



Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**


**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

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Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Coronavirus, Schools**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.31 am): Following the meeting of the national cabinet last night, the expert health advice is that schools should remain open. I repeat: the expert health advice is that schools should remain open. This is not being done at the risk of the health of our children. The health, wellbeing and safety of students always comes first. If this health expert advice changes, our instructions to schools will change. If there is a confirmed case at a school, the Department of Education, in conjunction with Queensland Health, will make a call about the closure of that school.

Extensive preparation and plans are in place. We know that our schools are ready to provide resources so that students' learning can continue. We must continue to follow what the health experts are saying because if we do not, it could have profound and long-lasting impacts on our society. Tens of thousands of jobs would be lost. There would be a 30 per cent impact on the availability of health workers who are parents and carers which would put lives at risk. I urge every parent to listen to this expert health advice—not rumour and gossip on social media. It is vital that people remain calm and treat everyone with respect and kindness.

I thank those parents and carers who are doing the right thing and listening to the advice, but I also want to thank those who are keeping their children at home if they are feeling unwell. I also want to thank principals, teachers, staff and other educators for implementing the necessary changes around large gatherings and social distancing; for example, the spacing of school desks as well as increased hygiene practices like more routine hand washing.

I also want to briefly mention the special pandemic leave provisions for public sector workers in response to these extraordinary circumstances. Special pandemic leave for public sector employees has been in place since 2009, but it has been updated to include the new COVID-19 pandemic and casual workers. Similar provisions were issued by the federal government for Commonwealth employees only yesterday. As the single largest employer in Queensland, the government has an important role to play in leading the way for all industries in implementing measures to protect essential workers across the state. We are ensuring that all Queensland government employees have adequate leave and support. This includes our doctors, nurses, teachers, paramedics, firefighters, police, scientists and other medical staff.

The public sector plays a unique role in responding to this unprecedented emergency, but it is not only frontline workers who are putting their shoulders to the wheel. They are also being supported by other Public Service workers; for example, departmental staff in Education, not teachers, who are putting together learning materials should schools close; those workers putting together a stimulus package for businesses; and those workers who have drafted the necessary changes to allow shops to restock overnight, to mention but a few. Without these important measures in these unprecedented times our community would struggle to continue functioning—a big thank you for all your efforts.