

CURRICULUM CHANGES IN YEARS 11 AND 12

Statement

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [9.38 pm]: In a change of tack, I will comment on education matters. Members who have followed questions and debates in this house, moved around their electorates talking to parents and teachers, read newspapers, listened to the radio and watched television could not help but realise that the implementation of curriculum changes into years 11 and 12 is a rather contentious issue. Time and again in answer to questions that I and other members have asked, the Minister for Education and Training has refused to acknowledge that there is an issue and that surveys reflect such a problem. Rather, she has quoted her own evaluations from professional development sessions and claimed that the system is moving on from a tired, old past. Further, she has stated that the issues that have arisen have been addressed, firstly, with the establishment of the Robson task force and the adoption of its recommendations. Recommendation 3 of the Robson task force states -

That the Curriculum Council, supported by system and sector representatives on the Taskforce resolve external assessment (examination) issues, such as the length of the exams, the types of items and the detailed exam formats and disseminate final decisions to schools by October 2005.

On 12 October the minister put out a media statement aimed at parents which stated -

... it was vital parents understood why major changes were being made to education in Years 11 and 12.

She then stated -

Three new subjects, English, Media and Engineering, will be introduced into Year 11 . . .

. . .

The introduction of the new courses under the outcomes and standards framework is the biggest curriculum change since 1984.

Members should keep that date in mind.

This new framework does not appear to be going so well. Today I received an e-mail, which has also been sent to the minister, from Edel McGill entitled "Course of Study implementation English". It states -

I have posted the following on the PLATO website forum. There have been supportive comments made in response. I submit to you for your information.

Day 5 English CoS

That is, course of study -

It concerns me greatly that I have now attended Day 5 training for the new Course of Study (English) and am no further along in my understanding of what needs to happen next year. In fact, I am even further behind, as we received the sample exam paper yesterday and it turns out that nothing that we have embedded in the courses is covered in the exam - it looks like we will have to go away and re-write the courses to give our students any reasonable chance of passing the exam.

And the exam? Well . . . suffice to say that if you were teaching circa 1984 then it will all be very familiar to you. Yes, we have hunted down a 1984 Exam and lo and behold - there are the same questions. (You simply have to update the technology.) And when I had the audacity to ask questions, I was told that I was reluctant to change ("your problem is your inability to change.")

Nobody will answer my questions. They are legitimate questions that I am seeking the answers to - for example: What is the situation with deadlines - school assessment policy says one thing, curriculum council says something else. Nobody will give me a definitive answer, they tell me to put it on a post-it note and it will be taken back to CC -

That is, the Curriculum Council -

and I will get an answer. To date I have not received ANY answers to ANY of my questions, but, I suppose, infinity has not arrived and therefore, there is still time. In the meantime, here I am accepting term 1 work from a student because I have to "provide every opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the outcome." To hell with my other marking (which seems to multiplying beyond my control.

Why do I feel like a voice in a vacuum? Why is no-body jumping up and down about this? We are screwing up the lives of students; we are making human sacrifices to the God OBE. Why is nobody DOING anything?

I am thoroughly disgusted with the lack of responses to my questions - from NCS -

That is, new course of study -

presenters; Curriculum Council; the union; other teachers.

I have completed Day 5. I am considered to be sufficiently trained to implement the courses next year. How come I don't understand it?

That is a pretty concerning e-mail. It came to me unsolicited and it is consistent with some other e-mails that I have received. I have consistently said that, because of the concerns surrounding the implementation of the curriculum changes, we should delay the implementation and review where we are going. The minister has consistently come back and said no - a flat no. She says that everything is under control, that she has addressed the issues surrounding implementation and that there is no doubt that things will be okay. I am becoming increasingly alarmed that they are not okay.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Do you think there will be unanimity between 25 000 teachers?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: We will not get unanimity.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Do you think we will get to the point at which every individual is happy?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: No. However, the minister should be aiming at a bit better than 10 per cent support, which is what I reckon she has at the moment. The concern in the community is overwhelming. The minister continually denies that and dismisses it. She is not hearing the same concerns that I am hearing. The steps that have been taken do not seem to be working either. That is increasingly alarming because, even if we accept that the changes in the courses of study are valid, there are obviously some serious problems because experienced teachers, even in English, are saying so. The minister told us not to worry about English because it is under control. She told us that English, media and engineering are under control to start next year. I am hearing alarming things about other courses, maths and science in particular.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: They are not due for introduction until 2007.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I know but the minister is telling us that English is under control.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Just because one person tells you that he is not satisfied and he is a member of PLATO -

Hon BARRY HOUSE: No. He is not a member of PLATO.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order, members! I cannot give an extension of time to Hon Barry House. Time is running out.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I am talking about experienced teachers in the system who are contacting PLATO because it is an avenue for them to express their frustration and concern. PLATO has done a terrific job in that respect. Do not forget that there is an alternative, which is PLUTO. However, no-one seems to be interested in PLUTO, which is supportive of the changes. PLATO has provided a forum. Very experienced teachers are using the forum to tell me, the minister and the public at large what their experiences have been. It is not a knee-jerk reaction. The teacher was referring to day 5 of the professional development course. One would expect an experienced English teacher to at that stage be able to get a bit of a grasp of the courses of study involved and the assessment procedures for their implementation from term 1 next year. It is seriously going off the rails. I do not know whether the teacher is a he or she. The teacher made a plea for someone to listen; for someone to do something. The only person who has the authority to do something is the Minister for Education and Training.