

Queensland Secondary Principals' Association

*Affiliated with the Australian Secondary Principals' Association*

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Queensland Secondary Principals' Association

*"Leaders in Education"*

## **Submission to Education and Innovation Committee**

### **Re: Inquiry into Strengthening Discipline in State Schools - Amendment Bill 2013**

Dear Committee members

#### **Introduction**

The Queensland Secondary Principals' Association (QSPA) is the peak body representing Secondary Principals and Deputy Principals in government schools across the state. Government schools, by far, provide educational services to the largest number of secondary aged students. The knowledge and experience of Principals and Deputy Principals in the secondary sector is vital in gaining a full appreciation for the measures and approaches required to ensure good order and management in our schools.

#### **Background**

Since the announcement of the Queensland governments education reform plan, April 2013, Great teachers = Great results, members of QSPA have been consulted regarding our knowledge, experience, views and beliefs on how disciplinary processes could be strengthened in schools. Discussions have been held regarding possible changes to the Education Act 2006, identified by departmental officers, as well as recommendations from members of our association. Furthermore, consultations have occurred relating to processes and procedures associated with the implementation of these changes and how they might be enacted by Principals. We have valued the opportunity to be involved in this process as any changes impact on our role and the way we lead our schools.

#### **Issues**

- Current processes and procedures are overly prescriptive and have created additional workload for Principals and staff in schools.
- The use of detentions as part of an overall discipline strategy is currently very restrictive.
- Grounds for suspension in the current Act are limited in some situations.
- Respect for the position of Principal and that officer's authority to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment has diminished over time.
- Unsubstantiated appeals by some parents consume excessive time of Principals and other staff in schools.
- Current perceptions by some students that their individual rights are greater than those in authority in the school community.

Principals are very aware of the accountabilities and responsibilities that are part of their leadership position in a school and in society in general. With experience in the teaching profession and schools prior to taking on the role of Principal, decisions regarding the discipline of students are not taken lightly. Any decision to discipline a student, suspend, exclude or cancel an enrolment is viewed in light of the individual's education, their fellow students' learning, safety, and in the best interest of all in the school community. Principals prefer to place their focus on student learning and would desire to never suspend, exclude or cancel a student's enrolment. Anything that can assist Principals in lowering the number of disciplinary absences would be welcomed.

**Preferred Future**

1. That the changes to the Education Act as recommended in the amendment bill before this committee be supported in their current form.
2. That the intent of the changes to the Act strengthening the authority of the Principal in dealing with student behaviour be supported.
3. That departmental policies and procedures are used to give guidance to Principals and that these procedures not form part of the Act.
4. That procedural fairness and natural justice be ensured for all concerned.
5. That Principals be given flexibility when dealing with individual students and the circumstances that surround each incident or situation.
6. That the maximum length of short term suspensions be increased as recommended.
7. That further provision be made for alternative sites to provide intensive behaviour support for high risk students.



Norm Fuller  
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