




Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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**EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (3.58 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to place on record my thanks to all of the teachers, the teacher aides and the principals across my electorate, especially those teachers who do an amazing job at the School of Distance Education and also the School of the Air. It is a very difficult situation when they are teaching children whom they cannot see. It is very difficult for them to interact, but they do an amazing job for those students.

The purpose of the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 is to make the preparatory year a compulsory first year of school education in Queensland; improve the regulation of the teaching profession in Queensland; and introduce a statutory debt recovery mechanism to recover state and Commonwealth funding paid to non-state schools in excess of their entitlement. I wish to focus on the introduction of the compulsory prep year and explore some of the issues that isolated and itinerant families may face with the introduction of this legislation. I am concerned that there has not been enough effort from the government to clearly articulate what this legislation will mean for those isolated and potentially itinerant families and how this legislation will work in practice for them.

Prep was introduced in Queensland schools in 2007 to provide a foundation in early learning areas of literacy and numeracy prior to entry to year 1. We are advised that since its introduction there has been a notable improvement in NAPLAN results for Queensland schools. According to the explanatory notes, the long-term benefits of participation in high-quality prep and equivalent education programs include improved relationships, better educational and employment outcomes, and lower rates of mental illness.

Currently there is no requirement in Queensland for a child to undertake a prep year of learning. Whilst prep enrolment and attendance in Queensland is very high, there remains a small cluster of children who are not participating in prep. We are advised that in 2015 approximately 400 children in the state schooling sector did not attend prep prior to the enrolment in year 1. Of those, approximately 17 per cent were Indigenous and 63 per cent were from metropolitan areas. I note, however, that there are another 20 per cent of students who did not attend prep and were unaccounted for in these figures. Are these students living in rural and remote communities? Are they geographically or data isolated families? This question needs to be answered and it needs to be addressed.

I am not sure that the government has appropriately investigated the reason why these 400 students are not attending. Are they going somewhere else in the private sector? Are they geographically or data isolated? Are they unable to access a school campus or are they unable to afford to access education services? We know there is a problem. We do not know exactly what the cause of the problem is. Perhaps we should understand it more fully before we try to legislate to resolve that problem.

Clause 8 amends the enrolment provision in section 156 of the Education (General Provisions) Act by inserting subsection 1A. The subsection provides the criteria on which the principal must be satisfied before a child is enrolled in year 1. In other words, the principal must not enrol a child in year 1 of schooling at a school unless they are satisfied the child was registered, or provisionally registered, for home education in the year before the proposed year of the child's enrolment in year 1 of schooling at the school. I can see how the other provisions in this section will work in practice, as they are straightforward. However, there are matters relevant to provision (c) for those families who do not have day-to-day access to a traditional school campus.

As a child who was a kindergarten distance education student, although it was some time ago, I do remember that my mother found it very difficult to teach kindy as well as teaching an older sibling distance education. I am particularly interested in how this legislative change will impact on families who do not have day-to-day access to a school campus and the available parent—and many of them across my electorate already are—is already engaged in educating their older children through distance education by either correspondence or the School of the Air, or if a parent is unable to teach prep schooling due to work commitments and this falls to another extended family member. I am interested in the government's expectations for outcomes and benchmarks of those who are registered, or provisionally registered, for home education in the prep year. This was canvassed in a committee hearing, and I commend my colleague the member for Broadwater for raising this very issue.

**Miss Barton:** You are welcome.

**Ms LEAHY:** I take that interjection from the member for Broadwater. The member for Broadwater asked this question with respect to prep and home schooling: how will the department of education be able to ensure that the minimum prep standard is being met for them to be able to advance? Is the curriculum provided? The departmental response was that there is a range of resource materials available on the homeschooling website to support students through that process. Further, the department replied that the parent of a child is required to provide the department their proposed education program philosophy so the department is able to see what is being proposed to be taught to that child and also requirements to provide samples of work performed by the child throughout the year. That is what provides some oversight of the standards and quality of the education.

Parents advise me that they find this very difficult and find it is insufficient for the development of their children to meet the year 1 requirements. To say that there is a range of resource materials on a website is somewhat out of touch with data droughts isolated families experience. My distance education parents inform me that they struggle at times to search the internet for a child's assignment, let alone download or browse the resource materials.

This brings me to the data drought. I know that the federal government is working very hard and it has done a fantastic job to address the situation of data for isolated children with the Sky Muster satellite. There are improvements. However, there are many more families yet to connect. I recently sat in a demonstration lesson at the Charleville School of the Air at their 50-year celebration, and the question was asked: can the teacher play a video so the students can see it during the on-air lesson? The response was not from the demonstrating teacher—who was absolutely fantastic, I might add—but from a parent in the room who said, 'No, we can't play a video during the lessons because we would have no data download left for a month. We just can't do that because there isn't enough data.' I spoke to this mum during the week. She is very hopeful that her Sky Muster connection will be up and running this Friday.

The standard Sky Muster configuration allows for up to three students at one site. Sites with more than this are on a special configuration. Families pay for the education port plan, but if they are enrolled at the Queensland School of Distance Education the cost will be offset by an internet allowance paid by Education Queensland. Minister, the data is not cheap for these isolated families. Will the internet allowance be paid by Education Queensland, and will it be extended to prep students who are registered, or provisionally registered, in 2017?

I will give the minister a scenario which is not uncommon in my electorate. A family of five lives 50 kilometres from Thargomindah with no school bus and no day-to-day access to a school campus. Two students are already on the School of the Air with mum at home as the tutor. In 2017 mum will have two students in the School of Distance Education and the youngest child will be eligible for compulsory prep. Isolated families would really appreciate advice as to how this legislation will affect this particular family's scenario. What will the costs be? How will children be assisted to meet the necessary benchmarks and prepare for their future schooling to make sure they are prepared appropriately for year 1? I look forward to the minister enlightening the House as to how this legislation will impact on that scenario.