

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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SUBMISSION: Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

From: QTU members - Cloyna State School

Queensland Teachers' Union members at Cloyna State School met on Tuesday 19th and Friday 22nd March to discuss the Bill with proposed changes to the Education Act.

Members agreed with many aspects within the Bill, however, concern was expressed specifically about the following:

School disciplinary absence, enrolment decisions, and student support plans

- *parents are able to appeal a short-term suspension (1-10 days) if it means a child will be suspended through cumulative short-term suspensions for 11 or more school days in a calendar year;*

QTU members at Cloyna SS believe that parent appeals in this manner will significantly increase the workload of school leaders. The reduction of suspension days to 11 appears to be random. A reduction in the number of suspension days reduces the capacity of the school to address issues that are of a significant concern – particularly violent students. A short suspension could be viewed by some students as a non-deterrent for abhorrent behaviour and further adds to the creation of an unsafe learning and work environment. Discussion also included concerns that this would add to the already apparent & evident pressure for schools to not suspend students. QTU members also discussed the possibility of an increase in unnecessary parent complaints that are vexatious.

- *the chief executive is given authority to provide education to students who are in the process of having their enrolment application reviewed by the chief executive (due to a principal considering that the student may pose an unacceptable risk to the safety or wellbeing of members of the school community);*

This amendment does not provide alternative solutions for schools to replace suspension as a consequence for inappropriate school behaviour. This could be interpreted as meaning that students could attend the school location while appeals are in process despite the Principal considering an unacceptable risk. This was of particular concern to QTU members at Cloyna SS – for reasons of limited access to staffing – eg: who supervises a child in a one teacher school setting?

- *require the chief executive to have a policy outlining considerations for SDA decision makers in relation to the suspension, exclusion or cancellation of enrolment of a student;*

QTU members at Cloyna SS would prefer to see the policy first. A policy can be made outside of amendments to legislation in consultation with all stakeholders. Discussion occurred as to a preferred strategy of reviewing current policies that exist and recommendations made within them to reduce suspension statistics for students with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students - eg: Inclusion; special needs, behaviour management, student code of conduct

- *the requirement for the chief executive to make a policy to provide for the making of student support plans (SSPs) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability or preparatory age students who have been suspended or are at risk of exclusion. The SSP is a written plan designed to determine behaviour supports and reduce the need for further suspensions or exclusion. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability are subjected to an over proportionate number of SDAs. Preparatory age students are in their first year of schooling and may be as young as*

four and a half years old. Additional support is therefore appropriate as they transition to schooling. The SSPs will allow focused strategies and support for these students and involve parents / guardians to help identify any needs or complexities contributing to the behaviour that may not otherwise be known by the school or appropriately supported;

QTU members at Cloyna SS acknowledge the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students & students with a disability are overrepresented in SDA statistics, however the strategy of making an SSP is a measure that will do little to reduce suspension statistics for these target groups for the following reasons:

- plans currently exist – a lot of plans for over represented groups are individualised based on the level of complexity that many of the students have (eg: out of home care, trauma, domestic violence, youth justice orders etc..) but this does not necessarily stop or reduce inappropriate behaviour at school
- this is just another way to unnecessarily increase workloads
- it is unclear who would actually write these plans – at a time when there is a shortage of education specialists and teachers.
- An additional plan would specifically increase a teacher’s workload because any plan requires a teacher to adjust curriculum and teaching plans already. When there are multiple students in a class that require specific plans, a teacher spends more time planning than they do actually teaching.

QTU members at Cloyna SS agree that the above reasons are the same for providing SSPs for Prep Students – while we agree that suspension should be a last resort, there is no excusing violent and persistent anti-social behaviours and suspension should be a consequence. Are we expected to look the other way when violence has been inflicted on teachers and other students when existing resources and support are minimal? It is apparent that many students are unprepared to start school (Prep).

QTU members at Cloyna SS discussed the irony in this amendment and the Minister’s recent commitment to “let teachers teach” by reducing unnecessary bureaucratic paperwork. Questions that arose out of discussions included: Who will write them? What PD will be available? What time & resourcing will be available? What is the level of effectiveness of a plan if resources are not available to the schools?

QTU members at Cloyna State School agreed that if Equity and Excellence is to be achieved in schools, then the amendments discussed above need to be delayed until there is increased confidence in the provision of appropriate resourcing and professional development for stakeholders. QTU members at Cloyna SS believe that amendments mentioned in this submission would see teachers and school leaders leave the public school sector.



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