



'We failed in our responsibility to keep these children safe from harm'

SA News

# Key parent group claims new education bill will give State Government more control over school governing councils

Tim Williams, Education Reporter, Sunday Mail (SA)

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PARENTS say the State Government has learned nothing from the [Debelle royal commission](#) because it plans to give itself more powers than ever to control, sack

and silence school governing councils.

The [2013 royal commission](#) found the Education Department wrongly told governing councillors of a western suburbs school not to tell other parents about the rape of a student by an after school hours carer in 2010. The governing councillors felt bullied into silence.

Parent group the SA Association of State School Organisations, which represents governing councils, says the wide-ranging education bill progressing through Parliament is a power grab.

“To look at this document, it’s as if the DeBelle royal commission never happened,” SAASSO director David Knuckey said in a letter to Opposition education spokesman John Gardner.

“The Minister (Susan Close) claims this (bill) is the biggest development in education in 40 years. This document sets parental involvement, community engagement, local control, transparency and accountability back 40 years.”

Mr Knuckey said the section on governing councils was dominated by detail of how the minister “may appoint overall, suspend, sack, gag, order, fine and limit the power of parents and volunteers. She also now enables (the department) to do much the same”.



📷 Parents claim new legislation will take power away from school governing councils and hand it to the State Government.

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SAASSO’s complaints include the bill specifying the minister being able to replace a suspended council with the principal, department chief executive or another bureaucrat; more scope for the minister to appoint council members; fines for governing councillors not

declaring a conflict of interest rising fourfold to \$20,000; and the word “parent” being replaced with “persons who are responsible for students”.

Mr Knuckey said the bill represented an end to the independence of governing councils from government.

Mr Gardner told Parliament the bill “removes even the identification of any dispute mechanism” between councils and the government.

“We are very likely to be moving amendments. Frankly, as to some of these positions, it is hard to see why the Government thinks it needs these powers to direct governing councils.”

A spokeswoman for Dr Close said the bill provided “more flexibility to respond to the needs of our school communities” and made clear the Government was committed to promoting parent involvement.

She said the minister’s new powers would be only for exceptional circumstances, such as in the event of suspending a council, would “not be able to be exercised in an unfettered manner” and would “ensure the continuation of the council’s business during this time”.

She said dispute resolution was already covered in regulations, while the large rise in maximum conflict of interest fines was due to them not having been changed for 16 years. The term “persons who are responsible for students” also covered step-parents and guardians.