

INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Organisation: Safe and Supportive School Communities: Finding Workable
Solutions for Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in
Schools (SSSC) Project, a committee of the Australian Education
Systems Officials Committee

Name: Mr Christopher Robinson

Position: Chair

Date received: 25/03/2009

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Submission to: the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Bullying of Children & Young People

Submission from: the Safe and Supportive School Communities: Finding Workable Solutions for Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in Schools (SSSC) Project, a committee of the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC)

Submission authorised by:

Name: Mr Christopher Robinson

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Date: 25 March, 2009

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1. Summary

The Australian Education Systems Officials Committee's (AESOC) *Safe and Supportive School Communities: Finding Workable Solutions for Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in Schools* (SSSC) project offers the following submission to the Inquiry into Bullying of Children and Young People.

The SSSC project provides the only national forum that brings together representatives from all Australian educational jurisdictions in an active ongoing collaboration to create safer school communities free from bullying, harassment and violence in schools.

With regard to the Inquiry's Term of Reference Four, the SSSC project's underpinnings and principles of operation reflect an exemplary model of coordination and cooperation between relevant government and non-government agencies to create greater national consistency, share resources and best practices, reduce duplication. The project also identifies and responds proactively to current and emerging priorities and actively support jurisdictions and school communities with regard to sustainable prevention and early intervention to address bullying, harassment and violence relating to children and young people.

The submission outlines the background to the SSSC project, its objectives, goals and selected outcomes and the project's current priority areas and future directions.

While the submission focuses primarily on Term of Reference 4, the project's goals and actions also intersect with and address in varying combinations the remaining Terms of Reference identified by the Inquiry. Throughout the submission, bracketed notations are therefore made where relevant to particular Terms of Reference.

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2. Background to the SSSC project

The SSSC is an ongoing collaborative initiative of Australia's Commonwealth, State and Territory Government and Catholic and Independent education authorities.

The SSSC is jointly funded by Commonwealth, State and Territory education departments according to the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) project formula and is managed by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA).

The project was initiated in 1999 to provide a nationwide structure for sharing information, resources and successful practices to counter bullying, harassment and violence in Australian schools, and a website that disseminates information on these issues.

The associated *Bullying. No way!* website (www.bullyingnoway.com.au) was launched by the project in June 2002 and continues as a collaboration between Government and non-government education authorities for the benefit of all Australian school communities.

The project's governance group consists of representatives of all participating education jurisdictions who meet by monthly teleconference and one annual face-to-face meeting. *(ToR 4)*

The project has been endorsed by all Australian education authorities to continue for the period 2008 – 12 with an enhanced brief to support jurisdictions and school communities to respond to emerging priorities in a planned, proactive and sustainable manner; and to address identified gaps and emerging priorities.

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3. Objectives and goals of the SSSC project

The key objective of the SSSC project is to sustain a national framework for sharing informed practice and workable solutions to bullying, harassment and violence in Australian schools. The goals of the SSSC project are to:

- provide MCEETYA and educational jurisdictions with strategic advice that enhances the capacity for Australian education authorities to respond in planned ways to identified issues and emerging priorities;
- promote collaborative processes that enable the above and below goals, and that reduce duplication and make links with other national and jurisdictional initiatives; and
- support and promote best/informed practice in relation to the creation of safe and supportive school communities.

(ToR 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

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4. Selected project outcomes

- ***National collaboration, shared knowledge and informed best practice to enhance prevention and early intervention measures.***

The SSSC project's cross-jurisdictional sharing of knowledge and effective, evidence-based practice supports a consistent national approach with flexibility for local interventions, and provides a good model of cross jurisdictional cooperation for other areas of national collaboration.

The project's focus on identifying and addressing priority issues also contributes to the capacity of future national guidelines and local initiatives to ensure maximum impact on school environments and increased public awareness of cross-government activities that are addressing the issue.

(ToR 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

- ***Bullying. No way! website – a widely known, respected and comprehensive 'one stop shop' resource.***

The *Bullying. No way!* website is acknowledged nationally and internationally as a comprehensive, balanced and respected information resource for school communities, universities, government departments, helping services, the media and the wider community. ***(ToR 2, 3, 5, 6)***

The website encourages a whole school approach that addresses individual, environmental and psychological dimensions of behaviour, and brings into focus those social and cultural factors that shape identity and behaviour, so that they too become amenable to change. ***(ToR 2, 3, 5, 6)***

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To support the prevention and early intervention work of school communities in these areas, the site provides immediate access to a wide range of policy and teaching materials developed or provided by Australia's education jurisdictions, school case studies of effective practice, interviews with Australian and overseas researchers, spotlights on key topics such as cyber bullying and bystander behaviour and an increasing range of classroom and student resources. **(ToR 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)**

Bullying. No way! website traffic continues to increase. Data indicates that over 2.16 million pages were viewed during the last fiscal year, while a voluntary online survey indicates that 67% of all respondents and 69% of students who responded to the question found that the website provided some to a lot of information; and 72% said they would recommend the site to others. The Google search engine lists the website first or second in response to Australian or world searches using the term 'bullying'. An overview of website data from 2002 – 2008 **(Attachment A)** identifies the increasing utility of the site by school communities and others seeking up to date and reliable information and strategies. **(ToR 3, 4, 5, 6)**

- ***Efficient approach***

The project increases effectiveness and efficiency and overcomes duplication of efforts by pooling resources and expertise, enabling jurisdictions to gain better leverage and respond to emerging issues through a coordinated and cohesive proactive approach that complements and supports other programs and initiatives.

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Individual jurisdictions are able to take lead roles on key issues and be supported with resources to develop planned, proactive responses on behalf of all jurisdictions.

The SSSC project enhances efficiency and adds value to the work of jurisdictions by reducing duplication of effort and promoting the anti-bullying initiatives of every Australian jurisdiction. **(ToR 3, 4, 5, 6)**

The dissemination of anti-bullying promotional materials provides a coordinated, cohesive and positive message across schools and the broader community. The national distribution of *Bullying. No way!* student pocket cards to all Year 6 – 10 students in Australian schools has received particularly positive feedback and resulted in a number of reprints. The cards list strategies children and young people can use when they are bullied, or when they witness bullying behaviour. Teachers and students attest to the value of the pocket cards as a simple but powerful cue to help students remember options for dealing with a situation at hand and for supporting constructive classroom discussions and systemic messages. (Attachment B, student pocket card) **(ToR 3, 4,5,6)**

- ***Increased capacity for strategic responses***

Due to the cross-jurisdictional platforms established through this project, the SSSC project is well-placed to provide strategic policy advice to government and respond effectively to the wide range of emerging issues such as cyber bullying and bystander behaviour. **(ToR 3, 4, 6)**

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- ***International stature***

The collaborative, cross-jurisdictional national approach of the SSSC project is recognised internationally as a unique and valuable strategy that responds proactively to what is a national and global issue for schools and communities.

Australian anti-bullying experts have presented the project to international conferences as an exemplar of world best practice. Jurisdiction representatives have been invited to participate in and otherwise contribute to European Commission anti-bullying and anti-violence projects and international conferences on behalf of the SSSC project, and the website has been referenced as a linked resource by organisations such as the United States of America's Crisis Prevention Institute and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website. ***(ToR 6)***

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5. Work in progress

The August 2007 Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) meeting approved an expanded SSSC project brief that continues the project during 2008 – 2012, with increased funding during 2008 – 2010. The project's main brief during this four-year period is to make a significant national contribution to address bullying in schools, reduce duplication and respond proactively to existing issues, gaps and emerging priorities including homophobia and cyber-bullying.

Due to the cross-jurisdictional platforms established through this project, the SSSC project is well-placed to provide the necessary strategic policy advice to government and to respond effectively to the wide range of emerging issues including cyber bullying and bystander behaviour.

▪ *Current priority areas*

The following priority areas, identified by SSSC project representatives as some of the more challenging issues and emerging priorities facing our jurisdictions, form the focus of the 2008 – 2010 project plan:

- Cyber bullying
- Bystander behaviour
- Violence
- Girls and aggression
- Student voice
- Resources for younger students
- Parental involvement
- Racism
- Gender and sexual diversity (including homophobia).

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Jurisdictions have taken lead roles during 2008 – 2009 to scan relevant research, policy and resources pertaining to particular topics; develop related information and advice for use by jurisdictions; and assist in the development of content for the *Bullying. No way!* website, based on evidence-based national and international research and effective strategies adopted by schools across Australia. **(ToR 3,4,6)**

Future directions

Further plans to realise project goals include:

- Establishment of an expert advisory group to support the ongoing work of the jurisdictions through the SSSC project.

The SSSC project recognises that there is a range of intersecting frameworks for understanding bullying, harassment and violence. It is therefore considered essential that processes are in place to enable the SSSC, educational jurisdictions and school communities to be informed and share understandings regarding current and emerging issues and research as well as effective practices. **(ToR 1-6)**

- Technological upgrading of the *Bullying. No way!* website to sustain and build its capacity as a useful resource for educators, a learning tool for young people and a point of access for the wider community. The upgrade will include updating and expanding the range of good practice school case studies. **(ToR 6)**
- Evaluation of the *Bullying. No way!* website to inform future directions. **(ToR 5-6)**
- An independent national research and consultation activity is currently being considered to reduce duplication and respond proactively to existing issues, gaps

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and emerging priorities and make a significant national contribution. The objectives of the research and consultation are to:

- provide a knowledge base of relevant research, effective practice, lighthouse schools, and school and practitioner case studies and stories.
- identify key indicators, risk factors, barriers to full implementation, and ways in which schools can be best supported to further embed safe learning environments.
- provide an overview and critical analysis of approaches, policies, curriculum and practices, including those that address cyber bullying, discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, and violence.
- make recommendations regarding professional learning and resource materials for school leaders, teachers and parents, and the successful implementation of these into Australian school communities, for example through online environments.
- contribute to existing and future jurisdictional and national guidelines and initiatives, in particular the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) Review being conducted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to ensure maximum benefit for school environments and an associated increase in public awareness of cross-government activities that are addressing the issue.

(ToR 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

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Appendix A

Bullying. No way! website data

Bullying. No way! website traffic data has indicated a continuing increase since 2002, with the largest overall increase from 2006 to 2007 and traffic continuing to increase steadily.

There was a total of 2.16 million pages viewed for the twelve months ending July 2008, indicative of an overall 59 per cent increase over the previous year and rapid growth during the months March to July 2008 which corresponds to the March 2008 introduction of the monthly e-bulletin. Figure 1 illustrates the steady growth.

The website was designed to be accessed both inside and outside of school hours. While figures indicate consistent use at night and on weekends, heaviest traffic occurs between Monday and Thursday 8am – 4pm with a peak between 11am – 12pm. An additional smaller peak occurs on weekday evenings between 7pm and 9pm.

The Google website continues to rate BNW at top of their list in response to worldwide and Australian searches for the term 'bullying'.

The "resources" pages, "forums" and the interactive student activity pages in the "chill out" section remain the most popular single destinations on the site.

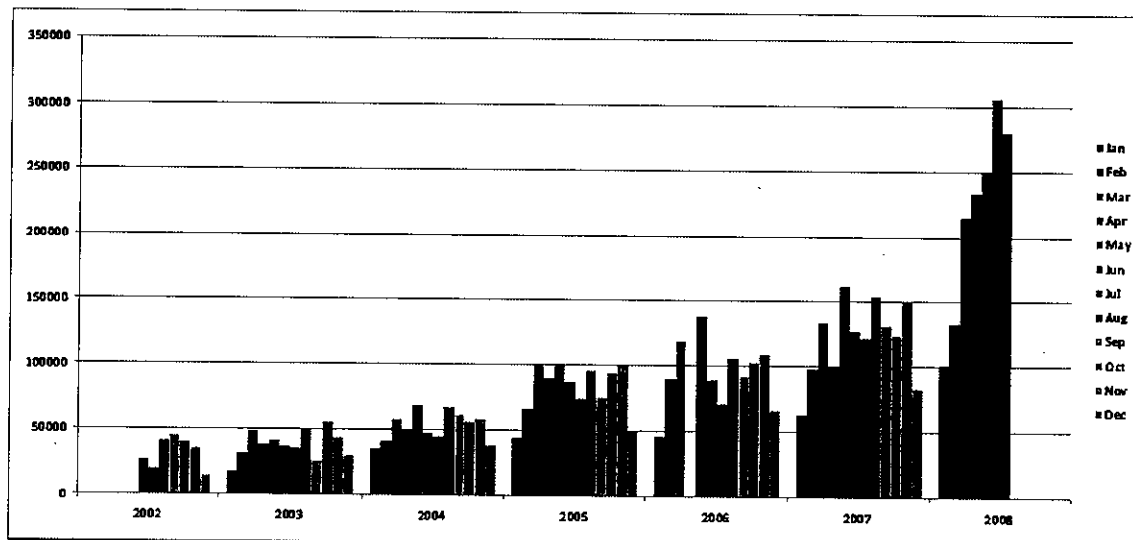
An online survey has been available from the website's homepage since October 2002. Students have accounted for 72% of the total 1 729 legitimate responses and, among student responses, Year 7 – 8 accounts for 47% and is thus the strongest single schooling level represented, followed by Years 9 – 10 (19%) and Years 11 – 12 (18%).

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Most respondents (64%) stated that they found the navigation very or fairly easy, indicating strong endorsement of the website's navigation structure. Seventy eight per cent of respondents indicated they had found at least a little information and 72% said they would recommend the site to others. When invited to make suggestions to improve the site, the most consistent response, from 300 respondents, was that they could add no suggestions for improvement.

Table 1. Page views per day, June 2002 – July 2008

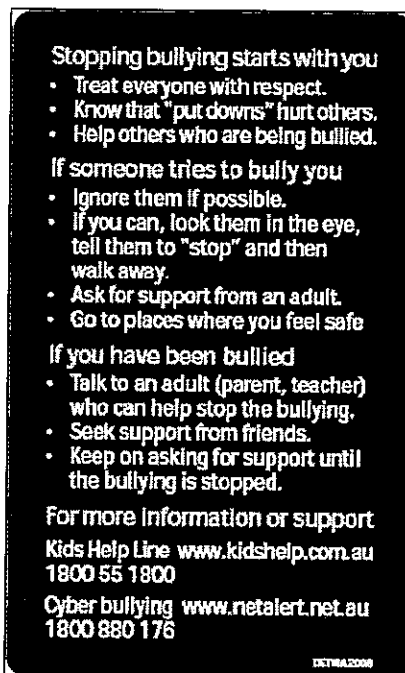


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Appendix B

***Bullying. No way!* student pocket card**



The SSSC project provides jurisdictions and school communities with awareness raising materials consisting of *Bullying. No way!* posters, brochures, web stickers, bookmarks and student pocket cards.

The initial trial and subsequent printing and national distribution of the student pocket cards for all Year 6 – 10 students was assisted by Commonwealth National Safe Schools Week funding.

The text was adapted with permission from the WA Department of Education and Training, and developed in consultation with Kids Help Line.

The pocket cards have received positive feedback from students and teachers and are now available on request to all schools and agencies that work with children and young people.

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Appendix C

Terms of Reference

Legislative Council

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into bullying of children and young people

TERMS OF REFERENCE

That General Purpose Standing Committee No 2 inquire into, and report on, best practice approaches to reduce bullying of children and young people, including:

1. The nature, level and impact of bullying among school age children and young people under the age of 18, including apprentices and trainees
2. Factors contributing to bullying
3. Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying, including 'cyber-bullying'
4. Co-ordination and co-operation between relevant government agencies to address bullying
5. The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches
6. Approaches to address bullying in Australian and overseas jurisdictions
7. Any other relevant matter.

Committee Members

The Hon Robyn Parker MLC (Chair)	(Liberal Party)
The Hon Christine Robertson MLC (Deputy Chair)	(Australian Labor Party)
The Hon Tony Catanzariti MLC	(Australian Labor Party)
The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC	(Australian Labor Party)
The Hon Marie Ficarra MLC	(Liberal Party)
Revd the Hon Dr Gordon Moyes MLC	(Christian Democratic Party)
Dr John Kaye MLC	(The Greens)