



Speech by

Hon. Rod Welford

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard Friday, 21 April 2006

EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) BILL

Second Reading

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts) (11.39 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Education (General Provisions) Bill provides a legislative framework for the education system that is relevant, consistent and supports the demands of modern schooling, now and into the future. The bill will ensure Queensland's children and young people are given every opportunity to be engaged in quality learning. It supports the implementation of a range of current government initiatives, most notably the introduction of the preparatory year from 2007 and raising the compulsory school starting age from 2008. It also incorporates the learning or earning reforms that commenced this year, creating one integrated piece of legislation.

There are provisions that apply to all school-age children and their families in all education settings. These aim to ensure that, regardless of the setting a parent chooses for their child's education, certain minimum standards apply to ensure the education and welfare of students is paramount. In summary, these provisions include:

- enshrining for the first time, objects and guiding principles to apply to the administration of the act;
- clearly setting out the compulsory schooling attendance obligations that parents must satisfy;
- increasing the penalty for those parents who do not meet these obligations;
- ensuring that state and non-state schools adopt consistent practices for granting early entry to the preparatory year and year 1;
- clarifying for parents that the preparatory year is part of schooling and cannot be offered by licensed child-care providers;
- ensuring that licensed child-care providers do not purport to offer a preparatory year;
- establishing a registration system for those parents who wish to home educate their children;
- providing for a consistent regime for the transfer of student information across schools and schooling sectors;
- ensuring that all schools provide information to parents about their child's educational progress and their school outcomes; and
- ensuring that parents can access student information held by the Queensland Studies Authority.

The remainder of the bill focuses on the state schooling sector by strengthening the ability to create safe and supportive school environments. The bill formally recognises the important role parents play in their child's education and seeks to foster a greater partnership between schools, parents and students.

The perennial challenge for state schools is to seek to balance the rights and needs of individual students against the rights and needs of the broader school community.

The bill acknowledges the fundamental right of students to be consulted on decisions that affect them and clarifies and strengthens the review and appeal rights for certain decisions. Individual rights, however, need to be balanced with the rights of other students and staff, to be safe at their school and to focus on learning. The bill does this by better supporting principals to meet their duty of care responsibilities for students and staff. In summary, the provisions affecting only state schooling include:

- formally recognising, for the first time, the enrolment process at state schools and providing explicit criteria to govern enrolment decisions;
- requiring state schools to develop an enrolment agreement that schools, parents and students can discuss and commit to;
- enabling principals to formally refuse enrolments on safety grounds;
- strengthening principals' ability to address student disciplinary issues through new measures including the ability to attach reasonable conditions to continuing enrolment;
- ensuring that where such sanctions are imposed the school makes contact with parents and affords appropriate review and appeal rights;
- clarifying the role the system must play in supporting and re-engaging students subject to disciplinary sanctions;
- ensuring that the behaviour management plan to be adopted by the school has been subject to broad parent and student consultation and accords with the department's code of school behaviour;
- enabling principals, in consultation with the school community, to set a dress code policy including appropriate sanctions;
- making sure that our schools are inclusive of their school communities in the provision of instruction in religious or other belief systems. Let me make it clear that the bill in no way diminishes a parent's ability to have their child receive instruction in religion. If parents prefer to opt out of religious instruction, then that option will be available to them, as is currently the case.
- enshrining a more transparent regime for the financial contributions made by parents for their child's education and allowing state schools to charge for highly specialised education services; and
- ensuring that P&Cs continue to represent the views of the parents and broader community and their members are afforded appropriate protection from liability.

The development of the bill has been the subject of a significant consultation process. I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

In October 2004, my department released a consultation paper, *Education Laws for the Future*, promoting discussion about the broad strategic direction of education in Queensland. The community was given 5 months to respond to this paper.

During this period, around 1100 people attended community forums throughout Queensland and more than 800 principals and representatives from peak organisations and government agencies attended targeted meetings. A young person's guide was also distributed to about 1000 young people and youth support workers.

My department received 2183 written responses and 24 submissions from peak stakeholders. These contributions helped shape the draft Bill which was released in December 2005 for a further three month consultation period.

I thank all of those people who took the time to write and/or attend the consultation sessions. Your input has been invaluable.

The review of the legislation has generated significant debate in the community. It's the nature of education that people have strongly held views and are passionate about what's best for children and young people.

The Bill recognises that there are certain core requirements that should apply to all children and young people in all settings. These have been kept to a minimum to recognise the community wants an education system that fosters choice, innovation and diversity.

In relation to the State schooling system, the Bill recognises the important role that state schools have in providing an inclusive and universal education service.

However for the state system to continue to be truly universal it must meet the needs of a broad range of students. State schools need the ability to uphold community standards through an appropriate disciplinary regime.

State schools need the ability to offer diversified curriculum and the power to innovate to suit the needs of their communities. This Bill strikes an appropriate balance in dealing with a range of competing demands.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Debate, on motion of Mrs Menkens, adjourned.