Extract from Hansard

Wednesday, 19th February 2025

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES (BARRING NOTICES AND OTHER PROTECTIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light) (17:13): I would like to make a few comments in support of the bill. As I just indicated, I support the bill. I also understand the need and the purpose of the bill. A number of previous speakers have elaborated on that, so I do not wish to repeat all those provisions.

I would like to make some observations, though. The observation that I would like to make is really an extension of the insightful comments made by the member for Black. It goes without saying the relationship between the school, the parent and the child underpins the success or otherwise of the child's wellbeing, growth and education. What we need to do is ensure that there is a positive relationship between the school—whether it is the principal, the teachers or whoever represents the school—the parents or the caregivers of the child and the child themselves.

When that relationship is not a positive one, even though, if you like, the conflict may be between the parents or the caregivers and the school, it is the child's wellbeing that actually suffers the most. I am sure as MPs we have all had parents come to us when the relationship between the school and the caregivers or parents has broken down in some ways or there has been some barring order given. My observation or concern is, rather than just having barring notices and doing this sort of activity—which is important; in the end, it is important to protect teachers and schools, etc., and I am not disputing that. How do you rebuild the relationship, though?

It is one thing to set expectations through laws, policies and procedures, etc., which are part of that foundation. How do you actually rebuild the relationship to make sure that this does not continue? I have seen some of these

relationships spiral out of control to the extent that I am not sure even a barring order is sufficient, and in fact sometimes I think the police are involved as well, and that helps nobody.

So just a word of caution is to make sure that we, as a government, as a society, put mechanisms in place and make resources available to make sure that we fully understand what are the drivers to the behaviours that lead to the break-up or the breakdown of the relationship between the school and the parents or caregivers. If we do not get that right, as I said, it is often the children who suffer the most. I have seen children withdrawn from schools where the relationship between the parents or caregivers and teachers or the school have broken down. I have seen children withdrawn from school and not been in some school setting. That is not a good outcome.

It will always be the case that there will be parents and caregivers at the margin where you can do as much as you try and it just will not work, and I accept that. What we need to ensure though is that, apart from those few on the margin, when parents do for some reason act inappropriately, we get a better understanding of what is driving that behaviour to see if we can actually intervene in different ways to address that behaviour. We do want them to behave properly and appropriately towards teachers and principals. I think it is appropriate.

Nobody should be subjected to abuse. I am sure MPs here do not like it when their staff are abused by people coming into their offices. I do not like that, so clearly I do not like any teacher, principal or anybody in a school setting getting abused either. It is not appropriate. But sometimes when we make the time and resources available to understand what drives that behaviour, we actually do get a better outcome, and ultimately the beneficiary of that better outcome is the child themselves.

What we do not want is where we have parents and caregivers behaving inappropriately the child is withdrawn, and then we have the next generation of people who perhaps behave in the same way. That is the worst outcome. So while I acknowledge the need for this legislation and I support it, I think sometimes we need to go beyond the law to resolve a problem. It needs perhaps some resources and other things to actually be addressed, and that would be my observation and caution, while I support these new changes.

TIME EXPIRED