




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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GRAMMAR SCHOOLS BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.29 pm): I will start where the member for Townsville left off and recognise the Toowoomba Grammar School, the great TGS, and its headmaster, Peter Hauser.

Mr Millar: Hear, hear!

Mr WATTS: Thank you. I hear a past, past member, an old boy.

Grammar schools have been part of the fabric of Queensland's history effectively since we became a state. Many, many people have passed through the doors and the gates of a grammar school and have gone on to play significant roles in building our state in the early years and other contributions right up to the present day. If honourable members take a visit to Toowoomba Grammar School they will find their honour board where they recognise everybody who served in the First World War and other wars. They have many boards recognising past contributions of students not only in school life but also their successes going forward since leaving school. I think it right that this bill recognises that history and makes sure that their names are preserved.

As has been stated, it has been over a hundred years since a new grammar school has been formed. Therefore, there are many aspects of this bill that are very relevant today in making sure we have a contemporary education system allowing for that history to be recognised but at the same time allowing the schools to operate in a contemporary fashion providing a modern education. I look at the success of my local grammar school. They now offer from prep right through to year 12 on what used to be the rifle range in Toowoomba. If honourable members drive down Herries Street it would be hard to imagine that it was once a rifle range where young boys would fire their .303s into targets, but that is the history of the school. It has been around for that long. If members read some of the early adventures, they would see that at times the boys would ride to boarding school. They would gather up their colleagues from way out west with their horses. These young boys with a rifle on their back would ride into the great metropolis of Toowoomba to go and receive their education. Can honourable members imagine what they would think if they saw a bunch of 14-year-old boys riding with rifles on their back through the main street of Toowoomba now?

The bill itself has some good aspects that will bring forward the contemporary needs of the schools. Certainly the changing of the board structure and the recognition of succession planning is very important. I think the ability, at the request of the board, to have two additional members is a good idea. However, one of the frustrations for boards of the past has been the length of time it has taken to have board members approved. Sometimes it has taken over a year and right up to 18 months for a replacement board member to be approved. I would ask the minister to look at that in view of modernising it. Leaving them without the governance of a full board for such an extended period obviously has difficulties. This is not directly related to the bill; it is more of a process with a view to cutting red tape. I would hope that when a request is made, the department gets through it in a timely fashion, ensuring that the criminal history checks and the other checks that need to be done to ensure

the person is suitable are all done in a timely fashion so the board can get on with the fundamental job of making sure the grammar school that they are to work for will be able to pursue the things it needs with a full complement of skills on the board.

I am pleased to see that the financial accountability will continue and that the existing arrangements regarding reporting will continue. Obviously schools go up and down throughout their history. Again, in the history of Toowoomba Grammar School there were some very tight and lean years. I think making sure that the minister and the education department are aware of any of those things is good governance and making sure the financial accountability is there is something that is well thought through.

I would briefly like to thank the opposition members of the committee because I have jumped in front of them today on the speaking list: the members for Broadwater, Albert and Buderim. I do appreciate them allowing me to do that so I can manage my time in the chamber to fit in with another meeting I have.

Overall, I think this is a good school. Certainly the boys of the blue and gold at TGS will be happy that their grammar school will be able to continue, that their traditions will be upheld and that the governance structures will be modernised allowing them to not only get the best education available but to do it while meeting all of the contemporary standards and recognising their traditions. In no way is that meant to take away from someone like myself who was state educated or any of my other great schools in Toowoomba. This is about the governance of our grammar schools going forward. I think the bill strikes a good balance, as I say, with the minister being aware there have been some lengthy delays in the past in relation to appointing those members to the board. If that could be addressed as part of a process, I think we would find many happy grammar boards as they can get on with the governance of their schools. I thank the members for their indulgence. I support the bill.