




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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GRAMMAR SCHOOLS BILL

 **Miss BARTON** (Broadwater—LNP) (4.44 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Grammar Schools Bill. At the outset I acknowledge my fellow members of the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee as well as those from the department who took the opportunity to brief the committee on the bill and also those who made submissions. I thank them for their contributions.

As has been outlined by many members in this debate so far, there are currently eight grammar schools in Queensland. Having had them listed by the member for Pumicestone, I will not go through the list again. It is important to note that grammar schools are a very important component of the education framework in Queensland and a very important part of making sure that parents and families have freedom of choice and flexibility to make the right education decisions for their child. What grammar schools strive to do is provide non-discriminatory secular education. I know there are members of this House who are very proud alumni of grammar schools, and off the top of my head—I hope I do not miss anyone—the member for Gregory is a proud alumnus and of course also the member for Callide, the member for Beaudesert and the member for Nanango that I am aware of. I am sure there are many others who are proud alumni of grammar schools here in Queensland.

One of the key components of this bill before the House today is the cutting of red tape. I am sure all members would agree that one thing that we as a parliament should strive to do is see government intervention lessen and decrease where it is appropriate. What we have seen over the many, many years that grammar schools have been in place in Queensland is that government does not always need to intervene to ensure the right outcomes are being met, and it is great to see there is bipartisan support for this cutting of red tape. We also see the removal of some very prescriptive financial accountability requirements, and that has been outlined by the minister, the shadow minister and other members in their contributions. This is not in any way, shape or form going to affect the financial strength and accountability of the schools or boards because there are other legislative frameworks and regimes which provide for that accountability. Where legislation is not needed it makes no sense that there is onerous and prescriptive legislation on our books.

The other thing that I wanted to quickly touch on in my brief contribution to this debate is with respect to changes to board membership. As the shadow minister for education, the member for Aspley, has outlined, this will lead to rejuvenation and better succession planning for boards. It will also give them an opportunity to respond to emergent situations where they think there is a more appropriate person who could serve on the board.

I do have a question that I hope the minister will be able to address in her response to the second reading debate with respect to ministerial appointments to the boards. When the department provided a briefing to the committee, it said that there was a requirement for the minister to consult with not only the existing board and the school, as I understand it, but also often the minister consults with the community. I wonder if the minister could detail the process that she goes through or would intend to go through when making ministerial appointments to grammar school boards. I am very conscious that

all schools across Queensland, whether they are state schools or non-state schools, are very proud of their alumni and the contributions they have made not only to the school community but continue to make in many cases across Queensland. I know that when a lot of non-state schools and state schools are making appointments to the boards or committees which are there to support the school they are very, very conscious that alumni often have a real desire to make a positive contribution to their old school. I am curious to hear from the minister whether or not that is something that is a consideration for her and what considerations she has when making ministerial appointments.

I wanted to also touch on the requirement for someone to disclose their criminal history, especially when they have been convicted of an indictable offence. I think we would all agree that it is important that anyone who is associated with schools in Queensland, be they state or non-state, must be of the highest character and of great integrity. I do not think anyone in this House would dispute that, but it is important to ensure that, where someone is making a disclosure about their criminal history, there are particular safeguards of that information as we have seen in other pieces of legislation before the House. I note that the minister has accepted the recommendation from the committee, and I thank her for that.

Finally, I would like to address the submission the committee received which expressed disappointment that there were no new grammar schools and that the ability to create new grammar schools is being removed as part of this legislation. What I would say to that person is there are a range of options and there are many, many choices that people can make when it comes to educating their children across Queensland, be it in the state or the non-state sector.

One of the things we in Queensland can be incredibly proud of, whatever your views, is that we have robust state, private and Catholic education sectors in this state. I think we can be incredibly proud of the freedom of choice that offers parents in particular. I appreciate that this person is of the view that there are not very many non-denominational private schools that are an option for them; however, given the range of options—non-denominational private schools, denominational private schools, independent public schools and other public schools—I think there is great flexibility and a large range of choices for parents across Queensland. It is something we can be very proud of and I look forward to continuing to support the passage of this bill through the House.