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EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Hon. MC Bailey MP—Chair
Mr JP Lister MP
Mr N Dametto MP (virtual)
Mr LP Power MP
Mr BA Mickelberg MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP

Staff present:

Ms M Telford—Committee Secretary
Dr K Kowol—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 4 April 2024

Brisbane

THURSDAY, 4 APRIL 2024

The committee met at 10.00 am.

CHAIR: I declare open our public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. My name is Mark Bailey. I am the state member for Miller and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Turrbal people, and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

Welcome to you all and thank you for supporting the committee's work. With me here today are Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair; Mr Brent Mickelberg, the member for Buderim; Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; Mr Linus Power, the member for Logan, who is substituting for Joe Kelly, the member for Greenslopes; and we will have via videoconference Mr Nick Dametto, the state member for Hinchinbrook, who is dialling in from North Queensland.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask you all to turn your mobile phones either off or to silent mode. Unfortunately there is always someone, so do not be that person.

**ENGLISH, Dr Rebecca, Senior Lecturer, School of Teacher Education and Leadership
Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice, Queensland University
of Technology**

CHAIR: I now welcome Dr English. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have a some questions for you.

Dr English: Thank you very much for inviting me to come today. My name is Dr Rebecca English. I am a senior lecturer in education. My research interest is in education choice. I have been researching this since my master's degree, which I graduated from in 2005, so clearly I am quite old. I have two concerns about this bill. The first one comes from my work as a senior lecturer researching home education choice. My second objection comes from my work as a senior lecturer teaching teachers. I will start by saying my concerns around home education choice.

If I wanted to craft legislation that was perfectly designed to drive families underground and away from eyes on with the regulator, I would do many of the things that are listed in this bill. That is what really concerns me. The first thing I would do is remove provisional registration. Evidence in New South Wales from advocates suggests that provisional registration removal drove families underground. As it takes a significant amount of time to come to be fully registered, parents lose faith that they are going to get registration, they run out of time to chase GPs and other doctors, psychologists, OTs et cetera, and they end up just kind of disappearing from the system. We should look to the ACT for really good advice on how to legislate around provisional registration and ensure parents remain engaged with the regulator.

My second concern is about the introduction of ACARA and the QCAA syllabuses. The government's own inquiry from 2003, which reported in 2004, argued that to maintain contact with the regulator what parents need is to be able to adapt an own-program approach. Part of what drove families away from registering 20 years ago or more was the failure to engage with them and understand that teaching standardised syllabus documents was not going to work. The issues around ACARA—let's start with that because it is prep to 10, it is a very standardised, very formal document

and it is written for a specialist audience. The QCAA syllabuses in senior secondary 11 and 12—I am not entirely sure how they would be implemented in a home setting. The way they are written and structured makes it very clear that it is about school. Both of those were, I think, a concern and they were recommendation 5 of the 2004 report.

My other concern, and it is connected to the syllabuses, comes from my work teaching teachers. I think about my own training. I had an advertising degree and then I went back and did a Dip. Ed. I spent 12 months in an intensive program. My undergraduate students spend four years at university. My postgraduate students spend two years at an intensive master's program to learn to be a teacher. Standard 2 of the Queensland Professional Standards for Teachers is that they understand the curriculum and know how to teach. Parents at no point have to understand the curriculum or know how to teach. They do not need to be registered. I fear that it is deeply de-professionalising for teachers that you take a document that is written for a professional audience and you make it something that anybody can pick up. To become a chemistry teacher in Queensland, even if you have a PhD in chemistry, you still have to do a master's program. If you have a degree in accounting and you want to be a business studies teacher, you still have to do a master's program. Those are my two major overarching concerns.

CHAIR: Thank you, Doctor. We will go to the deputy chair.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for your appearance and your very thorough submission. As an expert in this field, can you hazard a guess as to what the government is really trying to achieve, particularly in respect to the homeschooling implications of this bill?

Dr English: I think that is outside of my—it is well above my pay grade to estimate what the government is trying to do here, but thank you for the question.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you very much for your submission. It was very good to read through. Can you explain the comment—

... the use of curriculum is not positively correlated with success in home education, home education is successful because the child is educated at home.

Could you expand a little bit on that for me?

Dr English: Most of the research about what happens to home educated young people comes from the USA. When we look at that, there is no direct link between using a curriculum and having success in home education. The research is quite clear that home educated young people do as well as or better than their conventionally or mainstream educated peers and it does not appear that using a specific curriculum has any impact on the effectiveness of the program.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you for appearing. Lots of the homeschooling families have cited you as being a subject matter expert in this area. I have a question with respect to the senior subject syllabi that you raised earlier. Are you able to expand on that a little bit in terms of the specific examples of how that would manifest—why it is going to be difficult to be delivered in a homeschool setting?

Dr English: Certainly. With regard to the QCAA—and we call them syllabuses; I do not know why we plural the syllabus, but that is apparently what we do so I am happy to go along to get along—syllabuses are written in such a way that 12 months before they are implemented in a school the senior teacher in charge of teaching that senior secondary subject, probably the head of department in a state school or a subject coordinator in a private school, and the deputy in charge of curriculum will write what is called a student program and they will send that to the QCAA. That does not always get approved straightaway. Often there is back and forth between the school and the QCAA about the implementation of that. We do that in senior secondary because the syllabuses are set up in such a way that there are four semesters that lead to a final QCE exam that homeschoolers cannot access. For each of those preceding three semesters all of the assessment comes from the school, so the QCAA needs to ensure comparability across the state and that students are prepared and have practice in the discourse they will need to construct in their final assessment task.

Mr MICKELBERG: My understanding is that, in order to comply, homeschoolers in every individual instance would have to submit to the QCAA in that manner, and your contention is that that is not workable. Is that a fair comment?

Dr English: I do not know that the QCAA is set up to deal with that so I do not know how that would work, actually.

Mr POWER: I was previously a high school English, history, Japanese teacher.

Dr English: I feel you, brother. That is the same—not Japanese, but English and history. I am social sciences as well, and English.

Mr POWER: When you pick up a year, you immediately go to the curriculum and try to get a framework of understanding about what you are attempting to achieve through the year. Often it is in fairly plain language about what goals we are trying to achieve through the curriculum. You describe it as something that you need a master's degree for, which I do have but not in education. I have never found a problem in understanding how curriculum is attempting to set goals for our learning in the given semester or part of the semester. I would have thought it is actually in fairly plain language.

Dr English: Okay. That is your contention. We do four-year degree programs to ensure students are able to implement syllabuses. Are you suggesting that maybe we do not need a four-year program? I am not really sure what the question is, I am afraid. I am really sorry.

Mr POWER: I do not have one. I have a graduate diploma in education.

Dr English: So do I, yes. But in that 12 months we learned about how to read syllabus documents and to read curriculum and implement it and we learned pedagogy that goes with the curriculum and we learned about assessment techniques that work with that particular curriculum.

Mr POWER: My son is in year 12. He is very interested in the QCAA. One of the things we do, and he naturally went to, is look at the curriculum and what they were attempting to achieve to evaluate how he should answer questions that are put before him to see if he was achieving those goals. If a year 12 student gets value out of the QCAA curriculum, I think parents who are attempting to give their kids an education would probably get some benefit and guidance out of reading it in fairly plain language, would they not?

Dr English: I am sure they would get some guidance from it, but they cannot actually implement the syllabuses as they are written. The legislation is very difficult to implement in a home setting, if not impossible, because you cannot monitor and meet exactly what is required of the QCAA syllabuses.

Mr POWER: That is contradictory from what you said earlier about the QCAA being a highly technical document that someone with a master's in education—

Dr English: To implement it, that is what is required. You need to be registered as a teacher to implement the syllabuses and in order to be registered as a teacher, meet standard 2 of our Professional Standards for Teachers, you need to show an understanding of curriculum. There is a general understanding of curriculum, but there is a much deeper understanding of curriculum. I am not really sure what understanding of curriculum your son has or we would have. I mean, what are we talking about?

Mr POWER: I am not suggesting that there are not different levels of understanding of curriculum and pedagogy and classroom behaviour. I have only got a Dip. Ed—

Dr English: That is not 'only'. That is what was required back in the day. You must be a similar age to me.

Mr POWER: If you could just—there would be people who would have greater understandings, but I see a lot of value in the curriculum that is put forward and I think it would be valuable for homeschool teachers to have a framework about what they are hoping to achieve through a semester, would it not?

Dr English: I think there is value in looking at the syllabuses, but they are very strict documents and they are written to be implemented in a classroom setting. That is what they are designed for. The ACARA ones, for example, are designed to standardise curriculum and to some extent assessment because of the achievement standards across Australia.

Mr POWER: The year 3 curriculum says things like 'discuss connections between personal experiences and the character experiences in literary texts.' I no longer have a year 3 child, but if I was homeschooling my year 3 child and we were reading a text together, I might discuss something that had happened in our family with what had happened to the characters in the literary text. That is both in plain speak and quite useful for giving a parent guidance about how to deal with a text, is it not?

Dr English: What teachers do is use the elaborations that sit below that content descriptor and they will use those to develop pedagogy and assessment and reporting to parents on what that child has done and they will find alignments across the curriculum with that particular content descriptor.

They will also look to other parts of the syllabus documents—for example, the achievement standards, the level statement, the statement about what English is as a subject, the cross-curriculum priorities, the general capabilities and all of those things—in order to do the work that teachers do in a classroom, which is highly specialised and professional.

Mr POWER: I think you must be a more sophisticated teacher than me.

CHAIR: I will go to the member for Hinchinbrook, who has joined us via videoconference. Do you have any questions for the doctor?

Mr DAMETTO: I have a quick question with regard to the sharp rise in the number of homeschooling or home-educating families across Queensland. Do you have any information that might indicate why that is happening and whether or not it is happening across Australia or just in Queensland?

Dr English: My research indicates that there are two main groups of homeschoolers across the country and the world and it is growing everywhere, even in countries where it is only semi-legal, for example, China. People choose homeschooling for one of two main reasons. The first type I call the deliberates. They are the people who are always going to homeschool. They are the ones we might think of in terms of the stereotypes: fundamentalist Christian families, hardcore families who are anti-Establishment. The biggest growth has been in what I call accidental homeschoolers. That is roughly 80 per cent of the homeschooling population. Those families are drawn mostly from school refusers or children who just find that school is not really working for them for whatever reason. That is what has been driving the growth.

Mr DAMETTO: Is that something that is happening just in Queensland or across Australia?

Dr English: Across Australia the numbers appear to be growing and certainly did grow quite radically post COVID—and internationally as well. In the US, Canada and New Zealand the numbers are growing as well.

CHAIR: Thank you for presenting this morning.

BRYAN, Mrs Samantha, Team Leader, Queensland Chapter, Home Education Association of Queensland

SMITH, Ms Tina, National Secretary, Home Education Association of Queensland

CHAIR: I invite you to make a short opening statement, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mrs Bryan: The Home Education Association's presentation will focus on three overarching reasons for our objection to the vast majority of the amendments: the lack of evidence for such changes being needed, discrimination and risks to wellbeing. Firstly, I will speak to the lack of evidence of a problem.

The onus of proof is on the government to show how the current system is failing. Based on the HEU's own data and the testimonies you have received, it is clear that the system is not failing; it is working. Home educated children are receiving a high-quality education and successfully gaining employment or going on to tertiary study. As of yet, the government has supplied no evidence for why a change in legislation is necessary.

Secondly, I will speak to discrimination. Proposed section 7(da) spells out for home educators something that is not demanded of children attending school. Where is the corresponding requirement that school should be provided in a way that is in the best interests of the child or young person, taking into account their safety and wellbeing? Many submissions have testified that school has not met that criteria, forcing the parents to home educate to provide for the best interests, safety and wellbeing of their children. Why are we holding just one segment of our society to a different standard? Additionally, the proposed removal of section 210 would mean the HEU would not notify applicants of missing documents and families would be automatically denied registration, whereas schools will chase families for outstanding documents. Why the double standards? This smacks of *Animal Farm*: all families are equal but some are more equal than others.

Thirdly, wellbeing is at risk. The removal of provisional registration has significant deleterious effects for the very small percentage of new applicants who need to utilise this application process. Multiple parents outlined to the committee the reasons of mental, emotional and physical safety requiring sudden decisions to remove students from school to home educate them. Removing provisional registration punishes the very families who are seeking to do the right thing. The reduced time frames and the increased program and reporting requirements will affect the wellbeing of parents, which we know has direct effects on the wellbeing of children. Then there is the stress for children having to learn from a program that has not been tailor-made for them. Plus the manner of the government's dealings with home educators for the past 18 years has spread fear and mistrust, and this review from go to whoa has only deepened that. This increased fear, mistrust and sense of betrayal is likely to reduce compliance. Reduced compliance means children are less visible to the system; there is no accountability. So how does the government intend to fulfil its duty to oversee the wellbeing of these children?

The Australian Capital Territory Labor government once made a similar unwitting blunder when they also proposed restrictive and unreasonable legislation around home education. The ACT government had the wisdom and courage to take a step back and consult properly and they now have one of the best pieces of home education legislation in the country. What will your choice be?

CHAIR: Thank you. We will go to questions.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for being here today. I will have another crack at this question. What would you say is the government's motive in changing the framework around home education if you think it is not the right way to go?

CHAIR: Member for Southern Downs, I think you are asking a hypothetical question. It seems you are seeking an opinion, which is not allowed under the standing orders.

Mr LISTER: That is what they are here for.

CHAIR: I will allow it. It is obviously seeking an opinion, but go on.

Mrs Bryan: I cannot read the mind of the government, but the way this review has been conducted smacks of a fear that numbers have been growing. There was some comment made that, 'Now there's so many and so we need to make sure they're receiving a high-quality education.' Surely we thought that way back in 2006 when the Home Education Unit was created and it was important for those several hundred students back then to receive something. I do not know. Is the government just embarrassed?

Home educators are not anti school. We want to see high-quality education provided for every child in this state and country. We would love to see better resourcing of our schools so that children can be better supported there for the families who want to be there. Dr English talked about accidental homeschoolers. That is what has been driving the numbers: people who have tried school and found it insufficient to meet the needs of their children. We are not out on a quest to undermine school, but it feels a little like this review is perhaps seeking to eradicate home education.

Mr LISTER: Would it be better for the department to address the reasons families take their kids out of school rather than regulating you guys?

Mrs Bryan: I think they could be more productive, ultimately. If they really want to do a good job of engaging with the community and making sure there is high engagement and high compliance, the creation of a home education advisory committee, as recommended by the 2003 review into homeschooling that Dr English referred to, was one of the recommendations. That would be the single most important thing the government could do to improve compliance and mitigate the lack of trust that exists in the community.

CHAIR: In your submission you talk about how imposing the same curriculum or syllabuses used in schools would seem to be forcing students to take with them what is potentially the reason for their departure from the system. What I am picking up from a lot of the submissions is some fusion of the idea of curriculum and syllabuses and what they are. The curriculum allows a lot of flexibility to teach along various principles and is always tailored by the teacher in the classroom or the homeschool educator to relate it to the student and who they are, and that varies of course. It seems to me there are a lot of references to resources and topics rather than the issue of curriculum. That gives you a broad umbrella of things to cover but there is also a lot of flexibility about how the teacher or home educator covers it and tailors that. Would you agree that that tailoring is something that home educators do as well as schoolteachers?

Mrs Bryan: Are you asking: do they tailor the Australian Curriculum? Do they tailor the resources that they currently use?

CHAIR: What I am saying is that currently teachers and home educators tailor what they are teaching under the curriculum in a wide array of ways. For instance, if you are a teacher in a rural area, you might teach the similar topic quite differently to, say, someone in an inner-city area. Likewise, home educators have that flexibility, too. Would you agree that the curriculum does not specify how and what you should teach; it gives you a broad sense of what you need to teach? Currently—and it would continue—home educators have the flexibility about how to teach that and they are free to use resources from a wide range of areas.

Mrs Bryan: What I have picked up from the people who presented last week is that having to align with the Australian Curriculum is going to take a lot of work for them to learn what it is and then how to follow it. A significant difference between school and home education is that school starts with the curriculum and then tailors it. Home education starts with the child and says, 'What does the child need to become a successful, functioning adult?' and then they gather the resources, which may include curriculum, to achieve that end. You are approaching education I think from two really different perspectives. Can it be done? Probably, but the amount of work to have to learn something new and figure out, 'My child is in year 3. Is this a year 1 thing? Is this a year 7 thing? I do not know, but I would have to go and figure that out.' Parents would just be better off delivering the education rather than figuring out how to satisfy the bureaucracy that they are doing a good job. We know that they are already doing a good job because there is only half a per cent of families who do not have their registration renewed because of failing to provide a high-quality education. I would say they are pretty outstanding results.

Mr POWER: I am reading from the year 3 curriculum in the achievement standards, just building on what the chair said. It says here that students should be able to create a written and/or multimodal text—something written, a presentation or even a picture to describe it—including stories to inform, narrate or explain, to argue for audiences related ideas including relevant details learned from topics of interest or text. This is really quite broad in terms of what a student is to create. It goes on to say that they use text structures such as paragraphs—this is for the year 3s, and it is nice to have some guidance about where a year 3 should be—language features including compound sentences and topic-specific vocabulary and literary devices, data and visual features. I would have thought it is strong to have that guidance about where a student should be at, but they can create any type of written or multimodal text in order to display those skills. Is this not very broad about what a homeschool parent can teach their child?

Mrs Bryan: If it is broad and if at the moment we have the choice of using our own program, why do we have to follow the Australian Curriculum? We already have a very broad choice. Parents create their program, submit it to the HEU for approval, get approval and teach it. Then they submit a report, and if the report shows evidence of a high-quality education then their registration will be renewed. I think that is the kind of breadth and flexibility the home education community is looking for.

CHAIR: We will move on to the next question, but I think it says 'or equivalent of the Australian Curriculum'; it is not just the Australian Curriculum.

Mr DAMETTO: Samantha, I appreciate you presenting to the committee today. I have had a bit of a deep dive on this as well, trying to get a bit of an understanding of why the department and the government are going down this line with home educators. Through any of your research and any of the information that you have been through, have you seen any correlation between the data collected from home educators and funding for education in Queensland?

Mrs Bryan: I am sorry, but I am a little confused. Are you implying that the home education community receives funding?

Mr DAMETTO: No, I am trying to get an understanding of why the government would be so interested in so many new homeschoolers coming on board and maybe there being a correlation between a lack of data from those students being homeschooled and funding that is available to the state government.

Mrs Bryan: My understanding from communications from the HEU and from the federal education minister is that there is no federal funding. My understanding is that the federal government gives money to states based on student numbers, but that is distributed only to schools. I have a letter from Mrs Christine Ashton, the Executive Director of Registration Services, which the HEU is under, which states—

Federal funding under the act is calculated based on school enrolments and may only be distributed to schools or schooling systems ...

My understanding is that the HEU sees none of that money. I presume they are resourced by another pocket in the Queensland state budget, so I do not know how there would be any link to home education data to funding because as far as I am aware they do not get any funding.

Mr DAMETTO: Exactly. I have a subsequent question, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Yes, quickly. This will be the last question. We are a bit over time.

Mr DAMETTO: So there could be a correlation between a reduction in federal funding to the state government because of a lack of student numbers in public schooling because of the increase in homeschooling numbers; is that right?

Mrs Bryan: Potentially, yes. If numbers in schools are dropping and that has a correlation or a flow-on effect, yes, possibly.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for your answer.

CHAIR: I think the education budget is at a record level, so I do not think there has been any reduction as a result of homeschooling expanding at all. In fact, there are a lot of new schools being opened. Thank you very much for your submission. We very much appreciated it. We have gone over time by a couple of minutes, so we will move right along. We appreciate you coming and presenting to the committee.

**FERDINANDS, Ms Kirsten, Principal and Acting President, Brisbane South State
Secondary College, Queensland Secondary Principals' Association**

**STERGOU, Mr Andy, Principal, Sandgate District State High School, Queensland
Secondary Principals' Association**

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Ms Ferdinands: QSPA is the professional organisation representing government secondary principals, deputy principals and heads of department. QSPA members are represented in more than 96 per cent of state secondary schools in all parts of the state—metropolitan, regional, rural and remote—ranging in size from just over 100 students to our largest schools of now more than 4,000 students.

As detailed in our submission provided to the committee last week, QSPA does not support the option to provide for appeal rights for suspensions where cumulative days exceed 11 days in a school year. The proposed amendment represents significant challenges for school leaders, notably increase to workload. An appeal against cumulative suspensions has the potential to be complex and time consuming in a context where school resources are already stretched. Schools are not resourced to meet the demands made on them today. Based on existing policy, when an appeal is made principals provide an array of documentation in response to the appeal to that suspension. If the same process was replicated in an appeals process against cumulative suspensions, workload would subsequently increase, as noted in our explanatory notes to this proposed amendment.

The latest Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, undertaken by the ACU Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, found that every year sheer quantity of work is consistently the highest stressor for school leaders, and in 2023 the reports noted that more than half of the nation's school leaders are considering quitting or retiring early due to the stress and increasingly unsuitable or unsustainable workloads.

An appeal against cumulative suspension serves no value in improving outcomes for students. The student will have served the suspension and returned to school while an appeal is occurring. At best, a successful appeal will ensure a change to the record of the student on OneSchool but nothing else. At worst, it could develop tension between the school and family which is not in the best interests of either.

QSPA believes that empowering school leaders with decision-making autonomy and alleviating unnecessary tasks is a crucial factor in enhancing principal wellbeing. Every day principals make decisions to maintain the good order and management of their schools, including ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all students and staff. This includes using departmental guidelines and policies to follow in the decision-making in the event that a student is to be suspended. These disciplinary consequences are last-resort options for principals when other strategies to assist students to understand and respond appropriately to behavioural expectations have failed. If the amendment to allow appeals for short-term suspensions after those 11 days was to proceed and become law and practice in our schools, the trust in principals' ability to make informed and considered decisions in the best interests of their school community could be undermined, even in perception.

On behalf of all members of the Queensland Secondary Principals' Association, I would like to thank the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee of the Queensland parliament for the opportunity to speak this morning at the public hearing. We welcome any questions. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We cut short questions in the last session, so I will ask the member for Buderim to lead off with the first question.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thanks, Chair. Ms Ferdinands, presumably many of the instances that result in a suspension are behaviour against a teacher and/or the school leadership group. I am keen to understand your views as to what the effect might be if there is not a consequence or the appeals process undermines the confidence of teachers with respect to students who do the wrong thing being held to account where the offending might be against a teacher or a member of the school staff.

Ms Ferdinands: Obviously the perception of what is happening in schools is already in the community. Schools are reflective of the community, and I listened to the previous speaker around homeschooling and why parents choose to remove their children from schools. We as principals reflect on a lot of data every year and some of that data is around how we maintain good order and management but also ultimately maintain a safe environment for all of our staff and our students. If students were to remain in schools whereby they were unsafe, we risk the safety of all of our staff

and students in our schools. As principals we make good decisions. We make decisions that are based on policies and processes. We understand that every student has a right to an education. When we make those decisions as to whether a student should be suspended there are a large number of checkpoints that we go through, and ultimately the decision for suspension is made when it needs to maintain a healthy and safe environment for all students and staff.

Mr MICKELBERG: Your opposition to these provisions within the bill is well articulated in your submission and your comments, but I am keen to flip it around and ask how government generally can better enable principals to deliver on school safety and educational outcomes, in both a regulatory sense and a resourcing sense.

Ms Ferdinands: What happens in schools every day is around a large number of principals, school leaders and school staff undertaking support plans, support processes and interventions for all students, particularly those students most at risk. We are under-resourced, and we talk about increased workload. It comes back to the same people doing the same job, if not for longer and with limited resources. We are already doing that, and I am going to ask my colleague Andy to talk about it at a school example where schools are using whatever resourcing they get from the government or grants to make sure we are employing other people to do that. Not every school has the luxury of being able to get a workforce. Some of our regional and remote colleagues are doing it on their own, but if we are going to put additional support and resources to stop or to alleviate perhaps some of those suspensions, it is considerable resourcing that is needed in schools. I will just get Andy talking from a school example exactly what that support looks like and that considerable approach to trying to limit the number of suspensions.

Mr Stergou: Thank you for the opportunity to present here today. In my school context, I have an ICSEA of around 1004. It has just moved up to 1013. The majority of my students are in the lower quarter of socio-economic context. With regard to the supports we have done, I have spent the last two years investing and changing my workforce using I4S funding, which is discretionary funding to principals to employ an additional two guidance officers—so I have three instead of my one that I would normally be given—and I have increased my deputies from three to four. That is at a cost of almost half a million dollars with on-costs. On top of that, there is a behaviour support teacher. What we do now is: when a student comes back from a suspension we put plans in place, but that has taken me two years of workplace reform. That means that the money that would otherwise be going to in-class support for the other 94 per cent or 95 per cent of students who are not suspended and not receiving a consequence are not receiving that money. That is also to deal with the decline in parent and student opinions around a school being safe and behaviour being well managed in a school, because that is on a steady decline as well.

We want to make sure that we only use suspension or similar as the final resort. We care for the students' wellbeing—otherwise we would not be in this profession—and we use all of the tools at our disposal to provide for both the students who are going through a school disciplinary absence and those who are left behind in the classroom. Sometimes a suspension is needed to stop that behaviour and protect the students in the class to enable their learning to continue, while the ones at home being suspended are receiving education through their device and online learning platforms, but sometimes that child needs that reset. That allows the school to create a new plan and review the plan. When the parent comes in to review the evidence as part of our checklist, we also have that time to create a plan that could work for that young person.

Mr POWER: As a high school teacher—not a great one—when you have a student who is suspended, often it is not in your class as a high school teacher but you know they are suspended. It is often noted that they are a child with behavioural issues and you have a classroom management plan, formally or informally, where as a high school teacher you are trying to accommodate them and maintain classroom discipline. For them being out of a classroom, and in this case with appeals for a very significant period of time, they are likely to have fallen behind in curriculum and create further behavioural problems. Is that a concern for classroom teachers and principals?

Ms Ferdinands: Anything that disrupts a child maintaining their course of study or having success in school now or into the future is a concern for schools—from the classroom teacher right through to the principal. As Andy said, the work that happens in schools behind the scenes means that not every classroom teacher is seen but there is support working with the parent around intervention—whether that is a guidance officer or whether it is a support teacher or whether it is deputies—to maintain a program of study to try and get success.

Mr POWER: I guess my point was: in the classroom, if you have a student who is taken out of the stream you have to double back to try to refine them into your program of teaching. It adds extra complexities for classroom teaching as well, so there are no easy options here.

Mr Stergou: To answer your question, it has become easier since COVID. All of our students have devices. We also have online learning platforms, so the students can still engage with the curriculum. When you have four 70-minute lessons in a day, it is not just a curriculum overload or curriculum dump on students; there is also the relationship building and the enrichment opportunities. Instead of 10 exercises being done, the student who is at home could do five, but it is not mandated that they do 10. We ensure their curriculum is being delivered in their home. What you will also notice is that over the last five to 10 years there has been a reduction in long suspensions to reduced day suspensions for that reason. Any day of the week, teachers would take the option of catching up a student who has been on an SDA than having them not being addressed due to their complex behaviour at that pointy end.

CHAIR: Thank you for your submissions here today and taking the time to present to the committee. It is very much appreciated.

HOLCOMBE, Ms Sarah, State Council Member, Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees

RICHARDSON, Ms Cresta, President, Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees

SHIRLEY, Mr Nicholas, Principal, Cannonvale State School; Member of Executive, Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees

WOOD, Dr Craig, Research Officer, Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees

CHAIR: Welcome, all. You have two minutes to present your main points and then we will ask questions.

Ms Richardson: Thank you, Chair. The Queensland Teachers' Union is pleased to appear at today's hearing regarding the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. My name is Cresta Richardson and I am the president. I am joined today by Nick Shirley, an elected member of our executive and a state school principal; Sarah Holcombe, elected state council delegate and a state school principal; and Dr Craig Wood, QTU research officer. Chair, thank you for your earlier acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land.

This year, as you know, as we have established, it is our 135th anniversary. That is 135 years of representing the professional, industrial and legal interests of Queensland state school teachers, school leaders and TAFE educators. We have 48,000 members and 100 branches throughout Queensland. Each branch is represented at our state council. Between meetings of council, the management of the union is vested in the executive. Ms Holcombe is an elected member of our state council and president of the QTU's South Queensland area council. Mr Shirley is an executive member as well as the chair of the QTU's Education Leaders Committee. We have engaged with the department throughout the process of reviewing the EGPA. Our engagement is referred to in the explanatory notes of the bill. Our engagement in the department's review is not an endorsement of the amendments that are proposed in the bill. I will pass to Dr Wood and Ms Holcombe to discuss the QTU process in the review.

Dr Wood: Thank you, Cresta. Thank you, Chair, for acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. The QTU raised concerns throughout the department's process that commenced back in 2021. We have engaged in good faith throughout the process in the interests of our members and the hundreds of thousands of students whom our members teach every year. We have consistently raised concerns in steering committee meetings and stakeholder forums and with an initial 45-page submission in response to the consultation papers that contain 49 recommendations and a subsequent 13-page submission in response to additional consultation papers, and we aided another 10 recommendations in those. The initial submissions were prepared by the QTU and jointly with the Independent Education Union. The QTU and the IEU are the two registered trade unions that represent the professional and industrial interests of Queensland's teaching profession. The QTU supports the IEU's submission to this committee's inquiry into the bill which is made in the interests of the non-government sector. Our QTU submission to this bill is made in the interests of the government school sector.

The bill was introduced to the Queensland parliament on 6 March. There were just 13 working days between the introduction of the bill to the Queensland parliament and the close of submissions to this committee. The bill contains 172 pages and 132 clauses of amendments to legislation and regulation, with an additional 52 pages of explanatory notes, and the QTU has expressed significant concerns with these time lines.

Ms Holcombe: I would like to acknowledge the traditional lands as well and also pay my respects to the people of the Jarowair and Giabal people where I have my school. Over the 13 working days that we had to prepare a submission the QTU held two school leader forums, a meeting of the QTU executive and also a subsequent special meeting of executive. We also had a QTU education leaders conference and an additional session was held at this. All of these forums were very well attended. The QTU's submission was informed by these meetings as well as contributions from individual members and member collaborations.

Ms Richardson: Chair, we note that the QTU subbranch or work group submissions have also been made by our members—school leaders and teachers from Oakey State High, Cloyna State School, Kawungan State School, Kingaroy State High School, James Nash State High School and Redcliffe State High School—and I would really like to acknowledge the work of our members in getting that in. I am sure there is other feedback that is coming through to the committee as well. I will hand over to Mr Shirley.

Mr Shirley: Good morning, Chair. My name is Nick Shirley. I am the principal of Cannonvale State School in the Whitsunday region and also a QTU executive member. I want to acknowledge the voice of QSPA who just spoke before. We are quite aligned with their views that we have a balance of primary and secondary voice at this committee at this point in time. The depth of the QTU coverage and engagement of our members means the QTU has a comprehensive understanding of a 21st century risk to the safety and wellbeing of our students, teachers and school leaders. The QTU does not accept that the collective safety and wellbeing of school communities should be placed at risk to accommodate the concerns raised during the department's review process by parties who have limited experimental knowledge and understanding about the daily operations of Queensland state schools.

For clarity, the QTU supports the right for every Queensland child to access a high-quality education. However, the QTU also believes that every child, every teacher, every school leader, every teacher aide and other school employees have the right to a safe workplace, that every student has the right to an education and that every teacher has a right to teach. QTU members have been emphatic: this bill does not support the right balance.

The QTU views parts of the bill as an assault on principal autonomy, teacher professionalism and the right of all Queensland students to learn in a safe, caring and supportive environment. Rather than achieving the right balance, the QTU contends that many components of the bill, particularly relating to SDAs, are demonstrative of the continued assault of the teaching profession by the Australian legislators and bureaucrats in the Department of Education.

The QTU has consistently called for a workload impact statement and a separate budget impact statement on proposals arising from the review process and for both statements to be made public. The QTU is gravely concerned that the department has not satisfactorily analysed and reported on the workload that will be created by the implementation of the amendments proposed in the bill. The QTU takes no comfort from the explanatory speech in which the minister stated that the bill provides for a review of the SDA framework 18 months after commencement of the amendments to ensure the changes are achieving the desired outcomes. The QTU contends that the Queensland government should not undertake legislative change without first assuring the state's teaching profession that there will be no increases to workload. Simply, an 18-month trial is unsatisfactory.

Turning to budget impacts, the QTU is alarmed at the statement contained in the explanatory notes: 'Any potential costs will be met from existing budget allocations and are anticipated to be offset in the longer term as the process efficiencies are realised.' The QTU knows that increasing workload efficiencies is always at the expense of additional and more complex work being undertaken by teachers and school leaders. On that basis, the department must consider the impact amendments could have on accelerating staffing shortages, sick leave and WorkCover claims and the impact these will have on the Queensland budget.

Ms Richardson: To close our opening statement, I would say that we support the proposed amendments that provide principals with powers to delegate the function of telling a student and/or parent about an SDA decision. We reject the amendments to the EGPA that would provide appeal rights for cumulative 11 days of SDAs and that would legislate student support plans for every SDA and for students in particular cohorts. I would also like to draw the committee's attention to the matter of protecting school communities from online abuse. During the review process, the QTU strongly supported measures to regulate electronic or online behaviours, and we express our disappointment that those are not included in the bill.

CHAIR: Thank you. The member for Hinchinbrook has missed out on questions the last two rounds, so we will go to the videoconference. Nick, do you have any questions for the QTU?

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you to everyone for presenting to us this morning. Your submission is not only very informative but also very helpful for the committee to best understand the concerns of teachers here in Queensland. My question is with regard to the pressure that these legislative changes may have on the teaching cohort right now—and I see it in a number of submissions. Could you speak a little more broadly to the feedback from your members with regard to whether or not those extra pressures would turn them away from the teaching profession?

Mr Shirley: I am the chair of the QTU Education Leaders Committee. I have chaired numerous school leader forums and the recent education leaders' conference here in Brisbane over the last few weeks, and our members have been extremely clear: they are 100 per cent against this legislation in its current format. For the first time in my teaching and principal career, I am actually hearing of school leaders talking about leaving the profession due to the ongoing bureaucracy placed on them around the autonomy of making decisions around the safe workplaces that they lead in their schools. I am

talking large-school principals from the Gold Coast region right up to small schools up in the Torres Strait and to out west where there are really quite small schools, leading this workplace themselves. The current bill, as it stands, is placing huge workload on top of already busy principal workloads, and our members have strongly voiced that concern to me as the chair.

Ms Richardson: To add, this is a step where, ultimately, if our system were properly resourced and we could provide support to students fully as is required, I think the proposed amendments are not required as the proper support would be in schools to support all of our students to a high-quality education in Queensland.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for that answer. It is reflective of the conversation I have been having with teachers in my electorate.

Mr POWER: I want to thank the QTU but also your members who have reached out to me. I have had some good conversations with them over the phone and via email. I know that we are in a difficult situation here where we are talking about students who have had significant suspensions and there has been a real breakdown in their behaviour and their interaction with the schools. At that point we want the school community and leadership to have a connection with parents about what is happening and what is going on, and that is a very time-consuming and significant process often with not only difficult students, no doubt, but also difficult parents. The professionalism in that process is really vital to engage the student back into the student community. Isn't this just another step in that process of trying to professionally re-engage through a very difficult circumstance involving a student?

Dr Wood: One of the problems with the proposed amendments is that they are based on SDA data. One of the problems with SDA data is that it can only ever be a representation of the experience of our members and school leaders like Nick and Sarah. When the department reports on SDA data, it fails to recognise what occurred before the SDA decision was made. The reason for most SDA decisions in all regions is physical misconduct involving students, not involving an object.

Mr LISTER: You talked about protections against electronic abuse and the violence and so forth. Am I right to take it that it is not just students who can suffer from online abuse but your members as well—teachers and staff?

Ms Richardson: 100 per cent.

Mr LISTER: Why do you think the government has not chosen to take your submission or your view that there needs to be a strong regulation of that in the protection of your members and of students involved in the system?

Ms Richardson: I am aware that the Queensland Audit Office is doing some work around that, but that might be a question better served by Dr Rowan in the chamber.

Mr O'ROURKE: With regard to the school opinion survey, is there any direct correlation between the principals' management of student discipline and the overall morale of a school?

Mr Shirley: Absolutely. The school principals lead their workplaces at their school. School principals work very closely each and every day with their teaching team and their teacher aide teams to build practices that are safe and equitable for every learner at our school. That involves a lot of work behind the scenes on improving staff morale and ensuring our teachers and staff have the tools that they need each and every day to lead classrooms that are safe and provide high-quality learning outcomes for our learners. However, we can always do with more resourcing, and that is a key aspect. In my school in particular—I lead a large primary school—we invest heavily in additional resources at our school to make sure our teachers, teacher aides and teams have the tools and materials they need to do the job they need to do, which is to teach in our classrooms each and every day. Without the additional workforce resourcing that we put in at our own schools, there would be a detrimental impact on staff morale. Schools are actually doing that heavy lifting themselves using their own resources.

Mr Wood: Just to add to that, I take you back to the point I was making before around SDA data not truly representing what is occurring in schools, because I know that in Nick's school there is a whole heap of work that Nick does as a school leader and that our members do as teachers. One example of that is the Headstart program that invites parents of the prep year to come in and be part of the school community. That is about establishing a feeling of safety and a feeling of support within the school community. It is the incredible amount of positive, professional work that our teachers and school leaders do that establishes safe spaces and safe learning environments. This is work that is not accounted for with SDA counts. It is a massive problem and a massive misunderstanding from the department to produce legislation based on SDA data without recognising the incredible work that is done before you get to an SDA incident and an SDA decision.

Ms Holcombe: The impact that such legislation will have on the current teacher shortage is going to be profound simply because of the additional step that we talk about. We know we make professional decisions on this. We support our students. We are putting the plans in place. More often than not, with those students who are getting those over 11 days, the plans are in place. It is just a matter of reviewing. It is a constant process. When we are told that it is not enough, we have had enough. The issue is that we are going to keep losing teachers and, therefore, the supports will not even be on the ground to do it.

CHAIR: I thank QTU representatives for their submissions and attendance today.

LEONG, Ms Rebekah, Principal Lawyer, Queensland Human Rights Commission

McDOUGALL, Mr Scott, Commissioner, Queensland Human Rights Commission

CHAIR: I welcome representatives from the Queensland Human Rights Commission. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which committee members will have some questions.

Mr McDougall: Good morning, Chair. I thank the committee for the opportunity to present today. The commission's key concern is the overwhelming evidence that engagement in schooling is a significant protective factor and indicator of positive life outcomes. Conversely, limited access to education can have significant and long-term negative consequences on individual students, their families and the greater community. It follows that in this policy area we are dealing with a child's right to access an education and are presented with clear choices between policies that will address inequality and those that will amplify inequality. The commission advocates strongly in favour of measures that assist children and young people to stay in and thrive in school. The best outcomes will be achieved by intervening early before a school disciplinary absence is even needed. These measures must take into account that children are children who require the support of their families and other adults around them and that some children do not have family support. Early intervention also includes eliminating discrimination and making reasonable adjustments for a student's age, culture or abilities.

There also needs to be properly resourced alternatives to suspension to fulfil the purpose that suspension is trying to achieve. Other submitters have made suggestions about these alternatives and are better placed to do so. The commission also acknowledges the sustained calls from educators for more resources—and obviously I just heard the evidence of the Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees—training and time to properly tackle the issues that lead to SDAs. The commission strongly supports these calls and agrees that student wellbeing can only be addressed by a stable workforce whose own wellbeing is supported.

This bill focuses on measures at the opposite end of early intervention—that is, the circumstances of when a school disciplinary absence should be made and the safeguards in place. The commission's recommendations on the bill seek to ensure the prioritisation of early intervention strategies as well as support schools to make SDA decisions compatible with human rights, as they are obliged to do already under the Human Rights Act. In particular, the commission highlights that the current drafting of the bill, which mandates consideration of certain factors before making an SDA decision, could be interpreted as only allowing consideration of those matters to the exclusion of factors that are necessary to give proper consideration of human rights. Decision-makers need explicit discretion to consider all relevant factors, including human rights factors, in making an SDA decision. We also advocate for the exception of SDA decisions being made in relation to prep students, given the potential for harm of suspending or excluding a student at such a young age.

Finally, it is evident that genuine consultation with all relevant stakeholders needs to occur in relation to the department's policies proposed by the bill. This includes the school staff and communities who support students with disability, First Nations students and students in out-of-home care who will be most impacted by these policies.

Mr LISTER: I seek clarification on what you said at the beginning of your statement about how engagement with education is a significant protective factor from lifelong disadvantage. Are you speaking there specifically about absences from school which are unlawful—that is, not being exposed to education—or due to lots of disciplinary absences? You are not talking about those who are not going to mainstream schools but who may be doing homeschooling? I know there are a lot of people in the homeschooling community following this very closely. I want to give you an opportunity to provide an answer on that.

Mr McDougall: I am talking about disengagement from education and not disengagement from schools per se. There is clear evidence around this. If you look at Bob Atkinson's report a few years ago, he makes reference to the importance of ensuring there is continuity of education, especially up to the age of seven. I think there is overwhelming evidence that disengagement from education is contributing to the issues that we see play out on our TVs every night where children are being portrayed as criminal offenders.

Mr O'ROURKE: Your submission notes that it is generally accepted that school disciplinary actions are a matter of last resort. Given this, why do you think they need to be actually included in the legislation?

Mr McDougall: One of the issues with the process leading up to this bill—and I think this was alluded to by the Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees as well—is that we have not had an opportunity to consider this in close detail. I think this particular issue would have been an excellent issue for a parliamentary committee to consider in close detail because it would have provided an opportunity for teachers, parents and even children to be able to present evidence about how it is that SDAs are being implemented across Queensland. As far as I am aware, there is a wide variety of practice amongst schools. Some schools have very few SDAs that they rely on, whereas other schools will rely on them more frequently than others. Certainly, I have heard many stories where school suspensions have been the first option and not the last resort. Again, I am not in a position to present any evidence to that effect.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is in relation human rights but for all those students affected by the behaviour of the student who maybe is being excluded. We have acknowledged—and I think all submitters have acknowledged—that it is a last resort in most cases, if not the vast majority of cases. You have mentioned that teachers or principals should consider all of the factors, including human rights implications, of a school disciplinary absence, but, presumably, that also extends to the broader school community. In many respects the thrust of my question is: it seems as though you are trying to formalise a process through legislation that a principal would already be doing in most, if not all, cases. They are going to weigh the rights of the individual with the rights of the teacher and the broader school community. Why do we need to explicitly state that in legislation to ensure the status quo, if you will, is enacted?

Mr McDougall: To ensure we have proportionate decision-making when principals make those important decisions. We have pointed out in our submission that the current drafting requires principals to take into account certain prescribed matters, but those matters are presented as an exhaustive list when it should be an inclusive list which would allow for the operation of the Human Rights Act and the proportionality test in the Human Rights Act to be applied. One of the prescribed matters, for example, is what other opportunities there are, other than excluding the child, but there is an opportunity for other human rights considerations to be considered as well by the principal.

Mr MICKELBERG: In many respects we are dealing with anecdotal thought processes here rather than data to support it. We know what the outcome was but we do not know the reasons that necessarily resulted in that outcome. You talk about the fact that the department should publish that data around disability status or basically demographic data to support the de-identified reason for the individual being excluded. In your view, how would that work? Would it be public data? Is it information that only the department would have access to? How would that work?

Mr McDougall: I am not really in a position to answer that. The department would be in a much better position to answer how they produce and publish the data. Presumably, there is a way to do it. It would certainly be beneficial, particularly when we look at the imperative of other government initiatives such as the Closing the Gap program where this area is particularly important if we are going to achieve those targets. Data is a vital part of the process of achieving those targets.

Mr MICKELBERG: It strikes me as kind of a missing link. We talk about ICSEA data on the front end assessing the relative disadvantage of a school and educational outcomes on the back end. There is this resourcing question in the middle. Having data as the reason for that outcome as opposed to the relative disadvantage strikes me as the missing piece?

Mr McDougall: Yes, I would agree with you.

Mr POWER: The QTU spoke about rights in terms of safe, caring and supportive environment. Obviously, there are students with very difficult behavioural and learning needs. Sometimes those rights are in conflict. In that way, is it a useful framework where there are conflicting rights? Is it really a policy decision about what is the greatest benefit; is that a fair way to assess this policy?

Mr McDougall: Absolutely. Teachers' rights have to be considered as do the child's, obviously. It is not necessarily a case of playing one off against the other; it is about resourcing the options that are going to uphold both the rights of the child and the rights of a teacher to a safe place. I would also point out that not all of these SDAs involve endangering the safety of teachers obviously—

Mr POWER: In terms of safe, caring and supportive environment, there are 27 other students in a classroom. As a former teacher, I know that often you are not able to deliver the curriculum and the lesson plan that you want. Is there not a human rights consideration in that circumstance?

Mr McDougall: Yes, absolutely, 100 per cent. Again, it comes back to resourcing the alternatives so that supports can be put in place to support teachers to operate their classrooms in an inclusive way. That will often involve difficult choices, but it will always involve dealing with the

child's parents and accessing the necessary supports that are required. At the moment what we are hearing—and I think you have just heard it from the Teachers' Union—is that the resources are not being provided to enable those supports to be put in place to support children to stay in the classroom without disrupting others.

CHAIR: Thank you. Our time has expired, so thank you for taking the time to present to us here.

PROOF

ALEXANDER, Ms Matilda, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

De COCQ VAN DELWIJNEN, Ms Caitlin, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

WIGGANS, Ms Sophie, Principal Systems Advocate, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

CHAIR: I welcome witnesses from Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you. Thanks for presenting today.

Ms Alexander: Thank you. We would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet, the Turrbal and Yagara peoples, and acknowledge the lives of First Nations Australians with disability and the intersectional disadvantage they experience. We pay our respects to First Nations elders past and present and in particular to our President, Byron Albury.

Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion is an advocacy organisation and specialist community legal centre for people with disability. We are funded by the Department of Education and the department of disability to provide disability advocacy to young people in Queensland, including in Queensland state schools. QAI acknowledges the Department of Education's recent efforts to address the over-representation of students with disability in SDAs and we welcome the ongoing dialogue on this important issue.

Since 2002 QAI together with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, Youth Advocacy Centre, PeakCare Queensland and Youth Affairs Network of Queensland have been leading the A Right to Learn campaign which seeks to address the disproportionate use of school suspensions and exclusions on students with disability. This is based on research by QAI and the Centre for Inclusive Education which found evidence of disproportionate and excessive suspensions of First Nations students, students with disability and students in out-of-home care.

Disability is the most common factor amongst suspended students and students with disability are more likely than other students to get repeat suspensions which raises urgent questions as to whether students with disability are receiving the adjustments and support to which they are entitled under legislation. Our research also showed that when students are in more than one of these groups the risk of suspension is even greater. Students receiving social or economic adjustments at school such as neurodiverse students are issued repeat suspensions at higher rates than students with other types of disability, and all of this is occurring despite overwhelming evidence as to the ineffectiveness of school disciplinary absences and research which demonstrates the significant long- and short-term harm that they cause.

Whilst the department's inclusive education policies increasingly reference human rights principles and an intention to ensure students with disabilities access education, there continues to be a gap between policy and practice that must be urgently addressed by stronger laws and increased transparency. The A Right to Learn campaign is calling for the education act to say that exclusions and suspensions are a last resort. This was recommended by the disability royal commission and can be immediately implemented in this bill. The evidence we have heard today has already talked about exclusions being a last resort, so this is not something novel or against the evidence you have heard.

Appeal rights should be granted to all suspensions, regardless of their length or the number of cumulative days a student has been suspended for. We need to implement multitiered systems of support. We need greater transparency and accountability, for example in an annual report to parliament on school attendance, the development of inclusion score cards for schools and the establishment of an independent board to oversee reforms. We need the explicit inclusion of a person's human right to inclusive education in the education act.

QAI also makes additional recommendations about this bill such as introducing a limit to the number of suspensions a student can receive within a prescribed period without approval from the chief executive; introducing a legislative requirement to consult the student, their family and other relevant people about whether further adjustments could better support the student with disability; introducing a legislative provision that ensures students with disability have access to educational materials appropriate to their education and behavioural needs while subject to exclusionary discipline; and introducing a right to representation by providing students who are excluded with an independent advocate who can help them access their right to learn but also address the underlying problems.

We need to do everything possible to keep kids in schools. Exclusionary discipline does not work and is expensive. QAI has engaged researchers to calculate the overall costs to our economy of exclusionary discipline—a quantifiable result that we are expecting in the next few weeks and may even be able to provide on notice. Exclusionary discipline does not address duty of care because it does not address the underlying problems. Nearly every kid in youth detention has first been excluded from school. Every child has a right to learn. Let us keep our kids in schools.

CHAIR: Thank you for the presentation.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thanks for presenting today. I want to focus in on the home education aspects for kids who may have a disability and in your submission you say—

... many students with disability who experience barriers to inclusion in mainstream schools often resort to trialing home education. It is an onerous undertaking for parents and one that is rarely taken on lightly.

You subsequently talk about the provisional registration and the fact that removing that ability for provisional registration may result in—and I am paraphrasing here—a student with a disability experiencing significant barriers to inclusion and remaining there longer than they would otherwise. Can you talk to the effect on the individual—and obviously I am talking about a subjective judgement here, but in your experience and that of the people you represent—for a young person with a disability to be kept in school and/or potentially unable to attend school because of those barriers not being able to be provisionally registered for homeschooling? What effect would that have on the individual?

Ms Wiggans: As we said in our submission, we focused our evidence on the school disciplinary absence changes in the bill. We have heard among the homeschooling community that there is a lot of concern around the changes, including the changes to the provisional registration. The home education changes are not something that we have a great deal of experience in. Our education advocacy will typically provide support to students and families around school disciplinary absence decisions, so that is the focus of our evidence today. What we are hearing from the homeschooling community is a great deal of concern around the changes, so we would recommend further consultation around those issues.

Mr MICKELBERG: That is interesting to hear because many of the homeschooling families who have submitted to the bill have spoken about the fact that their children have a disability or other challenge with respect to accessing mainstream education, so were you involved with the consultation process? I note you said at the start you are funded partly by the Department of Education. Were you involved with the consultation process around the changes to homeschooling? I do not remember the exact percentages, but the percentages were very high of homeschooling families who had made that decision to support the needs of a child who may have a disability or other inclusion access issue.

Ms Wiggans: Our involvement in the consultation was around the school disciplinary absence changes. The homeschooling changes were not a focus of our engagement in that process, but I think your question speaks to a broader issue around the lack of inclusive education that families are experiencing in Queensland state schools. Whether that leads a student to go into homeschooling or it leads to challenges in a classroom that end up with a suspension or exclusion, it is coming from the same issue around the lack of resourcing and the proper implementation of inclusive education which is leading to these subsequent issues in which the lack of resourcing has been spoken about by a number of previous witnesses as well. That is a significant part of the problem that needs to be addressed as well as the changes in the bill.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for being here today. Ms Alexander, you touched on having a consultative process between the principal, student, family and their advocates. Do you have any concerns about the time that it may take to do that process?

Ms Alexander: It is a good question and it has a complex answer. The time is going to vary for each instance. We are talking about individuals here with individualised problems and individualised reasons they are having difficulty in schools. For some of those there might be a solution through the NDIS and for others there might be a solution through adjustments to the school, so there is not really a one-size-fits-all answer to how long it takes, but what we are talking about is fixing the problem. We are not talking about closing the doors for two days, opening them up again and the problem is still there or the problem has been moved to another school or, worse yet, the problem has been moved out of the education system and on to the streets. What we are talking about is taking the time to fix the problem of resourcing schools. We heard the evidence that was presented this morning and agree that doing this right requires additional resources to schools, to teachers, to families and to students.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for giving us your detailed submission and also presenting your evidence to the committee this morning. My question is with regard to inclusive policy for students with disability, learning disability and behaviour disability in Queensland schools. With regard to going to a more inclusive school model for children with disabilities, from the data that you have collected has that created a situation where there are more suspensions for those types of students or fewer?

Ms Alexander: I would say that a truly inclusive school has fewer suspensions and more students who are engaged. It is not just about suspensions, because it is also about increasing attendance rates, so part-time education plans and things like that are also something to look at. A truly inclusive education should have more kids engaged with education. That is what the disability royal commission found and that is why they said suspensions should be a last resort.

Mr POWER: My father was a teacher of the deaf, so all my life I have been involved with the process of mainstreaming deaf education in particular but disability education in general. That process has made it much more complex for both classroom teachers and principals with regard to discipline in the classroom; is that fair to say?

Ms Alexander: There are definitely complexities, yes.

Mr POWER: When we are talking about neurodivergence usually that is a teaching thing, but we are also talking about someone with a neurodivergence or disability where there is a significant behavioural problem in the classroom. Given that, does that make it difficult for a variety of other students and the teacher trying to get through curriculum in that circumstance if they do not have the ability to look to a range of professional measures?

Ms Alexander: Not necessarily. Many kids with neurodivergence are wonderful contributors to their classrooms and communities.

Mr POWER: I recognise that; what I specifically said was where there were significant behavioural problems. That is really what we are dealing with. For neurodivergent kids we might have a different teaching style and different method of engagement, but there are also significant behavioural problems associated with either the disability or the very broad term of neurodivergence.

Ms Alexander: And sometimes the school environment and one-size-fits-all approach does not fit diversity, whether it is neurodiversity or cultural diversity, so we need to go back and look at what is not fitting in that classroom and what reasonable adjustments we can make to that, and that can be complicated and it can require expert evidence, but keeping that kid engaged in school must be the primary goal so that that kid can go on and be in a workplace and that kid can go on and have the same life opportunities as everybody else and also so that the kids who are growing up around them will go to a workplace and learn that their colleagues in their workplace will need adjustments and that their colleagues around them might have different needs in how to meet those needs. It goes both ways.

Ms Wiggans: If I can just add, I think your question speaks to the need to be looking at what is behind the behaviour and what are the reasons for it, and I think that that is an aspect of the process that is sometimes missed, particularly when there is an absence of safeguards around the use of the discretionary power that principals have to issue an SDA. That is why we are calling for increased safeguards around that process to make sure that it is done only in those situations where it is a last resort, but it is also adding in processes that make sure that that thought process is there around is this the right thing, what is the behaviour about, how can we be better supporting this student or changing the environment so that that behaviour is not happening in the first place?

Ms Alexander: So we want to resource those schools and we want to resource those principals and those teachers with all of the relevant information, especially about a kid's disability, so that they can make the right decision, and many of them are. I love my kids' school principal. We get along really well. I am really proud of the fact that our school had only two very short-term suspensions in the annual reports of both last year and the year before, so this can happen. We can see schools that are using suspensions and its inclusion as a last resort. There was no exclusion in that there were no long-term suspensions in our school. Schools can get it right and we see some schools are getting it right and we see that some schools are not getting it right, so what we want to do is make sure that every school has the resourcing and the information to keep kids in school.

CHAIR: Thanks to the QAI team for presenting today and answering our questions. Thank you.

HAYES, Ms Katherine, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Advocacy Centre Inc

CHAIR: Welcome. You have two minutes to present your main points and then we will go to questions from the committee. Thank you.

Ms Hayes: Thank you very much and thank you for having me here today. I think it is important to start with that it is an absolute that the classroom needs to be a safe place for the teachers to work in and a safe place for all of the students. That is the starting point. At the Youth Advocacy Centre we represent the kids in the youth justice system, often the serious repeat offenders—so kids who have serious disengagement from school and from community and society in general. What we see is a very strong link with school disciplinary absences and a strong link with the bad behaviour that they engage in to get them into the youth justice system. The school disciplinary absence regime that is proposed by the bill disproportionately affects regional and remote areas. I was in Mount Isa last week and there is a state school, a state high school and then a flexi school—an Edmund Rice flexi school. The Edmund Rice flexi school is full so when kids are expelled from Mount Isa school there is nowhere for them to go. So where there is no alternative to the mainstream school, no viable alternative, these kids float into the youth justice system and become entrenched because there is no engagement with education.

There is also a systemic issue once the kids enter into the SDA regime because there is a lack of support in engaging with education while they are suspended and a lack of engagement and support while they are excluded. These are the high-risk kids who are causing a lot of issues that are in the media at the moment. As soon as they come to the attention of schools there needs to be wraparound support for them from all of the different agencies that they are exposed to. They are exposed to Child Safety, Department of Health, Education, Youth Justice and the QPS. All of these agencies should be wrapping around these kids and providing assistance for them as soon as there is any exposure to the SDA regime.

The final point I want to make is that there is a long time taken with many of the kids we represent to get them re-engaged into the school system. Some of the kids—not all of them—want to go back to school, but they find it very difficult to engage with the school productively to re-enter. There are delays of often a term before they get re-engaged into the school.

Mr POWER: There is difficulty in that where we have a sample of children whose behaviour is so extreme that they are getting suspensions, it seems to be implied that you are blaming the principals and their attitudes towards suspensions for causing criminal behaviour in young people.

Ms Hayes: No. What led you to believe that?

Mr POWER: Then we are talking about a correlation with a group that has extreme behaviours who are going to be correlated with youth justice issues.

Ms Hayes: Yes. I am not saying that the principal has caused that behaviour, I am saying that where there is a disengagement with school and that leads to a suspension or an exclusion, there is a high correlation with involvement in the youth justice system. I am not putting any blame on the principal whatsoever.

Mr POWER: In relation to the regime, as you called it, I know that in my own experience of principals in schools, if it were done outside the school regime it could be criminal in nature, but it is not dealt with that way by the principals. Often principals are attempting to deal with things in a very different manner. I am just trying to understand. Principals very much try to do these things very differently to how this would be dealt with outside the school environment so why are we identifying it as a problem that for the most part they are trying to do this very differently to how it would be dealt with in the youth justice system?

Ms Hayes: If a student's behaviour is subject to an exclusion and there is a lack of support, which there is at the moment, to rectify those underlying behaviours, they are highly likely to become engaged in the youth justice system. That is to the principals' credit, their attempts to try to engage them and keep them involved in the system, but if eventually the exclusion is used there is a high likelihood of engagement in the youth justice system.

Mr POWER: That goes back to my first question which you found difficult, which is as to whether it is a causation or correlation that the school is setting boundaries in what I think is a professional educational manner, and certainly still would do after the process, and whether that is the causation of youth justice issues.

Ms Hayes: No.

Mr POWER: A lot of those things come from outside the school.

Ms Hayes: Very much; yes, yes, yes. It is not just that you have an issue at school and then you are in the youth justice system, there are many factors that cause a child's involvement in the youth justice system, as I am sure you are aware. It is the disadvantage that they are often brought up in, the family situation, the dysfunction, family violence—all of that.

Mr POWER: Disability in some cases and neurodivergence in other cases

Ms Hayes: I am not sure about that, but there are many different factors that cause involvement in the youth justice system.

Mr MICKELBERG: You mentioned that a small group of kids who seek to re-engage with education when in the youth justice system find it hard to re-engage and there are some delays in that process. I am aware that within the youth detention centres there are TAFE facilities, and I have previously asked questions around how they are delivered, how they are rolled out and the follow-up after someone leaves youth detention. Can we get your views as to how that is working because presumably that intersection between the education they are getting while they are inside a youth detention centre and then being able to re-engage back with school should they choose to or be encouraged to is part of this solution.

Ms Hayes: Yes. That is not working at the moment. There is theoretically a great opportunity to engage kids when they are in the detention centre, but because of the understaffing that has been prevalent for the last few years it has not been taken up. At the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre there are fantastic facilities for learning, but the kids have not been able to engage in them properly because of the understaffing.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have heard in the past that kids who have not yet been sentenced for an offence and are only in there on remand are unable to access that education; is that correct?

Ms Hayes: No, that is not true. That has changed in recent times. It is mainly the staffing that is the issue.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for being here today. In your submission you talk about the multitiered system of support. I am just wondering if you could talk a little more about that, please?

Ms Hayes: When a student comes to the attention of a principal for difficult behaviour, and I am talking about very difficult behaviour, there is often underlying reasons behind that. It may be disability, it may be the family environment, it may be coming from a domestic violence situation or it may be drug and alcohol use. These are the end-of-the-spectrum, the very difficult kids. These issues need to be addressed properly in a concerted, coherent approach and that needs to be done with the support of the school and all of the other agencies around them, whether they are government or community. That is the way to address the underlying issues. They may not be able to stay in the school environment, but at the moment there are not alternatives that are sufficiently funded to accommodate all of these kids. When I was in Mount Isa last week there were a large number of children wandering the streets on a weekday because they are not engaged in the school and there was not room in the flexi school. Our staff refer kids to the flexi schools and to the Pathways colleges which are excellent, but there are not enough of them.

Mr O'ROURKE: With your organisation, what are the bodies involved in that, the community organisations?

Ms Hayes: There are so many of differing effectiveness, but across Queensland there are very many organisations. For example, in Mount Isa the Catholic Church is providing an array of great services. That is just Mount Isa. Across Queensland there are numerous everywhere in the community.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for your submission to the committee and presenting evidence today. You indicated that a child who has been suspended and can no longer attend school for whatever reason—usually something has gone on there, they have put another student or a teacher in danger and they have been suspended—are you suggesting that there should be a state funded suspension school or something to keep them engaged or give them somewhere to go while they are suspended from mainstream school?

Ms Hayes: What I am suggesting is that sometimes we have kids for whom a decision has not been made so they are in limbo. In the case of suspensions, they would be supported by other organisations. I go back to Mount Isa again. There is an organisation called the hub and they have federal funding that has given them a staff member who is trained as a teacher and can provide the education to the students while they are on suspension. Those kinds of arrangements, which might be tailored to the individual circumstances, would work well.

Mr DAMETTO: So better funding organisations to be able to handle those children. You were saying in Mount Isa the other day when you were out there that there were kids who were disengaged and still walking the streets. Were they not engaged with the hub as well?

Ms Hayes: No. When I was talking to the person who runs the hub they said that they have not been able to get the school to provide referrals to them. I do not want to speak about that situation. I do not know what is going on there. There is something available that is not being utilised for whatever reason.

CHAIR: Thank you for presenting here today and for your submission. It is much appreciated

**HOPKINSON-PEARSON, Mr Aenghas, Operations and Development Manager,
Teachers' Professional Association of Queensland.**

**SCHULLER, Mr Edward, Secretary, Teachers' Professional Association of
Queensland**

CHAIR: Welcome. I will ask you to present for about two minutes and then we will go to questions from the committee.

Mr Schuller: I will be brief. This bill is all about centralising power. The government want to completely rip away decision-making from local schools to put it in the hands of overpaid and out-of-touch bureaucrats. Make no mistake, this is yet another deliberate attack on education designed to reinforce a dysfunctional schooling system that is failing students, parents and teachers. In fact, the only beneficiaries of this system are the Labor Party and its philosophical arm, the Queensland Teachers' Union. This bill was designed and directed by these two political organisations that constantly scheme to promote themselves at the expense of quality education in Queensland. The proposed appeal process is completely bureaucratic and it undermines the judgement of principals and school staff. Labor's ideological obsession with gender also makes an appearance. Our education system has to be unashamedly steeped in reality. Teachers cannot be expected to be psychologists and to parent. Just let teachers teach.

This bill also enforces racial discrimination which sets a dangerous precedent for children who get treated differently in our country because of the colour of their skin. Few politicians have the guts to actually say it, but the centralised system is the problem. It is the cancer that causes the symptoms that we see every day. The reality is bills like this will continue to keep coming under this system, getting more and more radical each time. This will only stop when power is restored to a local level. Eighty per cent of the education bureaucracy would be completely redundant if schools had autonomy. Using those funds and resources, we estimate that teachers would get a \$30,000 to \$40,000 rise in their salaries and schools would become accountable to their local community. We will continue to fight to overhaul the education system so teachers get the support that they deserve and children get the education that they need. Thank you.

Mr POWER: In that presentation there were a lot of things that were not necessarily in the bill. When it comes to suspensions and the educational outcomes for those students, do you recognise there is community concern with suspensions and the long-term outcomes for students?

Mr Schuller: Yes, essentially. I would say that statement was all about the bill. When talking about restoring local control, there is that community concern and it is best addressed by the local community, not by introducing another bureaucratic step in that support process. Does that make sense?

Mr POWER: You said you wanted to support the local community, but when parents wanted to have a process of understanding why their child had had a long-term suspension, you seemed to not support that.

Mr Schuller: We do not support this process, no. We support it being implemented at a local level and schools being able to determine disciplinary processes in the community which knows the students and the parents best. One of the committee members was talking about the importance of engaging with parents. That is best done at a local level, not by the department.

Mr POWER: I understand that. We do understand that parents had already been engaged. We have spoken to the principals association about parents being engaged, but you want to close that process and not have parents further engaged through other processes?

Mr Schuller: No. What I am saying is you are working within the framework of a current system which you are trying to further centralise. It needs to be brought back completely to a local level. I actually listened to the submission of the Secondary Principals' Association and I 100 per cent agree with their decree that they need to have autonomy with making those decisions.

Mr POWER: And parents should just be stopped at that point?

Mr Schuller: No. Parents should be—

Mr POWER: It is all right.

Mr Schuller: Feel free to continue your question. I am just not sure where you are going with it.

Mr POWER: The process allows parents to have a process of appealing or engaging outside the school community where that process of engaging with the local principals has ended or if you hit a roadblock. You do not seem to be supportive of the parents engaging in that process.

Mr Schuller: I do think that parents should be engaged. They should be engaged on a local level. What I am saying is you are drawing the process and the way you are going about it by introducing the Department of Education to run that—that is where we have a problem. We have a problem that it is being centralised. Decisions should be made and they should be informed by parents and local boards. That should be done at a local level.

Mr POWER: If CathEd had a process whereby parents could appeal, would you be opposed to that as well?

Mr Schuller: No, that is not what I am saying.

Mr POWER: Anyway—

CHAIR: We will move on.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today. Is it the case that the association has thousands of teachers as members in Queensland?

Mr Schuller: Yes, it is.

Mr LISTER: Is it the case that you were not consulted in the preparation of this bill as the Queensland Teachers' Union was?

Mr Schuller: That is correct; we were not consulted. We did not expect to be consulted in the drafting of this bill.

Mr LISTER: What do you have to say about that omission?

Mr Schuller: Again, it comes back to the whole purpose of my opening statement, which is talking about the centralised system. It is designed to benefit two organisations, the Labor Party—the current government—and the Queensland Teachers' Union. We can talk about—although it does not particularly pertain to this bill—the workplace health and safety bill that this committee actually deliberated on where it became evident that the government are not particularly concerned about workers; they are concerned about themselves.

Mr LISTER: I asked the Queensland Teachers' Union representatives about their contention that there should have been measures in this bill to allow matters like online bullying and abuse to be dealt with not just in the interests of students, but also in the interests of teachers. The answer that the president gave me was that that is a matter that should be referred to the opposition spokesman for education in the parliament. Can I give you an opportunity to answer that question, or would you prefer that it go to Christian Rowan?

Mr Schuller: I think any organisation purporting to represent teachers should be able to speak to what their members have to say. That is what we have done on this bill. All the things that are mentioned in our submission, which I am happy to comment on further, came from our members. You will see a number of quotations from our members. I understand that the QTU were part of the drafting process of this bill, but their members were very frustrated. There was a bit of a backlash and it seems that they have then gone on to oppose the measures that they helped draft.

CHAIR: Is it true that you are not, in fact, a registered industrial organisation under industrial law, unlike the Queensland Teachers' Union?

Mr Schuller: We are not a registered trade union in Queensland, correct.

CHAIR: That is right. In your presentation you seemed to be advocating for cutting education bureaucracy by 80 per cent, which would mean the sacking of thousands of people who support a very diverse education system across a geography that would fit in three Great Britains with a relatively modest population in comparison. Are you serious that sacking that many people would be helpful to students across Queensland?

Mr Schuller: Do you think that the current system is working?

CHAIR: I am asking you the questions. Do you actually think—

Mr Schuller: I appreciate that, but the answer to that is it is not.

CHAIR: I would appreciate if you do not talk over the top of me. Do you think that sacking 80 per cent of the education bureaucracy is going to help the education of Queensland students in this state?

Mr Schuller: Returning schooling to a local level will.

CHAIR: I take that as a yes?

Mr Schuller: I am not speaking specifically around sacking 80 per cent. It will be that 80 per cent is no longer required. They might go back to a local level. Many of them are registered teachers. They could return to the classrooms and help fix the teacher shortage crisis. I am saying there is a significant problem with how centralised the system is and how bloated the bureaucracy is. You do not fix that problem by saying some people will lose their job if we do not do this, so we will continue to have appalling education in this state. You fix it by returning it to a local system.

CHAIR: In that one sentence you said you are not talking about sacking people, but then you talked about them all having to find other jobs. So I sense a contradiction in your presentation.

Mr Schuller: It is not a matter of fighting over jobs; it is about fighting for a better education system. I can tell that you are particularly frustrated at this point, but it has to be returned to a local level. If that involves some people in the bureaucracy losing their jobs, then that is what it takes.

CHAIR: I just note that under the previous Newman government there was a huge ballooning in class sizes and refusal to employ new people. That was a disaster for students in this state and yet that lesson does not seem to have been picked up by your organisation, which is advocating for sacking thousands of people.

Mr Schuller: I am not advocating for the policies of any former government. What I am saying is the policies of your current government and plenty of former ones, including LNP ones, have failed education in this state. I do not think you should be prosecuting a political message to justify keeping the system as it is.

CHAIR: I note before I go on to the next question that I had not raised any political issues before your presentation—

Mr Schuller: You raised the former Newman government—

CHAIR: You do not interrupt under parliamentary procedure. It was your presentation that raised political parties, the first and only one this morning. All the different groups have raised issues of policy, evidence-based policy. Your submission was the first one to have a political polemic in your presentation, so I think it is appropriate that I have the ability to respond to that. I will go to the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: You have spoken a lot today about local decision-making and you spoke about it in your submission as well. I am keen to get your views with respect to the impact on principals and school leadership of the changes, centralisation of the process around school disciplinary absences and dealing with behaviour in schools. Presumably it is principals, teachers and school leadership teams who are going to deal with the consequences of those changes. What do your members tell you about what that impact will be on them and their ability to maintain confidence of the school communities they represent?

Mr Schuller: I think it is a matter of accountability as well. If things are returned to a local level and principals have that decision to make, then they are accountable to the parents, they are accountable to the community around those decisions. Then teachers are also able to understand those decisions a lot better than they would if it went through that bureaucratic process. I know it has raised a few hairs, but I think it is a pretty uncontroversial thing to say that this system is not working and we need to restructure it immediately.

Mr POWER: I noted the member for Southern Downs talked about your membership. I found it curious that you described your members as failing in teaching students. I see in my community really professional teachers who are doing a great job teaching our students. Is it correct that you are asserting that they are failures?

Mr Schuller: That is complete and utter nonsense. I did not say that whatsoever. If I have put that in the submission, please show me where.

Mr POWER: Sorry, it was not in your submission. In the evidence you gave before you said that education was failing. I know as a classroom teacher you have a great deal of autonomy within the curriculum to deliver high-quality education for the students in front of you. However, you seem to be suggesting your members are failing; teachers are failing.

Mr Schuller: I am not suggesting that whatsoever. I am not sure how you have picked that up. I am saying that the education system is failing them as well. Teachers are working their absolute hearts out. You can pull a face, but—

Mr POWER: I just ask you to withdraw the language. It is unparliamentary. We dealt with this issue at a previous meeting where someone used unparliamentary language. I ask that it be withdrawn.

CHAIR: What was—

Mr Schuller: What is this regarding?

Mr POWER: I may have misheard, but I thought you used unparliamentary language.

Mr Schuller: I said you pulled a face. Is that unparliamentary?

Mr POWER: No. It was before that.

Mr Schuller: I am happy to hear from the chair.

CHAIR: I did not quite hear it. If you can ensure that any language is appropriate to a parliamentary setting, that would be appreciated. We will have a look at the transcript later on and if we need to tidy it up we will.

Mr DAMETTO: Out of the number of members you have across the Queensland landscape in the teaching cohort have any of those teachers indicated why they believe there seems to be a sharp rise in home education being the choice of many families across Queensland?

Mr Schuller: Yes, they have. We have actually run a survey of all of our members—and a broader one as well—around student behaviour. That is one of them. Some parents feel that the classrooms are becoming more and more unsafe. This is what we are hearing from teachers as well. That survey included parents and teachers and obviously our internal one was just teachers. Student behaviour is a big factor of that. That is why home education has become more and more popular. We did not focus on that in our submission because it was not a primary thing brought up by our members and we will always reflect what our members say.

Mr DAMETTO: I have a question regarding behaviour in classrooms and the tools that teachers currently have to control classrooms. Can you speak to that and what improvements your member base is calling for at this point?

Mr Schuller: I think a lot of this is included in the bill as well. I do not mean to seem like a broken record, but it does involve getting things back to a local level, so teachers having the ability to discipline students through a process that principals are primarily running. We do not believe that the proposal in this bill would actually assist that. That is why we are opposing that part of it. I have nothing further to add.

Mr O'ROURKE: Just touching on your comments in regards to the increase in the number of people homeschooling and the earlier presentation by Dr English around the fact that homeschooling has increased across Australia and across many countries around the world, I wonder if you have a comment in that space. It seems to be reflective across Australia and worldwide in terms of the number of students homeschooling?

Mr Schuller: I think there is a growing distrust in public education because of bills like this. I would put it as simply as that. Somewhere along the road there seems to have been a disregard for the basics. Instead of that, we are pushing through things at a state level that we should not be. We are trying to get teachers to parent when they should just be able to teach. Department directors acting under the guise of bureaucracy means that there is very little transparency, and there is plenty of transparency in home education of course. Like I said, we did not focus on that in our submission because that was not the primary thing that our members were talking about. That would be my comment on that.

CHAIR: That concludes this hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today for your presentation and answering questions from the committee. I appreciate you making the time and being part of the process. Thank you to our Hansard reporters faithfully transcribing for us. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's website in due course. I declare this public hearing closed. Thanks everybody for your participation.

The committee adjourned at 11.59 am.