




Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 16 November 2011

**EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW (QUEENSLAND)
BILL**

 **Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (5.27 pm): I rise to support the Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Bill 2011. The new law contributes to realising the Council of Australian Governments' vision that all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation. I believe it continues to build on the great Labor initiative of this government which I think has been one of our best policy initiatives—that is, the introduction of prep into Queensland schools. That has been an outstanding success. Children and parents are literally supporting it with their feet. I have not come across any parent who has not had anything but praise for the prep year and the additional year that we now provide for our children. What can be more important than early childhood education for our kids? I just know how well my daughter thrived in her early childhood education. If other children thrive as much as she did, I know that this is a step definitely in the right direction.

The law includes improved requirements for educator qualifications and educator-child ratios to be introduced over the coming years which will result in better outcomes for Queensland children in education and care services. Under the law and regulations, education and care services will be required to develop programs based on approved learning frameworks—the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care—which aim to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years through to the transition to school and in outside school hours care.

The regulations include the national quality standard, comprised of standards in seven quality areas that will serve as a benchmark for good practice based on contemporary research. Under the law and regulations, education and care services will be required to undergo self-assessment and develop quality improvement plans as part of a cycle of continuing improvement, which I believe is essential. The law and regulations bring together regulatory and quality assurance processes that will promote consistency of standards across states and territories and across service types, assisting Australian families who move between states or use different types of care—for example, long day care, kindergartens, family day care and outside school hours care.

So it provides consistency for families across Australia. But with any introduction of additional standards, it is always important to balance the cost versus the quality that we are implementing. I believe that this bill takes great steps towards achieving a balance between improving the education and care outcomes for our children with affordability for Queensland families. There has been a number of ways Queensland has been able to secure this balance. I want to now spend a little bit of time going through the negotiated outcomes that will make the transition and the cost effectiveness of this program for Queensland so much more because of what we have been able to negotiate, through the minister's office, on behalf of Queenslanders.

Queensland has negotiated a number of key concessions to minimise the immediate cost impacts on services and families with the gradual implementation of many regulatory standards. The first substantial change for Queensland services under this legislation will not occur until 2014, when long-day-

care and kindergarten services will be required to engage an early childhood teacher and family day care educators will be required to hold or be working towards a minimum certificate III qualification. The Queensland government's initiative to provide universal access to kindergarten will offset some of the impact of having to employ a teacher for those services that received funding through the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme, which, I might add, is a fantastic scheme that is introducing many additional kindergarten services. Other staffing changes, including an increase in the educator-child ratio, may also increase costs for services. However, these changes will not impact on our Queensland services until 2016—more than ample time for people to prepare for those educator-child ratios. Qualifications and ratio requirements under the national quality framework will be subject to review in 2013, 2014 and 2019.

The Queensland government has also negotiated other measures to ease the transition for the sector. For example, services licensed before 1 January 2011 that can justify the use of a one to five ratio for children aged 15 months to 36 months will be able to continue to use that ratio until 31 December 2017. So they will have a good six years to implement these changes, thereby minimising cost impacts for these services. Services will also be able to continue current staffing arrangements, allowing fewer educators to care for children during specified rest periods and rest pauses under certain circumstances. Here is also a provision to allow a diploma qualified educator to backfill an early childhood teacher during short-term absences including annual leave, and I think that makes a lot of sense.

In addition, an educator who is actively working towards an improved early childhood teacher qualification now has until 1 January 2016 to meet the early childhood teacher requirements. These new legislative requirements are expected to have a minimal cost impact on community kindergarten services in Queensland due to current staffing level practices in this sector. I think that is important in any transition.

The national quality framework delivers a new integrated approach to the regulation and quality assessment of services. It will drive continuous improvement in the quality of education and care services across the country whilst ensuring that it achieves a balance with ongoing affordability for families in Queensland, which I believe this bill delivers in bucketloads. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.