



Every Student Succeeding

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Committee Secretary Senate Education
and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator

Senate Inquiry into School Refusal

I am writing regarding the senate inquiry into school refusal. I am the foundation Principal of Queensland Pathways State College (QPSC), which was formally established in 2018. We are a specific purpose State High School supporting vulnerable students, aged 15 to 18, at risk of disengaging from mainstream schooling in their senior years. Many of our students would fall into the category of 'school refusal' prior to enrolment at QPSC.

We are a small school with 6 campuses across Queensland, namely Brisbane, Ipswich and Townsville. QPSC has been built on the foundations of BELIEF, RESPECT, UNITY and STUDENT SUCCESS which are our college values. Each campus enrolls approximately 30-40 students, with a total enrolment across the college of 200 students. We offer a 12-month, senior transitions program and further develop student's literacy, numeracy and workplace skills. We are also a registered training organisation (RTO) with 7 qualifications of scope.

Our curriculum is complemented with external qualifications in areas of student interest, utilising school-based apprenticeships, work experience, Vet in Schools (VETiS) and TAFE courses. Our program includes transition support at the completion to ensure all students can exit to further learning or employment and link them to support services (e.g., health, employment, disability) if required.

We have developed our own, evidence-based wellbeing program, to address student's barriers to attending school. Our topics include (but not limited to): locus of control, peer connection, cooperation, empathy and self-worth. Our curriculum has First Nations content throughout activities and our teaching practice acknowledges their ways of learning. We partner with organisations such as The Healing Foundation, to ensure all staff are confident in their teaching capabilities and understanding of our First Nations students and barriers they have faced.

Enrolment at QPSC is by referral only and students must demonstrate they face multiple and complex barriers to education. Referrals come from other state high schools, however, various government

organisations (Child Safety, Youth Justice, Queensland Health) and other non-government organisations (resi-care, private clinicians, private schools, special assistance schools) do make referrals.

Students attending QPSC are able to work towards achieving their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) but not ATAR. For students wishing to pursue university entrance post school, they enrol in various tertiary preparation programs delivered by universities on exit from QPSC.

Our student self-disclosed data at enrolment, suggests disengaged students are challenged by multiple complex barriers to education, which include mental health presentations (65%), trauma (34%), transient families (23%), unstable housing (9%), gender identity (14%), bullying experiences (16%) and low school attendance (42%). Our Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) for students with a disability, classified 80% of our students in 2022 with a disability. The breakdown was 70% social/emotional, 10% cognitive, with required adjustment levels of 43% at supplementary and 24% substantial.

We have a capped enrolment, limited by the number of campuses. We are state funded, not federally like other Special Assistance Schools. Our enrolment process ensures that students can be referred to QPSC at any time throughout the year and our curriculum delivery is student centred. This allows students to progress at their individual pace, and they are not disadvantaged if they need to take time off for various reasons due to their complex challenges.

Our partnerships contribute to the success of the college. We have formal agreements with Youth Justice, Queensland Health and Queensland Police, where we all agree we have a shared responsibility to ensure student success. For example, when students require ongoing educational support while accessing health facilities or youth detention, we work alongside these organisations so our teachers can still make contact and deliver our curriculum.

Supporting a cohort of vulnerable students requires a different staffing allocation compared to mainstream schools. For each campus we have a fulltime Head of Department, 0.5 Guidance Officer, 2 teaching staff and 0.5 teacher aide. We also have a student support officer across campuses to assist students when they need help with housing, transport or gaining independence. In addition, we have additional executive team members that specialise in teaching and learning and health and wellbeing. We also ensure our staff have time to manage their student case management workload and timetable afternoon debrief to support staff wellbeing.

The curriculum at QPSC is delivered through a positive teaching approach, which reflects a philosophy that is respectful, trusting and calm. All staff at QPSC are trained in Trauma Informed Practices, Restorative Justice, Youth Mental Health First Aid and hold a Certificate 4 in Training and Assessing. We have primary, secondary and special education trained teachers to support the various needs of our students. This minimum skillset allows our experienced staff to support students and collaboratively develop a student's individual learning plan, ensuring student voice is heard and supported.

Parent/carer connection is established when students enrol at QPSC. Many parents share feelings of hopelessness, distress or disconnect from their child. Rebuilding and supporting parents to engage in their young persons educational journey is part of the outreach support we give to students and their families. We've established strength-based approaches to communication and connection. Celebrating success with parents and inviting them to come in see, connect and be part of their child's learning journey.

By utilising a highly effective, individual case management approach, that supports a young person's wellbeing and education, we are able to achieve high quality outcomes for our students which is evident in our data.

In 2022, 72% of students that graduated our program received a QCE. On average, we were able to improve a student's attendance rate by 40%. We have balanced wellbeing and curriculum outcomes to ensure educational success.

In speaking with our students, on the difficulties of schooling, they share the following stories. When managing their mental health and attending full-time school, they acknowledge their previous schools would try to assist, by reducing study loads and extending assessment. However, teaching and learning continues with their peers while they're away and the stress and anxiety of missing content, catching up and thinking about what's ahead, makes it difficult for them to continue. Others refer to the complexities of unable housing, being a young carer or financial stress and trying to turn up to school regularly, while working and in full uniform became too challenging, even with the support they were given.

QPSC strongly believes that maintaining enrolment in a mainstream school is the best option for students. Schools are equipped with many specialists and have additional programs and experiences that a school such as ours can't offer. However, many students face barriers (as listed above), that prevent them from engaging in mainstream schools to complete their education. Therefore, providing options to these students so they can continue their education, is imperative for their lifelong success and connection to society. QPSC is a piece of the puzzle when it comes to alternative models to education. There is no one silver bullet which is why there is strength in the diversity of educational pathways for students.

I hope by giving the committee insight into our experience and success as a college, this may help structure solutions to 'school refusal' and support students to return to an educational model that supports their individual needs.

If you would like to discuss any of these points further, please contact me directly by email or through the school on

Kind regards

Kristie de Brenni
Principal