




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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GRAMMAR SCHOOLS BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.26 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Grammar Schools Bill 2016. I congratulate the minister for bringing it forward. I think that anything we can do to make rules that govern our schools in a more contemporary way to reflect the modern day and age is a step in the right direction. I think the minister has done an excellent job in bringing this bill to the House. I am also very fortunate to have two of Queensland's grammar schools in my electorate of Brisbane Central: Brisbane Girls Grammar School and Brisbane Grammar School. Both schools have a very long and proud history. It has been amazing watching the schools transition into the modern world, with new facilities being built and the adoption of technology and modern teaching practices to a point where, as we all know, they are providing a wonderful service to their students. They are both outstanding schools led by outstanding and dedicated individuals: in the case of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, Principal Jacinda Euler, and in the case of Brisbane Grammar School, Headmaster Anthony Micallef. Both schools are just up the road from my electoral office and every afternoon we see pupils walk past our office. I commend the schools on the manner in which those students conduct themselves. They are the epitome of good manners. They are well behaved and you can tell that they wear their uniforms with pride. I think that has a lot to do with the leadership in the schools which I think says to boys, 'You can do anything,' but, more importantly, says exactly the same to girls as well. In their schools they can become whatever they want. Their teaching styles reflect that outcome. Both principals, Jacinda and Anthony, get great support from their board of trustees. In the case of girls grammar, the chair, Elizabeth Jameson—

Ms Jones interjected.

Ms GRACE: She is absolutely fantastic. I take that interjection from the minister. She is outstanding as chair of the board of trustees of Girls Grammar School. I have known Elizabeth for many years. I know that she and her fellow board members do a wonderful job in supporting all of the principles that the school encompasses to deliver the best form of education.

Mr Howard Stack, the council chair at Brisbane Grammar School, has immense experience and is also a wonderful leader for the school. Those people are supported by their P&F presidents, Dr Fiona Harden at girls grammar and Craig Chapman at boys grammar. I acknowledge their efforts. The P&Fs do an absolutely outstanding job in those schools. As a local member it is a delight to see such a group of individuals on the boards of trustees and as council chairs, working with the principals and doing such a good job.

As we know, both of those schools and Queensland's six other grammar schools play an important role in Queensland's education system. Over the years, they have produced some truly exceptional achievers thanks to their outstanding teachers, to whom I pay tribute, their staff and their governance structures, which I know they have adopted and adapted according to their needs.

However, those governance structures now need updating. This bill seeks to replace the existing act with more contemporary legislation to reflect the changing realities of modern education. Each of the eight Queensland grammar school boards was consulted in the development of this bill, which I understand they all generally support.

This bill will ensure that the Queensland law meets the contemporary needs of grammar schools, which is very important. Because these schools are growing—they are very big institutions—another important measure in the bill is the reduction of red tape. The bill will transition from the current financial reporting requirements to other Queensland legislation regulating the financial accountability of statutory bodies, which I think is an important step. The bill will ensure that no additional grammar schools are established in Queensland in the future. I do not think one has been established for many years—

Ms Jones: Over 100 years.

Ms GRACE: Over 100 years, the minister says. Obviously, the need to establish more is not there. The bill protects the brand. It protects the use of the name and the schools will be able to provide the great education that they have provided for many years.

One of the most important things we are seeking to achieve is appropriate board composition in our grammar schools by modernising the way new board members are appointed and supporting boards with their succession planning. At the moment, grammar schools have outstanding boards of trustees, but as we know boards take on a lot of responsibility in the management and the strategic direction of schools, working with principals and other leaders in the schools. Anything we can do to assist them to modernise that composition mix is a step in the right direction. The bill will ensure that grammar schools have the right mix of skills, experience and corporate knowledge to deliver the best possible outcomes for their students. That is not to say that they have not done that in the past, but the bill modernises it and makes sure that that skill mix is there to meet their charter, which is especially important during periods when boards undergo rejuvenation. As we know, in any large institution or organisation it is important to have mechanisms in place for the rejuvenation of boards, the right skill mix and the ability to deliver on their strategic direction.

The bill retains the existing safeguards under the current act that allow the minister to appoint an administrator if the financial viability of a grammar school is threatened. While there is no indication that that is going to happen, one has to have safeguards in place. It is appropriate to keep the existing safeguards so that, in the unlikely event that a grammar school is in financial trouble, the education of its students will not be affected. It is most important that we have mechanisms in place, as we never know when something will occur. The students are of utmost importance. We must ensure that they get the education that their parents are paying for, who should not be distressed should anything happen. Therefore, the minister should retain the ability to appoint an administrator if necessary so that the good work of the school can continue.

The bill cuts red tape but not at the expense of effective governance oversight. It is very important that we maintain governance oversight. As I said, these are very large institutions. When one looks at their accounts and their financial management, they involve a lot of money, a lot of staff and a lot of responsibility. They have to confront a lot of issues every day. This will mean better governance for our grammar schools. It is very important to ensure that, should anything go wrong, those governance structures are in place. I have seen the way that they operate, so any improvement to contemporising the way that they operate is a step in the right direction. I know that the chairs, the boards of trustees, the principals and the teachers would welcome that, as they see continual improvement almost as a part of their strategic plan.

This is a great bill. The schools in my electorate have done exceptionally well. As I have said, the students wear their uniforms with pride. The teachers and everyone involved in both grammar schools do a wonderful job. It has been excellent to see the facilities increase and the manner in which they operate. I have been to their assemblies, which are absolutely amazing.

Ms Jones interjected.

Ms GRACE: Yes, and to see the way that they keep their traditions alive. It is a delight to see those fantastic schools. We never have any problems with any of the students going to and from school in the suburb of Spring Hill and on Gregory Terrace. I take every opportunity I have to visit the schools, which are wonderful. This bill really establishes them for the future. I commend the bill to the House.