




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Miss BARTON** (Broadwater—LNP) (12.03 pm): I rise to contribute to the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. At the outset I acknowledge my fellow colleagues on the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee: the members for Albert, Buderim, Townsville, Maryborough and Pumicestone. We do not always agree, but there are times when we are able to, in a bipartisan fashion, work together and agree. I also acknowledge the secretariat for the work that they did, the departmental officials who came and briefed the committee and, of course, those who took the time to make submissions.

As I said, we do not always in this House agree, but I think there is one thing that we can all agree on, and that is that education is the greatest gift that society and government can ever give a child. It is the foundation stone of someone's future. The opportunities that one gets from education will help set them up for life. I appreciate that all 89 members of this House are absolutely committed to making sure that the next generation of leaders are given the best possible start. In that vein I acknowledge the five schools in my electorate of Broadwater: Coombabah State High School, Coombabah State School, Labrador State School, St Francis Xavier Catholic School and Biggera Waters State School. The principals, teachers and teacher aides at those schools and schools across Queensland are doing a fantastic job of educating our children.

The shadow minister for education has touched on the move to compulsory prep. We know that the preparatory year of education is incredibly important. If we do not get it right from the beginning it makes it so much more difficult when those children get older. It is also particularly important to not only get the education component right but also get the relationship between teachers and students right. If kids do not enjoy the first years of school then they will not enjoy the next years, particularly moving into secondary education where we all know that it is vital for their future that they enjoy and engage in their education. We need to be conscious of and respect a family's choice and work with families to make sure that we can offer them the best option so that government and society can provide that education.

My good friend and colleague the member for Warrego has concerns about how we make sure that in rural and regional Queensland we offer the best form of early years and preparatory education. I do not intend to canvass the issues that the member for Warrego will, but I know that she and the member for Gregory are incredibly passionate about this. We know that it is not as easy for people who live in rural and regional Queensland to get access to school, to be able to drive five minutes down the road, as might be the case for those who live in more urban parts of Queensland. The shadow minister has touched on it and I am sure that the minister in responding to the debate will respond to the concerns that have been raised by the member for Aspley and will, in the course of this debate, be raised by the member for Warrego.

There are a number of issues that are being addressed in this bill and it is not my intention to canvass them all, but I do want to touch on the regulation of the teaching profession. There are a few elements with respect to that. Firstly, with regard to the Queensland College of Teachers and their ability now to have more flexibility in the return-to-work provisions, I can absolutely see the benefits of this. Being too prescriptive does not always provide the best outcome. What we are acknowledging here is that the Queensland College of Teachers is best placed, rather than government, to determine the right provisions for that particular individual. Importantly, this proposed change takes into account the individuality of circumstances for that particular teacher who seeks to return to the profession rather than assuming that a one-size-fits-all approach is going to work because, as we know, a one-size-fits-all approach very rarely works.

In relation to regulation of the teaching profession, we need to be conscious of the changes with respect to the disciplinary role of the Queensland College of Teachers. I echo the comments of my colleague on the committee the member for Townsville that our priority must always be the safety of children at school. The children who we are educating today are the leaders of tomorrow. Our focus should always be the safety of those students. As the member for Aspley touched on, and the member for Albert is passionate about, this is about making sure there is an appropriate mechanism to respond to vexatious complaints. The last thing that any of us want to see is a good teacher, who is out there inspiring children and providing quality education, slurred and sullied because of a vexatious complaint.

Whilst our priority will always and should always be the safety of children, we also need to make sure that we are conscious of natural justice and procedural fairness where appropriate to ensure that we do not lose good teachers from the profession as a result of vexatious complaints. As I said, that is something that the member for Albert is very passionate about and I trust that he will touch on it in his contribution to the debate.

The other thing that I will quickly touch on is debt recovery from non-state schools. We need to ensure integrity in the system. While we want to encourage parents to exercise their freedom of choice and their right to choose what is right for them and their child, we also need to make sure that, where taxpayer dollars are being sent to state and non-state schools, there is integrity in the system to ensure that there is no inappropriate use of funding or inappropriate oversupply of funding to non-state schools. Ultimately, that comes down to government offering the people of Queensland an assurance that taxpayer dollars are not going to be used inappropriately. I acknowledge that what we are doing here is ensuring that there will remain integrity in the system.

As I said, I think all 89 members of this House are incredibly passionate about education. I am particularly passionate about it, as is the shadow minister, because it is the foundation stone of someone's future. It is so critical that we get right the early years and the preparatory years, because it makes a difference. I had a fantastic preschool teacher and a great year 1 teacher. I loved school and I loved learning. To this day I continue to enjoy learning and each and every day I learn something new. I acknowledge and agree with the comments of the member for Townsville about the importance of reading. If you give a child the gift of reading, you give them the gift of knowledge. A thirst for knowledge and to learn something new each and every day allows children to immerse themselves in an amazing world of opportunities and experience. On that note, I acknowledge the teachers in my local schools and across Queensland who are encouraging students to participate in the Reading Challenge. As we all know, it is very important that kids learn to love school, to love learning and to love reading.

The opposition will not be opposing the bill. Some issues will be raised by my colleagues the members for Albert and Warrego. I will leave it to those more passionate members to raise those issues on behalf of their communities.