

Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2025 - Sandy Bolton MP for Noosa

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This bill was presented within the framework of an election commitment to free up teachers to spend more time in the classroom and less on red tape. It is also the same title as the Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2024, introduced at the tail end of the last Parliament, with development starting back in 2021. This one is about a quarter the length, and seems to be a subset, although we have not done a page by page comparison.

One of the amendments would remove the requirement for individual consent to be obtained for each online service and enable a public service employee of the Department of Education to record, use and disclose to an approved online service, personal information about a student at a state school approved online service. This would include a student's name, date of birth and email address.

Stakeholders were generally supportive of this including the Queensland Secondary Principals' Association and the Teachers Union, although the Queensland Law Society (QLS) did not as they felt parents should have to choose to opt out of consent rather than be deemed to do so. I am surprised that there wasn't further opposition, including from parents to what ultimately is a potential loss of privacy.

The Department responded that there are safeguards in the Bill to ensure this privacy, and that the Chief Executive must certify the service meets privacy arrangements set out in the bill. Even so I still have a niggling concern given the era we are in of cyber attacks and social engineering.

Second, there is a provision that extends the age eligibility of students in home education to 31 December in the year the student turns 18. This would align age eligibility for home education registration with students who attend State or non-State schools. Most submissions were on this, and all were supportive.

My office received requests for extending the eligibility period, and the committee did make a recommendation that there be further consideration around the extension of the age eligibility of students in home education to 31 December in the year the student turns 18 and 6 months. This addresses a situation where a student may need extra time to complete schooling. Further, after the inquiry parents sought extending home schooling to part-time home schooling, which apparently occurs in Victoria. As it wasn't examined in the inquiry, it should be looked at by the department for a further tranche of amendments.

Finally, noted is the support for the provision that will allow separate Parent and Citizens' (P&C) Associations for schools with multiple campuses and enable donations between P&Cs under certain circumstances.

This addresses a real issue as Tagai State College, for example, has 17 campuses through the Torres Strait Islands

The bill also makes some beneficial administrative changes, however they are not particularly new policies, mostly put forward by the previous Government from late 2024.

Overall, I must admit I am a bit confused as to what the Government had in mind when they said they would slash red tape for teachers as I cannot see much of what has been requested to alleviate the stress our teachers and students are under. Teachers want to teach, not sit in endless meetings and pushing information into students to meet some arbitrary benchmark and schedule.

Over the years there has been many recommendations to reduce this stress via the future schools model, flexi and alternative educational and vocational pathways. Not only are they proven to deliver positive educational outcomes, they provide an environment for improved mental wellbeing in both students and teachers. We must ask ourselves why we have an increasing volume of children on anti-anxiety medication above what in any way is acceptable and there needs to be an inquiry into this.

With what appears a reluctance of governments to move to these models, and a shortage of flexi or alternate schools, it is time to move beyond the reasons why we can't, to how we can.

Currently we have providers willing to enter into partnerships with government, and schools who are providing alternate pathways into the trades as an example for our students who do not intend to head into year 10 or 11. However we must provide extra resources and capital and I urge the government to ensure construction funding is available in the next budget for the Advanced Manufacturing Hub at Sunshine Beach High, as well funds for the incredible works our students are doing in constructing tiny homes for the vulnerable in our communities. Schools needing to fundraise for materials makes no sense. They are providing essential and needed trades, and infrastructure where governments are not.

As always, thank you to the Committee, Department of Education, submitters, stakeholders, and attendees to the public briefing and public hearing for their consideration of the Bill.

And especially thank you to our fabulous schools, teachers and students who do a phenomenal job, and whom we are all so proud of.

(750 words)