




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR OODGEROO

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ADJOURNMENT

Faith-Based Schools

 **Dr ROBINSON** (Oodgeroo—LNP) (9.06 pm): I rise to speak on the important contribution of faith-based independent schools in Queensland. I thank Independent Schools Queensland, ISQ, who were in parliament tonight, ACS, CSA, AACCS, ACC and the other representative groups of faith-based schools in Queensland. In 2020, an update titled *Economic significance of independent schools to the Queensland economy* noted the following: independent schools educate one in seven young Queenslanders; they save \$1 billion in recurrent and capital funding annually for governments by not taking up state school places; they contributed \$4.88 billion to gross state product through employment, infrastructure investment and international student programs in 2017-18—an average of \$40,000 per independent school student, an average return of \$3.66 for every \$1 of state and federal government investment; and they support 33,560 full-time direct and indirect jobs, worth \$2.95 billion in wages and salaries.

The February 2022 non-state school census found that over 141,000 students were enrolled in over 230 independent schools in Queensland of varying educational philosophies, religious affiliations, sizes and geographical location. Enrolments across the state have continued to grow, by 4.1 per cent in the past year and 25.8 per cent over the past 10 years. Parents and students value the autonomy. They say they value the choice, the diversity and the agility that is provided by these schools—and they value the religion, whether Christian schools, Muslim schools, Jewish schools or others.

Queensland parents and students are choosing these schools in increasing numbers and, in so doing, saving governments billions of dollars from education budgets. With respect to faith-based schools, the sweeping changes to Queensland anti-discrimination law recommended in the Queensland Human Rights Commission report has sent shockwaves through Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other communities, that are worried where the government might be headed. Professor Patrick Parkinson AM, professor of law at the University of Queensland, addresses the risks and impacts of these sweeping changes in his paper *Changes to anti-discrimination law in Queensland: why they matter to faith-based schools*. While he says that many of the proposed changes that update the legislation are sensible, critically the commission largely ignored or rejected the concerns of Christian leaders about their own schools.

The HRC report recommends further limitations on the rights of faith-based schools and tertiary institutions to organise themselves in a manner consistent with their faith and beliefs. It further reduces the religious freedom of Queensland parents to educate their children in accordance with their faith. It is in breach of international covenants that Australia has signed up to. This will be a big problem for faith-based schools and I ask the government to think very carefully about it.