




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Boarding Schools

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.38 pm): I turn to something that is very important for rural and remote people when it comes to education. This morning at 10 am a virtual protest rally, hosted by the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, was held on Zoom to highlight the plight of Queensland's boarding students. Parents are begging the Palaszczuk Labor government to allow boarding schools to return to normal for term 3. Not for the first time, I, along with the member for Warrego and other Western Queensland members, add my voice to that plea. I am placing on the record that the current arrangements are unworkable. Worst of all is the severe and detrimental impact on Queensland's many boarding students and their families—emotionally and financially.

The problem is the arbitrary ruling by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee that boarding schools can only accommodate 25 per cent of their students. The AHPPC is a committee of the chief health officers of all the states and territories, chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer. In other words, Queensland is fully represented on that panel, and Queensland is a state where boarding is a key delivery mechanism for education.

When the 25 per cent rule was proposed, Queensland should have immediately challenged the scientific basis of such a random and arbitrary rule. Unlike the 1.5-metre social distancing rule or the four-square-metre rule for indoor gatherings, this 25 per cent residency rule seems to have no scientific basis. Queensland's representative should also have asked the AHPPC what would happen to the 75 per cent of boarding students who have been forcibly excluded from school. That did not happen and my representations to the Queensland education minister were brushed off.

I can tell members what happened to the 25 per cent. They returned from COVID-19 free areas of the state to be subjected to the strictest isolation 24/7. They were put in lockdown. Then, during the day, they were working side by side with day students who were free to mingle with the community, go to markets, go on marches, use public transport and hug their parents and siblings. Many of the 75 per cent who have been forcibly excluded are still struggling with remote learning and have been apparently forgotten.

Yesterday the AHPPC issued a new rule lifting the 25 per cent residency, but schools are now required to submit new COVID-19 management plans to Queensland Health. This will make no difference unless the Minister for Education puts her shoulder to the wheel and gives some direction and clarification. We are going to be living with COVID-19 for some time, and the minister has responsibility for the education and welfare of all Queensland's students during that time.

This has been an emotional and hard time for rural and remote families who have had mum come to Brisbane and rent a house to try to get some of the kids to school while the other kids are still at home. We need to fix this. This is putting an emotional strain on many rural and remote families across Queensland.