

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

**Organisation:** NSW Secondary Principals' Council

**Name:** Ms Christine Mason

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# NSW Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) Additional Submission to the Legislative Council's Inquiry into Bullying

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## Background information

Data was gathered in February 2009 from Secondary and Central School Principals via an email survey containing questions based on the framework provided by the **NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into Bullying**. Ninety two responses were received from 631 schools. These responses were used to provide information under the headings listed in the terms of reference.

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

The majority of teachers in NSW government schools have accessed professional learning to support a reduction in bullying and are knowledgeable of the NSW Department of Education and Training's documents and resources, some of which are listed below.

1. *Anti-bullying Plan for Schools*
2. *The student Welfare Policy*
3. *Values in NSW Public Schools*
4. [www.det.nsw.edu.au/antibullying](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/antibullying)

Principals identified that whilst bullying can be a problem in schools, its impact is not felt by high percentages of students. Of the Bullying that does take place Principals ranked the prevalence of types of bullying from highest to lowest as follows.

	Highest
Verbal teasing/harassment/psychological	1 <sup>st</sup> (275)
Cyber messages	2 <sup>nd</sup> (257)
Exclusion	3 <sup>rd</sup> (249)
Physical harassment/intimidation	4 <sup>th</sup> (237)
'Ganging up'	5 <sup>th</sup> (229)
Physical violence	6 <sup>th</sup> (207)

## 2. Factors contributing to bullying

Principals identified and ranked factors that relate to the **target ('victim')** which are perceived as contributing to bullying.

	Highest
Lack of self esteem/ Mental health issues	1 <sup>st</sup> (268)
Poor role modelling	2 <sup>nd</sup> (259)
Need to belong	3 <sup>rd</sup> (253)
Racial/cultural/socio economic differences	4 <sup>th</sup> (203)
Lack of action or support from staff	5 <sup>th</sup> (186)
Media	6 <sup>th</sup> (165)

Principals identified and ranked factors that relate to the **bully** which are perceived as contributing to bullying.

	Highest
Poor role modelling	1 <sup>st</sup> (322)
Lack of self esteem/ Mental health issues	2 <sup>nd</sup> (282)
Need to belong	3 <sup>rd</sup> (259)
Racial/cultural/socio economic differences	4 <sup>th</sup> (214)
Lack of action or support from staff	5 <sup>th</sup> (188)
Media	6 <sup>th</sup> (185)

The survey enabled the identification of other factors contributing to students being bullied. These have been grouped under sub headings.

### **Media and cultural influences**

- Stereo typical male image promoted by the media
- Gang mentality
- Movies, trashy magazines, violent song lyrics and music videos, hideous violence in computer games and on vast numbers of websites, pictures of semi naked very thin 'role models' such as Lindsay Logan and Paris Hilton picture drunk, abusive, in conflict with reporters, fans, each other
- Weight issues
- The fine line that exists between the bully and the bullied
- Often kids who are bullied learn to bully and become the perpetrator rather than the victim
- Social skills, history, family capacity, resilience, reluctance of peers to support victim, fear of disclosure, sexuality, appearance, boyfriend/girlfriend conflict, no fear by bully, desensitised by media violence

### **Principals' responses relating to students who are the target or 'victim' of bullying behaviours**

- Those being bullied are usually "different" – physically, being a newcomer, social, cultural, economic, anything...
- Student refusal to report
- Students thinking that reporting bullying will increase the problem
- The establishment of "pecking order" among students
- Lack of resilience on part of the victim
- Victim's inability to relate to others
- Failure to conform seems to intimidate the bullies
- History of bullying in Primary school
- Poor social and emotional development
- Inability of victim to read other people

- Not understanding that their own behaviour and responses can make them the victims of bullying

#### **Principals' responses relating to students who using 'bullying behaviours'**

- Bully – the need to dominate
- Jealousy group mentality
- Pecking order important
- Weekend issues of not being part of the party scene
- Girlfriend/boyfriend issues when peer group intervenes
- Lack of cognitive functioning
- With girls, adolescent bitchiness, lack of awareness and lack of compassion

## Community and parental influences and attitudes

- Parents do not have strategies to support students who are being bullied
- Parents who become involved and escalate the situation
- Parents who do not allow their child to develop resilience, they want retribution for the bully rather than allowing the student the opportunity to work through the issues
- Poor supervision, following internet trends, poor parental responses, guidance and practices
- Small community – parents have generational angst, passed to children
- The lack of student ability to focus on their future and poor role modelling in the home environment
- Community issues coming into the school
- Cultural aspects in a town/areas e.g. the rugby league mentality

## Reporting incidents of bullying

The reasons for students' non-reporting of incidents of bullying have been identified and ranked in the following table.

Fear of further bullying/intimidation	Highest 1 <sup>st</sup> (340)
A feeling that nothing CAN be done by teachers or parents	2 <sup>nd</sup> (279)
A feeling that nothing WILL be done by teachers or parents	3 <sup>rd</sup> (246)
A sign of weakness/embarrassment	4 <sup>th</sup> (243)
Belief that the student can handle the situation alone	5 <sup>th</sup> (230)
Culture within the school does not promote this	6 <sup>th</sup> (183)

99 % of respondents believe that teachers in public schools have accessed professional learning to support a reduction in bullying.

### **3. Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying including 'cyber-bullying'**

#### **5. The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches**

Numerous strategies and anti-bullying programs have been implemented in government schools to address the issue of bullying.

**Many strategies, programs and resources used in schools to reduce or eliminate bullying behaviours amongst students were identified are some are listed below.**

- Secondary and Central schools use specific programs to educate Year 7 students about bullying and to build resilience
- The Police Youth Liaison Officer is utilised in many schools to address year groups with presentations
- Schools focus on communication strategies to inform students, teachers, parents and the community about bullying, to articulate zero tolerance and to encourage prompt reporting so that effective action can be taken to eliminate or reduce the negative impact of bullying on students -both the perpetrator and the target
- Schools address bullying behaviours in their student code of conduct and welfare and discipline policies and procedures
- Staff access a wide range of workshops on understanding and implementing anti-bullying strategies and interventions during staff development days and on other occasions
- Schools work with students and parents to address issues outside of school which contribute to bullying behaviours
- Mind Matters, Peer Support, Anger Management, Theatre Productions, Bully Busters, Cooling Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Bullying No Way, Better Futures, Circle Time, Mediation, Mentoring, Rock and Water, Student Leadership, Transition Program, Pikas Method and You Can Do It are all programs listed by principals as being effective
- Co-ordination of Anti-Racism awareness and programs in schools
- Use of Behaviour Support Teacher to work with targeted students – both bully and bullied
- Develop a school culture where students "report" ,rather than dob, bullying situations
- Be vigilant; use method of shared concern
- Establish clear welfare and discipline policies and procedures with classroom teachers closely supported in implementation by school executive
- Establish good communication with local police school liaison officer
- Implement student leadership programs - proactive student social justice group
- Embed welfare orientation & settlement programs within school curriculum
- Ensure early intervention
- Articulate clearly defined rights, responsibilities & consequence in classroom welfare & discipline policy
- Expect a strong and consistent response from all staff to address bullying behaviours
- Provide clear action statements for teachers to follow
- Constantly communicate – use Peer support, Pikas methodology, whole school approach and assembly reinforcement; display posters around school ; talk about the issue and expose bully traits
- Encourage reporting; act swiftly and decisively when bullying is reported; report to staff and students when significant events or action occurs
- Develop a common anti-bullying policy and practice with the feeder primary schools so that good practices are established early
- Publicise a plan for students to follow if bullied
- Map curriculum to highlight how anti-bullying messages can be included in classroom teaching

- Involve parents - urge parents to contact the school if they become aware of bullying
- Reorganise playground layout and seating to make more inclusive groupings
- Conduct round table negotiations with those involved – no blame



**4. Co-ordination and co-operation between relevant government agencies to address bullying; and**  
**6. Approaches to address bullying in Australia and overseas jurisdictions**

Students, staff and parents have received training from agencies (outside NSWDET) to assist in bullying reduction

Agencies that have provided this support (and the frequency of mention) include:

Police/Police Youth Liason/PCYC	32	Various performance groups (Class Act Theatre Co, Brainstorm Productions, Stride, JIRT)	7
Community and mental health agencies/local counselling services/Rotary	16	Churches/Religious/Salvos/Barnardo's Mission Australia/Centacare	14
DOCS	8	DET/school counsellor/district student welfare team/ Cabramatta Street Team	7

**Other sources of support include:** Plan It Youth, Better Futures, Dr Suzie Green, Ken Rigby (Adelaide Uni), Aboriginal Support Group, Job Link Plus, Chaplaincy Program, Community justice, Beyond Blue, Links to Learning, Cultural Groups (Deadly Vibe competitions), Mind Matters, Juvenile Justice, ISTB's Adult Mental Health Team, Home Base – local youth support agency, Pius XI (Aboriginal Community Health), Family Centre, Youth Pathways, Psychologist Michael Durrant, Workcover, CAMHS DEEWR, Eastlakes Family Support and Kuringai Youth Development services.

**A few additional comments from principals relating to this inquiry are listed below.**

- There is growth in cyber bullying. Cyber issues and text messaging are hard to deal with. School communities are learning to deal with this issue and research and support would be welcomed.
- Unfortunately in many cases bullying is an ongoing battle with basic human nature!
- Resilience training must go hand in hand with anti bullying initiatives.
- Bullying is an issue that when dealt with immediately can be curtailed to a certain extent.
- The word 'bullying' is part of the problem because it simplifies the issue into victim and perpetrator which as a concept does not always match the facts. Usually both sides are incredibly lacking in social training and their lack of skills manifests itself in ways we attempt to sum it all up with the word 'bullying'.

- Parents are a key group to work with in order to build resilience.