




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.33 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. Isn't it great to have a minister who has grasped the portfolio and is getting on with the job of modernising our education system here in Queensland? As I moved around my schools I was faced with paint falling off ceilings and gutters that were leaking. It is fantastic that the minister immediately moved on that with the maintenance backlog program. This has allowed several schools, some in very tough socioeconomic areas, to actually have pride in their school again—new paint, gutters that do not leak, classrooms that have doors that open and close without getting stuck. I certainly thank the minister for that.

The bill has three objectives: to support the implementation of the move of year 7 to secondary school from 2015; to include the preparatory year in a state school student's basic allocation; and to allow for the cancellation of the enrolment of international students at state schools for nonpayment of fees. I will address the last point first.

Toowoomba is a great education hub. A lot of overseas students come to our university to study. Often they bring children with them. Certainly, lots of those people have enjoyed the great facilities we have in our state, private, independent and Catholic schools. As would be expected, people from overseas in certain circumstances need to pay for that education, as all Queenslanders do through the various forms of taxation. I think it incredibly prudent of the education minister to move to ensure that the great education facilities we have are not abused by people and that they make a contribution when using our facilities. I certainly support that part of the bill. I think it is only fair to the taxpayer of Queensland to ensure people from overseas who have availed themselves of our facilities pay their way.

I refer to the move to recognise prep. Obviously prep has been rolled out for a number of years. I have seen that working very well on the ground in Toowoomba, to the point where we actually have a couple of even earlier programs now being implemented at Newtown and Toowoomba North state schools to encourage reading and participation of the family in early childhood development. I think it is great to have prep recognised as part of schooling. The availability of additional prep teacher aides has also been really well received.

This is all part of a bigger plan for education. We hear a lot of huff and puff from Kevin Rudd at the federal level about his plans for education, but he basically sold Queensland down the river. He would not give us the same deal that was being offered to Victoria. He certainly did not want to see the schoolchildren of Queensland treated exactly the same as the children in Victoria.

Mr Dillaway: Bill is coming for him.

Mr WATTS: Let us hope Dr Bill does come for him. Won't it be great to have a Queenslanders representing that electorate who actually cares about Queensland? It was very disappointing to see that Mr Rudd would not give us the same support he gave to Victoria and to other states. As the Great

Teachers = Great Results program is rolled out in Toowoomba North, a lot of teachers will avail themselves of the various opportunities that will present.

The move of year 7 to secondary school will have a big impact in Toowoomba. There are over 20 schools in the Toowoomba North electorate. We provide a great education. There is independent, Catholic and state education available. Boarding schools take children from a very wide catchment—from both Queensland and interstate as well as from overseas. Several of these schools have really had great support from the minister in relation to Flying Start. Schools that I have visited have shown me their plans. St Ursula's College showed me their plans for the various upgrades they are implementing.

Mr Johnson: A great school, too.

Mr WATTS: A very good school. They had a walk-through diagram. They are very excited about the opportunities the Flying Start funding will provide.

I recently visited St Mary's College—another great school in my electorate—and had the opportunity to speak to some of the school leaders about the various opportunities and upgrades on that campus. I recently attended the Toowoomba Grammar School and Downlands weekend, which is a great tradition in Toowoomba, and witnessed the rivalry of those two great boarding schools over a game of rugby. What was interesting in talking to people from both of those schools was the great support they have received from the minister in relation to Flying Start and opportunities that have presented to modernise and bring those facilities up to current standards in order to allow them to accept year 7 into their boarding program into the future. Another really hardworking school in my electorate is Toowoomba Christian College, which has received some very welcome funding to get some improvements in its facilities. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been invested in schools and the education of the young people of Toowoomba North and, as I say, young people from further afield from many country areas who come to Toowoomba to get their education. Without wishing to leave anybody out, I should mention my recent visit to the Glennie School, which has some fantastic facilities and great opportunities.

Mr Johnson: They've got a great tartan track there.

Mr WATTS: It has a good tartan track there, and I will give you a race around that one day, Vaughan. Fairholme College has also received some funding to upgrade some boarding facilities and some classroom facilities.

Mr Johnson: It was the last coalition government that made that happen, too!

Mr WATTS: It was the last coalition government that got the tartan track, was it?

Mr Johnson: Correct.

Mr WATTS: Excellent. I am very pleased to hear that. Again, they are great schools. I refer also to Toowoomba State High. Both the Mount Lofty campus and the Wilsonton campus have received funding through Flying Start so they can modernise and build facilities. We have heard huff and puff this week about the education minister and cuts in education, and that is of course completely untrue. In my area the amount of maintenance, construction and development going on across all of our existing schools—which is hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars of investment—has been welcomed by both the schools in terms of education and also welcomed by the community, the builders, the plumbers, the painters and the various tradespeople who have all been able to put tenders in for that work and then have executed that work well. And there is more coming.

One of the most significant contributions that has been made in my electorate in terms of education—and we hear talk as to whether we need all of the schools we have in Queensland—is that it is great to have a minister who recognises a growing area such as Highfields and how it needs a school and will be investing tens of millions of dollars in building a high school facility in one of the fastest growing areas in Queensland. The primary school there has 900 children and the Catholic primary school, Mary MacKillop school, is a very good school. All of the people in that community are so excited to have a high school opening that will mean that we do not have to have over 1,000 kids catching buses every day to the various schools in Toowoomba. The transition of year 7 into high school presented the opportunity for this transition to happen effectively in Toowoomba North and gave the opportunity for the high school to go ahead.

The schematic plans for the high school are out and the community consultation has happened. That is certainly a welcome investment both in the future education needs of the people of Toowoomba North, particularly the community of Highfields, and also presents some great opportunities for those in the building and construction industry, who have been doing it a little bit

tough. That is certainly one of the economic pillars that we have been trying to stimulate. The building of high schools and the before mentioned maintenance program have presented those opportunities and allowed people to help develop our education system in Queensland while at the same time run their construction businesses and make a good profit from it. I commend the bill to the House and thank the minister for it.