



Speech by

JO-ANN MILLER

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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EDUCATION [GENERAL PROVISIONS] AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (5.49 p.m.): May I say to the member for Beaudesert what a ringing endorsement of our wonderful facilities programs that Education Queensland delivers right across Queensland.

Ms Bligh: Especially Flagstone.

Mrs MILLER: Especially Flagstone. I have also been to Upper Coomera and it is just fantastic. I think we should place on record our appreciation to Al Wagner and all the people in facilities in Education Queensland for doing such a wonderful job.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, and a wonderful local member, Margaret Keech, and a wonderful principal of the school, too, who does a fantastic job.

Tonight I rise to speak in support of the Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2003. Already in this sitting we have debated and passed legislation that will support a safer environment for children in schools. This bill seeks to ensure that our schools are safe and secure learning environments and a safe workplace for all of our teachers and our staff. There have been some instances highlighted in the press in recent times where adults have entered school premises to specifically threaten the safety of a student within the school and other examples where minors not enrolled in that particular school have been on the campus and acting in a threatening or a disruptive manner. Unfortunately, there are examples of parents of students enrolled in schools who have behaved in a disruptive, violent or harassing manner towards teachers, staff and other students. Parents should know better, as this is disgraceful behaviour—as evidenced in the *Queensland Times* in our local city of Ipswich, where we have witnessed such behaviour.

This bill does not give principals the power to unfairly exclude a person. Included in the bill are specific reporting mechanisms for both state and non-state school sectors. All data relating to the exercise of powers, including reviews and appeals, must be published in the annual reports which are tabled in this House. The bill also contains specific review and appeal mechanisms to ensure that a principal, chief executive or governing body makes decisions based on appropriate grounds and within due process, and the bill does not give principals the power to issue an order against students of their own school.

This bill provides principals with a range of responses that they can initiate depending on the circumstances that confront them. Before a principal can invoke powers, he or she must be reasonably satisfied that the safety or wellbeing of other persons on the premises is at risk, that there is a danger to damage to property or to the premises, that there is a danger to the maintenance of good order on the premises or that there is a risk to the proper management of the institution.

The bill provides for the principal to issue directions to people on school premises. These directions may be up to 30 days with a maximum penalty for breach of \$1,500. The principal may also—usually in cases where serious and threatening behaviour is exhibited—ban a person from the school for 24 hours usually to allow for a cooling-off period. In the event of more serious behaviour or where the person is persistently in breach, the chief executive has the power to ban a person from a school for up to 60 days. In extreme cases, the chief executive may apply to a magistrate to extend that prohibition between 60 days and 12 months.

Breaches of these orders are most serious and are punishable by a maximum penalty of \$15,000 or a maximum of three years imprisonment. In non-state schools these powers will be exercised by principals and the schools' governing bodies. At all stages of the process there is a defined appeal right for the person who is the subject of the orders. I understand that there has been a high degree of consultation with the Queensland Teachers Union, the Queensland Independent Education Union, the principals associations, the Association of Independent Schools Queensland, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and state and non-state school parent bodies.

I would also like to note the contribution of Ian Ferguson, the principal of Redbank Plains State High School, and the secondary schools principals association for their commonsense, honest and frank advice to the minister and me. My understanding is that there were some matters raised by both teachers unions which, following discussions, were resolved. It can be said that all stakeholders support the bill. The proposed changes will have a positive effect on all school campuses throughout Queensland. This bill deserves the support of every member of this House. I would like to thank the minister and all the officers of Education Queensland involved in the preparation of this bill, and I commend the bill to the House.