



Speech by

**JULIE ATTWOOD**

**Member for MOUNT OMMANEY**

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**EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION [STUDENT PROTECTION] AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs ATTWOOD** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.41 p.m.): This bill amends three acts in order to secure better safety for our students—the Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988, the Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 and the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000. The main policy objectives of the bill are to amend the Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988 and the Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 to enhance the capacity of the Board of Teacher Registration to screen, monitor and make decisions about the suitability of teachers to work with children, thereby providing greater protection for children in schools from sexual abuse and other inappropriate conduct by school based employees. Parents in my electorate put the rights, interests and wellbeing of their children above all things, and this is reflected in the policies of this government through a range of initiatives relating to child protection that have been raised in this House.

This bill also amends the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000, the CCYP Act, to enable the commissioner to take into account decisions made about a teacher by the Board of Teacher Registration for the purposes of deciding a person's suitability to obtain or continue to hold a blue card. It also further amends the act to require providers, both employers and employees, of alternative education and flexible arrangements to hold a blue card. There are 1,071 teachers and teacher aides living in my electorate. I often meet teachers in the schools in my electorate and note the care and concern that they have for the students they teach. The safety and wellbeing of those children is of paramount importance to them. However, like most areas of employment, there are a small number of people in occupations dealing with children across Queensland who seek to abuse their position.

The teachers I have spoken to about this proposed legislation say that it is absolutely necessary and that these checks will ensure that our children are protected. They believe that the highest ethical standards should be attained in these occupations and the undesirable elements kept out for the sake of the reputation of teachers and schools in our state.

In May this year the Premier established a ministerial task force to act on recommendations of the *Report of the board of inquiry into past handling of complaints of sexual abuse in the Anglican Church diocese of Brisbane*. The report highlighted the issue of sexual abuse in schools and weaknesses in existing systems for checking and monitoring the suitability of teaching and non-teaching staff to work with children and for responding to complaints of sexual abuse perpetrated in school settings. There is a strong community expectation and support for prompt and effective action to address these deficiencies. The bill will seek to make clear that, in performing its registration functions, the welfare and best interests of children are to be primary considerations of the board. It will also seek to enhance the capacity of the Board of Teacher Registration to screen, monitor and make decisions about the suitability of teachers to work with children. I think this will mean that situations of abuse can be curtailed early and will mean that suspect teachers will know that they are under scrutiny in their dealings with children at the school.

As the member for Mount Ommaney, I always ensure that the children in my area have the best opportunities in their education and their further advancement later on in life. The education reforms introduced by this government go a long way towards ensuring that a thorough education is provided from the preparatory year to when they decide to seek employment and training and go on to higher education. These reforms will be supported by the current levels of excellence displayed by our teachers.

Recently, more than 1,700 15- to 17-year-old students will benefit from a \$17,000 injection by the government to support their transition from school to further study, training and work. The Minister for Education announced \$5.5 million in funding for high schools, TAFEs and agricultural colleges over the next three years. The funds will help these institutions improve coordination of their vocational education and training programs and provide enhanced career guidance and counselling for students.

Millions of dollars have been spent over the past five years on schools in my electorate. Major funding was provided for stage 2 and stage 3, including a massive sports centre and performing arts centre, for the new high school at Centenary, and for a \$7.2 million upgrade for the Corinda State High School. There have also been smaller amounts of funding spent on library extensions, tuckshop upgrades and general maintenance of primary schools in the area. This government has provided the necessary infrastructure to ensure that the standard of facilities matches the standard of learning in each school. However, we also need to ensure that children achieve their educational goals in a sensitive, non-threatening and caring environment.

Protecting our children from harm is the primary objective of this bill. We must constantly be on the lookout for those who prey on the innocence and vulnerability of our precious children. Abuse at a young age is not only cruel and inhuman; it is something that is never forgotten. It affects the way one can cope for the rest of one's life. This government must do all it can to ensure that it legislates to protect our children and protect them from harm in every way it can. I commend the bill to the House.