

Speech By

Wendy Bourne

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOURNE (Ipswich West—ALP) (5.33 pm): I rise today to speak on the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to begin by thanking the committee that worked on this bill and the secretariat who so ably assisted us in our consideration of these amendments. I would like to thank all of the various stakeholders who briefed the committee and also all of those community members who put in submissions. I am sure the member for Stafford, Luke Richmond, will enjoy his new role on this very important parliamentary committee.

The bill talks about reducing regulatory burden and delivering key reforms across the education portfolio to strengthen governance, improve educational outcomes, support re-engagement of students and the continuity of education, and improve the efficiency of education statutory bodies. However, this bill is largely a technical bill—a housekeeping bill, a bill that had the opportunity to do so much more. The bill does not support our teachers. Teachers in my community certainly are not speaking to me about this bill. They are talking to me instead about their pay, about increased classroom violence, about severe staffing shortages across schools—and this is all about improving educational outcomes, as mentioned in the explanatory notes. They are talking about the mounting challenges they face, and this government hesitates with technical jargon and red tape. This bill is a distraction, a smokescreen thrown up by this minister to mask his inaction in the education sector and in the parliament.

This bill greatly increases the role and responsibilities of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board. However, the key to all of these amendments is for this government to ensure that the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board is appropriately resourced to fulfil their duties. As we have seen in recent weeks, it has been reported that there have been several Public Service roles taken away, with temporary contracts in Queensland Police Service and other departments not continued or refilled. If Queenslanders cannot trust this government to properly resource our Public Service to fulfil their duties now, how can they expect that when the bill passes?

This bill also expands information sharing between several entities including the Department of Education, the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board and non-state schools. Submitters raised concerns about information sharing between the Department of Education and the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board. They claimed that, in relation to accreditation decisions for non-state schools and show cause processes, these changes potentially undermine their abilities to respond and be properly consulted in relation to the matters. The Office of the Information Commissioner has suggested that the government consider formalised memorandums of understanding to ensure the information sharing is compliant with privacy principles. We call on the government to accept this recommendation to protect the information of schools, parents and students because of what we have seen recently where thousands of Australian students and teachers were impacted by a major global cyber attack on online learning platforms. That particular incident compromised names, email addresses and school locations. The privacy of students' information is paramount and not something that should be taken lightly.

This bill will allow special assistance schools to provide education at a temporary site on a temporary basis, even if they are not affected by an emergency event. The department, however, did not make clear during the committee process why this was necessary, given that all other types of schools can only operate from a temporary site due to an emergency event. We welcome the ticket-scalping provisions to prevent Queenslanders from being scammed. This is a bright spot in an otherwise technical bill.

Though the opposition will be supporting the bill, we do not do so without being aware of its many shortfalls. Witnesses at the committee indicated that the bill's issues will have to be managed during implementation, meaning that after the bill passes the government will wash its hands of it. This bill has problems and Queenslanders have voiced them. Sadly, teachers and support staff are leaving the profession in droves and it is students in this state who suffer from this deficit of experience and care. There is no added incentive to become a teacher, as everyone knows the environment that our graduate teachers are entering and this is putting people off. Classrooms are becoming overcrowded; teachers are overworked and underpaid. The minister promised a 25 per cent reduction in red tape, but teachers across Queensland feel there have been no changes to their workload. This is unsurprising as the minister did not provide detail on how this reduction would be measured.

This bill misses an opportunity to make a material difference for our communities. We all know the minister has many challenges facing him in the education sector. I would have thought a largely technical bill would not be at the top of the minister's to-do list. I would have thought that supporting our hardworking teachers would be more of a priority. As I indicated, the opposition will be supporting this bill, but it really could have given some of our hardest working teachers, particularly those in Ipswich West, the break they so deserve.