

**Submission to Education and Innovation Committee**

**Re: Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Bill 2013**

9<sup>th</sup> September, 2013

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Please delete my name and address from this document prior to publication on the website.

I work in a complex high school in a rural town. The school has experienced and continues to experience disciplinary issues over the years. In many cases, issues tend to stem from social/family issues.

It is important that Principals do have a considerable degree of autonomy in making decisions to exclude certain students, for the good of the majority of other students at a school. Principals already have been given more autonomy in this area than in recent years, with such decisions able to be made at school level for particular reasons eg for long term documented refusal to participate in the course of study or for extreme situations.

In saying this however, Education Queensland and also the Government of the day is, I believe morally charged with a duty of care to the young people in our schools. This does extend to all young people.

Unfortunately, if the answer to all major difficulties is simply exclusion from school, this does not address the very real needs of some students.

I am not saying necessarily that schools can easily address those needs either. In the current school situation it can be very difficult to address such needs. Major psychological issues, including depression, suicide attempts or ideation, drug use, living in families where drug use is common, living in families where domestic violence, child abuse, hunger and so on is common are all issues that can make it not only difficult for the young people in those situations to engage with learning in school, but very difficult for schools to work on the full range of issues for the students concerned, and provide a meaningful education at the same time.

Student support services, such as school nurses, youth workers, chaplains, indigenous support workers and so on tend to be stretched to the limit in terms of their case loads. Potential and proposed cutbacks will make the situation even more dire for those students in need.

Teachers themselves find that with the current teacher:student ratios and much more complex needs amongst the student cohorts in our classrooms, it is increasingly difficult to address such needs as well as we would desire.

For some students the issues are so large that they rarely attend school anyway, and it becomes a vicious cycle. On the few occasions they attend, they find school difficult and they are unable to cope. So they attend less. So then it becomes ever more difficult to engage next time.

I am aware that in a few places, there exists alternative education centres, where very small ratios of students to teachers exist, and tailored programs are available. Timetables are adjusted to suit what the student is capable of working with.

However, many towns are not served by such centres. While Principals rightly should have some power over suspensions, it is also important that students whose behaviour is problematic for very real reasons are not left stranded when it comes to obtaining necessary and vital education.

Extending such centres to many more towns in regional Queensland is a necessary adjunct to ensuring that schools are a place of true learning for other students enrolled at the school. Without education, the problems of juvenile petty crime will increase, and the costs to the state will subsequently be borne by the Police and Justice systems, and possibly juvenile detention centres and jails in the future.

The discussion about suspensions and the powers of Principals cannot be had without a discussion about how to address the very real needs of troubled students whose misbehaviour stems from very real, deep-seated social issues.

I hope that the committee is able to take this into the scope of this issue.

Yours sincerely

