

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Committee Secretary
Education, Employment and Training Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

The Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP) welcomes the opportunity to submit our insights to the Parliamentary Committee examining the Education (General Provisions Act) 2006.

QASSP stands as the premier professional association for state school leaders in Queensland, advocating for the interests of educational leaders across the state. Our membership exceeds 1300 school leaders and represents 337 500 primary school students, reflecting a commitment to representing the diverse nature of primary education in Queensland.

The QASSP membership is dedicated to promoting excellence in state schools. Our vision centres around ensuring that every child has access to quality education, and we support most of the proposed changes to the Education (General Provisions Act) 2006.

QASSP engaged with the Department of Education (DoE) during the process of reviewing the Education (General Provisions Act) 2006 (EGPA). This engagement in the DoE's process of review was and should not be seen as an endorsement of the amendments that are proposed in the Bill. We along with other organisations raised concerns in the stakeholder forums regarding the proposed changes which we oppose.

The Bill was introduced to Queensland Parliament on 6 March 2024 and invited stakeholders to make a submission. Unfortunately, there were just 13 working days between the introduction of the Bill to the Queensland Parliament and the close of submissions. Our membership expressed significant concern with the limited timelines for consultation and feedback. QASSP held a board meeting, a state council, and several branches during this 13-day window, to gauge stakeholder feedback to prepare this submission. There was however no time to survey the membership or prepare a more detailed submission addressing all changes to the EGPA.

In examining this important updated legislation, QASSP members emphasis the need for policies that enhance overall quality of public education delivered to the students of Queensland. Drawn from the collective expertise of our members, our submission provides practical insights to contribute constructively to the ongoing dialogue surrounding this crucial legislation. We look forward to collaborating with the committee to advance the interests of Queensland's students, families, and educators.

Our submission is grounded in the professional perspectives and practical experiences of public primary school leaders. It is informed by QASSP positions, reports, research, and members awareness of current issues. QASSP is unwavering in its commitment to fostering a high-quality and equitable education system. Our goal is to help shape an education system, so it not only meets rigorous standards but also ensures equity across all public primary schools, cultivating in an inclusive and engaging learning environment for every student.

QASSP Supports:

QASSP members support the following changes to the General Provisions Act 2006:

- protecting students by:

- facilitating proactive and proportionate sharing of information when a student transfers between Queensland schools.
- allowing sharing of personal information to facilitate students accessing approved online services and support digital learning.
- contribute to the good order and management of Queensland state schools by:
 - ensuring a student has access to education pending an enrolment decision.
 - streamlining enrolment transfers between state special schools.
 - implementing a school-based regulatory framework for a state school kindergarten program delivered at a prescribed state school and updating eligibility criteria for a distance education kindergarten learning program.
 - updating provisions related to the operation of Parents and Citizens' Associations
- modernise and improve education services by:
 - enhancing the regulation of home education and streamlining the home education registration process
 - removing the use of gendered language
 - acknowledging wellbeing, inclusion and diversity
- the minor and technical amendments to improve the operation and effectiveness of legislation regulating education in Queensland.

QASSP Unanimously Opposes:

Our membership, through our 45 branches, our State Council made up of our Branch Presidents, Sub-committee Chairs and Board members, voted unanimously to oppose the below recommendations by way of motions.

The QASSP membership oppose the below changes to the act regarding the good order and management of Queensland state schools:

- introducing a new appeal right for accumulated short suspensions.
- introducing student support plans.

Current System Drivers are Undermining a Culture that Promotes Learning

QASSP Members are concerned that the above changes will decrease the school leader's ability to maintain the good order and management of the school. It should be noted that less than one percent of students in their entire seven years of enrolment at a Queensland primary school, ever receive a suspension. Effective behaviour management plans are designed around the principle of positive reinforcement, rewarding students for good behaviour to encourage its recurrence, rather than focusing solely on punishing negative behaviours. In recent years, members have seen our system focus on School Disciplinary Absences as a measure of a school's success regarding culture and engagement, when this is an inappropriate use of this data. QASSP members want a consistent and supportive environment that promotes respectful and responsible behaviour and focusses on the work that is exhibited by the 99 percent of students in our state primary schools, as opposed to the one percent of students who do at times find themselves suspended.

Queensland State School Leaders believe that providing students and parents with the right to appeal every short-term suspension over eleven days accumulated in one calendar year, has numerous unintended consequences. It focuses attention, resources and community attention on these one percent of students, which research indicates is counterproductive to achieving a positive school and system culture. Every school context is different and accumulating suspension days across schools is counterproductive to a differentiated approach to school discipline. Limiting Principal autonomy to apply the most appropriate consequence to a student's behaviour undermines each schools 'Student Code of Conduct' which is collaboratively designed with

community to fit local context. Every suspension issued to a student above 11 days could be the subject an appeal, creating an administrative nightmare for school leaders and regional office staff. Principals and Deputy Principals will be tied up in paperwork in responding to appeals rather than focusing on their core business, of being Instructional leaders.

State Primary School Leaders have reported that for the last 18 months, after suspending a student, supervisors have been phoning them and questioning them about the suspension. The EGPA in the past, has been strengthened to support school leaders suspending students without appeal for up to ten days. This proposed change to the act is seen as a regression of this approach.

Evidence Based Practices are critical to Support High Expectations for Students and Schools

There is no proven research that indicates the Introduction of Student Support Plans in the Act is effective in reducing future suspensions of students. Proponents of this approach provide only anecdotal evidence to support claims this will be effective. Including these measures in the act and not trialling the measures prior, is highly problematic as it enshrines practices without utilising evidence-based research or having first conducted a policy trial. No draft templates or plans have been developed, so there is no understanding of what a student support plan looks like, or the workload involved in providing a student with one.

The concept of a student receiving a suspension is to highlight to the student that the behaviour exhibited is totally unacceptable. The implied nature of the Student Support Plans indicates that the issue being addressed by the suspension is caused by the school or school staff. If a motorist is caught speeding, an infringement notice is given out by police. The responsibility to change behaviour is on the driver, not on the police officer giving the infringement notice. The police are not required to draft up a 'Support Plan' to change the drivers behaviour. It's the behaviour of the student that we are trying to change and yet the plans do not place any responsibility on the student. The plans only place additional workload on school leaders and teachers.

Respect School leaders and their Wellbeing

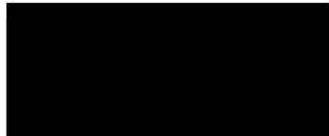
The 2023 Australian Principal Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing Survey highlights for the twelfth straight year, that workload of school leaders has increased. This survey which commenced in 2011 is the longest running survey of this type in the world. Every year 'sheer quantity of work' is consistently the highest stressor for school leaders. With 56% of school leaders indicating they were looking to leave their positions. School Leaders also work on average 55.95 hours a week, significantly more than 'Safe Work Australia' recommendations. These two changes to the legislation, provide substantially more workload to our school leaders without any additional resources for primary school leaders. Primary school leaders in Queensland feel disrespected that these changes have been proposed without any additional resources being provided to them.

Primary school teaching is a highly specialised profession, teachers are required to have knowledge of all learning areas, whilst supporting the social and emotional development of each individual student. These are the critical formation years for students. More needs to be done to ensure that students, teachers, leaders and schools are properly equipped to do this important work and provide the early and sustained intervention that our higher needs students require. Our teachers and leaders need to feel confident that their work is valued by the community. We need to trust the profession and those in the profession chosen to lead schools to make informed decisions that are in the best interests of all students in a school. School leaders expect to be accountable, however should not have to feel that every decision they make, is subject to appeal or require them to do additional paperwork.

Invest in State Primary School Students, Staff and Leaders

State primary schools in Queensland are where children with the most additional and complex developmental and learning needs go to school. Our leaders and teachers are proud to lead such diverse learning institutions. We expect that primary schools be provided with the resources to ensure every Queensland state primary school is a great school to attend and work, which includes giving Queensland schools 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard in 2025. Principals and Deputy Principals in our system take our responsibility seriously to provide safe and supportive environments for our students, staff, and the community. We expect that the updated Education General Provisions Act (EGPA) will provide us with the legislation to deliver such an environment for every Queensland school community. Every Queensland student attending our state primary schools, should feel confident that the leaders of their school are enforcing the 'Student Code of Behaviour' for every student.

Kind regards,



Patrick Murphy
President
Queensland Association of State School Principals
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