

Observations from Queensland.... The State Government is establishing a number of 'Schools of Excellence' They were going to be called "Smart Schools' for the 'Smart State' but that name has been changed...

One school is going to be devoted to excellence in Maths and Science and the other in Brisbane is going to specialize in the Arts.

These two schools will take over the premises of existing schools and rebuild for the new purpose... Toowong State College is going to be the Maths-Science specialty. The location of the Arts College was not known at the time of my visit.

It is anticipated that the most highly motivated students would be chosen for these schools and the very best young teachers will be appointed. This raises many questions in my mind which will no doubt be faced in due course.

These schools will be taking the best students from all the other schools and giving them privileged conditions to work in. The funding would have to be channeled into these schools to ensure their political success so all other schools will suffer.

The best teachers will be sought by these schools and again reduce their availability for the other schools will miss out.

There will be costs to be met in transporting the chosen students to these schools too. Will the State be providing buses for the selected students; and again be channeling funds in their direction?

There has been considerable disruption caused by this change. Toowong State College roll was reduced from over 600 to just 30 students this year. The newly appointed Principal has had to manage the change and has been told she will not be considered for the position in the new school. The teachers' union is being politically influenced because the school is in a marginal seat and would surely want a Labour win in that electorate. To obtain a labour win it feels bound to support the government moves rather than to protect the jobs of its own members.

The style of Academy schooling which I saw in the state tended to favour the use of PE or music time for special groups of students to expand their natural talents. Their other subjects fitted into the normal school timetable. Some training before and after school relied on the generosity of the teaching staff to give of their time to develop the programme for the selected students. Some schools had arrangements with sports clubs to provide coaching and mentoring expertise and also some funding for home-stay students, or provision of training gear, uniforms or expert guidance.