

Leave granted.

Motion withdrawn.

**EDUCATION BILL
(Serial 142)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr CHANDLER (Education): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to enact a new *Education Act* that reflects contemporary educational practices and supports a flexible system that can deal with current and future issues affecting school education in the Northern Territory.

This bill supports the implementation of new government policy such as independent public schools, and will make significant updates in important matters such as expanding the opportunities for parent and community involvement in schools, and supporting contemporary practices for students with a disability, and will broaden options for principals managing student wellbeing and behaviour.

The *Education Act* has been in force for over 35 years without major amendment or review. It uses outdated and inappropriate language and contains significant structural omissions. The act fails to accurately reflect contemporary society or educational practice. It lacks the flexibility to meet the complex needs of NT consumers or the education sector and lacks the breadth to allow for changing priorities. In particular, the act contains significant structural omissions in the areas of disability, special needs and inclusion, vocational education and training, and flexible models of school governance and operations.

It is a primary responsibility of government to provide education for Territorians and to regulate educational service delivery. School education is far more complex now than when the act commenced; however, most of the act remains unchanged. This sometimes makes it difficult to implement contemporary and innovative strategies and delivery models. The act is in need of comprehensive reform so that it reflects contemporary society and educational practice, and is responsive to current and future needs.

Reforming the act presents an opportunity to establish a strong legislative basis for transformational changes to education in the Territory to meet the changing needs of young Territorians into the future and to ensure there is sufficient flexibility to accommodate the current range of contexts and diversity in the Northern Territory.

Reform of the *Education Act* began in February last year with the release of a discussion paper which set out a number of potential reform options. This was followed by a significant period of targeted and public stakeholder consultation. During that first phase of consultation, 42 consultation workshops were held across the Territory and 45 written submissions were received at the end of that two-and-a-half month consultation period.

The initial draft Education Bill was informed by the feedback from that first phase of consultation with stakeholders, as well as research conducted into best practice models and initiatives across Australia. The draft Education Bill was publicly released earlier this year. Another 16-week period of consultation with stakeholders followed during which feedback was sought on the bill. Feedback from the second phase of consultation has been incorporated into the final bill. I now present the bill for passage through this House to become the new *Education Act* for the Northern Territory.

There are a number of proposed changes I bring to your attention. The Northern Territory Board of Studies is an advisory board and its current membership model is representative of a number of stakeholder groups. There are 16 members on the board and it has been challenging to maintain an effective NT Board of Studies in the Territory, particularly as it is a small jurisdiction.

The NT Board of Studies has no formal regulatory function, particularly as the SACE Board is contracted to provide services in relation to secondary school qualifications. Boards in other states and the ACT have a formal regulatory function, as well as an advisory policy role. Many jurisdictions have combined the functions of a board of studies with other regulatory functions such as teacher accreditation and non-government school registration. The core function of the Northern Territory Board of Studies is to provide advice to the minister on curriculum policy. This bill amends the model of the board to become a smaller, mixed-membership board which retains key stakeholder representatives but includes expert members in a range of fields.

The new board will consist of 11 members, one departmental representative, six expert members and four stakeholder representatives. Two of the expert members are nominated by the NT Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Public Schools of the NT, and this will maintain the cooperative arrangements between the school sectors. The other four experts are members nominated by the Minister for Education. Between them, the expert members must have expertise in a range of relevant educational fields, which will be specified