

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Queensland Secondary Principals' Association



Submission – Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation

Amendment Bill 2024

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The Queensland Secondary Principals' Association (QSPA) would like to thank the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee of the Queensland Parliament for the opportunity to provide a submission to, *Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*.

QSPA is the professional organisation representing Government secondary Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department. QSPA members are represented in more than 96% of state secondary schools in all parts of the state; metropolitan, regional, rural and remote ranging in size from just over 100 to our largest schools of more than 3000 students. Throughout this submission, where the term 'Principal' is used it should be read as encompassing all secondary school leaders as listed previously.

QSPA does not support the option to provide for appeal rights for suspensions where the cumulative days exceeds 11+ days in a school year. While acknowledging a parent or carers right to appeal, this proposed amendment presents significant challenges for school leaders.

Workload and School resourcing

- Based on the current policy when an appeal is made, Principals provide a vast array of documentation in response to the appeal to suspension. This documentation can vary in levels of detail and complexity, depending on the nature of the suspension. It can also vary from region to region, often dependent on the regional officer requiring the information. This process can be further complicated if relevant people, within and external to the school, are not readily available (e.g. relevant staff member is on sick leave).

- 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. There is continuing and growing expectations on schools to address issues that in the past were the responsibility of parents/carers or other agencies. **Within this context, any additional work required of schools, in this case addressing the requirements of an appeal/s, is not something that QSPA can support.**
- There is an acknowledged staffing shortage in many areas of Queensland. On any given day in secondary schools across the state, there will be Deputy Principals and Principals taking classes because they are under staffed. This isn't a one off, occasional occurrence. In many schools this is happening day after day, week after week. In this context the work of leading the school, and pertinent to this submission, responding to appeals against suspensions, just cannot be undertaken in a timely manner. It will be done after hours or on weekends; this is unacceptable and untenable.
- The Principal has the responsibility as the accountable officer on the school site in both legislation and in practice. Let's be clear, the main role of the principal should be that of teaching and learning. Every other task that takes attention away from this reduces the impact the leadership of the Principal has on quality teaching and learning. Ultimately any appeal will need the attention and focus of the Principal. It stands to reason that appeals that are complex will require even more time, energy and resources from the Principal and school.

Wellbeing

The 2023 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey undertaken by the ACU Institute for Positive Psychology in Education states, *"Every year, 'sheer quantity of work' is consistently the highest stressor for school leaders. Overwhelmed school leaders need autonomy, resources and open communication to combat stress and lead effectively."*

- Increasing the right of parents to appeal a short-term suspension adds to the 'sheer quantity of work' currently experienced by school leaders.
- The trust in Principals' ability to make informed and considered decisions in the best interest of their school community could be undermined, even in perception.
- Enabling more options for appeal provides exposure to more abuse, harassment, vexatious allegations and violence by parents and carers.
- Given the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy DOE (Department of Education) has introduced, adjusting any aspect of procedures pertaining to maintaining good order and discipline in schools has the potential to undermine the safety of schools as workplaces.
- The "Principal Guidelines Student Discipline" document outlines a comprehensive step-by-step process to assist Principals with decision-making in relation to suspensions. The documents states, "The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 explicitly makes Principals responsible for controlling and regulating student discipline in the school. Principals are thus afforded a number of powers under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 to support them to discharge this important responsibility, including the authority to decide to suspend, exclude or cancel the enrolment of a student at the school. These disciplinary consequences are 'last resort' options for Principals when other strategies to assist students to understand and respond appropriately to the behavioural expectations have failed."
- Questioning of or appealing against Principal decisions/authority across an array of school operations has increased significantly in recent years. Whether it be a parent unhappy about a teacher their child has or how a sporting carnival is organised; a growing number of parents now more readily use and abuse above and beyond their justified right to ask questions.

Enabling yet another layer of appeal to a Principal's decision making is a further step towards the erosion of trust in Principals and their ability to lead the school.

- Empowering school leaders with decision-making autonomy and dedicated resources to alleviate unnecessary tasks is a crucial factor in enhancing principal wellbeing.

QSPA does not support Amending section 283(3) to clarify that notice in the approved form must be issued within one school day of the student being told of their suspension (1-10, 11-20 and charge related suspensions).

- QSPA acknowledges that notice of a suspension should be made as soon as possible. This has benefits for the school and the student. Schools are complex environments. Constant and continuing under-resourcing of schools means that more than often staff are overwhelmed with the range of tasks requiring their attention and completion.
- No two days are the same in schools. A one-day turnaround is unrealistic in fast paced, unpredictable school environments. Staff often report having their attention and focus taken from a task with the arrival of a new 'more urgent' task on multiple occasions through each day.
- Whilst QSPA does not support the notification to be issued within the one-day timeline, we would support a two-school day timeline for suspension notifications to be issued.

QSPA is appreciative of the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry and looks forward to the findings.



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