact there and that gives children a flying start into schooling. So we have the opportunity to I think recognise existing workers, help them train up, working closely with the universities in doing that, and also with the universities in terms of encouraging choice by teacher graduates to in the future specialise in the early years because there will be a need for many, many teachers in this area.

MODERATOR: Thanks very much Minister. We due to time need to move on to the next issue. We're just talking about standards in schools and in particular the suggestion of an Inspector and we've had a question from Alison at the Sunshine Coast who says: "Bring back mystery inspectors, those that walk into classrooms unannounced and watch teachers in action". And I might send this question to Mike first and say do you think teachers would welcome this?

M.BYRNE: No.

[LAUGHTER]



M.BYRNE: I think the teaching profession has well and truly moved on from those days. And while we have those war stories of the past, I think there's more professional ways of working with teacher professionals to make sure that we do first of all define clear standards, have good professional development so teachers can have the skills to be able to guide their students, but also to work collegially both within their own school and across school systems to deliver standards in the best possible way. And I think there's some other models that are far more beneficial than the old inspectorate model.

MODERATOR: Okay Claire do you have any thoughts on what some of those models might be or suggestions for a good way to maintain standard?

C.WYATT-SMITH: Standards is a word that's being used in so many places, I'd suggest with so many different meanings and we say the word and I'm not always sure that we're on the same page when we say it. A key point I think for us to say is that being clear about standards will be very important for us as we try to secure improvements in students' learning and their life opportunities related to that learning. I think we need to work... The profession needs to be recognised as the proper placement where improvement occurs, that teacher assessment is central to that being the main driver. And teachers in my experience take very seriously the accountability issues and engage productively with issues of quality teaching, learning and assessment. So I think working with the profession and recognising the central role of the teaching profession is key, and no to the arrival of the unannounced inspector.

MODERATOR: Premier, will we be bringing them back?

PREMIER: Well I'm not even sure that in the old days that they came unannounced. I certainly remember being told by teachers that the inspector was coming and we had to be very good and we were offered inducements that if we behave ourselves we would get out early or some sort of reward for good behaviour. It's important, we do talk about a role for a much more structured process where a school is really struggling to meet what the community would say are the standards of the school. And while I agree with Claire, standards are thrown around, I think we all have some shared understanding of the basics. And when a school is really struggling to make those basics, we need I think to have a much more structured process that says we are going to come in and really assess what the issues are here, and we'll work with the principal, we'll work with the teachers. And I agree with Claire, it's professionals who will be the drivers of that. But sometimes those people in the school need an external professional to come in and say "Well have you tried it this way or that way?" and that will be way of, we use the language inspection but it's certainly not the old inspectorate as we might have known it. But I think the community is... I think it's a good thing, they're becoming very savvy consumers if you like, they have high expectations of our schools because they have high aspirations for their children and that is a good thing, and we need to be living up to it.

MODERATOR: Okay thanks. We actually have a question from the audience on this issue as well and I'd like to invite David Robertson from the Independent Schools Queensland to ask his question.

DAVID ROBERTSON: Thank you. To the panel just a comment about what the future might look like. As you know there's very significant reforms happening at the national level, we've got a new body called ACARA, we've got national curriculum etcetera and I

wonder whether the Premier or the Minister might outline how they see this new body in Queensland relating to the national initiatives. The second point is, as you would be aware for independent schools, school autonomy is a major driver of outcomes and performance. And I suppose we would be looking for some assurance from the government that this new body won't impact on school autonomy, particularly for independent schools.

MODERATOR: Okay perhaps the Minister would like to respond to that.

G.WILSON: Sure. On the first question, the Green Paper raises the question of putting QCT and QSA and the Non State Schools Accreditation Board together and becoming a combined standards organisation. The Non State Schools Accreditation Board already operates a high level of standards that are reviewed and against which school, private schools and independent schools are checked against to ensure that high standards are being delivered into the community. And the community would expect us to keep doing that. The concept is essentially that that be available across all schools. And so I would see that the independence of individual schools beyond the state school sector would in no way be impeded. In fact they continue to have the opportunity to perform at a high standard like they do now. On the question of ACARA, it's a very important innovation at the national level. If you talk to any parent that is in the defence forces or is moving around because of their employment and many, many more are now, they will tell you all of the problems that they have moving every two to three years between the states and the different schooling sectors, they welcome the fact that we are working towards a national structure for education, that is working on a national curriculum so that we can have consistency between the states so that we minimise the negative impact that is happening for students when they move interstate. And also to ensure that across the country through ACARA and the collaborative involvement that each of the states have in ACARA, that we do achieve high standards and consistent standards of curriculum across, and teaching across the state. So the new body, if we create that as coming out of the Green Paper and I invite professionals particularly to make contribution to the Green Paper around that third objective. The new body would work in a strong way to compliment at a state level across the schooling sectors, the pursuit of those high educational standards that ACARA through developing a uniform curriculum is achieving or seeking to achieve across all of Australia.

MODERATOR: Okay thank you Minister. I might just ask Mike from the perspective of your organisation what your opinion is on the introduction of the Inspectorate.

M.BYRNE: Well I commented a little bit before in relation to that but certainly if the Inspectorate is linked to standard, we believe first of all it's really important that there are clear standards and that we have structures, not only with our own schools to be able to demonstrate that we achieved those schemes, but I think publicly we need ways of assuring our school communities and our wider community, who invest a lot of money in education, that our standards are being achieved. And I think through the existing what we call the Non State School Accreditation Board, each school whether they are Catholic or independent school, is required to have a cyclical review process that both has annual report goals setting and then five year cycles in which we have to report back to NSSAB, the board that's in structure there. So when we look at this new structure, what we'd want to be assured is that those structures that we've really developed over a 20, 30 year period are respected and that we can still continue to develop those even better to be able to achieve those standards and accountability requirements.

MODERATOR: Okay Claire.

C.WYATT-SMITH: Can I just say something, while I think the intensity around the word standards is one of its highest levels in the history of this country, we have standards in schooling now and we have had them for some time. And the QCAR, Queensland Curriculum Assessment Reform Initiative in this state took particular care with looking at curriculum and aligning them with some standards and in 11 and 12 we've had standards tied to internationally recognised moderation practices where teachers come together and look at work samples. So it's not as if we haven't been working with standards already in this state, the question is which standards for what purpose.

MODERATOR: Well we've actually just received a suggestion online from someone who has an idea about how parents could be guaranteed of standards in schools. Mark from Morayfield says: "Why not have video in classrooms so as to allow parents to view what is happening at any time within the classroom?" I might ask the parent on the panel Margaret, what you think of that idea?

M.BLACK: I hope not. I think both our teachers and I really would like to thank our teachers for the great job that they do and sometimes in extremely tough circumstances, and boy oh boy is that more than Big Brother looking. And our children actually deserve the privacy that the teachers deserve and it's all about parents wanting assurance that they do certainly have a school that meets a certain standard but no, not a video camera.

MODERATOR: Okay Premier do you think this is a good idea for how parents can be guaranteed that their children are getting a good education?

PREMIER: Look I think it's something you'd have to be very cautious about. I do think there would be... One of the things I think children benefit from going to school rather than sitting at home and doing all of their work without being in a school environment, and I know that there are great things happening in home schooling and great things happening in distance education, but one of things children benefit from is being in an environment that's not their family and not their home and learning how to be with their peers, learning how to be, and gradually learn through that how to be an independent young person. And I think sort of having mum and dad at the end of the day saying "What were you doing in period three?" might not lead to family harmony. But having said that I think it's really important that every parent feels very comfortable at any time being able to walk into a school and walk into a classroom. And every primary school, I know with my own children and primary schools I walk into, I see parents doing that all the time and I think it's a really healthy thing. Good because parents know that they're welcome, but I think it also means teachers understand that at any time mum or dad or the principal or someone might walk in and schools are very I think observed places already. But I do think that ultimately technology is going to change and without, even without video cameras in classrooms, I don't think it's that hard to imagine a day when at your work computer you may not be able to just connect up to your son or daughter's computer and through that see the classroom anyway. So I think some of this is going to come in one way or another.

MODERATOR: Sure, well actually on that issue of teachers and parents relating to each other we've had an online question from Chris from Brisbane who says: "I'm a parent of four, I have observed that teachers are expected to have a high level of interaction with

parents as well as students. As mentioned in A Flying Start, the Green Paper, the support of parents is vital to a proactive learning child". And Chris's question is: "Can a class be included in teacher training that provides the tools and skills required for a teacher to encourage or mitigate attitudes encountered from the multiple personalities among parents?" And that might be a good question for Claire.

[LAUGHTER]

C.WYATT-SMITH: I think it's a really very good question because what we do obviously is in preparing our pre service teachers to be profession ready is we make sure that they undertake a range of studies that also attends to communication issues. And communicating with parents is a very important part of a teacher's work, and communicating about a whole range of issues right from behaviour to taking up learning opportunities through to achievement and assessments and the monitoring of that. So the communication practices that are expected of a teacher are attended to in teacher preparation programs in a range of courses. I think the other important thing to say is that our pre-service teachers are required to undertake placements right throughout their studies. And one of the opportunities I think there is for the pre-service teacher to take up opportunities to be actively involved in what the school is doing and of course taking privacy issues into consideration, then attendance at staff meetings, induction is critical into those on sight work practices. That's why this placement is such a critical part of the preparation. So yes I support the thrust of the question saying it's vital, and yes it is happening in our courses and we certainly advocate for it to be part of the placement experience concern as well.

MODERATOR: Great thanks, hopefully Chris is satisfied with that answer. On the issue of teacher training we have another question from the audience, Associate Professor Nan Bahr from QUT.

NAN BAHR: Thank you very much. We're very proud of our teacher education programs and I note that objective three states "An aim to lifting the quality of teacher training courses provided by universities". I'm interested to find out what evidence there may be that we already don't have high quality courses that are leading nationally and internationally.

G.WILSON: Well thank you very much. This is an important initiative where we actually want to engage with all of the university education faculties to identify opportunities to improve the education training given to undergraduates to a uniform level. This has been prompted out of observations made by Professor Masters in his review of Queensland Education that was tabled last year, and he does recognise that across the board we do have highly professional and highly qualified teacher education courses that are being taught. But what he did identify was that in talking to teachers that teachers, some teachers felt that they weren't as prepared and equipped for the workplace like they might have wanted to be. So it's not a negative, it's actually identifying that as these changes are taking place within our society and our community and changing technology and changing behaviour between students, that we want to make sure that teachers are equipped as fully as possible and at a uniform level and standard across the faculties, to meet the challenges of the existing classroom. So that's why there's a, it's foreshadowed in the Green Paper that there will be cooperative review undertaken in conjunction with the universities by the government to identify opportunities where we can strengthen the education training given to teachers at

university, particularly around issues of behaviour management. And that's obviously recognised as an important area where we can always seek to do better.

MODERATOR: Margaret maybe you'd like to comment on this?

M.BLACK: The Joint Parent Committee which is made up of the independent schools, the Catholic schools and the state schools have met with Minister Wilson on regular occasion and we often talk about the teacher training, particularly in the area of working with parents because parents can be difficult, I have no doubt about that, but they only want the best for their children. And I think that there needs to be an upheaval of the training for teachers around how to work with parents. And it is a known fact that three way engagement is the strongest possibility of getting the best education for their children. And how to get that message out to parents we believe has to probably come from the reach from the teacher because parents, some have had experiences from schools, they don't believe that they should be there, but believe me they should be.

MODERATOR: Okay thank you.

G.WILSON: Could I add, just add.

MODERATOR: Very quickly.

G.WILSON: That I think it's a complex relationship between parents and teachers and I do think that we should be looking at how we can better inform parents of what are appropriate expectations of what teachers are able to do in the classroom. And like to compliment, perhaps improve training for teachers at university about how to manage more effectively relationships with parents generally but particularly with parents where there are some challenges with their child's education. So I think that we can improve the quality of understanding by parents of the challenges that teachers face and what's their responsibility and what's the parent's responsibility.

MODERATOR: I might just return to the question we had from the Associate Professor and ask Clair, the question being whether or not there's any evidence that teacher education in Queensland is not vigorously comprehensive. Do you have concerns about the level of teacher education?

C.WYATT-SMITH: Thanks Erin for the question.

[LAUGHTER]

C.WYATT-SMITH: I think it's very important that we recognise that there's been rigorous accountability checks done on teacher education programs in this state through the Queensland College of Teachers. I think we actually need to make sure that that's very clear in the public date that programs in Queensland are vetted in ways that are far more rigorous and comprehensive than apply in some other states in Australia. Having said that I think the issue that Nan might be actually pointing to though didn't specifically state was the test, the test for teachers prior to their registration as fit for service. And I think the test is something we'll have to watch because we know any assessment we have to look at, it's fitness for purpose and the question is what will it contribute that we don't already know if it's only going to be a thin sliver of our programs. And the debate about what it's representing and how valid it is I think is one we're yet to have. Do I think

that we can do better? I always think that we can do better and I'm sure that everybody in the room would say that investing energies in ensuring currency and responsiveness is a shared concern. Do I think there's evidence in the report that teachers are ill-prepared? I'm not aware of any.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We've also had a number of questions sent in online from people raising concerns over the proposal for a six week training course for university graduates to become teachers. And we've had a question from Dawn at Boondall who says: "Can the government really think that by employing those people with a non educational degree that they will become good teachers in six weeks?" I might direct that one to the Premier.

PREMIER: Thank you, I'm really pleased someone asked this because I think it's been really misrepresented in the media. What is happening is in Victoria they're trialling a program where people who already have a degree and have already been in the workplace for a number of years who may want to become teachers, a program that would allow them to have six weeks of intensive training, then go into the classroom under supervision for four days a week and actually teach as teachers as part of a graduate diploma in education, and they would do that 12 months diploma over two years. So the answer is I don't think anyone thinks six weeks is enough to become a teacher. This is a structured program that's about identifying that someone for example may have been working as a scientist in a laboratory who wants to go and teach high school science, and they're in their early 30's, they've got a mortgage, how are we actually going to encourage them? They're not in a position for whatever reason just to become a student for even 12 months and live on those sort of wages, how do we restructure an education program to have those people coming into our classrooms. That's not something that's happening in Queensland at the moment. We are looking at what's happening in Victoria. I think this is its first year in Victoria, they had 380 applicants I think...

MALE: About 800.

PREMIER: Sorry, 800 applicants, some of whom had masters degrees, which doesn't make them automatically a good teacher but the point is this is about a post graduate diploma in the skills. And we'll be watching closely if it works. They've taken it, they've only taken 45 people into the program, we'll be watching very closely but it's not something we've decided to do yet but it is something that we will look at, as I think other states of Australia will because the opportunity to get people who have had life experience, who have worked in other careers, who have something to offer our children is something, and a passion for teaching, is something we shouldn't miss out on. But equally we need to make sure they're well prepared to go into the classroom and we need to assess this program and see how it goes.

MODERATOR: Mike did you have an opinion on this?

M.BYRNE: We wouldn't want to rule it out. I mean still I think when you first hear the six weeks you have immediate concerns I think in terms of the shortness of that. A lot of the success will depend on the mentoring they get within that follow up period. So one of the concerns I've heard in relation to that program is that these six week type teachers would then be sent to more difficult schools. I'd like to switch that around. And in fact we are going to do it, they should be matched up with some of the most competent

teachers who have also got a capacity to be able to mentor them effectively. I think it's worth looking at. We do have some skill shortages in some key areas and I think we shouldn't rule out anything in terms of getting some of these quality people into the teaching profession, but I think we need to do it very carefully.

MODERATOR: Sure, Claire did you want to add anything to that?

C.WYATT-SMITH: I agree with everything that's been said so far. The one issue I'd add is teaching is in fact a practice that involves bringing together research findings, theoretical underpinnings and practice into the classroom. And the concern that I'd have is that the mentoring would need to extend to the application of theory to practice in a quite focused way. And so we probably are well placed to treat it as an exercise for observation and once again analyse the potential benefits for us here in Queensland.

MODERATOR: Okay. We've had a question sent in from Tanya at Palm Beach who is concerned about the pay for teachers in Queensland. And she asks: "Why aren't all teachers in Australia paid at the same levels of rate?" And I might put that one to the Premier.

PREMIER: That's a terrific question Tanya. I think you wouldn't find a state government anywhere in the country that wouldn't love to see national wages for teachers because what you end up with is a wages, a wages war if you like between the states. And I understand why unions would do it, they look over the border and say "Well they earn more there so we've got a bigger wages claim" and ultimately that's how wages have been increased around the country in this profession. And the same in other professions, it's not unique to teaching, we'll have a similar argument around nurses' wages or whatever. I think, technically, I don't think there's any reason why it couldn't ultimately be set nationally. I think though the sort of politics and industrial reality would indicate that we're probably set for state based wage bargaining for some period of time. And it doesn't help any education system if there's a big disparity because then you lose your best people or you run the risk of losing some of your best people and your new graduates will go where the wages are higher, and that's not a desirable outcome I think for any, for Australia. You don't want all your best teachers in one place that for that period of time can happen to pay more than anywhere else, and there are some real issues around that. But yes, I'd love a wage bargaining in the education system to be the Prime Minister's problem, not mine, but that's not the real world.

MODERATOR: Well we've had a number of questions on special needs funding as well have come through the online submission and we've just had a question from Tina of Alexandra Hills who says: "We have a child with a disability and we wonder why the funding for early special education has been cut. Why should our child be further disadvantaged because of funding cuts?" I thought I might ask the Minister whether or not that is actually the case.

G.WILSON: Well we provide quite significant resources to support inclusive education within Queensland. It is a fundamental principle upon which the education system has been reformed over the last 10 to 15 years. And at a state level, those resources have gradually improved in their quantum. And decisions are made by principals and regional managers within the state education system about how to deploy those resources to give the best learning opportunity for that child, with whatever particular learning disability they may have. I'm not familiar, as you would expect, with the details of Tina's

particular case and I'll certainly have someone from the department have a very close look at that and very quickly. However I just want to underline and make clear, we are absolutely committed to inclusive education, we want to ensure that students, whatever their particular educational needs might be, that resources are deployed school by school and in such a way as to maximise that educational opportunity so that as far as humanly possible, students are actually on pretty much a level playing field.

PREMIER: I'm not sure what information Tina's working off. There has been no budget cuts to special education, in fact it's an area we see an increase in every single year. If Tina would like to leave her details we could certainly follow up for her.

MODERATOR: Terrific, well hopefully Tina can do that. We've also had another question on special needs from a primary school learning support teacher from Glenda at Toowong who raises concerns about dyslexia and notes that in the United Kingdom, dyslexia is seen as a disability and has the funding that comes along with that. And I couldn't help with the opportunity, the literacy expert with us here, she asks: "The effects of dyslexia continue throughout life. When and how does the Bligh Government propose to address the issue of support for dyslexic children in our schools?" And before we ask that question about support I might ask if Claire has an opinion on how we can help with dyslexic children.

C.WYATT-SMITH: I think the important thing for teacher education programs is to look very carefully at the place of the teaching of reading and to ensure that all our graduates are qualified in the teaching of reading right throughout schooling, and in particular teaching of reading for students with special needs. In terms of dyslexia, one of the ways I think that we go forward is careful diagnosis of the needs and the planning of the interventions for the individual student, and then the careful monitoring of those interventions for effect. The partnership therefore between the teacher, the learning support teacher and the parents, critical in a whole school provision. And for the school to look at what other specialist support needs the child has. So it's really a partnership model that's critical.

MODERATOR: Minister, is this an issue that your department is concerned with?

G.WILSON: It is indeed and the department is actually reviewing in a particular area a potentially far more effective way in examining the needs of the children with perhaps certain learning difficulties so that the preoccupation is on what the learning support that is needed is, on what is the learning support that's needed rather than whether or not they have a particularly named identified disability of some sort. So they're having a careful look at that now because the bottom line is we want to make sure the child gets the opportunity to have the education experience in an inclusive situation within a classroom that maximises their chances with education, rather than identifying whether they have a condition that satisfies a particular name or don't have a condition that satisfies a required name.

MODERATOR: Sure.

PREMIER: I think it is important to say though that we do provide learning support, additional resources into schools now. We do not determine... We don't define dyslexia as a disability, the questioner is right about that, and I think we'd be a little cautious and I think most jurisdictions around the world have been a bit cautious about doing that



because it's a pretty heavy label and it's one you want to use a bit carefully. And people usually only want it because they think it will deliver resources. So what we're sort of talking about here is how do we deliver the resources better, but there is, there are resources in our schools and they are learning support teachers who do work over and above the classroom teacher with children who have these sorts of issues with reading.

MODERATOR: Okay well let's move on to talking about NAPLAN results because we've had a number of questions on this issue. And in particular I'd like to put the question from Jacinta in Brisbane who says: "Is the Premier aware that private schools are now requiring parents to submit their child's Year 5 NAPLAN results, and then only taking the cream of the crop of students?" She adds: "Will this put pressure on the state school system?" And I might first of all go to Margaret to ask is this something that parents are concerned about? That the results will be used in this way?

M.BLACK: Probably don't start me on NAPLAN tests. We are absolutely horrified at the moment of NAPLAN tests. Until we have assurance of a national curriculum and quality assurance that our students are at the same age learning the same subjects, how on earth can anybody believe they can be tested? And what is a bigger disgrace is that they are now published across Australia. So we firmly believe that the NAPLAN tests are being used by media and other avenues to bag our school. And if nothing else out of today, we want recognition that our state schools are great schools and we do not have the privilege of whether or not we accept a school student or not. And we would be horrified if any school, and I'm sure, I know where Mike's coming straight behind me on this but we would be horrified if any school divided children on their NAPLAN tests on a national curriculum that doesn't exist.

MODERATOR: We're short on time Mike, any thoughts?

M.BYRNE: Certainly I'd agree with Margaret. I'd be very disappointed if schools were using that as a criteria for entry. When parents are enrolling their child, they certainly look for a rich range of data, NAPLAN scores might be one set of data but I'd hope that there would be a lot more than that. And I hope they'd look at the individual pupil and their needs as well as their academic performance in a NAPLAN test.

MODERATOR: Premier, did you want to add anything to that issue?

PREMIER: Well I'm not aware of the practice that Jacinta is suggesting is occurring and I think it would disturb many people. Certainly the Independent and Catholic schools that I am aware of are schools that are looking to promote their education and take students from a broad cross section. I'm not aware of any independent school that academically restricts entry. That doesn't mean it isn't happening but I'm not aware of it. Certainly I think most educationalists would think that the Year 5 NAPLAN results of an individual student would be a pretty poor indicator of long term outcomes.

MODERATOR: Right, well two final questions to finish us off. We've had a number of people ask about teaching of languages in schools and we've had one question from Michael of Annerley who wants to know whether or not this is going to continue to happen in our schools and if people will be given this opportunity, children will have this opportunity.

PREMIER: Short one, the answer is yes.

MODERATOR: Yes, the answer is yes.

G.WILSON: And I'll say it too, yes.

MODERATOR: Well let me ask then are members of the panel supportive of this? We've certainly had questions from people saying that they think this is a waste of time when more focus should be spent on maths and English, would anyone agree with that assessment?

M.BLACK: Our parents will tell you they want their children to learn the maths and English, the language first, and I know there's studies out there in relation to... Our policy is that it should be available, but parents should absolutely have the ability to withdraw and not a very narrow window for how they can withdraw. It needs to be a discussion between parents and school.

MODERATOR: Okay thank you. Well we have one final question for the Premier from Steve of Buderim, says: "While Queensland state schools in the south east corner swelter in 35 plus degree temperatures and high humidity in the summer months, will the Queensland Government be actively addressing this issue? Alternatively, can we be assured that politicians and policy makers will be turning up their air conditioned offices to 35 degrees during the Queensland summer months?"

[LAUGHTER]

PREMIER: Thank you, this was one of the biggest issues you face every February as the Education Minister. It is true that many of our schools in the south east are quite uncomfortable, particularly during February. I think if we are honest though, it's really only that February and then maybe just right in the end in December. For us to do this would be a very, very significant investment. And I'm not saying it can never happen, what I am saying is that there have been decisions made about other priorities in the last couple of years that I think have been just as important, computers for children, computers for teachers, the prep year, new school buildings replacing some of the very old buildings. We have got air conditioning for children in... What we've done is put the investment, the public investment in air conditioning in the hottest schools in the state, I think it's from Gladstone North, every school has now been air conditioned and every new school in that area is done. I think, will one day all of the SEQ schools be air conditioned? The answer is yes. The question is really is the pace at which it can afford to be done given a range of other priorities. And I certainly wouldn't want schools in the south east corner to have their air conditioning on full bore in June and July, paying the electricity bills either. So you've got to get that balance right.

MODERATOR: Right. Well we're out of time for any questions so I might just ask if the Premier has any closing words she'd like to say?

PREMIER: I'd just like to thank everybody who's both here today in the audience, everybody who submitted a question over the last week or so, and everybody who's come online while we've been here. Just listening to your questions is a very important part of us and our thinking in relation to the Green Paper and a number of the questions that were raised here are very similar to those that were raised in the first public consultation in Townsville. So I think at the end of this we may well see some themes emerging and that will help guide our decision making. So thank you, it's been terrific.

MODERATOR: Alright so thank you. Please remember that you can go to the website in order to download this session as either a video or a podcast, you can also get the transcript. And we'd also encourage people to go to the website to look out for details of the next People's Question Time. Thanks very much for everyone attending, thanks to our panellists, and thanks for watching.

PREMIER: And thank you to QUT.

[APPLAUSE]

[END OF PEOPLE'S QUESTION TIME]

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