

Submission
No 35

**INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

**Submission for the Inquiry into Bullying of Young Children and Young People
March 2009**

Context

is a large comprehensive rural school with an enrolment of approx. 1000 students including 9% Indigenous.

We have a proud reputation for academic, cultural and sporting achievement both locally and at state level. We have won national championships in events such as Rock Eisteddfod and Tournament of the Minds.

We have a strong discipline system which is well supported by the community.

I have included this context to highlight the fact that we are a very good school but still have bullying issues.

Anti-Bullying – what we have done

We have an Anti-Bullying plan which outlines roles and responsibilities of students, staff, parents and explains the procedures for dealing with and reporting bullying.

A fortnightly guidance lesson for years 7-9 addresses bullying as does regular items in the newsletter, special presentations from outside providers, assembly talks, counselling etc.

A welfare committee meets weekly to discuss student issues including bullying and resilience building.

We carried out an extensive anti-bullying survey for year 7 in 2007 and 2008. This will again occur in 2009. 50% of students admitted bullying a bit in year 7 2008.

Students who identified themselves on the survey and indicated they had been subjected to bullying were interviewed. The deputy reiterated the need to report incidents and counselled the students re strategies to deal with bullying.

In 2008 we had an Anti-Bullying Blitz for year 7 where all subjects taught a different Anti-Bullying lesson during weeks 6-8 in term 2.

After the Anti-Bullying Blitz there was an increase in reporting which was good as students are reluctant to report.

We also have put effort into teaching 'Habits of Mind' which promotes the management of impulsivity. Our school diary has a section devoted to the 'Habits'.

I am sure we are not alone in putting in place strategies to stop bullying. Unfortunately bullying continues to be an issue. Below are some thoughts related to my dealings with bullying.

Personal comment

Some students have difficulty in dealing with impulsivity. Their immediate response to a slight (name calling) is to use physical aggression even though they are well aware of the consequences (ie. possible suspension).

There appears to be a decrease in resilience. Some students can't cope with the slightest incident becoming very upset. An unintentional bump from someone who doesn't like them is seen as bullying. Some parents are overprotective and seek action on any minor incident involving their child. This is a small minority but does affect the student's ability to be able to cope with daily life in a high school.

Even though we regularly reiterate the need for all students to take responsibility for their actions, students readily blame others and make excuses for their bullying behaviour.

Male students in the junior years often are very concerned about loss of face with their peers and will fight even though they don't really want to.

Student bystander behaviour is of concern. Often students (including very good well behaved students) will swarm to an area where a fight or confrontation is occurring and do nothing. They have been warned and informed about the consequences of this behaviour on many occasions. We have had a few incidents that have been reported where students have used mobile phones to film such events. Disciplinary action is taken in these cases. We have banned mobiles and have a system in place where students can hand them in to the office for safe keeping until the end of the day. It is estimated that well over 50% of students will have a mobile at school every day which is not handed in or seen by a teacher.

Cyber bullying is a minor issue which is dealt with when evidence is provided. Sometimes when parents are interviewed about this type of bullying they are reluctant to remove computing access at home from their children.

Family breakdown does impact on bullying and is increasing. Some students spend time with both parents who share custody and on occasion the parenting is inadequate in providing a set of behavioural guidelines for the children. For some parents, their children are not a top priority which impacts on both the academic performance and behaviour of students.

Some parents get involved with bullying themselves: verbally abusing other parents in the community. This parent bullying can include going to other homes, making harassing phone calls, watching as their child assaults others (2 incidents with one set of parents).

A small number of parents try to bully and intimidate staff. I have been threatened by an angry parent (2008) who used four letter words when addressing me. Another parent had to be told not to raise her voice in my office when she attempted to defend her son who had used a metal ruler to assault another student (this happened this week). The other deputy received a phone call from another parent this week who began by accusing him in an aggressive tone of humiliating her child which was

untrue. He needed to raise his voice and inform her that he would not speak to her until she calmed down.

In 2008 another parent who was extremely angry called the principal a '...', screamed abuse in the foyer of the school and invaded the other deputy's personal space while screaming abuse. While these events are thankfully not common, this aggressive behaviour on the part of some parents certainly affects the well being of staff. I believe there is a real issue with the lack of protection for students and staff in schools. We have a large fence but our site is open. There is no way that we can stop outsiders from entering the grounds or any school area.

Some parents support their child's account of incidents regardless of the lies told. Some refuse to believe that their child ever does anything wrong and will even back the child providing excuses for their behaviour usually blaming the victim. Often this type of unconditional support back fires when the child increasingly defies the parent as they grow up.

Some students have a mental disability such as autism which affects their social interaction with other students. Some parents refuse to have their child tested to avoid 'labelling' which could impact on their future. Students on the autistic spectrum will behave differently because they lack social skills. They can become a 'provocative victim' of bullying. Because they cannot fully read the social cues of others, they overact and become bullies themselves.

The playground is an area where bullying occurs more than in the classroom. We have 5 teachers on playground duty at each break which covers all areas. To really make a big difference in playground bullying we would need to have 20 teachers on duty which is not possible and would impact on teachers' working conditions and their ability to prepare the academic program.

Ideas to help with anti-bullying

Provide extra funding to schools so more teachers can be employed to undertake extra playground duties.

Employ specialist part-time teachers or other professionals to run break-time activities for bully victims and others. We currently have a Youth Worker employed under the chaplaincy program and a Defence Force liaison person. Both these workers make a valuable contribution and help students with issues. The Aboriginal Educational Officer and various School Learning Support Officers also provide assistance. Additional staff with the specific responsibility of providing activities during breaks would compliment our existing services and help those less confident students who are often bully victims.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.