



Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Council, 28 May 2014, Proof)

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Extract from NSW Legislative Council Hansard and Papers Wednesday, 28 May 2014 (Proof).

EDUCATION AMENDMENT (GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS) BILL 2014

Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. John Ajaka.

Second Reading

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA (Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for the Illawarra) [3.33 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Education in New South Wales is a complex and important undertaking. New South Wales has a unique education environment of nearly 3,100 government, Catholic and independent schools serving the needs of over one million school students. As everyone is aware, school education is for the majority of students their most significant opportunity for providing access to lifelong economic and personal success and satisfaction. For some students it is their only opportunity to realise life opportunities not afforded their parents and families. Universal provision of school education is the responsibility of government schools. They remain the centrepiece of New South Wales education. All three New South Wales education sectors—government, Catholic and independent—provide schooling of the highest quality and the overall quality of New South Wales schooling is predicated on the complementary interaction of our schooling sectors. But while it is appropriate to recognise and celebrate the achievements of New South Wales schools and New South Wales students we must also remain committed to improvement.

This Liberal-Nationals Government places education reform at the heart of its priorities. Our reforms have been targeted at necessary improvements and we have moved swiftly to introduce much-needed change. We introduced Great Teaching, Inspired Learning, a program of action that will raise the quality of New South Wales teaching. We have introduced strategies to support students who live outside metropolitan areas in rural and remote New South Wales to provide them with the support often taken for granted by students and parents in urban New South Wales. We have taken necessary and long overdue steps to allow school communities and principals to make local decisions in the interests of their communities because we trust that they know and understand the needs of their school better than a centralised bureaucracy.

On 13 November last year this New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government legislated to merge the Board of Studies NSW with the NSW Institute of Teachers to create a new entity—the New South Wales Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. The board brings together in one agency the three pillars of education—teacher quality, school curriculum and student assessment. It delivers on its charter in relation to these essential education areas in the interests and to the benefit of all New South Wales schools, teachers, students and their parents, whether they are in government, Catholic or independent schools. But while we reform, streamline and create opportunity we have a clear responsibility, an obligation, to provide education of the highest quality and to make sure, as far as possible, that this education is delivered in every school regardless of sector or location.

This is not a responsibility that this Government or the Minister for Education takes lightly. This legislation is about providing that assurance. In 1990 the Board of Studies NSW was established as the New South Wales curriculum authority with the additional and crucial responsibility for the registration of non-government schools. This role had previously been undertaken by government school inspectors. It was a Liberal-Nationals Government, in establishing the Board of Studies in 1990, that determined that this essential task should be the responsibility of an independent agency. As the only education institution in New South Wales whose remit requires it to work explicitly across school sectors, the Board of Studies, and now the new board, is uniquely situated to assure New South Wales parents of the quality of school education their children receive.

Since 1990 the Board of Studies and now the new board have provided support to Catholic and independent schools in meeting their responsibility regarding school registration requirements. School registration is the Government's means of assuring compliance with the New South Wales Education Act. Parents and the community have realistic expectations that this should occur. It is the aim and intent of the board to assist and support schools in the registration process. The board's role in school registration is not about the heavy hand of government nor unnecessary regulation for regulation's sake. We are utterly opposed to a pointless bureaucratic

process. In relation to school registration, the New South Wales Education Act states that government schools "will comply with similar requirements to those required for the registration of non-government schools". However, there is currently no independent process for verifying compliance with the Act and no external process available to provide an assurance that government schools meet the minimum requirements for non-government schools to be registered under the Education Act.

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It is now time to establish a means of ensuring compliance with the Act for the government school sector. This new section is designed to allow for this while explicitly recognising the unique responsibilities of the government school sector and the rigorous and extensive quality assurance processes that the Department of Education and Communities [DEC] already imposes on its own schools. The proposed changes specifically recognise that the Department of Education and Communities is singly responsible for the universal provision of schooling and that the Department of Education and Communities' own internal governance arrangement reflects its awareness of its obligations for quality universal provision of education. Section 27 of the Education Act will be amended to include the following clause:

(3) The Board is, with the assistance of the Department, to provide advice to the Minister on the compliance by government schools with similar requirements to those required for the registration of non-government schools.

This bill is the next logical step in assuring high quality schooling for all New South Wales students. The bill amends the similar requirement provisions in section 27 of the Act to allow the Minister for Education to be satisfied with government school compliance with those requirements.

The existing registration and associate accreditation requirements for government schools are currently met by the system processes of the Department of Education and Communities. In effect, these requirements constitute minimum requirements for operating a school in New South Wales. These include: teaching staff experience and qualifications and the associated quality of teaching; adequacy of educational facilities; satisfactory premises and buildings; safe and supportive environment for students; and the school curriculum and associated record of achievements of students. As a consequence of this amendment to the Act the Department of Education and Communities will provide the board with information on the systems and processes for meeting annual agreed standards.

The independent process the board will use to review government school compliance with the registration requirements will be similar to that which currently occurs in relation to the Catholic systemic school sector. A new committee will be created to review information submitted by the Department of Education and Communities and report to the board. A similar committee already exists to govern the registration and accreditation of non-government schools. The departmental processes for monitoring compliance will involve an on-line compliance monitoring tool that will help school principals to easily and efficiently provide the department with evidence that their school meets the standards. It will allow schools to monitor practice, attach evidence as appropriate and attest to compliance with the requirements for registration and accreditation.

The material provided by the Department of Education and Communities will include information on: how its schools meet the minimum requirements, for example, available policies and procedures that reflect the requirements; its internal system of monitoring and reporting on compliance with the requirements; a process for improvement where there are concerns about compliance; a process for rectification of non-compliance; and data and information on a specific area or domain nominated for more in-depth review by DEC. I must also emphasise that the terms of reference for the Government Schools Registration Committee will not include providing advice for the closure of government schools. The provisions of section 28 of the Education Act in relation to the closure of government schools will remain unchanged.

It will not involve government schools being registered for a defined period of time. The Department of Education and Communities will work closely with the board to establish transparent quality assurance processes. These arrangements will only apply to government schools established under the Education Act 1990. They will not apply to TAFE colleges or other non-school providers which present candidates for the Record of School Achievement or the Higher School Certificate. The latter are catered for under other statutory arrangements.

These changes to the Act are supported by the three education sectors and key New South Wales education stakeholders. They are supported because they provide an additional level of external oversight to our larger schooling system while reflecting and supporting the unique roles and responsibilities of government school education. The Government has the balance right. This new legislation is the next step in this Government's commitment to make sure that every school in every community provides the education that parents expect. I commend the bill to the House.