



# PREFACE

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The future of our society will be largely determined by how well our schools educate our children. Schools are responsible not only for preparing students for further education and for employment, but also for assuring that children grow up to be responsible adults who can get along with others.

In Queensland, it is our state education system that is the major bearer of this responsibility — nearly three-quarters of school-age children in Queensland are enrolled in state schools.

### The principles of state education

The fundamental ideals that have governed Queensland state schooling since its inception are that education be free, secular and compulsory. These democratic ideals have lost none of their currency or importance, and they underpin the principles of today's state education system. These principles relate to the inclusion of all students, to providing access to educational opportunities on a statewide basis, and to searching for quality in education and encouraging individual excellence.

### The search for quality in education and encouraging individual excellence

In Queensland, we are justifiably proud of our past achievements in providing all individuals across the State with an equal treatment and quality service. However, we also recognise the need to *continually* strive for quality in education if we wish to ensure that today's successes continue into the future.

This year, we undertook a series of statewide consultations to inform the development of a ten-year strategy for quality education — *Queensland State Education 2010*. The consultations showed an emerging need for a new teaching and learning paradigm — one that better prepares children for the communities they are part of, and their place in the rapidly changing world. As part of the response to this need, we have embarked on the development of a new framework for curriculum, pedagogy and classroom assessment. This framework will be explored, trialled and developed in selected schools in 2000.

### Inclusion and access

For many individuals, participation in formal education is adversely affected by factors beyond their control. In accordance with the ideal of equality of opportunity, provision has always been made by the State to cope with these circumstances as far as possible, and State resources are distributed according to the principles of fairness and justice.

A popular argument that I hear today is that 'public education' refers not only to state schools, but to *any* school in receipt of public funds. In the context of today's enthusiasm for market forces, this shift in definition has been accompanied by the emergence of a 'belief' that individuals now have a choice over which school they will attend. This belief is based on the assumption that all individuals have equal access to educational opportunities, which itself hinges on the assumption of a level playing field.

In reality, a level playing field does not exist and the ability to choose is not universal. Without a strong public education system unequal access to educational opportunities will increase further. This will result in systematic disadvantage for low-income students. Adoption of the belief that all individuals have the benefit of choice will only serve to further the divide between those who do and those who don't have a choice available to them. It will *not* foster

the opportunities to participate in and complete schooling that ought to be available to all people on an equitable basis.

## The way forward

I believe there is a need to reassert the traditional ideals and principles upon which Queensland's state education system is built. At the same time, there is also a need for us to recognise that systemic change is necessary if we are to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

## Enhance community confidence in state education

We need to enhance community confidence in state education. There has been much social, cultural, economic and technological change. As we strive to develop a model for schools that acknowledges these new realities, we must recognise the opportunity to embrace a greater role than ever before for the school as a valued community institution.

## Renew commitment to state education

We need to renew our commitment to state education. Our education system should guarantee that everyone receives a high quality education. This will involve being able to offer a diversity of educational options and experiences that cater for all individuals. Our goal should be to create public schools that are so 'commonly good' that the quality of the outcomes is no different whichever state school one attends.

In part, the achievement of these objectives will require a system capable of offering a diversity of educational options and experiences.

## Curriculum, classroom pedagogy, and assessment

The overriding message from the *Queensland State Education 2010* consultations is that overregulation and inflexibilities in the schooling system have served to limit the successful participation of many students. There is a plea for greater freedom to respond, and effective support to do so. Parents, students and the interest groups that spoke on their behalf want educational options that suit their diverse backgrounds and circumstances. The overwhelming message from schools is that they want to

innovate, experiment and present as offering a distinctive educational experience to their local community.

I believe that this could be achieved by shrinking back the eight Key Learning Areas. A reduced core curriculum would allow schools to differentiate their offerings within a systemic policy framework. Each school would be able to develop a distinctive approach to schooling, and to provide a flexible and creative response to the identified needs of their students.

Differentiation may prove essential in addressing the current concerning decline in year 12 retention rates. The *Queensland State Education 2010* consultations revealed that the current narrowness of year 12 options is one reason why students do not remain at school and complete year 12.

Success for students in their schooling, whether measured by year 12 completion, by attainment of certain standards, or in social outcome terms, depends on recognising that students learn in different ways and in different environments, have different learning needs and different starting and end points. By differentiating their curriculum, schools would be better equipped to effectively meet the needs of all individuals.

## Resourcing

Queensland's state schooling system faces increasing pressure due to the growing demand to educate more children, for an increased number of school years, from more diverse backgrounds.

There is a clear need to put money into state schools if we are to continue to successfully meet this challenge and maintain those basic democratic principles related to inclusion, access, quality and excellence which have underpinned and sustained Queensland's state schooling system since its inception.

There are many challenges ahead of us, and success will depend on our teachers, principals, schools, district and central office staff, and ancillary staff. Over the past year, all have contributed to the achievement of best practice in the provision and support of educational services.

I have no doubt that together we can continue to build a strong and effective state system. It is a pleasure to take this opportunity to acknowledge my indebtedness and my thanks to these people for their dedication and tireless efforts.