




Speech By
Hon. John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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EDUCATION (STRENGTHENING DISCIPLINE IN STATE SCHOOLS) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. JH LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Minister for Education, Training and Employment) (11.07 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I would like to thank the Education and Innovation Committee for its detailed consideration of the Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Bill 2013. I believe it is fair to say the bill has sparked interest across the community. This is testament to the importance education has to Queenslanders. I appreciate the efforts of the committee in navigating the views of the community in its examination of the bill. I would also like at this time to acknowledge the contribution of those who have made submissions on this bill to the committee.

I am aware that before preparing its report the Education and Innovation Committee received a briefing from officers of my department, considered written submissions from numerous stakeholders and held a public hearing inviting views from selected stakeholders. The committee tabled its report on 9 October 2013, making eight recommendations in relation to the bill. I am pleased to note the committee was supportive of the bill and recommended that it be passed.

Recommendation 2 is that I ensure there are complaint mechanisms in place for parties who are concerned with the use of the expanded powers afforded to principals under the bill. In response, I advise that the department already provides a complaint system about school operations. Fact sheets prepared to inform parents and students about these reforms will also mention the availability of these processes.

Recommendation 3 is that adequate guidance be provided to state school principals in relation to exercising their powers to suspend or exclude a student on the basis of criminal behaviour. I confirm that guidance will be provided to principals through departmental procedures. Information and training on the new reforms will be available for principals and key school staff.

Recommendation 4 is that the bill be amended to recognise that suspension and exclusion are discipline options of last resort. With respect to the committee, this recommendation is not supported. An amendment of this type would constrain the autonomy and responsiveness of principals, which lies at the heart of these reforms. Furthermore, this amendment could also have a counterproductive effect and potentially lead to perverse outcomes. For example, this approach may limit a principal from applying a suspension or exclusion option warranted in the circumstances, such as a one-off event of such magnitude that no other discipline option is suitable. It is, of course, necessary for principals to be able to respond to these types of situations without having to first exhaust all early-intervention strategies. It is absolutely vital that our principals have the flexibility to deal with all

circumstances that arise. Nonetheless, the principle that suspension and exclusion are discipline options of last resort will be clearly communicated to state school principals. This will be made clear in the departmental procedure.

The Newman government trusts state school principals to make appropriate and fair discipline decisions and to use suspensions and exclusions in situations they consider appropriate. However, with expanded grounds for state school principals come higher expectations of how they manage issues within their community. It is important to note that the department is committed to continued monitoring of the use of suspension and exclusion powers. All state schools will also undergo a discipline audit over the coming year from an experienced school principal. The discipline audits will assist schools to benchmark their progress in strengthening discipline and provide an independent view of what areas they could further strengthen.

At recommendation 5 the committee seeks my confirmation that policy and procedure documents relevant to the bill will provide for early-intervention strategies, positive behaviour management strategies and evidence based practice. This recommendation is supported. Positive behaviour management strategies and evidence based practice underpin the department's policy and procedures in this area and outline the expectations of principals to implement such strategies.

Recommendation 6 is that information about the number of excluded students who receive education through alternative education centres be published quarterly. This publication will not occur for practical reasons. The department does not have access to student-level enrolment details from non-state schools or non-government organisations. Regional case managers will continue to support excluded students and monitor their re-engagement with training or education. However, to report on the educational placements of all excluded students would require manual analysis of each regional case manager's records. This additional administrative burden will divert case managers' attention away from their key role in supporting disenfranchised students.

Recommendation 7 also recommends quarterly publication of suspension and exclusion data sorted by various identifiers, such as gender, Indigenous status, children and young people with a disability, and children and young people in the child protection system. Departmental data on school disciplinary absences is currently published each school semester, which is approximately every six months. At present, the published data is provided by region and by school and includes the Indigenous status of students who received a student disciplinary absence. Given these existing arrangements, a move to quarterly reporting is not warranted. The department will engage in careful consideration, and consultation with stakeholders, as to what other identifiers can safely be included in the published data without risk of identifying individual students.

Recommendation 8 requests that the department actively communicate changes to policy and procedures to key stakeholders. The department will use various strategies to advise of changes to discipline policy and procedures, such as email alerts, departmental newsletters, departmental websites, principals association newsletters, P&C Queensland's newsletters and education publications. In addition, as I have mentioned, fact sheets about disciplinary consequences will be available for parents, students and school staff to traverse the system.

I welcome the committee's endorsement of the alternative and early disciplinary strategies of community service interventions, discipline improvement plans and detention on non-school days. The committee has recognised the benefit of providing principals with additional means of dealing with student misbehaviour. It is also pleasing that the committee recognised that the bill removes unnecessary red tape but that this is not at the expense of good disciplinary policy.

Let me again express my gratitude to the committee for their timely review of the bill. I now table the government's response to the committee's report.

Tabled paper: Education and Innovation Committee: Report No. 24—Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Bill 2013, government response [\[3944\]](#).

In closing, this bill originates from our pledge to enhance discipline powers across the state schooling system as contained in the Newman government's education reform plan announced in April 2013, Great Teachers = Great Results. This is achieved by the bill, as it both affirms and bolsters a state school principal's authority as to matters of student discipline in their school. It is another example of us getting the job done. I commend this bill to the House.