

In that regard, I think we will find that there will be people, particularly in the media, who will be perhaps disappointed that the document is not more political, and that it does not give a hard time to academics for being too left, quasi-psychological, uninspiring or unimaginative, or not producing teachers capable of teaching in a classroom and managing that very difficult environment. But, equally, there is no bill of clean health here either. We have a lot of work to do in this country in establishing a research base which we can rely upon when those people who replace us in this parliament are again confronted with issues to do with teacher education. I hope that the Australian government at this opportunity takes up our recommendation of establishing that very important longitudinal study along with, of course, the educational research fund—call it what you will—to put education in this country in an informed position. Unfortunately, that is not where we are at today.

Teacher training in Australia is certainly not in crisis. It is with a good deal of heart that I say that. But we certainly can do better. I do believe that our community is ready for further education reform and that we need to see that beginning in our universities. On the evidence that is available here, it cannot generally be said that teacher training produces graduates without the necessary suite of knowledge, skills and strategies to teach effectively, but it is happening in some quarters and we will need to be courageous enough to meet our obligations and to challenge it.

The country is also confronted by the fact that we do not have at this time a set of professional standards for either teacher registration or teacher education that is nationally consistent. That is a very important initiative. I think it is one of the centrepiece recommendations from the committee's report. I think that will need to be handled in a very delicate fashion with our state and territory colleagues, because we will all have to own this if it is to be successful in the future.

Adopting this recommendation has a risk in that if not handled carefully and with a genuine spirit of goodwill with state and territory colleagues we run the risk of bringing those professional standards in a nationally consistent way down to a lowest common denominator. We must be very careful that that not be allowed to take place and that we in fact strive to lift standards, which can only result in better learning outcomes for our kids. I think Rebecca would be impressed with our report. I think she would see that we are actually attempting to harness the information we have to hand in a way that reforms education, makes it stronger and makes it better for people in her situation in the future who are challenged with questions of the difference between four and six. I thank the House.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (4.40 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training entitled *Top of the class: report on the inquiry into teacher education*. I commence my comments by extending, as other speakers have, my thanks to the chair, the member for Cowper, and the deputy chair, the member for Port Adelaide. It has been quite rightly identified that this inquiry, given the highly political nature of education as an issue of debate in the community, could have become quite divisive. Thanks to their leadership and the partnership approach taken in this committee we managed to work our way through some fairly difficult and challenging issues to come up with what were solid and practical responses in a way that, as the chair made clear in his comments, focused on what would be a good outcome rather than on what was an ideologically correct position. I think at the end of the day that is why the committee feels so comfortable with the unanimous support that stands behind this report.

Before I get to the recommendations I would like to take the opportunity to personally acknowledge the work of the committee secretariat. I suspect that the process that we went through was not the standard process for many committee hearings. I do not think there was a single person on the committee who was not absolutely engaged and interested in debating out both the content of the report and the recommendations. It was a very vigorous engagement of minds, which my colleague the deputy chair has often talked about, not only between the members of the committee but with the secretariat. It puts a lot of pressure on the secretariat personnel to have to do that, with fairly vigorous members of parliament putting their views. It was handled extraordinarily professionally and resulted in a first-class report being produced. To all members of the secretariat, past and present, who lived through that process with us I extend my thanks for their professionalism.

I would like to address some of the context in which this report now enters the educational debate in this country. Many speakers have made the point that it was certainly not in evidence received by the committee that there is a crisis in teacher education. Indeed, I think it would be fair to read from that statement that we do not believe there is a crisis in teaching. What we do believe is that there are looming serious challenges and significant pockets of shortfall that need to be addressed and that one way of addressing that is through the manner in which we educate and train our teachers and provide them with support in ongoing professional development.

What are those challenges and those glaring gaps at this point in time? One challenge is that we have brought down a report on how to produce a quality teacher in a time period where the issue is going to be how you get a

warm body in your classroom. That is a real challenge. Already we are seeing significant shortages, and the shadow minister for education, the member for Perth, talked about some of those in his contribution. There are significant shortages in certain aspects of teaching, in particular in maths and sciences, in languages other than English of course and, increasingly, in some of the technical subjects being taught in schools. When we combine that with the fact that the teaching workforce is ageing, we are looking in the near future at a significant demand for teachers in the classroom. So the pressure will be on to simply push people through in numbers in order to address that shortage. I think there is no more critical time for a report such as this one about quality; to be saying to governments and all the partners involved in teacher education—the universities, the employing authorities and, indeed, the young training teachers themselves—that this is exactly the point in time when you need to make sure that you are maximising the quality outcomes, because the pressure for quantity is going to be significant.

I think that, with regard to this report and its recommendations, there is a real urgency about making sure that these very practical measures are put in place to ensure that we do not end up in that bind where schools are simply faced with the fact that any teacher in the classroom is better than none and so that some of the things that the shadow minister talked about, such as people teaching maths with no maths qualifications, do not continue to occur. That is the overall workforce plan and the context in which we bring down the report.

We also bring it down with the recognition that, for many young people, the teaching profession has undoubtedly become less and less attractive, particularly secondary teaching. We know that societies have become more complex and communities deal with multiple challenges in terms of drug and alcohol issues, crime rate issues and neglect issues that are confronting classrooms around our country. We know that to some extent some of the very good developments we have had through encouraging our children not to unquestioningly obey authority, with all of the problems that had in the past, have also meant that it is much more difficult to assert authority. For many teachers that is a real challenge, particularly, as I said, in the secondary system.

I talk to a lot of young people. I have a son doing teacher training at university. There is nobody more critical of that than those who have just come out of school. They know what horrors they were, so it is very difficult to encourage them to feel positive about becoming a high school teacher. It is interesting to listen to their conversations. Part of the reason that I think we get an overapplication for primary school teaching and an underapplication for the high school teaching is that they have this view—they know how horrible they were at 14 but they were not too bad at seven or eight so, if they would like to teach, perhaps the primary school option is the better one. That is a real challenge.

Some of the programs that we are recommending in this report will, I hope, start to address that. What happens is that you get a big supply of kids applying to do primary teaching and not so many applying to do secondary. The universities say, 'We can fill up classes full of primary school teachers and get the funding for that, so we will do it regardless of whether there are actually jobs for them at the other end of that process.' Some of the really serious recommendations in this report about workforce planning and tying the funding of university courses to that planning are very important, because if you make courses available in the areas you are more likely to have kids look at it and say, 'I actually really liked science at school, so maybe being a science teacher would not be a bad option.'

The other really good thing that has happened is that we have seen a movement towards mature age entry in particular into secondary training because of options like the one- and two-year diplomas in education. Many of them are even going into the full degree courses. That is a good outcome too. The recommendations in here actually provide for opportunities to not close down and become prescriptive about the entry level. I think the committee very wisely, under a lot of pressure to talk about entry-level criteria—should we test, should we enforce interviews, should we have psychological testing of people on their appropriateness to the profession?—listened through all of that and worked our way through. I think that, quite rightly, the committee at the end of the day said that the real test is what comes out the other end. You can spend your whole life arguing about what criteria and characteristics you can or should measure at the intake level.

There needs to be a good course providing plenty of practical experience from the earliest stages that allows people to self-deselect, if you like, if they recognise early on that they are not suitable for the classroom; a good course that measures the standards that young people reach at the end; an ongoing induction program that supports that through provisional to full registration; and then an ongoing professional development program that says, 'If you want to get registration and reregistration and promotional-level standardisation then you will do ongoing professional development.' I think that this report is a sound basis for all the things that we need to do to ensure that quality can be sustained under the immense demand for more and more teachers that is going to face us in the next 10 to 20 years. I commend the report.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Hall**) adjourned.