

IEUA-QNT SUBMISSION

20 February 2024

Submission: Consultation Draft – *Putting Queensland Kids First Plan*

The Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory Branch (IEUA-QNT) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Consultation Draft of the Queensland Government’s *Putting Queensland Kids First* plan [1].

About IEUA-QNT

IEUA-QNT represents ~16,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions in Queensland and the Northern Territory and consistently engages in industrial and education debate at both state and national levels through its Education and Industrial Committees and through its national counterpart, the Independent Education Union of Australia, which receives input from teachers in all States and Territories.

Our members work in kindergartens, schools and post-secondary institutions and work with students from a wide variety of backgrounds, in a wide variety of sociocultural contexts.

Submission Points

1. Our union’s interest in the Consultation Draft of the *Putting Queensland Kids First* plan derives from reports from our members that:
 - a. The number of students with complex needs, and at risk of disengaging from the education system, is increasing and;
 - b. Teachers are increasingly required to modify learning programs and provide complex support for students with complex needs, without access to relevant professional training and even where a teacher is not the most appropriate person to provide the supports required.
 - c. Engagement of support staff and access to allied health practitioners who can support the work of teachers, is constrained by the extent to which schools are resourced to provide stable, ongoing employment which is itself dependent on stable, ongoing funding.
2. These anecdotal reports are supported by data showing that classroom disruptions are an increasing problem in Australian schools [2-4] and that numbers of students withdrawing from the schooling system to engage in homeschooling are rising [5].
3. As acknowledged in the Consultation Draft of the *Putting Queensland Kids First Plan*, the most socially and economically effective means of preventing disengagement is to intervene and provide support in early childhood. We commend the Queensland Government for

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recognising this and articulating a clear plan to prioritise early intervention, including the parallel commitment to provide free kindergarten for all four year old children [6, 7].

4. We also commend the Government for committing to work collaboratively with communities in order to develop place-based responses that are grounded in unique and situated community needs, particularly for First Nations communities.
5. While we commend the Government for recognising the importance of early childhood development and experiences in ensuring that all children get the best possible start, and articulating a clear and sound set of principles that underpin its plan, we would offer additional commentary related to the necessity of support for students who have either not been picked up at an earlier point, or whose challenges emerge later in life.
6. We note that the Queensland Government has made a significant investment in provision of alternative education centres for students who would otherwise attend state schools [8].
7. The rise in enrolments in special assistance schools (Table 1) is an indication that the non-government sector also plays an important role in supporting at-risk students.
8. Further, while the needs of older students can, on occasion, be met through transfer from mainstream schooling to special assistance schools with lower student-teacher ratios and a variety of allied health/support staff, this is not an option for many students.
9. There is still a clear and urgent need to provide better support in mainstream school settings. Failure to resource those schools adequately and appropriately will exacerbate social segregation.
10. In our submissions responding to recent reform of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* [9], we have made the point that the concept of “wellbeing” as a pre-requisite for meaningful engagement with schooling and learning is complex.

Table 1: Growth of (Non-Government) Special Assistance Schools in Queensland 2019-2023

Where no data is publicly available, cells have been left blank.

Year	Number of accredited special assistance schools	Number of mainstream schools accredited as special assistance sites	Total schools offering special assistance at one or more sites	% of all non-state school domestic enrolments	Source
2023	42	2	44	2.00	[10]
2022	42	2	44	1.70	[11]
2021				1.40	[11]
2020	37	2	39	1.24	[12]
2019				1.13	[12]

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11. While we recognize that attention to wellbeing is an essential element of a contemporary education system, the system itself is not adequately resourced to provide students with the various supports required (which may include one or a combination of diverse services such as counselling, occupational therapy, mental health support, housing support etc).
12. We acknowledge the recent budget commitment to employment of wellbeing support staff in schools[13], but caution that changes to what is expected of education institutions (including early childhood, primary, secondary and post-secondary settings) must not create unrealistic expectations about the level of support that early learning centres, kindergartens, schools, teachers and school leaders can provide.
13. Nonetheless, there is a clear need to fund and deliver interventions at later stages of development and schools remain an important point of connection/referral to other support.
14. We are also concerned that there is insufficient detail regarding how services for at risk children and young people will be maintained for the extended period required to overturn what are often intergenerational patterns of disengagement and disadvantage.
15. We would, therefore, ask what steps government might take to ensure that the funding and resourcing of the necessary supports continues into the future, particularly if there is a change in Government and/or Government's willingness to recognise the broader systemic factors that contribute to, and compound, early disadvantage?

Concluding Comments

IEUA-QNT thanks the Queensland Government for the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Consultation Draft of the *Putting Queensland Kids First* Plan.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage in further discussion, particularly in relation to how the intention of supporting all children and young people to achieve their full potential can be supported in non-government schools. We would commence this discussion by indicating that, while the principles underlying the *Putting Queensland Kids First* Plan are sound, they are insufficient in that they do not address the core challenge of ensuring stable, long-term funding and resourcing.

Kind regards,



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Branch Secretary
Independent Education Union of Australia -Queensland and Northern Territory Branch
Tuesday 20 February 2024

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References

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