




Speech By  
**Corrine McMillan**

**MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD**

---

Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2024

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

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (6.27 pm): I rise to oppose the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023 published by the Greens electoral party. Their helping families with school costs bill would require the introduction of a further bill to expand the schooling costs to be funded by the state. The bill proposes the funding of individual student resources, extracurricular services, an adequate quantity of the required school uniform and other resources necessary to ensure each student's participation in a state school's educational program. Currently, the EGPA requires the state to meet the cost of instruction, administration and facilities associated with state schooling. Beyond this, parents may pay for some schooling costs out of pocket.

Fees at each state school are set at the discretion of the principal in consultation with their school's Parents and Citizens Association and within parameters set by the Department of Education and legislation. Schools can charge fees for school-based resources, including the Student Resource Scheme and recovery of costs for extra non-curricular activities. Decisions are made at a local level to ensure any charges to parents or costs to the school are directly related to the educational outcomes of the student body.

Further, no student is denied any access under the leadership of the school principal based on their socio-economic circumstances. Certainly no student in any of the schools that I led during my 13 years as a principal was denied access to any extracurricular activity based on their socio-economic circumstances.

The bill prejudices ongoing intergovernmental negotiations with the Australian government and would be of potentially limitless cost to the Queensland government. This overlooks the role of the Australian government to fully fund schools: firstly, by placing the responsibility on Queensland to fill the current school funding gap when this should be a joint effort from the state and Commonwealth governments; and, secondly, by overlooking the Commonwealth's ability to tie conditions to its funding. We know that, whenever the Commonwealth administers funding to the states and territories, that funding is directly tied to student outcomes, to benchmarks and to targets for each state and territory.

Under the Australian Education Act 2013, both the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments are required to contribute to the SRS. Queensland state schools are currently funded at 90.5 per cent of the SRS. Queensland contributes 70.5 per cent of the SRS and the Commonwealth contributes the remaining 20 per cent. As I mentioned, often the Commonwealth government expects states and territories to meet student benchmarks and performance targets. None of this detail is mentioned in the Greens bill. Incredibly, this information is lacking. This puts Queensland students and Queensland state schools and its leaders at risk of not knowing what those expectations will be.

The bill requires Queensland schools to be funded at 100 per cent of the SRS by 2025. It does not specify which level of government is responsible for funding this increase. This is a key point of negotiation for the next school funding agreement, due to commence in 2025. Queensland has asked the Commonwealth to increase its funding from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of the SRS. Further, there

are no costings in the Greens bill in terms of where this money will come from and what other programs, projects or services in our state will be cut to provide money for this initiative. The bill does not recognise that some SRS funding may be tied funding from the Australian government, making it clear that any additional funding it provides under the next school funding agreement must be directed to specific activities. It would not be available for expenditure on individual student resources.

The private member's bill proposes that the state must fund state schools to provide activities that are comparable to those in non-state schools. Non-state schools provide a diverse range of parent funded curricular and extracurricular offerings. If it is necessary to ensure all types of activities provided at non-state schools are also publicly funded at state schools, this could result in a potentially limitless cost to the Queensland government. I would go so far as to say that this bill is an election push for those schools in particular wealthy electorates where students attend private schools and have limitless opportunities and access to activities and experiences versus state schools in the same electorate. Having said that, there are many state schools that provide exceptional and outstanding opportunities for their students. I have a niece who attends Kedron State High School who is currently studying in France for three weeks. That is a fantastic opportunity offered by a local state school.

State schools are required to provide clear communication to parents on the fees charged and the timing of payments, to resolve any disputes about invoices and payments and to consider financial hardship and, where appropriate, fully or partially waive fees and/or outstanding debt and put payment plans in place. This is particularly the case in the current economic climate. There are many situations that I can reflect on where families have been on a payment plan—many for around 13 years as two or three children move through secondary school.

The department has commenced a review of the policy settings and requirements for fees, charges and other costs set by state schools to minimise costs and provide relief to state school parents and carers, without compromising educational outcomes. The cost of living and the current economic circumstances in Queensland, Australia and globally have been the impetus for that review. Cost-of-living issues are very much being considered as a part of that review. It is appropriate that a public education system engage in that process. I have heard the minister speak to a number of principals over many meetings. She has asked our local principals to ensure the opportunities being provided to students reflect the current economic climate and the economic context that our families are living in.

Updates will strengthen the focus on affordability and equity, including fee waivers for parents experiencing financial hardship, and provide clearer direction about prohibited fees and charges. A new retail entities procedure will also be introduced to provide greater guidance to schools regarding uniform suppliers, tuckshop and outside-of-school-hours care. The Queensland government and the Department of Education are aware of the impact of cost-of-living pressures and have put in place measures to support Queensland children and families. Many of my colleagues on this side of the House have listed those interventions. They include laptops, food programs, the \$106.7 million Student Wellbeing Package over three years from 2021-22 to 2023-24, and providing state school students with access to mental health support from psychologists or similar wellbeing professionals at no cost. Often a school's ICSEA will determine the level of intervention that we as a state provide to our students in those economic groupings.

The 2024-25 state budget includes an additional \$502 million for the whole-of-government Putting Queensland Kids First package, which includes further whole-of-person supports for students. The bill's proposals could result in a potentially limitless cost to the Queensland government. This is certainly supported by the committee's findings. Opposing the bill ensures the Queensland government will continue to implement the most efficient and effective resourcing arrangements for our state schools in the current funding environment. I oppose the bill before the House.