



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (5.42 pm): We now know that education begins pretty much from birth and that the years prior to formal schooling starting are incredibly important to a child's overall education. I want to start my contribution by talking about one of the innovations that I am most proud of as a member of this parliament and a member of the Labor Party. Free kindy, which our government was so proud to introduce, allows Queensland parents to access 15 hours of free education for a kindergarten-age child. This child could be as young as three but can be as old as five, because in Queensland parents and kindy teachers work together to determine when a child is ready to start prep.

These are discussions that I am having at this very moment with my Elyse's kindy teachers. She is going to start school at five because she is ready. However, for my son Heath, many years ago, due to advice from his kindy teachers, he repeated a year of kindy. He got an extra year of kindy to allow his speech to develop and his social skills to mature. Since then, like many children who have walked the same path, he has not looked back. That was the right choice for our child, and thanks to free kindy it means that parents will be able to access that free kindy and ensure their children are ready to start school—not simply sent to school because it is time. A kindy teacher's perspective on school readiness is so important. It is another set of input, another set of eyes and expert assistance in making a decision that many parents find daunting at best and sometimes overwhelming.

It is clear that the legislative changes around homeschooling and increasing the age are partly required because, in Queensland, every child now having access to free kindy means that more children than ever will have access to that critical early education and parents will be allowed to decide at what point their child exits that free kindy system. In Queensland, we allow parents to have a strong influence on when their child starts school. This means that, depending on the child's birthday, the child can be as young as four or as old as six, as in my son's case. Children who do an extra year of kindy and are then homeschooled need these changes to ensure they can finish school.

I note that the bill also has clauses which pertain to eKindy which will assist little learners who miss large chunks of kindergarten due to a health condition. I am sure as parents we could imagine nothing worse. With increasing numbers of children likely to access kindy, more children may experience a delayed start to school due to being unwell, and that means more children may require that change as well. It also means that more children could be captured under the current provisions, which is why the changes that we are passing are so important.

The bill's changes for home education are very sensible because they address a fundamental inequity between homeschooled students currently and their school campus attending counterparts. I understand that if my son were homeschooled under the previous legislation he would not be able to finish year 12 as a homeschool student because he turns 18 in the January of the year he is due to finish year 12. Under these changes, students like Heath who are homeschooled will be able to finish. I have met with local homeschoolers in my community over a long period of time about this issue and they have explained why they are seeking this. In my case it is easy to understand, because I can put

myself in their shoes and imagine what it would be like if my own child could not finish school if he was being home educated.

In the interests of equality with students who are attending school, these students who may have started school later than their peers have the right to finish their secondary schooling on the same schedule as their school-attending counterparts. According to the committee report, that is what this change achieves. Make no mistake: this is absolutely monumental for the families affected by this change—and those families will grow in number every year.

I want to give a shout-out to the home education associations, such as the ICPA and free2homeschool, which do fantastic work advocating for their community. I note that they are seeking further amendments to better support their organisations and the way we regulate their children's education. I have had some fantastic meetings with many of the members, as has the shadow minister, the member for Bulimba. The amendments they have proposed are a continuation of the large body of work and review of homeschooling begun by our former Labor government. I note that the committee has recommended that further consideration be given to extending the age eligibility in home education by a further six months. I hope the minister is seriously considering this and listening to homeschoolers about what they want in this space.

I was delighted to attend the homeschool markets last Monday alongside the member for Jordan, their local member. It was fantastic to see these bright young people coming together and putting on stalls with some crafted things they had personally made just in time for Christmas. I got a gorgeous pair of icicle earrings. I was excited to see that, in addition to these stalls, there was strong representation there from TAFE Queensland. They are working very hard partnering with our homeschool associations and our homeschool students to engage with these students and offer them postschool options in a way that really addresses the importance of the homeschool sector. We need to make sure we are partnering with them and working with them. I thank all of the wonderful associations that provided their feedback.

In the time I have remaining I want to highlight the parts of the bill that pertain to P&Cs. I will start by thanking the great team at P&Cs Queensland: Scott, Clare, Arlene, Katrina, Karl, Erika and Peita. Scott and the entire committee do an amazing job at helping our P&Cs with all of their important work. As the shadow minister said, at a time when volunteer numbers are generally going down and a lot of groups are struggling, P&Cs Queensland are reporting that their numbers are heading up. I think that is a tribute to the work of P&Cs Queensland. It is a testament also to the dedication of Queensland parents and carers, who love their kids so much.

I take a moment to thank the P&Cs in my area as well as the P&Cs across Queensland. I know in my community we have had some schools including Corinda, Oxley and Jindalee that were impacted by floods to varying degrees. Other school P&Cs expressed that they would love to offer some financial support, but previously they were not able to do that. Under these changes the generous parents at Jamboree Heights, for example, could provide some financial assistance to their neighbours at Jindalee State School if that neighbouring campus was flooded more seriously. Also a school that has two campuses can now structure their P&Cs in such a way that they could have multiple P&Cs set up if they wished to ensure the parents of those particular campuses can meet face-to-face on the issues that impact their students. It recognises that some of these school campuses are vast distances apart. This is a commonsense change to help our P&Cs be responsive to community need.

In the time I have remaining I want to thank the many stakeholders who contributed to this bill: our teachers, hardworking public servants, parents, kindy teachers, principals and our unions to name just a few. I also want to congratulate the shadow minister, Di Farmer, on the power of work that she has done on this bill, which I think is recognised by both sides of the House, over such a long time. I am disappointed to see some of the amendments she mentioned were not included. I certainly encourage the minister to keep working with stakeholders whom he has acknowledged in his speech who are seeking further changes, such as our homeschooling community.

As I said, I think it is fair to say that the lion's share of the ministerial work on this bill was done by our shadow minister. I did hold out great hopes that the current education minister would dedicate the free time this gave him to working overtime to secure a deal for our hardworking teachers who have been beaver away with their union for months to secure a fair and equitable deal that acknowledges the hard work they do for our kids day in and day out in our community. I ask the minister to please put this at the top of his to-do list. For the sake of our children, for the sake of our school communities and, of course, for the sake of our teachers we really need to get this sorted as soon as possible. At the end of the day this bill is about our young people, and ensuring our teachers have nation-leading wages and conditions is about our young people as well. They deserve nothing less.