




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.02 pm): I also rise to support the Education Legislation Amendment Bill. The Queensland government's commitment to move year 7 from primary to secondary education from 2015 will give these students the opportunity to not only have the same learning experience as the majority of their interstate peers but also enjoy the maximum benefit of the Australian Curriculum through specialist teaching staff and facilities. The abundantly clear message that came through during the community consultation period was that what matters most is the quality of education our young people receive and that they are well supported through the tender years of early adolescence and making the transition from primary school to high school. With this in mind, secondary school is without a doubt the right place for year 7 students.

In its submission to the inquiry into the Education Legislation Amendment Bill, Queensland's peak parent body, P&Cs Queensland, stated that—

... it is important to amend the Bill to include Year 7 in the definition of secondary school from 2015 as the majority of year 7 students in Queensland will be in their eighth year of school by 2015.

It comes as no surprise then that pilot schools are currently reporting strong attendance, participation and engagement by year 7 students and their parents. They are in the correct environment with the appropriate resources for students at their level. We look forward to seeing the results of the formal evaluations of the pilot schools that will be conducted later in this current school year.

It is important to acknowledge the impact on families with students moving to high school a year earlier, especially in regional and remote locations. I refer to communities like Bargara, Agnes Water and Moore Park Beach that would benefit from having their own high school, but the travel will be an issue. Another change for the better that will result from the amendments in this legislation takes place at the beginning of a child's education in that prep will be formally recognised as the first year of schooling. The addition of a full year of quality education for our students comes with the full support of the Queensland Teachers Union, which has consulted closely with this and the previous government to see this change come to fruition. Having prep as the formal commencement of schooling will allow schools to give their students the best possible foundation for their entire education.

I turn now to the administrative requirements for non-state schools to comply with the new definitions of primary school as 'prep to year 6' and high school as 'year 7 to year 12'. From day one our government has promised to reduce red tape wherever possible, and this situation is no exception. It pleases me to note that the bill provides for a streamlined process that will be easy and straightforward for the non-state schools in the Burnett electorate that will need to change their accreditation status for 2015. One of these schools in my electorate is the Bundaberg Christian College, which is one of 130 independent schools across Queensland that offers prep to year 12 on one campus. Under the bill, for these independent schools such as the Bundaberg Christian College that offer both primary and secondary, it will simply be a matter of notifying the Non-State Schools

Accreditation Board that they propose to deliver year 7 as secondary education. This simple process will reduce the administrative burden on the schools as well as on the accreditation board itself.

The final important amendment made by this bill is another that I fully support. It allows for the cancellation of enrolment of international students at state schools when tuition fees have not been paid. In its submission to the inquiry, the Queensland Teachers Union agreed that if international students are to utilise the resources and services of state schools it is reasonable that they should contribute to the cost of providing these services. However, at this point in time the state currently has around \$1.5 million of tuition fees outstanding from international students, with very little chance of recouping the debt due to the lengthy time frames and relative ineffectiveness of civil enforcement options. The only way to stop this from happening and to ensure that the resources of state schools are not being drained unnecessarily is for cancellation of enrolment to become a real and genuine deterrent. Of course the government recognises that all human beings have a basic right to education. We will certainly not be cancelling enrolments without first exploring the full financial situation of each family and working with them to enable payment of fees. The parents will be given at least three warnings to either pay the outstanding fees or enter into a payment arrangement. The director-general will also have the discretion to waive fees where exceptional circumstances exist. We expect that, under this process with the cancellation of enrolment being a real possibility, families will be encouraged to communicate with the department rather than ignoring requests for payment, as has happened in the past.

In closing, I commend the minister and the department for their vision for the education of our children and the amendments in the bill that will allow the education system to work more effectively. I take this opportunity to thank the committee staff—Bernice, Emily, Greg and Carolyn—and thank my fellow members of the committee for the bipartisan way that this was done.