




Speech By  
**Scott Stewart**

**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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**EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (11.55 am): I rise to speak in support of the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill as the chair of the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee, whose responsibility it was to examine the bill in detail. Firstly, I would like to thank the groups and organisations for their submissions and those who spoke to the committee at the public hearings that were held over the duration of the examination of the bill. I would also like to thank the committee members from both sides of the House and the secretariat staff for their involvement in the examination of this bill.

The Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 makes significant amendments to the prep year of schooling, the teaching profession and non-state school funding arrangements. The bill will ensure that all Queensland children start their school education in prep. It will improve the regulation of teaching in Queensland by streamlining governance, improving the disciplinary framework and strengthening the ability of the Queensland College of Teachers to protect our all-important students. The bill will also improve the administration of the Commonwealth and state funding to non-state schools by establishing statutory arrangements for the recovery of state and Commonwealth funding paid to non-state schools in excess of their entitlements. The bill will also improve oversight of non-state schools by allowing the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board to share information with law enforcement agencies and reduce the collection of unnecessary school survey data.

As a parent, former teacher and high school principal, along with just about every other member of this House, I understand the importance of education at an early age and the role it plays in the development of our young children. By the time a young person reaches the age of five, they have generally learned about 70 per cent of their learning skills, including asking complex questions. As every parent in the House will know, the most feared complex question that is asked of a parent is, 'Where do babies come from?' Perhaps it is not a complex question but more of a complex answer given by parents.

**Mr Boothman:** Storks.

**Mr STEWART:** Storks, a cabbage patch, among some other examples of where children come from. Other learning skills include improving walking, running and climbing skills; improving drawing skills and learning to write some numbers and letters; understanding the meaning of numbers; developing relationships with peers; showing independence; showing confidence and increasing skill and speed in physical abilities; and having extended conversations. All of that is learned through the role that a parent plays for their own child in developing learning skills from a young age.

Perhaps one of the most valuable gifts education can give to a young child is the ability to read. Research conducted by Lorelee Hiskin from the University of Missouri showed that students who have a positive attitude towards reading and confidence in reading have higher levels of academic success. Therefore, the sooner we can get children learning to read, the better their educational outcomes. This

bill makes prep the compulsory first year of schooling by providing that a principal of a state or non-state school must not enrol a child into year 1 until the child has undertaken prep in a state or non-state school. That is an important step in securing better long-term educational outcomes for that student.

As we know, all flowers do not bloom on exactly the same day. Our children's educational milestones are like those flowers: they do not all happen on the one day, or exactly at the same time as each other. That is why this bill does not lower the compulsory schooling age of six years and six months. It provides flexibility for parents to determine whether their child should enter prep in the year they turn five by 30 June, or the following year. This is a signature feature of this amendment, ensuring that parents retain the choice about when their child is ready for schooling.

This bill has four key components to it. I have already spoken about the introduction of compulsory prep which is very close to my heart. I would also like to speak on the second aspect of the bill, namely the ability this bill brings to improving the disciplinary framework and strengthening the ability of the College of Teachers to protect the safety and wellbeing of our Queensland students. Protecting the safety and wellbeing of our students is our No. 1 priority. This bill gives the college stronger powers to suspend a teacher's registration where the college reasonably believes the teacher poses an unacceptable risk of significant harm to our children. A decision to suspend a teacher's registration will be reviewed by the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. A person cannot work in a school when their registration is suspended. Currently the threshold for suspending a teacher's registration requires the college to believe there is imminent risk of harm. It is important that we provide the college with the ability to act early and suspend a teacher's registration when that is in the best interests of our children. This current threshold of imminent risk is too high and does not align with the removal of educators in the early childhood education and care sector because of risk to children.

The department advise that there have been concerns that there are some circumstances where the act does not allow the college to act soon enough to protect the interests, safety and wellbeing of our children. Currently a teacher's registration may be suspended if the college reasonably believes that the teacher poses an imminent risk of harm to children. Clause 33 makes a small but important amendment to section 49 of the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act by changing the threshold for suspension from imminent risk to a lower threshold of unacceptable risk of harm to children. Lowering the threshold for suspension allows the college to suspend a teacher's registration immediately where the college reasonably believes that the teacher poses an unacceptable risk of harm to our children. Essentially, the amendment provides the college with the ability to act earlier. The explanatory notes describe the policy intent of the amendment to section 49 as—

The main purpose of a section 49 suspension is to ensure children are protected while the College progresses disciplinary action to the relevant disciplinary (now practice and conduct) body, which will make the final decision in relation to the teacher's registration. The new threshold for suspension of teacher registration is intended to strengthen the ability of the College to act in the best interests of children to protect the safety and wellbeing of Queensland students.

In considering the suspension of teachers, the Queensland Teachers' Union maintains that the welfare and best interests of children is a paramount concern and that no objection to lowering the threshold was any of their concern. The QTU believes that the amendment to section 49 is balanced by the ability of the teacher to appeal the suspension of registration.

This bill promotes the high value of education in our community by determining that the prep year of schooling becomes compulsory and provides every opportunity for our young people to succeed in life through high-level education learning outcomes built on the foundations from a compulsory prep education and, secondly, by delivering stronger powers to the Queensland College of Teachers to suspend a teacher's registration where the college reasonably believes the teacher poses an unacceptable risk of harm to a child. For these reasons, I commend the bill to the House.