



Speech by  
**Ros Bates**

**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

Hansard Tuesday, 6 October 2009

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## **EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (3.59 pm): I rise today to contribute to the cognate debate on the Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. The Education and Training Legislation Amendment Bill seeks to make minor amendments to legislation administered by the Department of Education and Training to remove redundant provisions and to correct deficiencies or omissions and clarify existing provisions. In addition, the bill seeks to amend the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 to enable the minister to provide, or assist in providing, a pre-preparatory learning program at certain state and non-state schools for children aged at least 3½ years of age and to prohibit a licensed child-care provider from using a term that indicates, or could reasonably be understood to indicate, that the licensee is purporting to offer education in the preparatory year of schooling.

In the electorate of Mudgeeraba I have 24 child-care centres in areas such as Mudgeeraba, Tallai, Gilston, Merrimac, Worongary, Robina, Reedy Creek and Bonogin. I have recently visited, or am in the process of visiting, each of these centres so that I can represent their views in parliament. I share their concerns over proposed changes to legislation relating to the ratio of children to teachers and the process of standardisation to bring Queensland into line with other states.

In Queensland, babies and toddlers are required to have one staff member for each four children with two staff members per room. These child-care centres have been constructed to Queensland standards and cater for this age group, currently accommodating eight children and two staff members. New requirements will see these staff ratios lowered to one staff member for three babies and toddlers. Child-care operators are concerned that they will lose money on each child. Combined with the need to increase staff, the total staff cost per child would increase by 25 per cent. Under these new regulations, it is estimated that the cost to parents of each child would rise by \$20 per child per day.

It is also noteworthy that other states do not have restricted room sizes in the same way that Queensland has. Unfortunately, the size of rooms that currently operate in Queensland means that centres will have to downsize the number of children or increase their capital expenditure to upgrade their current facilities. These issues are of great concern to owner operators, particularly in this current economic climate. New federal agreements arising out of COAG that change the staff to child ratios and room sizes threaten to have a dramatic impact on Queensland child-care providers and on the cost to parents of provision of child care. In addition, a new model of funding—DECKAS funding—is due to be announced that may also significantly impact community and C&K kindergartens.

The other changes in early childhood education revolve around a government commitment to allow universal access to kindergartens for all Queensland children aged 3½ to 4½ and the associated commitment re-announced by the government in the recent election to build 200 kindergartens on state school grounds but would not be operated by the state school. A C&K community kindergarten was announced for Mudgeeraba State School. This announcement was greeted cynically by the private operators, who saw this as nothing more than political pork-barrelling to save a Labor marginal seat.

I recently visited the C&K centre and was informed that they have been waiting to move for the past five years and that very little maintenance and upkeep had occurred in that time. This was justified by the carrot being dangled that they would indeed move. They are still waiting. Whilst I understand there is a need for child care for those families in my electorate, there are already 27 centres. My understanding is that the C&K centre is to commence building in 2010. There remains enormous uncertainty and lack of detail which is of great concern to all early childhood education and long day care which currently has them in limbo.

The bill enables the minister to provide, or assist in providing, a pre-preparatory learning program in certain state and non-state schools. Again, this program will focus on literacy and numeracy, and will be provided to pre-preparatory age children—that is, children who are at least 3½ years old. In addition, the bill makes minor amendments to the Child Care Act 2002 to provide that the provision of a pre-preparatory learning program is not child care for the purposes of that act. The bill also strengthens the prohibition on the use of certain terms by child-care providers to ensure that child-care providers cannot describe the care they provide in any manner which may suggest that they are providing preparatory year education. The government needs to engage all public and private child-care and preparatory school facilities so that they understand the concerns of each and not only take into consideration the educational and child-care needs of families and children but also seek to ensure that private operators are not disadvantaged by any new legislation being considered.

The Mudgeeraba electorate is a fast-growing electorate, with over 65 per cent of the electorate under 45 years of age with school age children. Many more children are preschool level and under, and this rapidly growing young community needs the services that it deserves. The electorate has eight feeder state primary schools and additional private schools which cater for preparatory year to year 12. Unfortunately for this young and vibrant electorate, we are yet to have a state high school west of the M1. Until the recent redistribution, we were the only electorate on the Gold Coast with no state high school. With over 35 per cent of the students at Robina, Merrimac and Varsity state high schools residing west of the M1, it is high time that this government took its head out of the sand and provided Mudgeeraba with much needed infrastructure now, not in 20 years time. I commend the bills to the House.