



Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 2

Inquiry into bullying of children and young people

FINAL REPORT

The Chair of General Purpose Standing Committee No 2, the Hon Robyn Parker MLC, today tabled the Committee's report on the bullying of children and young people, saying the inquiry clearly demonstrated that there needs to be a concerted effort to address bullying, particularly given that in the most extreme cases, bullying can result in the loss of young lives to suicide.

"When you consider that more than 570,000 calls are received yearly by the national Kids Helpline service and almost half of those are from NSW – and the State Government doesn't provide funding to the service - clearly our State is not doing enough to help kids in distress," Robyn Parker said.

"Bullying can have long lasting and harmful affects on a child's self-esteem, mental health, school performance and well-being. This inquiry has found that there needs be far greater co-ordination between departments and Government agencies on the roll-out of bullying programs to reduce duplication, and school communities need more support and guidance to develop and implement successful, evidence based responses to bullying and cyber-bullying."

"The committee was alarmed at the growing prevalence of cyber-bullying, which is more insidious in nature, having a heightened impact due to its ability to reach into the private domain of a child or young person. The committee is also concerned that the Commonwealth's National Secondary Schools Computer Fund does not provide any support or professional development to schools on cyber-bullying."

"The committee found that schools are overwhelmed by the sheer number of anti-bullying programs, some of which lack rigorous evaluation. Schools need the flexibility to decide which anti-bullying programs best suits their community and teachers must receive better training to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge and tools to prevent and intervene in incidents of bullying."

"The NSW Department of Education needs to provide schools with clear guidelines that outline their responsibilities, the department should centrally collect information on the effectiveness of school anti-bullying policies and audit this information."

The committee has made 25 recommendations, including: the employment of additional School Liaison Police and school counsellors; a blueprint for schools to determine which anti-bullying program is best suited to them; that the Attorney General examine the adequacy of the existing legal framework for bullying related offences; recurrent financial support to the Kids Helpline; the implementation of uniform procedures for collecting bullying and bullying related data from NSW schools and TAFE; and that the Minister for Education require all schools to publish their anti-bullying policies online.

**Ms Parker will hold a press conference at 1.15 pm today, Thursday
12 November 2009, in the Media Room at Parliament House.**

For comment

Please contact Robyn Parker, Committee Chair on 9230 3332 or 0427 015 049.

Further information

A list of the Committee's recommendations is attached. The report is on the Committee's website www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc2. Hard copies are available by phoning (02) 9230 3544.

Summary of recommendations

- Recommendation 1** **8**
 That the Minister for Education and Training require the Department of Education and Training and all registered training organisations to annually collect data on the level of bullying among apprentices and trainees, and that this data be collated by the Department, with appropriate protections for the privacy of individuals, institutes, colleges and registered training organisations. Further, the Department should be required to take action in relation to any problems that are identified in the data.
- Recommendation 2** **32**
 That the Minister for Education and Training introduce a community-wide Anti-Bullying Week, which focuses on all schools and TAFE institutes, that highlights safe and friendly schools and raises awareness of the effect of bullying behaviours, and that this week should have a positive and friendly name that is chosen through consultation with children and young people. Further, that the Minister allocate adequate resources for the development and distribution of materials in all schools, TAFE institutes and the community.
- Recommendation 3** **33**
 That the Minister for Education and Training formally approach the Australian Press Council regarding the implementation of media guidelines on reporting instances of bullying of children and young people.
- Recommendation 4** **41**
 That the Minister for Education and Training ensure that the NSW Department of Education and Training work with the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, to seek annual feedback from children and young people on anti-bullying initiatives that are implemented in their schools. This consultation process should include use of the online environment to maximise the engagement of children and young people.
- Recommendation 5** **49**
 That the Minister for Education and Training require all NSW public schools to publish their anti-bullying policies on their school website, and introduce legislation to require all non-government schools to do the same.
- Recommendation 6** **54**
 That the Minister for Education and Training develop a protocol for schools to report on their policies on bullying prevention and response, and their effectiveness, and to require schools to submit annual reports on bullying in accordance with the protocol. This should include incidents of cyber-bullying and bullying that occurs off school premises, if these incidents impact on the school community.
 Reporting should commence in the 2011 school year.
- Recommendation 7** **54**
 That the Minister for Education and Training implement a system of random audits of schools' anti-bullying policies and reports.

- Recommendation 8** **54**
That the Minister for Education and Training implement a system of sample surveys of schools to assess the incidence, type and impact of bullying, and the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies.
- Recommendation 9** **57**
That the NSW Department of Education and Training ensure that parents of students in public schools are provided with regular updates on the progress of their complaints about bullying, and that parents are made aware of the avenues for escalation if a school does not adequately address their concerns.
Further, that non-government schools introduce equivalent mechanisms.
- Recommendation 10** **57**
That the Minister for Education and Training require the NSW Department of Education and Training to investigate the feasibility of allowing schools access to a child or young person's history of either being the victim or instigator of bullying at any previous school that the child or young person may have attended.
- Recommendation 11** **63**
That the NSW Attorney General examine the adequacy of the existing legal framework for bullying related offences, and identify any legislative changes that could enhance the legal protection provided to victims of bullying and cyber-bullying.
- Recommendation 12** **63**
That the Minister for Police consider the employment of additional officers to work in the School Liaison Police program, taking into account the findings of the evaluation by Charles Sturt University.
- Recommendation 13** **63**
That the Minister for Police ensure that all School Liaison Police are provided with consistent training and guidelines to ensure that the best possible support and advice is provided to school students who are experiencing bullying or cyber-bullying, and their families.
- Recommendation 14** **64**
That the NSW Department of Education and Training require all NSW public and non-government schools to have information on their school websites that outlines the potential legal ramifications of bullying, and provides contact information for the School Liaison Police and support services such as Kids Helpline.
- Recommendation 15** **79**
That the Minister for Education and Training ensure that, as part of the Review of the National Safe Schools Framework, the Reference Group consider the introduction of a program that would provide schools with guidance on the research base and cost effectiveness of programs to address bullying, similar to the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Program operating in the United States of America.
- Recommendation 16** **94**
That the Minister for Education and Training require the NSW Institute of Teachers to review the current competencies for NSW teachers to ensure that bullying is covered, and to include bullying in the mandatory professional development programs for practising teachers.

- Recommendation 17** 99
That the Minister for Education and Training take immediate action to support the recruitment of additional school counsellors. Further, that the Minister consider adopting the model proposed by Public Schools Principals Forum, which would involve the recruitment of university graduates with social-work qualifications to undertake those functions of school counsellors that are not related to clinical assessment.
- Recommendation 18** 99
That the NSW Government provide recurrent financial support to the Kids Helpline service.
- Recommendation 19** 115
That the Minister for Education and Training develop guidelines for schools on their responsibility to address cyber-bullying, particularly that which occurs out of school hours.
- Recommendation 20** 115
That the Minister for Education and Training ensure that the Commonwealth Minister for Education provides schools with support and professional development on cyber-bullying as an integral component of the implementation of the National Secondary Schools Computer Fund.
- Recommendation 21** 115
That the Minister for Education and Training ensure that the Consultative Working Group on Cyber-Safety develops a voluntary cooperative agreement to ensure that local Internet service providers conform with international best practice in regards to user protection from cyber-bullying.
- Recommendation 22** 125
That the Minister for Education and Training ensure that schools implement a proactive prevention and protection approach to addressing bullying by embedding anti-bullying education in all aspects of learning as part of a broad focus on student well being.
- Recommendation 23** 130
That the Minister for Education and Training ensure that the NSW Department of Education and Training collaborates closely with the research community, both in New South Wales and across Australia.
- Recommendation 24** 132
That the Minister for Education and Training work towards greater co-ordination and co-operation between all levels of government, school systems, schools and the research community in efforts to address bullying, including that the:
- Reference Group to the Review of the National Safe Schools Framework consider the means to achieve greater co-ordination among bullying initiatives used in schools
 - Consultative Working Group on Cyber-Safety consider the means to achieve greater co-ordination among cyber-bullying initiatives.
- Recommendation 25** 133
That the Minister for Education and Training request that the Commonwealth Minister for Education consider the merits of permanently establishing the Reference Group to the Review of the National Safe Schools Framework to oversee the ongoing co-ordination of future efforts to address bullying.