



GYMPIE WEST STATE SCHOOL

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Only the best for Gympie West...

10 September 2013

Chair, Education & Innovation Committee
Mrs Rosemary Menkens

Dear Mrs Menkens

My name is Bob Cole. I am the Principal of Gympie West State School in Wide Bay, Queensland. I have an intense interest in your current 'Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Bill'.

As a State School Principal, I do understand and support the move to strengthen powers relating to suspension, exclusion and so on. My concern, at least for primary schools however, is that the Bill will be dealing only with what happens after students have grossly breached school disciplinary boundaries. Much more important, in my view is, the set of tools/resources available to schools to prevent such breaches from occurring in the first place.

The following are sad facts in my humble opinion:

- Behaviour management is the single biggest problem in most, if not all primary schools/classrooms.
- Primary schools, even large ones, have no staff allocated to manage this aspect of school life. It is left to Teachers, Principals and others to fit it in around teaching and learning and everything else.
- You get what you pay for! If DETE is not prepared to pay for staff to assist in this area, every other area (learning, public opinion of state schools, market share, etc.) will also suffer.

I have resolved this issue in my current school, but in a way that is not transferrable to other schools without hiring of additional staff. By effectively managing other programs in my school, I have been able to free up one teacher (out of my 27) to become our Behaviour Management specialist. This BM Teacher plays a pivotal role in the whole-school student management process we refer to as our 'Responsible Thinking Process' or RTP. Details of the process can be found at www.responsiblethinking.com.

The RTP has been in place here for 12 years now and I feel confident that:

- Gympie West has the most consistent and well managed classrooms of any school I have ever been in;
- Our RTP system has 100% community support (in a school of over 550 students);
- Teachers and students feel well supported on a daily basis as they are able to spend their classroom time on teaching and learning rather than constantly interrupted due to ongoing behavioural issues;
- The RTP teaches self-discipline rather than an 'authority-driven' model; and best of all...
- **Gympie West's academic exit results have skyrocketed since the introduction of the RTP took the majority of the distractions to learning out of the classroom. They have been at or around national averages for many years now.**

The reality is however, that in a school of this size, a full-time person dedicated to Behaviour Management support for teachers is the only way forward. Well gone are the days when every parent backed up the teacher or the Principal as a matter of course. Much of my time is taken up dealing with issues relating to poor parenting practices and issues of family dysfunctionality. In many of these cases, I feel it is inappropriate for a primary school student to pay the penalty for the sins of his parents. These young people need supportive systems, not big sticks.

You get what you pay for – if we keep trying to tackle this issue with pieces of paper because it is the cheapest solution, our schools will pay a much bigger price in the long run. The best solution is to supply staff to schools (not regions) for behaviour management purposes and let the schools decide how to use them.

I wish your committee well in your deliberations.

Yours faithfully

Bob Cole
PRINCIPAL