

# Teachers Registration Board Inquiry – Update

As you may recall, in the Term 2 issue of School Post we reported that in May of this year, SAASSO made a submission to the state's Legislative Council, calling for an inquiry into the Teachers' Registration Board.

As representatives of all South Australian public school parents – and as parents ourselves – we are deeply concerned about the functioning of the Teachers' Registration Board, which is designated with the welfare of our children as its primary consideration.

In our submission, SAASSO made three broad recommendations:

1. For the Legislative Council to conduct an inquiry into the operations of the Teacher's Registration Board pertaining to the composition of the Board, its rules and definitions and its role in ensuring the welfare of our children.
2. Review the Act, particularly pertaining to the composition of the Board, its rules and definitions and its role in ensuring the welfare of our children.
3. Review resourcing and develop a proper management regime (particularly concerning accountability) which more appropriately balances the welfare and best interests of children and teachers alike.

We can now report that on Wednesday, October 29, the Legislative Council voted 14 to 8 to support the motion introduced by the Hon. John Darley calling for an inquiry into the effectiveness of the Teachers' Registration Board.

In his speech to the Legislative Council, introducing his motion, Mr. Darley said,

*"I move that the Statutory Authorities Review Committee inquire into and report on the effectiveness of the Teachers Registration Board in the exercise of its functions and power with respect to:*

1. *The welfare and best interests of children as its primary consideration in the performance of its function;*
2. *The manner and process by which it ensures that a teacher registration system and professional standards are maintained to safeguard the public interest in there being a teaching profession whose members are competent educators and fit and proper persons to have the care of the children;*

We can now report that on Wednesday, October 29, the Legislative Council voted 14 to 8 to support the motion introduced by the Hon. John Darley introduced a motion into Parliament, which calls for an inquiry into the effectiveness of the Teachers' Registration Board.

3. *The composition of the board;*
4. *The manner and process by which evidence is gathered and presented to the board, including the representation of parties to proceedings;*
5. *The relationship between the Department for Education and Children's Services and the board; and*
6. *Any other relevant matters.*

*This motion was first introduced on 26 September 2007 by the Hon. Nick Xenophon in response to allegations of improper conduct by a teacher at a school in Mount Gambier. These allegations were reported and investigated*

*by the Teachers Registration Board, but parents expressed concerns about the way in which the investigation was conducted and how the board dealt with evidence, especially from children and parents who were affected. Since the motion was introduced, the South Australian Association of State Schools Organisations has come out in support of establishing the inquiry, and I thank it for its support.*

*Its support indicates that there are wider systemic issues that need to be brought out into the open and solutions sought. I think this inquiry will have much to contribute in shining a light on the inadequacies of the current legislation and practices of the board in its*

*interaction with those in the school community and its dealings with the Department of Education. I urge all members to support the motion."*

The Teachers' Registration Board is a Statutory Authority. This means, it is a body established by an Act of Parliament, to perform a specific function. However, while it is part of the South Australian Government, it is self-funded and independent of day-to-day ministerial control.

Under the *Parliamentary Committees Act 1991*, South Australian Parliament has established nine Standing Committees consisting of members from both the House of Assembly and Legislative Council. The role of these



Committees is to hold the government of the day accountable and to inform Parliament on matters of public interest.

One of these is the Statutory Authorities Review Committee (SARC). It is one of four Standing Committees administered by the Legislative Council and is the Committee which inquires into and reports on statutory authorities. As such, SARC will conduct the inquiry into the Teachers' Registration Board. Inquiries can be called in one of three ways: by a motion from the Legislative Council, by a

motion from the Committee itself, or by a direction from the Governor of South Australia.

SARC is a five person committee comprised of two Labor members, two Liberal members and one independent member:

Hon. Ann Bressington (Independent)  
 Hon. Bernard Finnigan (Labor)  
 Hon. Ian Hunter (Labor),  
 Hon. Rob Lucas (Liberal)  
 Hon. Terry Stephens (Liberal)

In recent months, SAASSO has met with both major parties and all independent members of the Council to discuss the need for an inquiry. All members have been receptive and expressed genuine interest in the current membership and functioning of the Board. There has also been much discussion around the need for greater transparency.

The Hon. Ann Bressington MLC said, 'I congratulate the Hon. John Darley and SAASSO for pursuing this most important matter. I am a strong advocate for transparency and accountability in our schools and strongly agree that 'the welfare and best interests of children' should be the number one priority'.

The question now is; just when will the inquiry begin? The SARC only undertakes two inquiries at any one time; at present there are already inquiries into WorkCover and the Office of the Public Trustee. One of these will need to conclude before an inquiry into the Teachers' Registration Board can commence. As there is no time limit on inquires (some lasting years), it is not clear when one of these inquiries will end and the inquiry into the Teachers' Registration Board could begin.

Once the inquiry does begin, advertisements will be placed in The Advertiser and Messenger Newspapers calling for public submissions to aid the inquiry. Submissions can be made by any interested organisation or individual and will be a matter of public record. However, confidential submissions can be made to the committee.

Once the inquiry concludes, the SARC presents its findings to the House of Assembly. There are times when positive outcomes are achieved, in the form of a new Bill or an apology by the Government, as was the case in the Mulligan Inquiry. SAASSO would certainly hope that the Government would act swiftly on any findings of an inquiry into the Teachers Registration Board.■