




Speech By
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EDUCATION (ACCREDITATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS) BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.08 pm): I rise to talk on the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill 2017. The non-state school sector plays a huge role in education across Queensland and most particularly in Toowoomba. Ensuring that we have a simple accreditation process, that we have a board that is focused on keeping up to date and that the funding arrangements are in place is very important.

I know that in recent times in the great electorate of Toowoomba North we have had some substantial changes in our education provision. Last year Downlands College, one of the great and famous schools of Toowoomba, started to go down to grade 5. I know they were struggling to get funding approval for that for a period of time, so I think having a simplified process is very useful.

Toowoomba, as people know, is a hub for education. You will hear just how big a hub it is because I will list them off for you. I think people will be surprised at how the little provincial seat of Toowoomba North can have so many state and non-state schools. On top of that, this will be the first year that I have not opened a new school in the electorate since I came into this place. We have been going at a rapid pace. Obviously, Highfields State Secondary College was one that was opened, funded and built by the LNP. We have what is now known as TACAPS. The Toowoomba Anglican and Preparatory School was granted its application to become a high school as well, so it is now prep to 12. Mary McKillop at Highfields was granted its application to become a high school, and the Toowoomba State High School and the Wilsonton campus were split so they are each a high school in their own right. I think all of those have been good outcomes for the people of Toowoomba.

You certainly would not miss out on having a choice of education in Toowoomba. Fairholme College is a prep to 12 college. My girls went there, and it is a great school and does a fantastic job for people all over Toowoomba and many of the boarders who come in from out west. We have St Mary's College, which, as many people may know, is where Johnathan Thurston attended and played football for a period of time. St Ursula's College has recently gone through a change, with the Ursulines handling over control to the bishop, basically. They are not quite in with all the other Catholic schools. They are a little independent of that, but they are now overseen by the bishop locally. We have the Toowoomba Christian College, which is a great college on your way out of town towards Highfields. It has been growing steadily and it brings young men and women up with strong faith. It is a school that is well received and respected by many people from around the district. We have the Glennie School, which I must make sure that I mention because my wife teaches there and, if I do not, I will be in a lot of trouble. She probably will want me to mention to the board that they need to increase funding for the sports centre, which they have already given money for. She will be keen to see a little bit of extra funding for sports facilities, which is her area of education. Toowoomba Grammar School, of course, is one of Queensland's oldest schools and a very well known GPS school. My boys went there. It certainly gives boys a fine education, both at a junior and senior level. Just to run them back up, we have: Fairholme,

Mary McKillop, St Marys, St Ursula's, the Glennie School, Toowoomba Christian College, Toowoomba Grammar School, Downlands and Toowoomba Anglican and Preparatory School—and that's just the senior schools.

With regard to primary schools, we have some fine non-state schools. Holy Name is a school that has been providing strong Catholic education for many years. It only has a small enrolment, but it has a very dedicated staff and it does a wonderful job. Mater Dei is celebrating one of its birthdays this year, and I know that Chris and the team up there in St Theresas' Parish will be looking forward to everybody coming to their fete this year. We also have Our Lady of Lourdes and Sacred Heart, and all of these are Catholic schools which provide options for people in Toowoomba.

I will take a little bit of liberty because I know this bill is about funding those schools, but I could not continue without mentioning Highfields State Secondary College and Wilsonton. As the minister knows, whilst there may have been a bit of kicking and screaming about the hall being built, I thank the minister for building that hall. It was a shame that the commitment could not have been made in the 2015 election like we did.

Ms Jones: You did not fund it!

Mr WATTS: It was fully funded, Minister. You know that, Minister.

Ms Jones: Start being honest!

Mr WATTS: You know that, Minister. You know that it was funded. You know that I worked for it. You know that the P&C supported me—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order!

Mr WATTS:—for the children and families of Wilsonton—

Ms Jones: It was my money, and you know it!

Mr WATTS:—because they needed it. Whilst, as we can hear, the minister was dragged kicking and screaming to the party—

Ms JONES: I rise to a point of order. I find that personally offensive and I ask you to withdraw immediately.

Mr WATTS: I withdraw.

Ms JONES: You did not fund it. We funded it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members in the House, there was a point of order. That is when everyone needs to stop talking. The point of order was taken and an apology was given. The minister has now resumed her seat. I will now call the member to continue, and I need everyone else to listen in silence.

Mr WATTS: We of course have Rockville State School, Wilsonton State School, Newtown State School and Harlaxton, which I visited recently. The distance travelled by the students is very important, and they are kicking some really good goals in literacy despite a tough demographic. I went there the other day and planted a tree with the kids, and they were having a fantastic time as part of NAIDOC week. Fairview Heights recently got their best results on NAPLAN, and I was out there visiting them. They were thankful for the Master Teachers program and they thanked us for the funding in the Great Results Guarantee, because it has made a difference to their ability to get those literacy results.

Highfields State School is where I had children attend for primary. Again, that is a great school that was nearly closed back some 40-odd years ago, but now it is one of the biggest primary schools in the district. East State School, which probably is the biggest school in the district, has recently had a principal change. I certainly wish Richard Gibson success in his appointment there. I visited North State School the other day, and they were telling me about the fete they have coming up and some of the fundraising they are doing.

Overall I think people can see that, whilst it is a little electorate in a provincial town, we certainly punch above our weight in terms of educating future generations. I think that streamlining some of the processes involved in the non-state school sector is very important. We have a very strong non-state sector in Toowoomba at both the primary and secondary levels. At the secondary level we host a lot of students from northern New South Wales, overseas and all over Western Queensland in the form of our boarding population. A lot of these kids come to our town after going through remote learning or very small schools, and they are always welcomed into our town. I think they have a good time because a lot of them stick around and think of Toowoomba, if not as home, as their second home.

I would like to say that I think these changes will help the non-state sector continue the great work they do. As we all know, choice is very important to people who live in Queensland, including choice in education to ensure that their children get not just the best option that they can find but one that really suits their personality. I would suggest to anybody raising children in Queensland that, if they are not sure they can find the school they are looking for where they live, they should move to Toowoomba North because we certainly have a school that will fit the bill for whatever their child needs in terms of their educational future.