



Speech By  
**Amy MacMahon**


**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 October 2023

**EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) (HELPING FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL COSTS) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Introduction**

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (12.30 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 for particular purposes. I table the bill, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the Education, Employment and Training Committee to consider the bill.

*Tabled paper:* Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023 [1621](#).

*Tabled paper:* Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023, explanatory notes [1622](#).

*Tabled paper:* Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023, statement of compatibility with human rights [1623](#).

Today I am pleased to be introducing the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023. State schools are meant to be free, but right now Queensland parents are having to spend thousands of dollars in fees and out-of-pocket costs every year to send their kids to state schools. This is because Labor has let Queensland state schools become some of the most underfunded in the country—the worst funded state schools of any state or territory except for the Northern Territory. Funding for Queensland state schools is falling short by \$1.7 billion every year—\$1.7 billion. This \$1.7 billion means crammed and understaffed classrooms. It means teachers burning out and kids struggling to keep up. It means families having to decide whether they will pay their next electricity bill or subject fees. It means teachers using their own already-too-low wages to buy their students basic resources so kids do not miss out.

In a wealthy state like Queensland—where our state government is sitting on a \$12 billion surplus, where corporate profits are soaring—there is no excuse for underfunding state schools, which is why today the Greens are introducing the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families With School Costs) Amendment Bill to ensure that every Queensland state school is fully funded and truly free. No matter where a child grows up in Queensland, from Cooktown to Surfers Paradise, no matter what their parents earn, we can afford to give every Queensland kid a great state school education for free. By ending the \$1.7 billion shortfall in annual minimum needs-based funding and boosting funding even further, we can:

- scrap state school service and subject fees;
- provide stationery, textbooks and resources so families are not out of pocket;
- hire the teachers and staff our schools need; and
- make sure no child misses out on excursions, school sports and cultural programs.

Right now, funding for Queensland's state schools is the second worst in the country. According to the Australian Education Union, the shortfall in minimum needs-based funding to Queensland state schools is \$1.7 billion every year. Under the national education standards the states are expected to contribute 80 per cent of minimum needs-based funding for schools with the other 20 per cent coming from federal government, but the Queensland government only contributes 69.26 per cent of needs-based funding. This underfunding means:

- kids going without the resources they need;
- fewer teachers and more crowded classrooms;
- worse students outcomes and poorer long-term prospects into adulthood;
- families under the pump struggling to afford state school fees and growing out-of-pocket costs; and
- children missing out on essential childhood experiences like going on school camp or playing sport.

Under Labor, more than one in 10 state school children are not funded to have their minimum education needs met. Over a decade this is equivalent to leaving an entire year level without education. Without adequate academic and social support at schools children are falling through the cracks and being set up for a lifetime of lower income, worse social and health outcomes, and increased likelihood of poverty and incarceration. The percentage of Queensland students meeting the minimum national standard for reading, literacy and numeracy is declining across almost all year levels and areas.

This is also about inequality. State schools educate 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 80 per cent of kids from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and the vast majority of students with disabilities and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. These are the kids Labor is short-changing by \$1.7 billion every year. Full funding would also mean that we would have a chance to make our state schools truly inclusive. The Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education said—

With the will, skill and funding, we know EVERY child can be supported to succeed at their local regular neighbourhood school with their siblings and friends.

Instead, this government is leaving behind the students and families who most need our support.

Because state schools are underfunded by \$1.7 billion every year—over \$2,000 per child—schools have no choice but to charge parents and carers for basic resources to plug this funding gap. Families are paying hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars every year for resources, laptops, software, school and subject levies, uniforms, excursions and extracurricular activities. As families struggle through a cost-of-living crisis, when many are struggling to pay rent or mortgage repayments, these costs stretch family budgets to the limit.

We surveyed over 700 families from right across Queensland earlier this year, and nearly half of these families said they had had to ask for help to cover state school costs for their kids. This means families going on payment plans with their child's school, going into credit card debt, having to borrow money from friends or relatives or seeking help from a charity just to pay state school expenses. One parent said—

My parents help me out. Even though I work fulltime in healthcare it's hard as a single parent.

Another parent said—

I take money out of my food budget to pay for things like sport and excursions when they come up.

Another said—

It is a constant juggling act to make sure my children have clothes and shoes that fit, the right resources and that they don't miss out on activities such as swimming lessons, excursions or school camps.

No parent should have to go into debt or skip meals just so their kids can get a state education, which is why the Greens are fighting to make sure Queensland state schools are fully funded. But this is the reality for Queensland families right now. One parent talked about how at their child's school there were fees to use a laptop or get a school ID. One family said they could not afford these fees so their kids just went without. Other parents talked about going without food or petrol so they could buy their kids uniforms when they grew out of old ones. Another parent talked about how their kid's school is in continual fundraising mode and how the pressure to pay for compulsory and optional items and activities is intense. Parents and carers talked about the high cost of essentials like swimming lessons, laptops or iPads. Parents talked about the ever-increasing cost of stationery. This is the experience of families sending their kids to state schools—schools that are meant to be free.

It is not just students and families who are being set up to fail but teachers as well. Queensland teachers do amazing work in underfunded schools, and in many ways our state schooling system rests on the hard work of teachers working longer hours and spending more and more money out of their own pockets. Teacher morale and retention rates are declining under increasing pressure to perform without the staff and resources they need. According to the government's own figures, there has been a 15 per cent increase in annual teacher resignations since 2018.

An annual survey of teachers by Monash University found that: one third of teachers were intending to change careers; two-thirds of teachers were dissatisfied with their job; 61 per cent felt personally unappreciated; and 91 per cent of teachers said they did not think politicians respected them. Why would they? Teachers in Australia work 15 per cent more than teachers in other OECD countries. They spend more time on documentation and admin than teachers elsewhere, and under their current pay agreement Queensland teachers are essentially receiving a real wage cut of 3.9 per cent.

It is clear that our teachers are incredibly passionate about the work they do. They work so hard to make sure their students get the opportunities they deserve, but by denying Queensland state schools the \$1.7 billion in annual funding needed to meet minimum education standards we are failing teachers and putting us on track for a shortfall of 1,700 secondary teachers by 2026. Here is what teachers are saying in the annual Monash survey of teacher perceptions. One said—

I would have said I'd teach until retirement but now I don't think I have more than two years left in me.

Another said—

Part of me loves teaching and would never leave, but the other part of me is so worn out I wonder how long I can stay.

Another commented—

I would like to stay but I genuinely don't know if I will be able to keep up this kind of workload.

The President of the Australian Education Union has said—

Underfunding of public schools is leading to unsustainable workloads for teachers and principals along with the need to use their own money to pay for the basics so that students don't miss out.

My office heard from the partner of a first-year teacher. This teacher was so excited to graduate and start teaching at a state school north of Brisbane. In her first semester this teacher spent thousands from her own pocket on furniture and resources for her students, most of them from poor families. She spent hours each night laminating exercise books and naming stationery she had bought for her students who would otherwise have gone without. She wanted so badly to teach and for her students to succeed, but before the end of her first year she resigned due to the unmanageable workload and returned to working in child care. Despite all the passion in the world for her job and her students, she, like many other teachers, could not cope in a state system that is underfunded by \$1.7 billion every year below the minimum needs-based funding.

The Australian Education Union found that teachers are spending on average nearly \$1,000 out of their own pockets every year for resources for their classrooms. Many teachers said that this was the only way to deliver a lesson and that students would miss out if they did not use their own money for these resources. Many teachers have reported to us that they also buy food for kids who come to school hungry. Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions, and Labor is failing in both.

We have an opportunity to change this. The bilateral funding agreement between the federal government and the states is being renegotiated over the coming months and we have an opportunity to set our kids and teachers up for success by fully funding Queensland state schools. We are introducing the helping families with school costs bill now so that the education minister has an opportunity to develop a clear plan to make every Queensland state school fully funded and truly free and to ensure that full funding is embedded from the beginning of the next bilateral agreement with the federal government, not years down the track. The minister has said that state schools are on a path to full funding, but we cannot afford to wait any longer. We cannot afford to lock our state schools into another five years of underfunding. We cannot afford to let Queensland families go into debt with out-of-pocket expenses. We cannot afford to let kids go without the resources that they need.

The bill obliges the relevant minister to introduce subsequent legislation to ensure state schools are provided funding to meet state school students' minimum educational needs under the national standards framework and also cover the costs of providing to state school students free of charge resources, textbooks, stationery, personal computing devices, school uniforms, and sporting, cultural and academic programs. In introducing subsequent legislation to meet these objectives, the minister is to determine school funding in accordance with the amount of funding a school requires to meet the minimum education needs of its students as set by the Schooling Resource Standard. Costs above the Schooling Resource Standard for each school are to be determined by the chief executive in an annual report established by the minister.

Subsequent legislation to achieve these objectives and determine these costs would also oblige the minister and the chief executive to have regard to what costs will be incurred in ensuring the academic and extracurricular activities available to children are comparable between state schools and private schools. The chief executive is also to have regard to any additional costs associated with addressing the economic, social and geographical disadvantages of the students attending a school and any particular requirements of students with disabilities and other needs.

Providing kids with truly free and quality state education is affordable. Queensland is a wealthy state and ordinary Queenslanders deserve their fair share. If mining and energy companies are making record profits, if sales of luxury cars and yachts are going up, if the big banks and the mining industry are making a killing, then we can absolutely afford to fully fund our state schools. We can afford to scrap huge out-of-pocket expenses that families are paying, and we can afford to make sure that every Queensland kid gets a great education.

The benefits are so enormous that we cannot afford not to. Based on an estimate from the Australia Institute, continuing to underfund Queensland state schools will cost the Queensland economy up to \$6 billion a year by 2043. Underfunding schools will reduce government revenue by \$1.9 billion a year. In the long run, fulling funding schools pays for itself with a thriving economy and skilled workers who have had the benefit of a great state education. Last year the state government banked a \$12 billion surplus. We have the money. The only thing missing is the political will.

I have had the chance to speak with unions, school principals, parents, teachers and P&Cs about underfunding in Queensland state schools, and the overwhelming feedback is that our state schools need to be fully funded to give Queensland kids the best chance to lead rich, good lives. The Australian Education Union has said—

Full funding for public schools is the only way to ensure every child gets every opportunity to succeed. It means more one-on-one support for children, more time for teachers and better results.

The Gonski review was over a decade ago—a whole decade. The Australian Education Union has said—

There has now been a generation of children who have been denied full and fair funding for their entire school lives. This can no longer continue.

This cannot continue, and there is no reason for it to continue. Our state government right now is sitting on a \$12 billion surplus. Mining profits are soaring. Bank profits are soaring. Queensland Labor can well and truly afford to make our state schools fully funded and genuinely free. We can make sure that no kid shows up on the first day with only half their book list and hoping that other kids do not notice. We can make sure that no kid has a school uniform that does not fit because their parents have to wait for payday to get them a new one. We can make sure that no kid misses out on school camp, school sport or an excursion because their parents cannot afford the fees. Every single Queensland kid—no matter where they live or what their parents earn—should get the best possible start in life, and we can start today with this bill.

### **First Reading**

**Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (12.45 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

### **Referral to Education, Employment and Training Committee**

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Education, Employment and Training Committee.