

Submission
No 50

INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Workplace Relations

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BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations is pleased to provide a submission to the New South Wales Legislative Council Inquiry into the Bullying of Children and Young People. The submission is proposed to provide guidance to the General Purpose Standing Committee to inform and assist practices in New South Wales on this important issue.

The Commonwealth believes student wellbeing and safety are essential for academic development. All students should be able to learn and develop in safe and supportive environments. As such, a number of Commonwealth and collaborative activities have been undertaken and are outlined in this submission.

Some components of this submission are confidential as they are drawn from reports that have not yet been published. These components have been labelled accordingly. DEEWR asks that the General Purpose Standing Committee respects the confidential information as such and seeks to raise any questions regarding this with the Department.

DEEWR looks forward to hearing of the outcomes of the Inquiry and hopes that submissions provided will help to direct and inform on best policy and practice in the Australian Schooling context.

RESPONSES TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

TERM OF REFERENCE ONE:

The nature, level and impact of bullying among school age children and young people under the age of 18, including apprentices and trainees.

It is rarely contested that bullying can have a negative impact on its victims. This includes both immediate impacts following bullying; and the effects that continue or develop in adulthood due to low self-esteem, mental health problems and other direct impacts of bullying. The impact of bullying has been widely reported; particular cases include the case of Year 9 Kadina High School student, Alex Wildman, who committed suicide after being subjected to periods of bullying by his peers; and a Year 8 Melbourne based student who lost his spleen following a bullying attack at school.

Recent research conducted by the Commonwealth into the nature and prevalence of covert bullying has found that this form of bullying is socially isolating; makes young people feel scared, alone and embarrassed; causes increased risk of absenteeism from school and social events; and increases the likelihood of emotional difficulties, conduct problems, inattention and poor peer relationships (**confidential information**).¹ As such, the long-term impacts on victims can be profound and not only affect their health and wellbeing, but academic outcomes given that some students do not attend school when subjected to bullying. This can then affect future employment prospects and positive adult relationships.

For both bully and victim, the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS) also found that there are lower levels of school connectedness; general feelings of loneliness and lack of safety were experienced by both; and an increased likelihood of emotional and conduct problems (**confidential**).²

In recent years, the nature of bullying has changed due to the emergence of new technologies enabling new forms of bullying to develop. Commonly known as “cyber-bullying”, technology has allowed bullying to continue outside of school hours and blur the line of responsibility for both schools and parents. Seven to ten per-cent of Year 4 to Year 10 students reported being cyber-bullied as part of research undertaken for the ACPBS (**confidential**)³, but the incidence may be higher due to under reporting by young people; as

¹ Professor Donna Cross; Edith Cowan University; *The Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study* (Australian Government: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – not yet released) 19.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid: 16.

many do not report issues as they are frightened their mobile telephone or computer will be taken from them, thus socially isolating them further.

As part of a creative technology project commissioned by the Commonwealth and undertaken by the University of South Australia (in collaboration with Flinders University), research was undertaken into the human dimension of covert bullying and in particular, covert forms of cyber-bullying. Young people reported feeling publicly humiliated by cyber-bullying⁴, and were bullied increasingly on social networking sites as opposed to other forms of cyber-bullying; for example, via email (**confidential**).⁵

The level of bullying in the Australian context is something that is difficult to determine. There is no apparent consistency to the type of data states and territories collect in relation to school bullying. Rigby estimated that approximately one in six children was bullied at school in the mid-1990s.⁶ In this instance, only students who were bullied on a weekly basis were defined as victims of bullying. While the incidents appear to be increasing due to wide media coverage on the issue, this is not necessarily the case. The scope of bullying has widened due to the emergence of technology allowing new forms of bullying to develop in cyber-space. The ACBPS found that one in four (or 27 per cent) of Year 4 to Year 9 students reported being covertly bullied during the course of the study (one school term). Of these students who had been covertly bullied, sixty one percent also reported being overtly bullied. Prevalence was only slightly higher amongst girls at 18 per cent: to boys at 15 per cent (**confidential**).⁷ Factors relating to these statistics are outlined in response to Term of Reference (TOR) 2.

The impact of bullying has also been noted amongst young apprentices and trainees; in late 2008, the Department responded to an extreme case of workplace bullying in New South Wales (NSW), which led to the suicide of a young apprentice in October 2008. It is understood that this matter is now subject to a coronial investigation and the Commonwealth is undertaking discussions with state and territory governments to determine ways of responding to issues of bullying in the workplace relating to young apprentices and trainees. It is understood that state and territory governments have laws in place that protect employees from workplace bullying, and these are usually governed by the appropriate workplace authority, such as the NSW Office of Industrial Relations managed by the Department of Commerce.

⁴ Dr Barbara Spears et al, University of South Australia; *Behind the Scenes: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying* (Australian Government: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – not yet released) 8.

⁵ Ibid: 18.

⁶ Dr Ken Rigby, *Bullying in schools and what to do about it*, <<http://www.kenrigby.net>> (March 2007) accessed 26 February 2009.

⁷ ACPBS: 14.

As demonstrated, the impact of bullying can be profound on young people and has the potential to cause problems both during childhood and adulthood. Problems including self-esteem issues and suicidal ideation can and do have severe consequences for the young person, their family, and for society. Given the statistics of school-based bullying are high (although it is difficult to determine the exact number of young people subjected to bullying), it is evident that all levels of government; as well as community organisations and other interested parties, need to work collaboratively to address this issue.

TERM OF REFERENCE TWO:

Factors contributing to bullying.

There are many varying factors that contribute to bullying. These are highly dependent on the local factors such as the school ethos and culture, and are often related to the views of parents, teachers and peers.

The ACPBS found that, with particular relation to covert forms of bullying, the issue was widely under-reported due to shame or inappropriate responses from parents and teachers (**confidential**).⁸ In addition, it was found that the reaction to overt and more physical forms of bullying resulted in an increase of more covert forms of bullying, as young people resorted to behaviour particular to the situation, thus ensuring their behaviour went undetected (**confidential**).⁹

Other research has shown that individual characteristics can also heighten a young person's risk of becoming a victim of bullying. A study of 17 primary schools in the United Kingdom found the following factors contributed to this risk:

- their development of proactive and adaptive coping skills;
- the young person's sex and age;
- their health status;
- any educational problems or developmental delays;
- the social context of their home environment (such as number of siblings, single-parenting compared to both parents);
- number of friends; and
- their place in the social hierarchy of peer relationships.¹⁰

It is important to note that while these factors have been identified as heightening a young person's risk of becoming a victim of bullying, other contributing factors in individual situations should not be disregarded.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dieter Wolke, Sarah Woods and Muthanna Sumara, "Who escapes or remains a victim of bullying in primary school?" in *The British Journal of Developmental Psychology* (December 2008) 2-3.

Each circumstance is different and a child who would not normally be a target of bullying can become a victim for a short or ongoing period.

The Wolke et al report also found that young females who were not well liked in their early years of schooling were more likely to remain victims of bullying in late primary school.¹¹ This indicates that issues relating to self-esteem, number of friends, rejection and age all play a contributing role to bullying amongst primary school children.

Rigby recognises power differences and locations as main contributors to bullying. This includes those who are physically weaker or unwilling to defend themselves.¹² Location is also an important factor in the type and extent of bullying, with most children surveyed reporting that they were most likely to be bullied in the playground, followed by the way to and from school, and then the classroom.¹³ It is important to note that this does not necessarily include cyber-bullying, which commonly occurs at home.

School ethos and culture are important in the reduction of bullying in schools. Rigby reports that effective schools need to acknowledge and/ or implement the following to ensure that their school does not have a high incidence of bullying. The schools should:

- accept that bullying occurs in their school as denial can be seen as endorsement of the bullies' behaviour. Many schools deny the problem because there is a lack of consistency in the definition of bullying; and or because they fear damage to the school's reputation;
- not justify or try to explain the bullies' behaviour (for example, that it is human nature or the victim provoked the bully);
- accept some responsibility for its occurrence: while acknowledging that there are other contributing factors as outlined above, the school accepts some responsibility and seeks to take action;
- recognise that some young people are at heightened risk of being bullied and assist by helping the young person to acquire skills to reduce target risk. This may include assertiveness or friendliness; and
- truly believe that taking action will help to reduce bullying and convey this attitude to others.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid: 9.

¹² Dr Ken Rigby, *Children and Bullying: How Parents and Educators can Reduce Bullying in School* (Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) 23.

¹³ Ibid: 40.

¹⁴ Ibid: 152-154.

As identified in Rigby, the role of all school community members is vital in reducing bullying. While some of the factors contributing to bullying may be unavoidable (such as a young person's disability, their age and sex, or the context of their home environment), recognition of the heightened risk these young people face of becoming victims of bullying and monitoring the situation is critical. The active role of the school is important in both acknowledging these factors and seeking to reduce the risk.

TERM OF REFERENCE THREE:

Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying, including 'cyber-bullying'.

Research indicates that interventions responding to an established bullying problem usually result in reductions in bullying of around 15 per cent.¹⁵ While a 15 per cent reduction is credible, more focus needs to be on preventative or early intervention strategies to have a significant impact. Any application of early intervention approaches used to reduce bullying in schools need the commitment of schools (particularly school leaders) and education authorities alike. Short-term approaches can often show immediate success but without investment in resources for the long-term, problems are likely to reoccur.

The National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)¹⁶, which was developed in 2002 and endorsed by all Ministers for Education in 2003, consists of an agreed set of national principles to promote safe and supportive school environments and includes appropriate responses which schools can adopt to address the issues of bullying, harassment, violence, child abuse and neglect. All schools in Australia are encouraged to use the NSSF as a basis for developing approaches to address bullying in their individual settings as it was developed with respect to the Australian context and federalist framework. It recognises that sustainable approaches are required to effectively reduce bullying in the long-term. A copy of the NSSF and its supporting packs can be found at www.dest.gov.au/schools.nssf. The *Guiding Principles for the provision of a safe and supportive school environment* can be found at [Appendix A](#).

Stakeholder consultations indicate that the NSSF has been an effective vehicle for raising community awareness of the importance of safe school environments. It has promulgated a greater understanding and appreciation of the relationship between safe school environments, student wellbeing and improved learning outcomes.

The Framework is highly regarded by Australian and international researchers and practitioners, and is the only national framework of its kind in the world. Cross-sectoral collaboration and effective working

¹⁵ Dr Ken Rigby and Coosjie Griffiths, *Applying the Method of Shared Concern in Australian Schools: an evaluative study*; (Australian Government, not yet released), 7.

¹⁶ Curriculum Corporation, *The National Safe Schools Framework* (Carlton South: MCEETYA Secretariat, 2003).

relationships across Commonwealth, state and territory officials and other key stakeholder groups underpin the success of the NSSF.

Following the release of the NSSF, a best practices project was undertaken to examine how the NSSF was effectively implemented in schools (see below).

Utilising the National Safe Schools Framework:

During a study commissioned by the Commonwealth and undertaken by the National Coalition Against Bullying (auspiced by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation), best practice school based approaches to bullying were examined following the introduction of the NSSF in 2003.¹⁷ This report found that the following elements of approaches to addressing bullying had higher rates of success than those not displaying these components:

- the teaching of values, respect, compassion and acceptance of difference;
- open discussions about the problem thus contributing to a positive culture;
- the adoption of restorative practices to improve school ethos and encourage students to act in accordance with values such as compassion and fairness;
- an audit of current school welfare programs that identifies areas for improvement and change; and
- the adoption of a whole-school approach.¹⁸

The Commonwealth has recently commissioned a review of the NSSF, which seeks to address emerging issues such as cyber-bullying in order to provide nationally consistent principles and guidance to schools. The review will also examine potential linkages with other wellbeing areas such as social and emotional learning, values education and substance abuse and relational violence. It will also look at new legislation which has been developed in relation to cyber-crimes and how this relates to children who cyber-bully through online technologies and mobile phones. This project is expected to commence in early April 2009, and is expected to be completed in May 2010. Following its completion, the reviewed NSSF will be submitted to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) for consideration and the endorsement of all Ministers for Education (both Commonwealth and state and territory levels).

¹⁷ Dr Helen McGrath, *Making Australian Schools Safer: Report of the Outcomes from the NSSF Best Practice Grants Programme (2004-05)*, (Department of Education, Science and Training: 2007).

¹⁸ Ibid: 6.

As part of the Best Practice Grants project funded by the Commonwealth, which 171 schools participated (97 projects), schools reported the following strategies helped to reduce bullying in their setting:

- increased teacher supervision in the playground in identified high-risk areas;
- more stimulating lunch time activities to keep young people occupied; and
- a more streamlined transition from primary to secondary school.¹⁹

The most common programs introduced to address school bullying contained elements of peer support, the teaching of social skills, values education and restorative practices.²⁰

While the restorative practices approach was widely used by schools participating in the project, many teachers reported that they felt more comfortable referring students to trained staff as opposed to using the practice themselves. They found the practice time consuming, although very effective when used.²¹

This highlights the need for teacher professional development in this area. Once a teacher feels comfortable using this type of approach, the timing issue may no longer be a factor as their experience and confidence grows. It should be noted that restorative practices may not work in every setting, and for every student. In some cases other approaches including punishment by detention and suspension will prove more effective. It is important for teachers and school leaders to assess the viability of such an approach in their individual school settings.

The six overarching themes identified through the project that guided and maintained safe school environments were to:

1. take a whole school approach;
2. plan for and create a caring, respectful, inclusive and supportive school culture;
3. use evidence-based practice;
4. use a risk-management approach;
5. focus on skill development; and
6. plan for sustainability.²²

By using the NSSF as a basis for effective practices and approaches, the McGrath report highlighted the following results. There was:

- increased teacher confidence in dealing with issues;
- acceptance of the role of teachers in discouraging bullying;

¹⁹ McGrath, *Making Australian Schools Safer*, 7.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid: 9.

²² Ibid: 10-11.

- greater willingness [of teachers and school leaders] to develop skills to prevent and manage bullying;
- a decrease in detention and suspension rates;
- improved peer relations; and
- better student-teacher relationships.²³

As demonstrated above, the NSSF has provided guiding practices for many Australian schools which has enabled them to develop their own best practice approaches to countering bullying in individual school settings.

Using the National Framework for Values Education to create a positive social and educational climate for students:

The *National Framework for Values Education* in Australian Schools was developed from the *Values Education Study 2003* and national consultation. The National Framework was agreed to and endorsed by all the state and territory Ministers of Education and then distributed to all Australian schools in 2005. The Framework recognises the values education policies and programs already in place in education authorities and Australian schools. It also recognises that there is a significant history of values education in government and non-government schools drawing on a range of philosophies, beliefs and traditions.²⁴

The National Framework sets a context for values education which has:

- an underpinning vision for improved values education in Australian schools;
- eight Guiding Principles to support schools in implementing values education;
- key elements and approaches providing practical guidance to schools in implementing values education; and
- nine Values for Australian Schooling that emerged from Australian school communities and from the National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the Twenty-First Century.²⁵

As part of the implementation process for the Framework, the Commonwealth commissioned two rounds of cluster school projects in which schools were selected to design, implement and evaluate quality projects in values education which would reflect and utilise the Framework in local contexts. The projects,

²³ Ibid: 12.

²⁴ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* < <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8757> > (July 2008) accessed 18 March 2009.

²⁵ Ibid.

managed by Curriculum Corporation, centered on using action research to methodologies to encourage improved values education practice for all Australian schools.²⁶

As part of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2, the Airds – Bradbury Cluster in New South Wales found that by implementing a values education approach, they were able to reduce suspensions and other disciplinary action.²⁷

The focus of the Airds – Bradbury cluster was on:

- empowering students to determine for themselves what is right or wrong through planned values activities;
- delivering values based curriculum that engages student which links to their life experience and gives students responsibility for their learning;
- promoting a safe and inclusive school environment creating pride in their school; and
- carefully planning and targeting sustained professional learning to ensure the success of embedding values education into teacher practice and curriculum content.²⁸

While the cluster-project did not explicitly highlight a reduction in bullying, teaching explicit values in this cluster of schools led to the reduction of disciplinary actions undertaken for disruptive and unruly behaviours, including bullying. Further information about values education and the cluster projects can be found on the *Values for Australian Schooling* website at www.valueseducation.edu.au/values

The Method of Shared Concern approach:

During 2008 Rigby and Griffiths conducted an evaluation of the *Method of Shared Concern* approach for reducing bullying in schools in Australia.²⁹ The *Method of Shared Concern* originated through the work of Anatol Pikas and has been used in Sweden, Finland, England, Scotland, Spain, Canada and Australia.³⁰ This method seeks to resolve bully-victim problems by empowering particular students, including bystanders, through a series of meetings to find a long-term solution to prevent individual cases of bullying from continuing. Through the method, a teacher or counsellor conveys to others the feelings of

²⁶ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *About Values Education School Cluster Projects* <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_about_values_clusters_projects,8876.html> (July 2008) accessed 18 March 2009.

²⁷ Curriculum Corporation, *At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling – The Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2*, Ed. Barbara Vaughn (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) 56.

²⁸ Ibid: 53.

²⁹ Rigby and Griffiths, *Applying the Method of Shared Concern in Australian Schools*.

³⁰ Ibid: 10.

concern for the victim to instil empathy in perpetrators and bystanders and demonstrate the harm it causes. The most critical component of this method is that it attempts to resolve cases **without** the use of punishment.³¹

Through the evaluation, the method proved generally helpful in improving the attitudes and behaviour of those who are suspected of bullying others.³² In approximately 90 per cent of cases, there were notable improvements reported for the victim of bullying; and in most cases there was cessation.³³

Limitations for this kind of method include the willingness of educational authorities and schools to undertake procedures that can sometimes be viewed as burdensome and time consuming as Rigby reports³⁴; however given it success, this indicates that time and resources need to be invested in any kind of approach used to directly address bullying; or approaches that address the wellbeing of the school community and contribute to a positive culture.

Other approaches used:

The Better Buddies Framework – developed by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation; is an initiative designed to create caring environments in primary schools and is aimed at reducing bullying. Through this initiative, children in their first and last year of primary school are teamed up with a “buddy” to help younger students feel safe and cared for and older children feel valued and respected. This initiative is supported by the purple “Buddy Bear” logo.³⁵

Other examples including the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, the *English Sheffield Project* and a systemic school-based anti-bullying program used in Canada. Many other examples are available and recommended by various experts and academics.

Important notes about recommending one particular methodology as effective practice:

The above examples are not exhaustive, and the Commonwealth does not endorse any programs not developed by or for the Government, or through a collective whole-of-government approach, but rather uses these examples to make the Committee aware of some of the approaches currently being used in the

³¹ Ibid: 10-11.

³² Ibid: 104.

³³ Ibid: 98.

³⁴ Ibid: 103.

³⁵ The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, “The Better Buddies Framework”, *The Alannah and Madeline Foundation* <<http://www.amf.org.au/better.cfm>> (February 2009) accessed 4 March 2009.

Australian setting. Further examples of methods to address bullying internationally and in individual jurisdictions can be found in TOR 6.

It is important to note that the Commonwealth does not recommend one approach only as best practice, as individual schools will require different approaches based on their own unique setting and community. Frameworks such as the NSSF offer guidance to schools and education authorities, but do not recommend particular approaches for this reason. As Rigby and Griffiths report, reductions in bullying cannot be attributed to one particular measure or methodology as programs contain different elements³⁶ (as do individual school approaches). However as a guide, the most common elements these programs and approaches include are:

- risk management procedures;
- working with children in classrooms;
- peer support practices;
- punitive methods for individual cases;
- restorative practices; and
- problem solving approaches to address behaviour issues.³⁷

Interestingly, Rigby reports that teachers primarily use a disciplinary approach (in over 75 per cent of cases) in varying degrees of severity although it has been shown to have little positive impact on situations.³⁸ This demonstrates that schools and education authorities alike need to take a fresh look at approaches to addressing bullying in school settings and acknowledge that many teachers and school leaders are unsure of how to deal with this issue, perhaps because of a lack of professional development or state and individual school policies advocating disciplinary approaches thus limiting the actions teachers can take in dealing with individual cases. While examining new approaches and trialling new methods would be resource intensive, it is essential to addressing the issue and utilising Australian schools as leading examples of effectively addressing bullying problems.

TERM OF REFERENCE FOUR:

Coordination and cooperation between relevant government agencies to address bullying.

While State governments and non-government sectors have legal responsibility for the administration of schools, the Commonwealth is committed to helping ensure the safety of our schools and is exercising

³⁶ Rigby and Griffiths, *Applying the Method of Shared Concern in Australian Schools*, 7.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ K Rigby and S Bauman, "What teachers think should be done about cases of bullying", *Professional Educator*, Australian Council for Educational Research (2007); cited in Rigby and Griffiths, *Applying the Method of Shared Concern in Australian Schools*, 9.

leadership in establishing and implementing a national approach to achieving safe and supportive school environments.

The National Safe Schools Framework:

The NSSF consists of a set of nationally agreed principles for safe and supportive school environments and includes appropriate responses which schools can adopt to address the issues of bullying, harassment, violence, child abuse and neglect.

The Commonwealth and state and territory education authorities will guide a review of the NSSF in 2009-10 through a project reference group. Members of the reference group will play an important role in the development of a revised NSSF which will be presented to MCEETYA for endorsement.

Reviewing the NSSF will also raise awareness of cross-government measures in this area and incorporate new approaches that jurisdictions have developed since the original framework's inception in 2002; these include the Commonwealth's Family-School Partnerships Framework, Queensland's School Wide Positive Behaviour Support model, and South Australia's Learner Wellbeing Framework. Reviewing the NSSF will ensure that the focus on whole-child wellbeing (academic needs, social and emotional, and physical wellbeing) is incorporated into the work all governments are taking to counter bullying and violence in schools.

Reviewing the NSSF will ensure that the collective Australian Governments are taking steps toward achieving some of the goals outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Melbourne Declaration), which was endorsed by MCEETYA in December 2008. The NSSF supports the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, in particular providing all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination; and allowing all young Australians to become confident and creative individuals who develop personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others.

Scoping Study on School-Based Programs – Violence:

In addition to the NSSF, the Government is also involved with other agencies and departments via the development of a Scoping Study on School-Based Programs addressing Violence. Information is being sourced from all state and territory Ministers for Education about educational programs that focus on the prevention of violence amongst school aged students in both government and non-government schools.

The scoping study also seeks to capture information about the extent of implementation of Commonwealth initiated programs such as the NSSF, Resilience Education and Drug Information (REDI) initiatives and other related national initiatives. This information will provide a comprehensive overview of all strategies currently in place to support students in becoming responsible citizens. Findings will be presented to MCEETYA in June 2009 to determine the need for future work in this area.

Australian Government's Cyber-Safety Plan:

The Commonwealth has also committed \$125.8 million over four years for a cyber-safety plan as part of the 2008-09 Federal Budget. Cyber-bullying is an issue currently being considered as part of this plan by the Consultative Working Group on Cyber-Safety (CWG).

The membership and terms of reference of the CWG were announced on 15 May 2008 by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy (see [Appendix B](#)). The Group is a key component of the Government's Cyber-safety Plan; it performs the important role of providing advice to the Government on measures to protect Australian children from risks they could encounter online, including cyber-bullying and viewing illegal content. The CWG meets four times a year and has members drawn from community groups, industry and government.

As part of the Government's \$125.8 million Cyber-safety Plan, \$2.313 million has been made available over four years for ongoing research into the changing digital environment to identify issues and target future policy and funding. Some of these funds will be used for a major review of Australian and international research on cyber-safety. The research project will be undertaken by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University and will be overseen by Professor Donna Cross. The research will cover matters such as the nature and prevalence of cyber-safety issues, including cyber-bullying, online predators and the disclosure of personal information. The project will also explore views on the consequences of these risks, and what technical and behavioural measures can be used by children, parents and teachers to help reduce them.

A sub-committee of the CWG has been established to specifically address the issue of cyber-bullying. A number of Government agencies are represented on the CWG Cyber-bullying Sub-committee, along with CWG members from industry and community groups. The first meeting of the CWG Cyber-bullying Sub-committee occurred in November 2008. Representatives from state and territory education departments also attended the meeting and discussed the measures and approaches taken by the states and territories to address cyber-bullying.

The work of the CWG and its Cyber-bullying Sub-committee will be informed by the Government's Youth Advisory Group on Cyber-safety. The Youth Advisory Group will provide advice to the Government and the CWG on cyber-safety issues from a young person's perspective. Cyber-bullying will be one of the cyber-safety issues discussed. Members of the Youth Advisory Group will communicate through a number of mechanisms including an online forum. The Youth Advisory Group is expected to commence in the first half of 2009.

Safe and Supportive School Communities Committee

The Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions are also represented on the Safe and Supportive Schools Communities (SSSC) officials committee. Jointly funded by the MCEETYA project formula, the SSSC is a cross jurisdictional forum which enables identification of national emerging priorities, sharing of knowledge and exchange of effective, evidence-based practice. The SSSC developed the *Bullying. No way!* website (www.bullyingnoway.com.au) which provides useful information to students and parents to address bullying and conflict, and offers a wide range of resources that can be accessed by schools communities from every sector and jurisdiction. In August 2007 AESOC approved the continuation of the SSSC project for four years from 2008-12. Subsequent funding is contingent on a review in 2009-10.

The Australian Youth Forum

The Australian Youth Forum (AYF) was launched in October 2008. The AYF is the Government's direct communication channel with young Australians and the youth sector engaging them in an ongoing dialogue on issues effecting young people now and into the future and is managed by the Office for Youth in DEEWR. The AYF includes a number of initiatives including direct youth engagement activities, such as the recent youTHINK event held on the 20 February 2009; the AYF website; outreach activities; research; youth sector engagement; and the provision of funding to the National Youth Peak.

The AYF website provides young people the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas on topical issues through the 'Have a Say' discussion boards. Each discussion board is open for approximately two months after which the input is summarised and provided to the Minister for Youth for response. Young people can suggest future discussion topics through the website and all suggestions are provided to the Youth Engagement Steering Committee for consideration. The Steering Committee then makes recommendations to the Minister for Youth. The online discussion boards provide all young Australians with the opportunity to contribute their ideas at a time that suits them, regardless of their geographical location.

On 2 October 2008, the AYF website was launched as part of the overall launch of the AYF. One of the first two ideas board discussion topics was 'Bullying'. The 'Bullying' ideas board closed on 12 December 2008. 54 posts were received on the 'Bullying' topic. The majority of the posts shared personal experiences with bullying, with a few also providing suggestions on how the Government could address this problem. Of these posts, most spoke of either increasing the punishment for bullying or providing greater education to students on bullying behaviours and general values. A full copy of the posts is provided separately.

Minister Ellis will be responding to the feedback received on the bullying topic with a statement on the AYF website. This statement is not yet publically available.

TERM OF REFERENCE FIVE:

The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches.

The most useful evidence base for Australian schools is the NSSF as it was designed within the Australian schooling context by education officials and experts in the field. Any other approaches schools use should be complimentary to the NSSF.

Throughout this submission, approaches to countering bullying and violence in schools have been outlined, particularly those in ToR 3. This includes utilising the NSSF as best practice, implementing values education as a core part of Australian schooling, the Method of Shared Concern approach, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, and the AMF Better Buddies Framework.

In addition, it is important for Commonwealth and state and territory education authorities to utilise research undertaken both nationally and internationally to inform their future policy development. This research may include:

- The Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study.
- Behind the Scenes: Insights into the Human Dimension of Covert Bullying.
- Applying the Method of Shared Concern in Australian Schools: an Evaluative Study.
- Making Australian Schools Safer: A Summary Report of the Outcomes from the National Safe Schools Framework Best Practice Grants Program (2004 – 2005).
- The National Framework for Values Education.
- An Investigation into Cyber-bullying, its Forms, Awareness and Impact, and the Relationship Between Age and Gender in Cyber-bullying (University of London research paper – July 2006).

- Behind the Screen: the Hidden Life of Youth Online (UK Institute for Public Policy Research – April 2008).

TERM OF REFERENCE SIX:

Approaches to address bullying in Australian and overseas jurisdictions.

During preparations for Australia to attend the International Network on School Bullying and Violence meeting in July 2008; run by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED), all state and territory education authorities provided advice to the Commonwealth on activities currently undertaken to prevent bullying in schools. The information below was provided as their response and the Commonwealth acknowledges each state and territory for their comprehensive contributions. Details of what each state and territory jurisdiction was undertaking as of July 2008 are detailed below.

New South Wales

In 2005, the Department of Education and Training implemented the *Anti-Bullying Plan for Schools* as part of the *Student Discipline in Government Schools* policy. As part of its implementation, all New South Wales government schools have been required to revise and/or implement an Anti-Bullying Plan. Schools include in their plan - specific strategies for students, parents, caregivers and teachers to report and intervene in bullying situations, including accessing help and support.

The *Student Discipline in Government Schools* policy also covers guidelines for a discipline code or school rules; strategies and practices to promote positive student behaviour, including specific strategies to maintain a climate of respect; strategies and practices to recognise and reinforce student achievement; and strategies and practices to manage inappropriate student behaviour.

All New South Wales government schools are also governed by the Department's *Student Welfare Policy*, which is a framework for school communities to review student welfare, determine key issues for action and develop and implement student welfare actions and initiatives.

Responsibilities within the directorate include developing, implementing and evaluating plans and programs, including training, to improve the personal safety of students and staff as well as the physical security of government schools. See www.schools.nsw.edu.au/adminsupport/safetysecurity/index.php

Victoria

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is committed to providing safe, secure and stimulating environments for all students, and provides a range of anti-bullying policies and strategies for schools to deliver on this commitment.

In 2006, the *Safe Schools are Effective Schools* policy was released and schools are currently implementing this approach. The policy details how effective schools take a whole-school approach to promoting positive behaviours, building social skills, enhancing student and teacher relationships and creating an environment in which the entire school community can feel safe, secure and supported. The Effective Schools Principle is at [Appendix C](#).

As part of the implementation of the policy, all Victorian government schools were required to review their Student Code of Conduct by the end of June 2008 in light of the best practice highlighted in the resource provided. See www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/safety/bullying/default.htm

Queensland

Education Queensland is committed to achieving excellence by enhancing educational opportunities for all students. To this end, schools create environments where:

- all students feel a strong sense of belonging
- all students learn to interact respectfully with others
- all students learn to understand and appreciate diversity, and
- all parents and carers in the community can take an active role in the life of the school.

Education Queensland's Inclusive Education policy recognises and actively addresses injustice and disadvantage, responds to uniqueness of individuals so all students can access schools and participate to achieve learning outcomes and to develop skills to work and live productively and respectfully with others from a range of backgrounds, abilities and cultures.

All state schools operate under the Education Queensland policy entitled *Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment*, which outlines Education Queensland's commitment to safe and supportive environments for all students. This policy requires that each school community develop a Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students that fosters the development and enhancement of a safe and supportive school environment. The *Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment* policy was updated in November 2006.

State schools are also required to abide by the Code of School Behaviour. This code outlines standards of behaviour expected of students and the responsibilities of parents, schools, principals and senior Education Queensland staff in promoting responsible behaviour and supporting student learning. See <http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/index.html>

Western Australia

The *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy, which was updated in January 2008, supports WA public schools to promote a safe and supportive school environment. It emphasises the importance of the social context in schools and teaching students to accept responsibility for their own behaviour. Schools are required to regularly monitor their behaviour management practices and procedures, promote pro-social behaviours and employ strategies to manage the behaviour of at-risk students.

All schools are required to outline approaches to the prevention and management of bullying in their Behaviour and Management Plans. The *Preventing and Managing Bullying Strategy* developed by the Department provides a guide for schools to develop such plans.

In addition, state-wide awareness-raising about Internet safety has been conducted for a range of educational professionals and parent groups by the Commonwealth Government entity, NetAlert and DET personnel in collaboration with the WA Police. Recently, all WA schools have been provided with a DVD, *Keeping Safe on the Internet*, developed by the Department and WA Police. This resource contains presentations for both children and adults about safe Internet behaviour. See http://policies.det.wa.edu.au/our_policies/ti_view?uid=deb58b0b4b3124d00f49657279a61861&iview=summary_view. Links to a number of other policies are available in the "related items" section of this web page, including the Child Protection, Duty of Care for Students and Attendance policies.

South Australia

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) *Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12* was launched in 2007 following an extended inquiry, involving sites, Central and District offices and partners, including families, other agencies and experts. See www.decs.sa.gov.au/learnerwellbeing

This framework is a summary of current knowledge about learner wellbeing that is strongly grounded in local practice. It has been developed to support sites from child care to senior secondary schools to take an inquiry-minded approach to the improvement of wellbeing for all learners, beginning with a particular focus in Site Learning Plans in 2007. The strong and mutual interconnection between wellbeing and

learning has meant that learner wellbeing has always been an integral part of educators work. The DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework supports educators to build upon and improve on current effective practice through the use of an inquiry approach. This Framework acknowledges bullying as a risk factor for students disengaging from education.

Consistent with the NSSF, South Australia has two cross schooling sector advisory groups regarding bullying harassment and violence and child protection.

In 2005, SA Government, Catholic and Independent schools joined forces to form the Coalition to Decrease Bullying, Harassment and Violence in South Australian Schools (the Coalition). The Coalition supported the 2006 and 2007 National Safe Schools Weeks and research through the University of South Australia. It was the first time that all three school sectors in the state joined together to tackle the issues. The Coalition membership includes representatives from the three schooling sectors and eminent researchers from three of South Australia's universities, Professors Ken Rigby and Phillip Slee and Drs Barbara Spears and Shoko Yoneyama. In 2007 the Coalition developed and distributed to parents through their local schools advice regarding cyber safety called *cyber bullying e-crime and the protection of children*.

The Chief Executives of the three schooling sectors regularly meet regarding child protection. *Proactive Practices for Staff and their Interactions with Students* form part of a set of child protection policies that have been developed in collaboration with Catholic Education South Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia. The government and non government school sectors are committed to establishing child protection standards that are consistent across all South Australian schools. The state education sector has developed *Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum* with the other two schooling sectors likely to use this resource. As a condition of registration all teachers in South Australia are required to have a police check and be trained in the mandatory notification of child abuse.

In recognition of the role of trauma in student behaviour and wellbeing, school counsellors are trained in SMART (Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma) developed in collaboration with the Australian Childhood Foundation.

DECS launched the *School Discipline* Policy in 1996. Every school received a copy of the *School Discipline Implementation Kit* to support schools to create safe, orderly, productive and successful learning communities. This policy states that DECS, school communities, services and agencies will work together

to create learning communities which are safe, inclusive, conducive to learning and free from harassment and bullying. Within this framework all schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy.

Australian Capital Territory

In 2007, the Department of Education and Training in the ACT updated its *Providing Safe Schools P- 12* policy. The policy dictates that all schools should promote and seek to provide a supportive learning environment in which all students can expect to feel safe. It emphasises the need for schools to develop their individual policies in consultation with students and parents and to use the implementation strategies outlined in the NSSF.

The *Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT Public Schools* policy states that all schools must develop procedures to counter bullying, harassment and violence. Schools must report instances of bullying, harassment and violence that pose an immediate threat to the safety of students and staff as critical incidents. This report must be made to the Director Schools immediately by telephone and in writing within 24 hours. See *Providing Safe Schools P – 12 policy* at [www.det.act.gov.au/ data/assets/pdf file/0005/19499/SafeSchoolsP-12.pdf](http://www.det.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/19499/SafeSchoolsP-12.pdf) and the *Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT Public Schools* policy at www.det.act.gov.au/ data/assets/pdf file/0004/17608/CounteringBullyingHarassment.pdf

Tasmania

The Tasmanian Department of Education has supported schools to adopt positive behaviour support approaches as part of the curriculum since 2005. The *Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS)* program currently supports approximately a third of all government schools across the state to review what currently happens in their schools and, with their broader communities, to refine and implement positive behaviour support approaches. SWPBS is best described as a systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools families and communities to design effective environments that improve the link between research validated practices and teaching and learning contexts.

The primary purpose of SWPBS is to provide safe and supportive school environments that prevent problems because they are predictable, have consistent expectations, where safe behaviour is explicitly taught, modelled and acknowledged; and the emphasis is on modelling, teaching and promoting positive behaviour. The 4 Positive Behaviour Systems are outlined in the diagram at [Appendix C](#). For more information see www.education.tas.gov.au/school/health/wellbeing/positivebehaviour. The Tasmanian

Curriculum *Health and wellbeing* enables students to understand the factors that contribute to the wellbeing of themselves, others and the community.

Northern Territory

The *Safe Schools NT Framework* is designed to strengthen school discipline and learning. This framework requires that the department promotes safe and supportive teaching and learning environments for staff and students; promotes positive learning environments; and builds staff capacity and sustainable practices through professional learning.

All schools were required to implement the *Safe Schools NT Code of Behaviour* by the end of 2007.

Throughout this process, professional learning for teachers and principals has been provided and schools are given resources and tip sheets to allow schools to individually address their school and student needs.

The *Building Relationships and School Wellbeing* (BR&SW) Program was the Department's response to increased calls from schools for support with issues of student behaviour. BR&SW was developed in 2004 and is based on best practice. BR&SW involves ten Key Elements including the NSSF to develop a climate of wellbeing within the school community. Qualified teachers are placed as above establishment positions in selected schools to assist them to review their policies and processes, the relationships between students, teachers, parents, the school and wider community. Once these elements are reviewed and a plan is developed, they assist in the implementation of this plan for the agreed period. For more information see www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/safeschools

Overseas Jurisdictions

During the 2008 OECD meeting, eight countries provided information and presentations on the work undertaken to address bullying in their jurisdictions. The information below is taken from the report provided by the OECD following the meeting.³⁹ For the purposes of this submission, the four countries deemed to have the most progressive approaches (aside from Australia) have been included.

Belgium (Flanders)

In Belgium (Flanders) a National Policy Plan was developed in 2003 as a long-term vision for preventing bullying. The Plan consists of four elements:

- A Prevention Plan on behalf of pupils which includes policy on violence, bullying and inappropriate sexual behaviour. Key concepts include a positive school climate; improving social skills; the

³⁹ Henning Plischewski and Kirsti Tveitereid, "Policy Overview of school bullying and violence among 8 members of the SBV network", *International Network on School Bullying and Violence* (2008).

establishment of a behaviour code in all schools; awareness raising and education for parents; teachers and students.

- A Prevention Plan on behalf of school staff which includes creating a positive work environment, damage control, awareness raising and extra education and training.
- An Intervention on behalf of pupils which includes principles for dealing with problem behaviour, stopping unwanted behaviour and interventions for serious issues.
- An Intervention on behalf of school staff including complaints mediation, principles for internal investigations, and outlines the role of principals.⁴⁰

Belgium takes a leading edge in that it clearly acknowledges the welfare of teachers and school staff in its policy. This acknowledges that the wellbeing of staff is vital to the wellbeing of students, thus reducing the risk of problem behaviours like bullying.

In addition, Belgium has invested in two initiatives designed to target particular groups in an effort to reduce bullying and violence in schools. The *Youth for Youth* Project targets disadvantaged youth in secondary schools by giving them a “yo-yo” coach. The Yo-Yo coach is a young adult who has recently left school and is often from a similar background to the young person they work with. This coach works with the young person and also advises their teachers on appropriate strategies to address their behaviour problems.⁴¹

The *Time Out* projects are run by 15 welfare organisations (funded by the Belgian Department of Education and Training) for students with serious behaviour problems such as theft and persistent bullying. Under these projects, students are taken out of school for a short (five to ten days) or long (four weeks) period of time. The projects are designed to reintegrate and reengage students with school. Restorative justice practice is also used to get the perpetrator to recognise their poor behaviour.⁴²

New Zealand

New Zealand schools use the *Supporting Positive Behaviours* toolkit and website which provide information on how schools should respond to inappropriate behaviour such as bullying within the *National Administration Guidelines*.⁴³ The website recommends resources which use a whole-school approach, as well as classroom and targeted interventions.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 45.

⁴¹ Ibid: 46.

⁴² Ibid: 46-7.

⁴³ Ibid: 49.

Slovakia

Slovakia developed the *Methodological Regulation on Bullying* in 2006, which has eight guiding principles for schools to respond to problem behaviours. The regulation explains how schools should develop and ethical code, implement sanctions and guiding information and resources for teachers.⁴⁴

The OECD - International Network on School Bullying and Violence (SBV)

In summarising the 2008 conference (where the above information was derived), the OECD noted that many countries focus on "... exclusion and punishment rather than positive early intervention" to respond to the problem.⁴⁵ This is evident in many of the countries not detailed above who are part of the SBV Network. Australia takes a leading edge in this arena by considering early approaches to student wellbeing including social and emotional learning in the early years, values education, and the various positive behaviour and wellbeing approaches used in state and territory jurisdictions.

⁴⁴ Ibid: 50.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 52.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROVISION OF A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

(THE NATIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK POSTER FOR AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS)

National Safe Schools Framework

Guiding Principles for the provision of a safe and supportive school environment

Australian schools:

1. affirm the right of all school community members to feel safe at school
2. promote care, respect and cooperation, and value diversity
3. implement policies, programmes and processes to nurture a safe and supportive school environment
4. recognise that quality leadership is an essential element that underpins the creation of a safe and supportive school environment
5. develop and implement policies and programmes through processes that engage the whole school community
6. ensure that roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community in promoting a safe and supportive environment are explicit, clearly understood and disseminated
7. recognise the critical importance of pre-service and ongoing professional development in creating a safe and supportive school environment
8. have a responsibility to provide opportunities for students to learn through the formal curriculum the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for positive relationships
9. focus on policies that are proactive and oriented towards prevention and intervention
10. regularly monitor and evaluate their policies and programmes so that evidence-based practice supports decisions and improvements
11. take action to protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON EDUCATION
EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

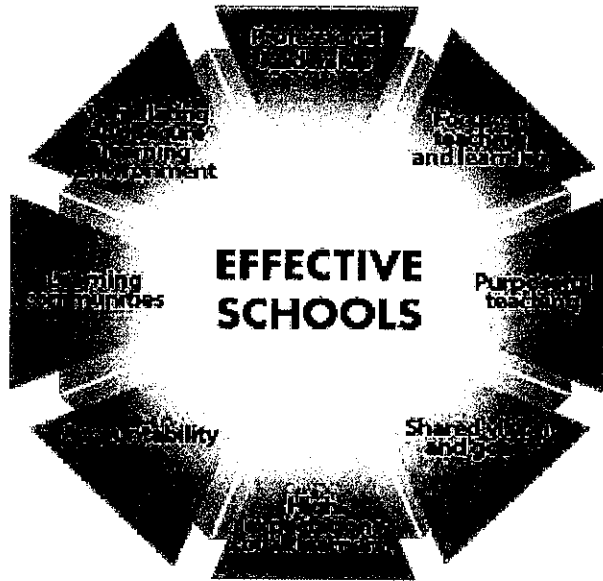
Members of the Consultative Working Group on Cyber-Safety⁴⁶

Member	Title and organisation	Role
Mr Abul Rizvi	Deputy Secretary Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy	Chair
Dr Judith Slocombe	Chief Executive Officer Alannah and Madeleine Foundation	Member
Ms Hetty Johnston	Executive Director Bravehearts Inc	Member
Ms Bernadette McMenamin AO	Chief Executive Officer Child Wise	Member
Mrs Sue Hutley	Executive Director Australian Library and Information Association	Member
Mr Chris Althaus	Chief Executive Officer Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association	Member
Mr Peter Coroneos	Chief Executive Officer Internet Industry Association	Member
Mr Darren Kane	General Manager Law Enforcement and Legal Support Group Telstra Corporate Limited	Member

⁴⁶ Tim Marshall, "Consultative Working Group to Improve Cyber-Safety", *Media Centre – Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy* < http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2008/035 > (9 February 2009) accessed 16 March 2009.

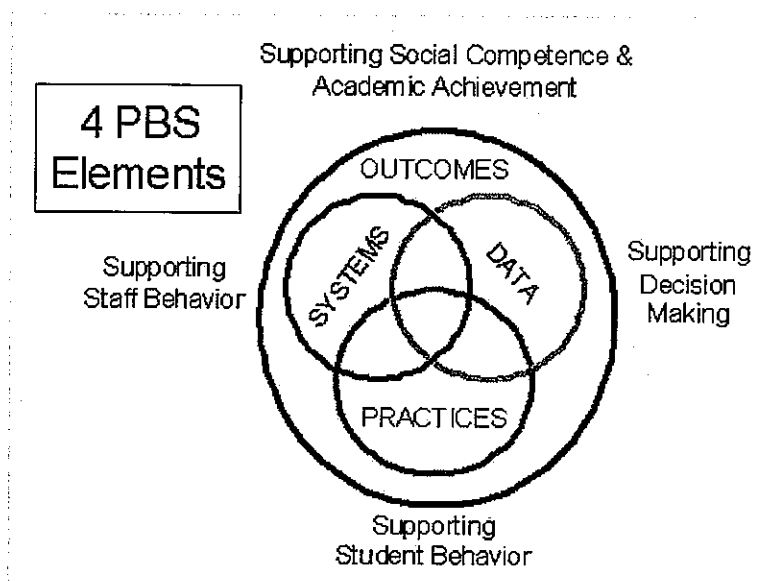
Mr Anthony Pillion	Manager Webshield	Member
Ms Jennifer Mardosz	Vice President, Business and Legal Affairs Fox Interactive Media	Member
Ms Carolyn Dalton	Senior Policy Counsel Google Australia	Member
Ms Julie Inman-Grant	Asia-Pacific Regional Director of Safety and Security Microsoft Pty. Limited	Member
Dr Karl Alderson	Assistant Secretary Attorney-General's Department	Member
Ms Nerida O'Loughlin	General Manager Industry Outputs Division Australian Communications and Media Authority	Member
Mr Andrew Colvin	National Manager High Tech Crime Operations Australian Federal Police	Member
Ms Gabrielle Phillips	Branch Manager Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Member
Ms Fiona Smart	Branch Manager Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	

Victoria's Effective Schools Principle



Source – Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (VIC)

The Tasmanian School Wide Positive Behaviour Support Program -
Positive Behaviour Systems



Source - www.pbis.org/schoolwide.htm