



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

 **Ms BOURNE** (Ipswich West—ALP) (5.10 pm): I rise today to speak on the Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2025 and reflect on the critical work shaping this legislation. It is a privilege to be a member of the parliamentary committee that conducted the inquiry into this bill. I would like to begin by sincerely thanking every Queenslanders who contributed to this process. Whether through written submissions or appearing at public hearings, their insights have added genuine depth and value to the committee's deliberations.

On this side of the House we understand that the committee process is not just a procedural step; it is a vital part of how we as parliamentarians fulfil our duty to represent our communities. It provides us the opportunity to scrutinise legislation carefully and ensure the voices of everyday Queenslanders are heard before any laws are passed in this chamber.

The Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2025 is an example of legislation that has benefited from this rigorous process. It follows a strong foundation laid by the former Miles Labor government which, through its 2024-25 budget, delivered record funding for education in this state—funding that supported the building of schools, the employment of more teachers and the provision of vital classroom resources. That investment affirms our belief that every child, no matter their background or postcode, deserves to have access to a high quality of education. The bill before us today was introduced into the Queensland parliament on 6 March 2024 by the Hon. Di Farmer, the then minister for education and youth justice. It builds on that funding by refining the legislative framework that underpins our education system, improving equity, access and clarity in several key areas.

One area of particular interest is the proposal to extend the age eligibility for home education. The committee recommends extending the cut-off date to 31 December in the year a student turns 18 and six months. The Department of Education has advised that this change will eliminate a regulatory barrier that currently affects some home educated students. Why does this matter? Right now, some students risk losing access to education related supports, funding and opportunities not because of academic performance or personal choice but because of an age restriction. The proposed change will bring home educated students in line with those attending state and non-state schools. It will ensure they can continue participating in sport, accessing educational resources and applying for travel and further learning programs. It is a small but significant amendment that will make a real difference, especially for students who have repeated a grade due to illness, family circumstances or learning needs.

It is also timely. The Australian Psychological Society recently republished a report highlighting a striking trend: home education enrolments have skyrocketed. In just five years enrolments have jumped by an extraordinary 229 per cent from just over 3,400 students in 2019 to more than 11,250 in 2024. That is equivalent to one student missing from every third classroom in Queensland. This dramatic increase signals that home education is no longer a fringe choice. It is a growing mainstream learning mode, and this legislation must reflect that reality.

The committee also noted that some stakeholders, including the Home Education Association, have called for an even broader change. They have proposed increasing the eligibility age to 19, in line with arrangements in New South Wales, which would allow for an additional two years of home education eligibility. While this bill does not go that far, their suggestion reflects a legitimate desire for flexibility and inclusion, which the government may wish to consider in future reviews.

Another bill component relates to parents and citizens' associations, or P&Cs. These organisations play a vital role in supporting our schools, raising funds, fostering community and advocating for students. I thank all those volunteers who work tirelessly in P&Cs across not only Queensland but also Ipswich West. They are an amazing group of people.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kempton): Member, please pause for a minute. Member for Bulimba, you have just passed between me and the member on their feet on three occasions. I would ask you to bear in mind the standing rules and orders. Thank you. You may proceed.

Ms BOURNE: The bill allows schools with multiple campuses to establish P&Cs for each campus. It also enables a P&C to raise funds for another school, a change that could support schools recovering from disaster or hardship. Lastly, it aligns P&C executive eligibility rules with those that apply to school councils, specifically regarding prior convictions for indictable offences. I acknowledge that these provisions may raise questions about participation rights. Indeed, restricting eligibility for P&C leadership positions can impact on an individual's right to participate in public life; however, we must also balance this with the duty of care we owe to our students and communities. The intent of these provisions is not exclusion but protection, ensuring those in positions of trust within our school communities meet appropriate standards.

I turn now to another key part of this bill—the changes to eligibility criteria for eKindy. Clause 35 proposes ensuring children who live more than 16 kilometres from a centre-based service offering a kindergarten program or a state school providing kindergarten are eligible for eKindy. This makes practical sense, especially for rural and remote Queensland families for whom distance remains a barrier to early learning.

This bill also introduces changes to medical eligibility so that children who will miss more than 10 consecutive weeks due to a health condition can access eKindy. This inclusive measure acknowledges the real-world challenges faced by families caring for unwell children. The Queenslanders with Disability Network provided qualified support for these provisions; however, they raised an important point: eKindy should never become a substitute for genuine inclusion. It should not be used to sideline children with disabilities due to a lack of training or support in mainstream settings. I agree with their view entirely. The purpose of this change must be to increase access, not reinforce exclusion. Our commitment to inclusion must remain firm across all education sectors from early childhood to senior schooling.

The committee received 34 written submissions, conducted a public briefing with the Department of Education and held a public hearing with selected stakeholders. This process was thorough and transparent. I would like to thank everyone who contributed and the committee secretariat for their dedicated work. I also acknowledge the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee, which was the first to review this bill when it was introduced in 2024. Finally, I thank the Education, Arts and Communities Committee, which delivered the most recent report on the bill.

In conclusion, the Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2025 is a targeted, thoughtful piece of legislation. It reflects a previous government that was responsive to Queensland's changing educational landscape. From homeschooling to early childhood programs and from P&Cs to school equity, this bill is about ensuring no student falls through the cracks and every Queenslanders has a pathway to learn, grow and succeed. My sincere thanks goes to all homeschooling parents—and a number of them live in Ipswich West—who do an amazing job teaching their children at home. I also acknowledge the homeschooling parents in the gallery today and all of the amazing teachers and school staff across Queensland. I would also like to thank P&Cs Queensland, who also do an amazing job. I will finish by saying Labor will be supporting this bill.