

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 21 November 2007, Page 1446

EDUCATION (COMPULSORY EDUCATION AGE) AMENDMENT BILL

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (11:43): I rise briefly today to indicate my support for the second reading of this bill. This is a simple bill that amends the Education Act 1972 to ensure that all 16 year olds are participating in full-time education or training until they turn 17. I believe this is a positive measure, provided that the training and education is meaningful and stimulating. It is extremely important that a young person be involved in education, employment or training. Now more than ever our young people require adequate training for a competitive, challenging and evolving workforce.

Our education system should be practical enough for young people to see that there is a clear pathway to their job of choice—provided they are willing to put in the effort, of course—and develop the skills necessary to perform that job. Tertiary education is not for everybody. The important thing is that our young people have opportunity, and the commitment to introduce technical education in South Australia by both major parties is to be commended.

Having said that, I think we are all aware that there are young people at school with no desire whatsoever to be there. This achieves nothing for them and it disrupts their classmates and teachers. There will always be some hard-core troublemakers, but the challenge for us is to provide resources and to develop programs to make training relevant enough to keep this number at a minimum.

Schools which focus on vocational training (such as Fremont-Elizabeth City High School) strongly emphasise pathways to work outside the school environment, such as acquiring trade skills, and this is certainly a positive thing. This problem can be reduced by more schools providing relevant and more attractive options for people with little or no interest in an academic pathway. We want to see as many 17 year olds as possible achieving their full potential through full-time education, training and/or work.

I would like to add that my three sons (that sounds like a TV show) all left school at the beginning of year 10. They lost interest and just were not engaged. They were high performers and ambitious, but school somehow lost its zing. We came to an arrangement that they could leave school, but they had to find work or get into some sort of training or tertiary education. One of my sons went on to get an international business degree at university and another son went on to study IT.

What did it for them was that they actually had permission to have a break from school to assess where it was that they wanted to go and had a choice about that direction. I think this is also something that we need to consider with our young people. We need to look at what is disengaging for our children about our education system. What is it that we need to do to improve it, to make sure that they have variety, that they are challenged and, most importantly, that they do continue to learn.

My second-oldest son's complaint was, 'It is not just challenging me any more and I am not learning anything new. It's boring.'

With those comments, I support the second reading of the bill. I think there are amendments being proposed that I will consider at the committee stage.