

SECOND READING SPEECH
THE HON DAVID JOHN BARTLETT MP

TEACHERS REGISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

This Bill is an amendment Bill which amends the *Teachers Registration Act 2000*. The Bill will provide for a new Act which will be cited as the *Teachers Registration Amendment Act 2009* to commence on 1 January 2010.

Mr Speaker,

I move that the Bill now be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, I am proud today to bring to the house this Bill that builds upon and improves the teacher registration process in Tasmania – a process that has been in place since the *Teachers Registration Act 2000* was first proclaimed.

The registration of Tasmanian teachers ensures that all Tasmanian students are taught by appropriately qualified and competent teachers who are of good character and meet community expectations with regard to their fitness to teach. As a result of the registration process, our teachers can be confidently proclaimed as being highly trained and competent professionals of good character.

In order to be registered, and thus teach in our schools, Tasmanian teachers have to meet qualification requirements which focus on their pre-service teacher training and the amount of practice teaching this training comprises.

Mr Speaker, in order to be registered, and thus teach in our schools, Tasmanian teachers have to undergo a national criminal history check as part of the process of proving good character and fitness to teach.

Once registered, Tasmanian teachers must continue to show evidence of their professional competence and their good character in order to have their registration maintained and renewed over time.

Together, these requirements ensure that the teachers working in Tasmanian schools are professionals of a calibre of which our community can be justifiably proud.

Earlier this year, the Teachers Registration Board registered its 10,000th teacher; marking a wonderful achievement for the Board, the registration process, the teaching profession and the Tasmanian community as a whole.

Mr Speaker, the legislation I present today has been under development for some time. It is the culmination of nearly 5 years of consultation and discussion between the education sectors, the unions and other key stakeholders and it represents a series of amendments to the original Act that are designed to add clarity to and improve upon the provisions of that Act.

The legislation provides for the period of registration to be up to 5 years in length, instead of the current 3 years. A 5 year registration cycle minimises the time and resources needed to manage the administration and processing aspects of teacher registration. In no way however, does it minimise or compromise standards or safeguards.

The legislation provides for ongoing communication between Tasmania Police and the Registration Board in such a way that the Board will be notified if a registered teacher is convicted of an offence. The legislation also provides for notification by employers if a registered teacher faces disciplinary action in the course of his/her employment. These provisions ensure that the Board will be aware of any matter of concern that might impact on the registration of a Tasmanian teacher no matter where that teacher happens to be in his/her 5 year registration cycle.

The legislation also provides for the immediate suspension of registration should the Board believe that a registered teacher poses a risk of harm to a student. This is a new power Mr Speaker, one I will expect the Board to use in only rare and extremely serious situations. However, as a result of this provision, the Tasmanian community can be confident that the Teachers Registration Board is able to appropriately respond to very serious events.

Mr Speaker, the legislation further empowers the Board to maintain its focus on strengthening existing safeguards by stating that the Board must consider the welfare and best interests of students to be of paramount importance.

This provision clearly sets the welfare of Tasmanian students at the heart of the teacher registration process and in this way, it provides a further example of this Government's commitment to introducing policies that will ensure only the best outcomes for all our children and young people.

The original Act allowed for the placement of conditions on provisional registration. The new legislation allows the Board to place conditions on registration as part of the granting or renewal of full registration. I am expecting that the power to place conditions on both categories of registration will allow the Board to better respond to individual circumstances.

Consider for example the case of an experienced teacher who comes to Tasmania from overseas. This teacher, having never taught in Tasmania before, will be unable to show evidence of his/her teaching competence in Tasmanian schools. As a result, under the original Act, the Board would only grant this teacher provisional registration. Under the new legislation the Board will now be able to consider granting full registration in recognition of his/her qualifications and previous teaching experience with a condition that requires the teacher to show evidence of teaching competence in Tasmanian schools within a reasonable time frame.

Another example of the way in which the capacity to place conditions on full registration can result in a more appropriate outcome is the example of a senior and very experienced educator whose current role has taken them out of the classroom setting. Under the original Act and over time, this person will not be able to meet the required number of teaching days to maintain full registration and may, as a result, only achieve provisional registration status.

Under the new legislation the Board will now be able to consider granting full registration in recognition of the years of experience this person has as a teacher and leading educator with a condition that acknowledges the person is working in a non-teaching role.

Over the next few months, I will require the Board to develop a policy framework to provide guidance and clarity in relation to the placement of conditions on full registration. This policy framework will be developed in collaboration with all key stakeholders and will ensure that all registered teachers and those who apply for registration in the future understand how and why conditions are placed on registration.

Mr Speaker, there is a range of more minor amendments within the new legislation that add clarity to existing Board functions and powers, resolve wording anomalies and provide more detail to existing provisions.

For example the processes involved in the lodgement and management of complaints are expanded; enhanced clarity has been given to the sections which provide for the management of inquiries and hearings; the functions of the Board have been clearly identified and expressed in a way that facilitate shared understanding.

Mr Speaker, it is important for all to be able to clearly understand how the Board operates and manages important processes like disciplinary inquiries. I have ensured that the new legislation governs the Board's actions and operations in ways that will be transparent to all involved, thereby strengthening the Board's capacity to make the right decisions in the right ways.

The Board's power to communicate with other registration bodies is also now fully explained and ensures that the Board can participate as a full member of the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA).

The legislation also allows the Board to provide information on who has registration to teach in Tasmania in a more efficient manner. I am pleased to say that this will result in the development of on-line access to the register of teachers – a service that most, if not all other teacher regulatory bodies are already able to provide to their schools and registrants.

And finally Mr Speaker, the legislation provides for a more logical and straightforward fee structure which will result in clarity for registrants in relation to the cost of making an application for registration in comparison to the cost of annual registration. Mr Speaker, under the original Act this breakdown of the fee structure did not exist and therefore the management of registration fees was overly complex and at times confusing.

As the new legislation provides for a registration cycle of up to 5 years the total cost of registration may be perceived to have increased. This is not the case Mr Speaker. The legislation provides for registrants to pay registration in annual instalments – no-one will be required to pay for 5 years of registration in advance.

Mr Speaker, in addition to the amendments I have already outlined I can also advise the House that the new legislation will provide for teacher registration in the Tasmanian Academy and Tasmanian Polytechnic. I would ask you to note that the legislation provides for a full year transition process for teaching staff in the Polytechnic thus requiring registration to be fully implemented in this institution by January 2011. As teaching staff in the Academy have already gained registration the legislation simply confirms this as an ongoing requirement for them.

To be granted registration Polytechnic and Academy teachers will need to be of good character, be competent and have appropriate teaching qualifications. Mr Speaker, I will expect Polytechnic teachers to have qualifications that are relevant for the Polytechnic context – I do not expect Polytechnic teachers to gain teacher qualifications that are better suited to primary or secondary school settings. The Board will work with the Polytechnic senior executive to identify and recognise the qualifications that are right for the Polytechnic.

Now the safeguards, professional standards and quality assurance processes that apply in the school sector will be in place for young Tasmanians furthering their education and training in these two post Year 10 Institutions. In this way the Board is responding to this Government's vision for the future of Tasmania – ensuring its support of post Year 10 pathways that aim to increase the qualifications, skills and life choices of all Tasmanians.

By introducing teacher registration into the Academy and the Polytechnic the quality, professionalism and competence of all those teachers working to improve learning outcomes for students at the two institutions will be assured.

Mr Speaker, I am excited that the hard work and dedication of those involved in the registration of teachers in Tasmania has proven to be so successful and is ensuring that Tasmanian students are taught by highly professional, highly trained and highly skilled teachers who are of good character. Teacher registration is important to this Government, to Tasmanian educators and to the Tasmanian community as a whole and the Teachers Registration Board, in enacting and making operational the process of teacher registration, is responsible in its actions to this Government, to Tasmanian educators and to the Tasmanian community. This legislation will ensure that the Teachers Registration Board is able to successfully meet Government and community expectations in fulfilling the function of teacher registration in Tasmania for many years to come.

Mr Speaker, the Government fully supports the introduction of this Bill.

I commend the Bill to the House.