

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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SUBMISSION: EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) ACT CHANGES

QTU MEMBERS – NANANGO STATE HIGH SCHOOL

Members of Nanango State High School met on Tuesday 12 March 2024 to discuss the proposed amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006. Our submission is to express concerns about the impact of the proposed changes to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, particularly in 2 areas:

- Clause 79 ss 285, 286 – Submission against suspension
- Clause 94 Insertion of new ch 12, pt 3, div 8A 321 Policy about student support plans

Clause 79 – Submission against suspension

The members of Nanango State High School are firmly opposed to the addition of a right of appeal against short suspensions as an amendment to the Act. Our concerns are outlined below.

QTU members at Nanango State High School have a number of concerns about the impact of the addition of a right of appeal against short suspensions.

Members are concerned that the appeals process will cause increased workload impacts on all members to provide additional evidence supporting the school decision. School leaders have a particular concern regarding this workload increase. With regard to the nature of short suspensions, this will require a rapid prioritisation of appeals over the other work of principals, creating a psychosocial safety hazard in their role. It also takes principals away from the important work of supporting students and teachers, thus creating an exponential effect of increasing psychosocial hazards right across the school community.

There is also a significant question as to why Student Code of Conduct documents are required to outline behaviours and consequences, if schools are not to be permitted to enact those consequences without being questioned. The proposed amendment may lead to overly prescriptive policies at the school level in an attempt to cover all possible scenarios that may result in suspension. Members are concerned that behaviours that do not fall neatly into possible categories, but still result in harm to others may not be actioned with a consequence that reflects their severity to reduce the possibility of appeal.

There also exists a serious concern that the persons charged with determining the outcome of the appeal have no knowledge of the school context, and/or the context surrounding the incident or behaviours leading to the suspension and the resultant impact of those behaviours. These factors are exceptionally difficult to judge from an official document such as a OneSchool behaviour record. Many members have experienced seriously intimidating behaviour from students, in ways that require a consequence, but are difficult to capture in a OneSchool report. Comments that indicate a student is aware of where a teacher lives for example, may not appear in a behaviour incident referral to be serious, but in the context of a small town where many teachers are neighbours with their students, and where the school is aware of criminal behaviour on the part of members of the household, this is cause for concern.

A related concern to the above is that suspensions enacted by previous schools will count towards the total days that trigger a right to appeal. Schools have very different contexts, and it is the belief of members at Nanango State High School that students should have a fresh start. By including a previous history, even to provide a positive right for that student, ensures that this fresh start is not achievable. It also places schools in a position where they are now impacted by decisions made by different leaders in a very different context, that may not have been made in their own context.

The proposed amendment in Subsection 285 Clauses 2-3 (pp 73-74) is of concern. The seemingly arbitrary figure of 11 days will severely limit the application of disciplinary consequences without actually addressing the root issues resulting in the behaviour. While the Department has been clear that the power of a principal to suspend has not been changed, the reality is that appeals result in

increased workload for school leaders and the overturning of suspensions will result in a lack of trust between schools and parents.

Members are concerned about the positioning of suspension as a causal factor in more serious behaviour, or a child's contact with the Youth Justice system. It is the view of members at Nanango State High School that suspension is a symptom, not a cause of a greater problem that may be beyond the capacity of the school to resolve. Particularly in rural areas like our own, with limited access to support services or alternative settings, the burden of supporting families often falls to the school. We are already doing more than required to try to prevent these outcomes.

The members at Nanango State High School are strongly opposed to the proposed amendment because of the lack of trust it demonstrates in school leaders and their decisions. It furthermore undermines the credibility of the school in the broader community by suggesting that school leaders are seeking to suspend students unnecessarily. Members are also concerned that students whose behaviour poses a risk to their safety and wellbeing, and the safety and wellbeing of other students will remain in their classroom with no consequences should they have already accumulated 11 days suspension, if an appeal occurs or is successful.

Clause 94 Insertion of new ch 12, pt 3, div 8A 321 Policy about student support plans

The proposed introduction of Student Support Plans for students in 3 identified cohorts (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Students with Disability and Prep students) is a cause for significant concern among members. Members are aware that students in these three groups are often overrepresented, however, resoundingly agree that this does not tell the full picture. Often students have additional complexities that are beyond the capacity of schools to ameliorate. The workload imposed, the lack of appropriate resourcing and the undue accountability being placed on school leaders and teachers with seemingly no accountability on students or parents/caregivers are some of the key reasons members do not support this proposed amendment. Another issue is that essentially, this constitutes a duplication of workload in many cases.

Workload is ever increasing in schools, with seemingly nothing being taken from the list of responsibilities to make room for new expectations or requirements. This proposal is no different. The time required from school leaders to organise and attend meetings, write plans, communicate plans and review plans is a significant workload issue when school leaders are working on average more than 55 hours per week already. Additionally, teacher workloads will increase with the additional planning required to implement these plans and provide evidence for reviews.

In addition, many of the issues that result in student behaviour that requires a suspension for the safety and wellbeing of the school community, and/or the good order and management of the school are beyond the ability of school resources to address. In many cases, they require therapeutic or family interventions, which is beyond the scope or capacity of the school. Schools need more resources and more intergovernmental agency support from Queensland Health, Youth Justice, Child Safety, Child and Youth Mental Health, and more. However, the legislation simply places responsibility for managing behaviour squarely on the shoulders of schools and teachers, with no additional support.

While there is significant accountability placed on school leaders and teachers to support students in order to prevent behaviour, there is no accountability on students and/or parents/carers with regard to accessing supports, or changing behaviour. There is also no information on what options school leaders have when support plans are not followed by students, and then a suspension is required in order to protect the school community from harm. Any policy regarding support plans must include elements of accountability for the student to utilise the supports provided and empower principals to implement consequences when students do not access these supports, or continue to behave in ways that negatively impact on the school community.

The final issue is the duplication of workload that this proposed amendment represents. Schools already have in place multiple interventions, and processes to identify students requiring support. This is particularly the case for students with disability, who are already required to have Personalised

Learning Plans in place that document their disability, and adjustments made to support students. These plans can include behaviours that are a manifestation of the student's disability.

Schools already conduct Functional Behaviour Assessments, implement Individual Behaviour Support Plans, Behaviour Risk Assessments, Crisis/Escalation Plans, Discipline Improvement Plans, Part-Time Educational Plans, and enact a multiplicity of other support interventions, all of which are documented in OneSchool, and regularly reviewed and updated. Schools already have robust systems in place to identify students who require one or more of the above plans or interventions. What will these Student Support Plans accomplish that the multiplicity of other supports detailed above will not? Additionally, what additional resourcing is being provided to schools to support the implementation of these plans?

QTU members at Nanango State High School have been clear that they oppose these amendments, and will continue to do so until appropriate resourcing is provided to support schools and teachers. They are in agreement that these amendments will unnecessarily increase workload for all school community members, negatively impact the capacity of principals and school leaders to keep their schools and workplaces safe, and ultimately drive people from considering teaching as a profession or drive experienced leaders and teachers to leave the profession, at a time when attraction and retention is crucial to the future of Queensland public schools.



Jade Wager

QTU Representative, on behalf of QTU members at Nanango State High School.