




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 30 November 2021

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Department of Education

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.45 pm): I rise to bring to the attention of members of the Queensland parliament serious allegations pertaining to the Department of Education and specifically the Integrity and Employee Relations Unit. A former employee of the Queensland Department of Education and another public servant who is currently on long-term sick leave within the Department of Education have approached me in my capacity as the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for education. They have sought formal public interest disclosure status via myself as a state member of the Queensland parliament.

Having taken formal advice from the Clerk of the Queensland Parliament, who referenced schedule 5 of the Queensland parliament's standing orders, I then formally wrote to the Crime and Corruption Commission asking them to assess the matters raised and to advise me of their intentions. With respect to the formal correspondence I sent to the Crime and Corruption Commission, it was indicated in that correspondence that, had a formal response not been received back from the Crime and Corruption Commission by 26 November 2021 in relation to the intention of the Crime and Corruption Commission to assess and/or investigate the matters, it would then be my intention and responsibility as an elected member of the Queensland parliament to raise such matters in the Queensland parliament. I did not receive a response from the Crime and Corruption Commission by 26 November.

Having met with both complainants and carefully listened to the information of the circumstances which they described, I was deeply shocked and gravely concerned; hence, I do not take this step lightly in raising these matters in the Queensland parliament. Allegations from the two complainants included workplace bullying, maladministration, nepotism and cover-ups within the Department of Education specifically related to complaints about teachers that were effectively dismissed without due process and investigation. I am very concerned about the specific allegations of alleged criminal conduct, including the fabrication of evidence, hacking and reprisal action against public servants.

One specific allegation that shocked me—and one that would equally shock all Queensland parents—was a case of a teacher allegedly committing a heinous act against several students. The teacher allegedly admitted to forcing children into inappropriate physical acts including forcing students to squat in a corner as a punishment for simply talking. The public servant who was a senior investigator within the Department of Education spoke to the Office of the Human Rights Commission about this specific allegation, and it was confirmed that the actions of the teacher were an act of torture and should be addressed accordingly. It was reported to me that no reprisal action was taken against the teacher by the Department of Education and, when the investigator pursued the issue, he was put on a performance management plan and reprisal action commenced against this public servant.

Both the former public servant and the public servant still with the Department of Education referenced documented examples of bullying and provided evidence of departmental procedures not being followed, as well as further references of computer hacking and material breaches of code of

conduct and relevant standards by senior executives within the Department of Education. These allegations are deeply disturbing, yet they are only the latest in a long line of serious workplace cultural and management issues that have beset the Department of Education under the Queensland state Labor government.

Hundreds of thousands of Queensland parents, students, teachers and staff entrust the Queensland state government to operate the Department of Education in a manner which ensures that the highest standards are met and maintained and where the safety of students, teachers and employees of the Department of Education are paramount. On the basis of the information that has been provided to the Liberal National Party opposition, and in view of countless other reported failings, it is absolutely clear that the state Labor government is failing to deliver the world-class education system that Queenslanders deserve.

Finally, there is also the serious matter of the principles of natural justice and welfare not being afforded to public servants who seek public interest disclosure or whistleblower status, because in this instance it seems to be problematic with respect to those two public servants who have sought assistance from the LNP opposition. As I indicated, one public servant has already left the Department of Education whilst the other is on long-term sick leave with the department due to the circumstances of this situation.

Clearly, both public servants and Queenslanders alike are rapidly forming the view that the Labor state government is losing control of the education system. I take this opportunity to say to the Minister for Education and the newly appointed director-general that these are serious matters which need to be looked at. These public servants have raised a raft of issues in relation to their particular unit. Time is of the essence in resolving those matters as they seriously pertain to students and student welfare issues, and I would encourage them to look into these matters as a matter of priority and urgency before the conclusion of this year.