




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (6.37 pm): I rise to speak to the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023. The Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee in its report No. 3 of the 57th Parliament, tabled in the Assembly on 11 April, recommended that the bill not be passed.

On 11 October Dr Amy MacMahon MP, the member for South Brisbane, introduced the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill into the Queensland parliament. The bill was referred to the Education, Employment and Training Committee for detailed consideration and report. It was subsequently transferred to the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee following its creation on 14 February 2024. The committee was required to report on the bill by 11 April 2024 in accordance with standing order 136(1).

According to the explanatory notes, the objective of the bill is to strengthen the obligations of the Queensland government and the Minister for Education such that students in state schools receive a quality, well-funded education and opportunities to participate in a range of academic, sporting and cultural programs necessary for their complete academic and social development free of charge. The bill also requires that the academic and extracurricular services offered at state schools are comparable to services offered at non-state schools. To facilitate the calculation of costs to be paid by the state, the bill propose that the chief executive of the Department of Education be required to report information on enrolments and costs for each state school to the minister annually.

The bill would also require that the costs to state schools of providing educational and extracurricular services are to be met from: 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard funding amount for each state school; 100 per cent of the total loading for each state school; and any other amount for each state school identified through an annual analysis by the department of the costs of schools. The bill proposes to achieve its aims by inserting a number of new provisions into the Education (General Provisions) Act. There are no revenue or appropriation measures contained within the bill. However, it proposes to require the development of subsequent legislation for the provision of school funding. Clause 5 would insert a new provision into the education act that the minister must, by no later than the commencement of the bill, introduce a bill into the Legislative Assembly that achieves key objectives of the bill related to the funding of state schools and the reporting of school costs—proposed sections 56C and 56D in clause 5—by the start of the 2025 school year. That bill would have significant financial implications for the state.

This bill seeks to ensure that all school costs, including extracurricular activities, are free for families at all state schools. This bill also requires a further bill to be introduced to parliament to change the definition of what is funded by the state government. Currently schooling costs to be funded by the state under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 include 'instruction', 'facilities' and 'administration'. This bill seeks to include: individual student resources, for example, textbooks, stationery, computers; an adequate quantity of the required school uniforms for each year a student is

enrolled at a school, including summer and winter, and any extracurricular activity uniforms; extracurricular services, for example, sports, music, drama, academic challenges and camps; other resources necessary to ensure each relevant student's participation in a state school's educational program; and that the academic and extracurricular services offered at state schools are comparable to the services offered at non-state schools.

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. Schools can charge fees for school-based resources including: student resource schemes to provide access to textbooks, consumables and equipment, either outright or for hire; and recovery of costs for extra or non-curricular activities, such as camps, excursions, performances, formals and sporting events.

The main concern with this bill is that 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. This could result in a potentially limitless cost to the Queensland government if it is necessary to ensure all types of activities provided at non-state schools are also publicly funded at state schools. This bill would prejudice the ongoing negotiations between federal and state governments regarding the next funding agreement. This agreement outlines the funding mix and also the requirements of what funding is spent on. This is another example of the Greens party not understanding how to actually govern.

It needs to be noted that under the Labor government the following support is already available to families. There are laptops for disadvantaged kids—a \$152 million program for 140,000 laptops over the next three years adds to the 42,000 digital devices the government has supplied to disadvantaged students in state schools since 2020. There is the Textbook and Resource Allowance, saving \$155 in years 7 to 10 and \$337 in years 11 and 12 per student off the cost of textbooks and learning resources. This is paid directly to the school and is passed on to every parent of secondary school-age students attending state and approved non-state schools. The School Transport Assistance Scheme assists with the cost of transport for eligible students. There is access to free period products at every school that wants it. FairPlay vouchers of \$200 for sporting registration and fees for children aged from five to 17 years are available. There is a program providing state school students with access to mental health support from psychologists, social workers, guidance officers and/or youth workers for free. After-school homework centres provide free access to supervised, after-school homework support at 120 state schools across the state. Students also receive a free healthy snack whilst there. The School and Community Food Relief Program, a \$15 million program to support schools across Queensland, delivers school breakfast and lunch programs. There is also the expansion of the hugely successful GPs in Schools program from the existing 50 high schools to a further 20 high-priority primary schools in Queensland.

In their statement of reservation, the LNP members of the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee said—

The Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendments Bill 2023 proposes the reduction of out of pocket expenses to families. While the Opposition members acknowledge the intent of the Bill, we hold considerable reservations.

...

The Opposition members of the Committee do not believe the Bill in its current form will achieve its objectives.

I recommend that the bill not be passed.