



Speech By  
**Amy MacMahon**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2024

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

**Second Reading**

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (5.30 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill to fully fund state schools in Queensland will now get debated in the nick of time. The Labor government has an opportunity now to lock in place full funding for state schools before the election. I want to thank the parents, teachers, P&C groups, community service organisations, unions and everyday Queenslanders who made submissions on the committee inquiry into this bill, including West End State School P&C and the Buranda State School P&C, two of the incredible state schools in South Brisbane.

This was the first inquiry of its kind this state has had on the issue of state school funding in Queensland. State schools in Queensland are chronically underfunded. The committee report sets this funding out in black and white—

It is anticipated that Queensland's state schools will receive 90.5 per cent of SRS funding in 2024

Not 100 per cent but 90.5 per cent! That is what the Labor government thinks of Queensland state schools.

I say to those people who made submissions that your extensive knowledge and firsthand experience of underfunding in our state schools was invaluable. Because of you, the committee was able to hear directly from families and P&Cs about the impacts that current underfunding is having, including the enormous financial hardship on families, teachers' worsening conditions, the huge out-of-pocket costs that teachers incur so that their students do not go without and the reliance on P&C groups to fundraise to finance essentials for schools. Despite hearing about those concerns, particularly the costs associated with out-of-pocket expenses for Queensland families, the committee has recommended that the bill, which is designed to ensure that state schools are fully funded and genuinely free, not be passed. The committee has not recommended that the parliament undertake any alternative investigation or efforts to increase school funding.

I want to paint a picture of the values and priorities of this Labor government. Just next door, the Star Entertainment Group has been allowed to build a gigantic casino on parliament's doorstep. Due to money laundering, links to organised crime and fraud, Star has been found unsuitable to hold a casino licence in New South Wales. In 2022, the Gotterson inquiry found Star unfit to hold a casino licence in Queensland. However, last week the Premier took it upon himself to give Star a tax break. Star has been given a 99-year lease on public land. They have been allowed to build a bridge across the river that deposits people directly into the restaurant and retail precinct of the casino. Therefore, you can be a fraudulent, underhanded mega company and you will get the red carpet treatment from this Labor

government—you will get a priority development area to bypass planning laws and you will get a tax deferral. However, if you are a state school—too bad. This Labor government has said, ‘Sorry, we don’t have the money to spare to make sure you are fully funded.’ Instead, state schools are underfunded by \$1.7 billion every year.

State schools go without the resources they need. Teachers are worked to the bone in the middle of a teacher shortage. If new class reader books are needed to teach kids to read or if repairs are needed to a crumbling toilet block then it is left to parents, staff and the P&Cs to run raffles or Father’s Day stalls or sell a few sausages on election day in order to pay for the things that state school kids need. This is Queensland: it is one rule for the big corporations and LNP and Labor donors; it is another for regular people.

The state and federal governments are meant to be negotiating new bilateral agreements on school funding, but it seems they are in a deadlock on how much the federal government will increase funding by, with no plan to get Queensland state schools to 100 per cent funding anytime soon. The federal government are saying that they will increase their funding to 22.5 per cent while many of the state governments are pushing for 25 per cent from the federal government. The Labor state government have only committed to 75 per cent funding for state schools by 2032. Even if the federal government increased their funding to 25 per cent, state schools will remain underfunded until 2032. In estimates, I asked the minister—

If the federal government are offering 22.5 per cent of school funding, is it the Queensland government’s intention to provide the remainder that is needed to get up to 100 per cent?

Her answer was, ‘No.’

There is nothing radical about helping families with school costs. This bill proposes to fund schools to 100 per cent of minimum needs funding and provide additional funding to cover other costs such as uniforms and extracurricular opportunities—essentials for a well-rounded education. It is simply the minimum that Queensland kids deserve. No matter where kids grow up in Queensland, from Cooktown to Surfers Paradise, and no matter what their parents and carers earn, the Greens believe that Queensland kids should be able to receive a great state education for free—I repeat, for free.

The Australian Education Union estimates that Queensland state schools are underfunded by \$1.7 billion annually. The Queensland Teachers’ Union said—

... the Union agrees with the statement, contained in the Explanatory notes, that ‘Queensland state schools are not funded to meet the minimum educational needs of students.’

It further stated—

The QTU recommends that the Queensland Government must ensure that all state schools in Queensland receive a minimum of 100 per cent of the SRS.

By ending the \$1.7 billion shortfall in annual minimum needs-based funding and covering out-of-pocket expenses, we could scrap state school service and subject fees. We could provide stationery, textbooks and resources so that families are not out of pocket. We could hire the teachers and staff that our schools need. We could make sure that our hardworking teachers have the time and resources to focus on teaching without having to pay thousands out of their own pockets. We could make sure that no child misses out on excursions, school sports and cultural programs.

Since the Gonski review 13 years ago, which was meant to fix the massive gap in state school funding, Queensland state schools have missed out on billions of dollars in minimum needs funding. Economist Adam Rorris, an education, finance and training adviser to the Australian government, said—

When governments fail to reach this funding level, they fail the students of this country.

Labor and the LNP have failed Queensland kids.

The average child completing state high school this year will have lost out on about \$37,000 in minimum needs funding since they started year 1 and even more if they are disabled, if they are a First Nations child or if they are a child from a low-income family. That means more kids falling through the gaps, more families struggling to pay out-of-pocket school costs and more unpaid hours for teachers and school staff.

Because state schools are funded \$3,000 below minimum needs funding, schools have no choice but to charge parents and carers for essential resources, sports, excursions and school camps. Parents and carers are hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars out of pocket for their kids who are at state schools, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. According to one parent, the total cost of mandatory school fees, subject fees, resource fees, software and technology and minimum uniform requirements for their

daughter's first year in a state high school came to \$2,139 before any optional extras like excursions. One parent submitted—

As a solo parent with 2 kids in state school, the fees take me all year to pay off ... there is subject fees, excursion fees, camp fees that cost over \$300 for 2 day camps. I can't afford this so my kids have never been. They want to join music but I can't afford it.

Just imagine what it must be like to tell your child that, through no fault of their own, they cannot go on school camp with their friends, they cannot learn to play music or play a sport and they will be denied the opportunities to thrive that other children have. This is Labor's and the LNP's vision for Queensland: a society of haves and have-nots. As one submitter wrote, it is embarrassing. West End State School P&C submitted that in the last year the number of requests received from families for financial assistance to pay for things like books and resources has increased fivefold. That is a fivefold increase in families reaching out for help. Other P&Cs spoke about their fundraising efforts to cover the essentials for their schools.

Today, this Labor government has the opportunity to do the right thing by Queensland kids. Legislating full school funding would lock in full school funding. It would mean that, regardless of who formed the next government, Queensland state school kids will get the funding that they need and teachers will get the funding and staffing they deserve.

*(Time expired)*