




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Department of Education, Workplace Health and Safety

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.00 pm): This week principals, teachers, staff and students have returned to schools across Queensland to commence term 2, and I wish them all the best for this next term of the school year. Unfortunately for many principals and teachers across Queensland, a lot of these dedicated school staff are returning to some workplaces that are harmful, unsafe and ultimately detrimental to their own health and wellbeing. The raw facts paint a damning picture of the entrenched workplace health and safety issues that continue to befall Queensland's education system under the Palaszczuk state Labor government.

As recently reported, for the eight-month period between July 2020 and February 2021 WorkCover claims for staff at the Department of Education have continued to grow with more than \$28 million in injury claims being paid out. Of this, there have been more than 2,300 physical injury claims totalling over \$22.6 million and more than 250 psychological claims totalling more than \$5.4 million. This deterioration in the health and wellbeing of those who teach and inspire our youngest, the next generation of Queenslanders, is something that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority by the current state Labor government's Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations.

Labor is failing to ensure the safety of our dedicated Queensland state school staff, where during the four years from 2015 to 2019 the number of suspensions for attacks with objects increased by 29 per cent to nearly 2,000 incidents, with the number of attacks on teachers without objects increasing by a staggering 50 per cent to more than 3,300 incidents. Is it any wonder that the results of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey released in February this year show that 40 per cent of surveyed Queensland school principals were either physically assaulted or threatened with violence last year? This is almost nine times greater than the general population. What is more, in the same survey Queensland principals had reported the highest rates of stress and depressive type symptoms when compared with other state jurisdictions.

Following the reporting of these increasing WorkCover claims through the Department of Education, Queensland saw an outpouring of teachers and principals who felt compelled to speak up and share their own harrowing experiences of an education system which they feel is letting them down. As reported just last week, teachers and principals have now felt compelled to share how a poor work culture with increasing workloads and growing physical and mental injuries have led to a number of incidents where staff have had to turn to alcohol and prescription medications just to cope with their dysfunctional workplaces.

There must be a zero tolerance approach when it comes to any form of violence, bullying or intimidation in our schools. That is why the Palaszczuk state Labor government must immediately develop and implement a comprehensive and sustainable strategy to urgently address this growing workplace health and safety crisis in our state schools.