

**To:**

**Mr James Sloman, Principal Teacher, Mansfield State High School,**

**Ms Hamilton, Year 9 Deputy Principal, Mansfield State High School,**

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**Mr Chris Rider, Education Queensland, Metropolitan Region,**

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**Hon John-Paul Langbroek MP, Queensland Education Minister,**

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**Ms Tanya Chilcott, Schools reporter, Queensland Newspapers,**

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**Ms Marissa Calligeros, Reporter, [m.calligeros@fairfaxmedia.com.au](mailto:m.calligeros@fairfaxmedia.com.au)**

**Re: Two-day suspension for a having a mobile phone in a school bag- 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

I am disappointed at the treatment my son, Marcus Brown received regarding the incident resulting in a 2-day suspension; disappointed more than words can adequately express.

**Concerning the details of the suspension;** the phone was powered off but appears to have turned itself on due to a "Valentines Day" message alarm sent by Telstra. I have since confirmed this older type of phone does turn itself on when calendar events arise. I cannot be sure it will not do it again.

What I find especially disconcerting is that his school bag was taken to the office without Marcus's knowledge. He spent most of the lunch period looking for it, believing someone had taken it by mistake. Marcus approached the office toward the end of the lunch period to determine if his bag had been handed in there. At that time he was instructed to see Ms Hamilton. Marcus was late for his next lesson, and had little time to completely eat his lunch. The actions of the school in this concern me more than the phone issue, as Marcus – like myself – are prone to severe headaches when stressed and blood sugar levels are low. There was additional stress of locating a school bag that had been taken by a teacher without his knowledge or consent.

I agree Marcus was not in compliance with the school's policy that the phones are to handed in to the resources centre before school and collected after school. I believe the school has not the resources or the capacity to comply with this requirement in an efficient, timely or secure manner. Considering there more than 1800 students at the school, and, given trends in the uptake of technology in this age group, it appears reasonable to assume that a large proportion of them have mobile phones. As a first offence perhaps a confiscation or detention would have been more appropriate than a 2-day suspension.

I understand the school's intention to prevent students using their phones while at school and the possibility of theft however, there is no process to ensure that students have indeed retrieved the correct phone from the cardboard box/es the students are expected to leave their devices in each morning. The practice of dropping off the phone and then lining up to retrieve it out of a box has resulted in delays significant enough for Marcus to miss buses home and to be late for practice and rehearsals for the bands and orchestras he participates in. Furthermore, Marcus is frequently at practice or rehearsals before the school resources centre opens and closes (3 days before and after school 1 day a week). The additional time required to take the phone to the resources centre has made him late for class and music rehearsals on more than one occasion.

This policy is no longer practical and is most certainly out-dated. Provisions need to be made that do not penalise students with complex timetabling needs such as Marcus's and to enforce this policy the school must provide a system that can be complied with easily.

To be able to communicate with us if there is a transport or other problem is the primary reason he has a mobile phone, and we consider this a safety issue and not an amusement nor an indulgence, neither does he use the 'phone during school hours, nor is it upon his person during school hours, neither do his parents condone or tolerate trivial or unnecessary use of mobile phones at any other time.

I could understand a period of confiscation or detention for actual use of the phone. However, in this case the phone was in his bag, far enough away from the classroom to not be heard when the phone turned itself on and sounded an alarm. That this has resulted in a suspension, appears a remarkably excessive response - one could say a terrible overreaction.

#### **Regarding the use of suspension from school for having a phone in his bag:**

The Education Queensland Code of School Behaviour for Queensland schools (refer to <http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/pdfs/code-school-behaviour-a4.pdf>) contains the following statements:

(I have added the bold face emphasises phrases particularly pertinent to this issue):

*The Code of School Behaviour defines the responsibilities that all members of the school community are expected to uphold and recognises the significance of appropriate and meaningful relationships.*

*It outlines a consistent standard of behaviour for all state school communities in Queensland, inclusive of students, staff and parents. The Code has been developed to deliver the best possible outcomes for students, recognising the close relationship between learning, achievement and behaviour.*

#### **School communities will use The Code as a basis for providing:**

- **positive support** to promote high standards of achievement and behaviour
- **clearly articulated responses and consequences** for inappropriate behaviour.

And also

### *Consequences for Unacceptable Student Behaviour*

*Student behaviour that does not comply with the expected standards is not acceptable. The Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students will set out the range and level of responses and consequences for student behaviour that is not consistent with these standards.*

*Consequences are to be applied to:*

- *provide the opportunity for all students to learn*
- *ensure the safety of staff and students*
- *assist students who exhibit challenging behaviours to accept responsibility for themselves and their actions.*

***In applying consequences for unacceptable student behaviour, the individual circumstances and actions of the student and the needs and rights of school community members will be considered at all times.***

*Schools use a range of consequences that are authorised by Education Queensland which include:*

- *suspensions*
- *exclusions*
- *cancellations of enrolment.*

***These consequences are to be used as the last resort for serious behaviour after consideration has been given to all other responses. Access to alternative programs and input from other agencies may be necessary for students who repeatedly do not comply with expected standards of behaviour.***

We have been unable to correlate the statements above with the actions exhibited by your school on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014. We could see no evidence of positive support; consideration of individual circumstances; consideration given to all other responses; nor of a “serious misbehaviour”.

It is distressing that there is such a prevalence of serious misbehaviour within the student body, requiring such frequent recourse to these consequences of last resort. I am only grateful that this was not a ‘hat offence’ requiring three days suspension (apparently inflicted on another boy on parade late last year for having a hat not parallel to the ground).

It appears you are satisfied that you have only the students' welfare foremost in your approach to such disruptive and anti-social behaviour. I'm certain that your continued vigilance will ensure that students adhere stringently to an exhaustive list of school policies that you insist that children at your school accept and comply with in slavish obedience; obedience that you enforce with ruthlessness to make the a Borgia pale.

This is not a repeating behaviour, merely an accidental first offence and neither

does Marcus “use the 'phone to Facebook chat with each other in class” (as was alleged to him). I don't believe there were any impacts to the safety or welfare of others, nor impediments to learning opportunities of other children at the school, nor deliberate insolence.

To reiterate, the 'phone was in his bag; it was turned off; the carrier sent a calendar alert; the old-style phone (*which incidentally doesn't even have the facility for internet browsing, let alone for social networking*); in response to this message from the carrier, the 'phone turned itself on and played an alert.

I am certain that I do not want my normally well-behaved son thinking the Mansfield state *public* school cared more about mobile phone policy than incidences of fighting, bullying etc. Excluding from attendance a good student who is so heavily involved in the school's music program for such a trivial matter does not transmit a message that says "we care about your education and self development"; rather the message you have managed to convey -and underline with this gross overreaction - is "we care more about enforcing the letter of every policy". Student morale is adversely affected by incidents such as this and it certainly does not convey the vision of “Quality Learning in a Caring Environment”.

In this age of enlightened reason and technology prevalence, I urge you to honestly consider if your zero-tolerance approach to discipline takes precedence over education, open communication, or even simple civility. How your actions in this instance may be reconciled with published Education Queensland Guidelines concerning the level of alleged misconduct and the penalties you impose are not issues that neither my husband nor I are personally qualified to determine. I am sure the education minister and regional director can assist with any future adjustment necessary.

To further discuss this matter with myself, you may contact myself by return email (preferred) or by telephone at 0414491726. My husband (Bryan Brown) may be reached on 0414436469.

I optimistically anticipate your considered response,

(Joanne) Bernadette Savage

Bryan Brown