




Speech By  
**Margaret Nightingale**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2024

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

 **Ms NIGHTINGALE** (Inala—ALP) (6.22 pm): I rise against the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023. This bill seeks to mandate that all school costs, including extracurricular activities, be covered entirely by the state for families at state schools. As a teacher and mother of children who attended state schools, I am and always will be a strong advocate for free state education. This bill proposes that the state government cover an extensive range of costs that go beyond individual student resources such as textbooks, stationery and computers. It also proposes providing a comprehensive school uniform for each year of a student's enrolment and funding a wide array of extracurricular activities from sports and music to academic challenges. By attempting to ensure state schools provide every type of activity offered by non-state schools at no cost, we risk imposing a potentially limitless financial burden on the Queensland government. This is not just an abstract concern; it has real implications for our state's budget and priorities.

It is like sending a child into a department store with an empty trolley to do the Christmas gift shopping and then trying to work out how you are going to buy food, pay the rent and keep the lights on because they have spent every cent on Xbox games and Lego. What might we see in the Greens' trolley in an everything-is-free, education shopping spree? Could it stretch to cover extravagant items like high-end art supplies or even luxury items such as sailing lessons or designer formal wear? An everything-is-free approach may sound idealistic, but it is not practical or sustainable.

Current practices already allow principals the discretion to waive fees, arrange payment plans or provide access to optional activities for students facing financial hardship. I see this happen every day in my community. Schools and their communities work diligently to manage costs transparently and fairly. Having served on the executive of two P&C associations, I have seen firsthand how schools consult with their communities to make informed decisions about costs, from school excursions to uniform pricing. Together they make decisions, sometimes down to the brand of crayon to include on the book list.

When I talk with parents, teachers or principals from state schools in my electorate of Inala, they never once ask for everything a student gets at a private school. When you ask parents, they tell you that they want improved student learning, and teachers want time to focus on student learning, rather than spending additional time on administration and data collection which this bill would require. This is a workforce that needs reduction in workload, not an increase.

Parents tell me every day that the practical cost-of-living supports, like the significant support our government already provides to families and students, is making a difference, like the \$152 million program to supply additional laptops to disadvantaged students, many of whom are in my electorate of Inala. Additionally, the Free Kindy initiative offers a saving of up to \$4,800 per child and provides 15 hours of free early education per week, giving them the best start in life. We also support the Share the

Dignity program which ensures that free period products are available at participating schools. This means that students come to school more often and are not staying at home to avoid the fact that they cannot afford period products.

The Miles Labor government is prioritising the mental health of our students. We offer free access to mental health professionals within state schools and we are expanding the successful GPs in Schools program to include additional schools. Then there is the free supervised homework assistance and healthy snacks and \$15 million to the School and Community Food Relief Program to support breakfast and lunch programs. These practical, cost-of-living relief measures mean that we are helping families in real and tangible ways. These measures demonstrate our commitment to supporting students and families effectively and responsibly. We are doing what matters for Queenslanders and for Queensland students.

In contrast, this bill disregards the comprehensive support already in place and could disrupt crucial funding negotiations between federal and state governments regarding the next funding arrangement. I oppose this bill and encourage other members to do so.