




Speech By
Mark Boothman

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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GRAMMAR SCHOOLS BILL

 **Mr BOOTHMAN** (Albert—LNP) (5.09 pm): I, too, stand here today to speak to the Grammar Schools Bill 2016. I would firstly like to thank my fellow committee members from both sides of the chamber. It is certainly very good that we worked so well on this bill. I would also like to thank the committee staff and all of those who participated and took the time to discuss this bill.

Firstly, I would like to mention the schools in my electorate. There are certainly quite a few. The Albert electorate is very diverse. The demography of the north of my electorate is different from the demographics to the central and southern parts of my electorate. My electorate is a bit of a mishmash of demographics. Recently, I asked the minister a question on notice if the transfer points for Mount Warren Park State School could be changed in the future to assist the teachers in my area.

Back in 1893, under the Grammar Schools Act 1860 the first grammar school was opened in Ipswich. The original act was designed to be a cost-effective way for the government to support secondary education without having to outlay the full cost of establishing high schools. The 1860 act allowed townships that had the financial capacity to fundraise locally to enter into a partnership with the Queensland government to build educational facilities. Back in those days, the Queensland government would match the funds raised by a township pound for pound. In those days, the grammar school boards were administered by seven people, of whom four were appointed by the Governor.

I found it interesting to note that the original 1860 act contained a provision to provide public scholarships for students to attend universities in Britain and the other southern states. In 1891, a royal commission into education reported that schools directly controlled by the state would be less expensive and as effective as grammar schools. That report led to the end of the establishment of grammar schools. Between 1863 and 1892, 10 grammar schools were established. Unfortunately, Maryborough Grammar School and Maryborough Girls Grammar School were forced to close during the Great Depression, leaving eight of the original 10 schools that still survive today.

As mentioned by other members in this debate, the bill makes three major changes to the Grammar Schools Act. Firstly, the bill reforms the membership of the grammar school boards by providing, at the request of the board, an additional two board members who may be appointed by the minister. The member for Toowoomba North referred to delays in replacing these board members. Unfortunately, that also occurs in the state school system. A few of the schools in my electorate have had acting principals for a good part of the year. That is certainly concerning a lot of my local residents. Samantha, the acting principal at Norfolk Village State School, is doing an amazing job. The school community certainly very much supports her. They have said to me that they would love her to be the permanent principal of that school. We need to speed up the process of appointing permanent school principals. I know that there is a lot of red tape and a position has to be made available, but a permanent principal gives certainty to a school. The school community knows the direction the school is going in with a permanent principal. An acting principal is not in a permanent position and the school community fears that the school's direction may change in three or six months time.

The bill also gives additional flexibility by reducing the prescriptive requirements regarding procedures for borrowing money, auditing accounts and general funds. There is still the requirement to inform the minister without delay if there are any significant concerns about the financial viability of a grammar school.

The third major change contained in the bill is the prevention of the creation of any additional grammar schools. As I said previously, the last grammar school was established in 1892. An individual expressed some concern to the committee about the lack of parental choice when it comes to high-quality secular education in Queensland. I can understand that that individual was not overly comfortable with the bill not allowing any more grammar schools.

I have a daughter in prep. She is very excited about going to school. She likes playing games on the iPad most of the time, but we try to make sure that it is educational software that she is playing. We need to make sure that there is choice for parents and that schools are equally funded across-the-board to ensure that each child, no matter where they live, is not discriminated against. We need to make sure that a school that is possibly within a five-minute radius of another school does not receive reduced funding just because it is located in an area where a large proportion of children go to a private school. Even in our so-called good areas—where we see good academic results—there are families who are struggling. Both parents are working five, six, or seven days a week. They are doing it pretty tough. We should make sure that those kids in those schools get a decent share of the pie to ensure that they become the entrepreneurs and innovators of tomorrow.