

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

Organisation: Government of Western Australia, Department of Education and
Training

Name: Ms Sharyn O'Neill

Position: Director General

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Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Education and Training**

Your ref :
Our ref : D09/0115088
Enquiries :

Ms Beverly Duffy
Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Duffy

Thank you for your correspondence dated 17 December 2008 offering the opportunity for the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, to provide a submission to your Committee regarding bullying of children and young people. Please find attached the Department's submission on this key issue.

The issue of bullying is one that the Department takes very seriously and we welcome this opportunity to provide some information for the Standing Committee to consider.

The Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, looks forward to hearing the results of your inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharyn O'Neill', written over a circular stamp.

SHARYN O'NEILL
DIRECTOR GENERAL

18 MAR 2009

Att.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION FOR INQUIRY INTO THE BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Department of Education and Training of Western Australia would like to submit the following information for consideration by the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 under its Terms of Reference in the inquiry into bullying of children and young people.

RESPONSES UNDER THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

The Department of Education and Training of Western Australia uses the following definition of bullying:

Bullying is when an individual or group misuses power to target another individual or group to intentionally threaten or harm them on more than one occasion. This may involve verbal, physical, relational and psychological forms of bullying.

This definition refers to all the key aspects of bullying behaviour. The term 'bullying' is often misused. There is misunderstanding in the community that leads to 'one-off' acts of violence being labelled 'bullying'. Bullying is repeated and involves an imbalance of power. Violent incidents are more often isolated and the power relationship may well be equal. The Department distinguishes 'bullying' from 'violence' as they require different responses and a lack of clarity can lead to choosing inappropriate responses that can result in poor outcomes. Bullying requires a response that addresses the social dynamics if long term change is to occur.

Bullying takes many forms and can include:

- **Verbal Bullying:** The repeated use of words to hurt or humiliate another individual or group. Verbal bullying includes using put-downs, insulting language, name-calling, swearing, nasty notes and homophobic, racist or sexist comments.
- **Psychological Bullying:** Includes repeated stalking, threats or implied threats, unwanted email or text messaging, abusive websites, threatening gestures, manipulation, emotional blackmail, and threats to an individual's reputation and sense of safety.
- **Relational Bullying:** Usually involves repeatedly ostracising others by leaving them out or convincing others to exclude or reject another individual or group from their social connections, making up or spreading rumours and sharing or threatening to share another's personal information.
- **Physical Bullying:** Includes repetitive low level hitting, kicking, pinching, pushing, tripping, "ganging up", unwanted physical or sexual touching, and damage to personal property.
- **Cyber Bullying:** Involves the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, text messages, instant messaging and websites to engage in the bullying of other individuals or groups. This technology provides an alternative means for verbal, relational and psychological forms of bullying.

Apprentices and Trainees

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (1984) in Western Australia clearly specifies that workplace bullying is an occupational hazard in the workplace. While employers are primarily responsible and need to comply with the requirements of the Act, employees and others have responsibility for OH&S in the workplace.

Apprentices and trainees in Western Australia are managed by the Department of Education and Training through ApprentiCentre which has legislative responsibility under the *Industrial Training Act 1975* to ensure that apprentices and trainees are supervised and that the training environment is suitable and supportive. ApprentiCentre employs field staff based both in the metropolitan and regional areas to assist and support employers, apprentices, trainees and other stakeholders in ensuring that all parties meet their obligations under the training contract.

Apprenticeship officers monitor the workplace and are able to mediate with the employers on instances of bullying in the workplace or other OH&S issues. Reportable incidents are reported to Worksafe, Department of Commerce if they require more serious intervention that would lie within the legislative jurisdiction of another state government agency.

All first year apprentices attend inductions conducted by apprenticeship officers and these sessions include information on OH&S responsibilities and related issues. Every apprentice and their guardian (for those 18 years and younger) has access to an apprenticeship officer and to ApprentiCentre's 13 19 54 information line which provides an avenue to discuss any issue which impacts on their training contract.

In addition to the support provided by ApprentiCentre, school based training arrangements such as School Based Traineeships, Apprenticeships and the School Apprenticeship Link program also have coverage under the policies and provisions of the school system.

2. Extent of Bullying

In an extensive research project by the Child Health Promotions Research Centre (CHPRC) and Edith Cowan University conducted in Western Australia it was reported that 45% of Year 4 students and 49% of Year 6 students reported they were bullied by other students at least once in a term. Approximately 50% of the students reported being bullied at recess and lunchtime and between 15% and 22% reported being bullied in the classroom.

This study found that boys were more likely to experience direct physical bullying and girls more likely to experience indirect non-physical forms, such as exclusion and having rumours spread about them. In general girls are bullied about as often as boys.

Data from the Kids Help Line as cited in Rigby (p37) indicates that the most severe problems with bullying occur in the 10-14 year old age group with figures tapering off among students 15-19 years.

Cyber bullying data

Data that was collected by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre during Terms 2 and 3 of 2008 from 2 400 students from 40 Western Australian schools across the state and sectors showed the following:

- Students who are cyber bullied are:
 - 13 times more likely to be bullied face-to-face;
 - four times more likely to cyber bully others and twice as likely to bully others face-to-face;
 - twice as likely to have their own mobile phone and nearly twice as likely to have wireless internet at home; and
 - nearly twice as likely to report poor school grades.
- Students who cyber bully others are:
 - 18 times more likely to bully others face-to-face;
 - four times more likely to be cyber bullied;
 - nearly three times more likely to have their own mobile phone; and
 - more likely to think cyber bullying is okay.

- Mobile phones are most commonly used for cyber bullying among adolescents in Australia.
- According to the research findings cyber bullying has a greater impact on those being bullied than traditional face-to-face bullying.

The Department acknowledges that it is very difficult to obtain accurate data on bullying as it is dependent on the degree of reporting. While reporting mechanisms are in place for behavioural incidents in public schools, bullying is not a separate category. Data on bullying incidents is generally collected by schools on an individual basis and informs their improvement planning. It must be noted that data can only be collected on reporting not necessarily on the number of incidents. Unless it is reported it cannot be recorded. This can result in inaccurate data. Encouraging reporting of bullying is the first step to being able to collect accurate data.

3. Factors contributing to bullying

Factors contributing to bullying in schools and society are numerous. No one theory completely explains how bullying behaviour is developed. However, recent evidence strongly suggests that school ethos can contribute significantly to the incidence and degree of bullying behaviours.

Persuasive evidence by Roland and Galloway (2002) as cited by Rigby (2007) suggests that where there is effective classroom management that develops a positive classroom climate, where the work is interesting and rewarding and where students feel respected and confident there is less likelihood of students engaging in bullying. There is also a considerable body of evidence that suggests there is less chance of bullying behaviour occurring in schools where bullying is actively discouraged, where an inclusive and caring community is developed and where the whole school community is well informed of bullying and how to deal with it.

While school environment can have an impact on the incidence of bullying there are many other contributing factors such as personality, genetic predisposition, family life and parenting, social prejudice and group dynamics. These factors seem to act in conjunction with each other, rather than bullying being the direct result of one or the other. It is this complexity that makes bullying so difficult to address.

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

Bullying requires early and appropriate interventions from schools. Responses need to take into consideration social dynamics. Reprimands and other behavioural sanctions are unlikely to reduce bullying and may result in the student who has experienced the bullying being further targeted.

Preventative approaches to address bullying need to consider whole school, targeted group and individual student interventions.

When considering the whole school prevention strategies, the components that contribute to the greatest reduction in bullying are:

- increasing awareness of bullying in the school community;
- having a whole school plan that addresses bullying;
- promoting a positive school ethos that encourages open communication;
- consistently using behaviour management methods that encourage empathy, problem solving and positive action;
- mobilising the peer group to respond effectively to bullying behaviour and to support students who have been bullied;
- addressing bullying and social skill development within the curriculum; and
- enhancing the playground environment and supervision.

The preventative whole school structures and strategies that research is indicating will make a difference are:

- shared leadership where a whole school pastoral care approach is promoted;
- a school culture that seeks to be proactive and restore relationships damaged through conflict;
- awareness-raising strategies and planning to deal with specific forms of bullying in particular cyber-bullying and racism;
- a well-resourced and skilled student services team;
- close collaboration with parents and the wider community on bullying;
- developing active, trusting relationships among all school community groups;
- professional learning for staff and parents addressing bullying prevention and management;
- professional learning for staff and parents on identifying the signs of a student being bullied,
- social competency development curriculum;
- positive staff role modelling;
- vertical timetabling to build student relationships across year groups;
- providing incentives for respectful behaviour; and
- collecting appropriate information so that preventative strategies can be monitored for success and changed if ineffective.

Early identification of bullying behaviours is vital if schools are to be most effective in managing bullying. It is important that schools respond in a timely fashion when issues are identified as it is understood that those who are engaged in bullying and are bullied can experience long term effects.

Targeted early intervention strategies could include:

- the development of effective bystander behaviour through the curriculum;
- identifying early signs of relationship issues within year groups and across the school (e.g. class meetings and social problem solving);
- proactive teaching of pro-social behaviour to identified students;
- actively providing other options for individual students experiencing unsafe areas or times at the school;
- referring identified students to appropriate specialist support staff;
- assisting in repairing and rebuilding trust and relationships between identified students and others;
- providing students at risk of being targeted or those who demonstrate bullying behaviour with access to specialist/pastoral care staff;
- setting up buddy systems for vulnerable students;
- using whole school behaviour management strategy methods for identified students e.g. friendly reminders of appropriate cooperative behaviours; and
- identifying cohorts of students and year groups who are either engaging in bullying behaviours or who are being bullied (or both) that require targeted programs.

Schools need to provide clear processes for staff, students and parents to report bullying when it occurs or when they become aware that a student is being bullied. It is also vital that these processes are fully understood by parents so they are aware what actions they should take if they believe that their own child is being bullied or is bullying others.

Public schools in Western Australia are encouraged and supported to outline the actions teachers are expected to take if a bullying incident is reported to them or if they witness an incident. All school staff need to be confident in their ability to deal with bullying situations as they occur. Professional learning of teachers and other school staff is therefore essential to assist their effectiveness to deal with bullying incidents in a supportive and effective manner.

In response to incidents of bullying, schools need to have strong case management and student/situation monitoring processes in place, especially for students with ongoing high support needs. These processes will often involve the relevant school staff, parents, the student/s and external agency services where needed. A well structured reporting and recording system should be in place to ensure a consistent approach to each reported incident. This work is labour intensive and requires significant resourcing to implement effectively.

Schools are encouraged to identify the key staff who will be involved in the intervention for reported bullying incidents and be clear about the approach the school will take in managing these incidents. Bullying is effectively managed by practices that resolve conflict, restore relationships and promote tolerance. The approach recommended to Western Australian public schools are restorative and solution-focused in nature with the intention of restoring relationships.

Therefore the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia encourages schools to implement humanistic approaches such as:

- the *Pikas Shared Concern* method (particularly for older students);
- *No Blame Approach*;
- social problem solving approaches;
- restorative practices that rebuild and repair relationships;
- community conferences;
- small group and individual conferences;
- motivational interviewing; and
- cooperation circles

In situations which have resulted in significant harm, behaviour management sanctions may need to be explored. Sanctions are also warranted where the methods described above have been unsuccessful in resolving the problem with particular students.

It needs to be noted that the use of sanctions as the first strategy may result in retaliation against those who reported or the person who has been bullied. However, when all other options have been exhausted or where the bullying is of such a serious nature that the use of restorative processes only is not sufficient, then sanctions may need to be considered.

Cyber Bullying

The nature of cyber bullying means that the amount of time students can be exposed to bullying behaviours has increased. Whereas with traditional at school bullying behaviours students could feel safe at home, with the advent of cyber bullying this is no longer the case. It has also complicated the landscape by making it possible for students to be anonymous in their bullying. This anonymity means that a student who is being bullied is unable to identify the person engaging in the bullying. This can make it very difficult to address. Evidence is indicating that some students who would not engage in bullying behaviour face-to-face will participate in cyber bullying because of the anonymity.

Additionally the role of the school in relation to cyber bullying that is occurring outside of school hours but is feeding back into the school day can blur the lines of responsibility. Should the school deal with the issue or should it become a parent and possibly a police matter?

As the culmination of the cyber bullying research conducted by the CHPRC discussed previously, 200 Year 10 students were involved in a cyber summit. One of main aims of the summit was to engage students in problem solving around the issue of cyber bullying. The results of the summit have been presented to the Minister for Education in Western Australia in the form of a Declaration. The ideas outlined in this document demonstrate the willingness of young people to own the problem and to develop their own solutions.

Bystanders to Bullying

The role of bystanders is becoming more clearly understood and it is evident that they can play a pivotal role in reducing bullying behaviour. A bystander may be someone who sees bullying or knows about it but he or she is not usually directly involved. Everyone at the school can have a role in supporting those who are being bullied. All members of the whole school community need to be aware of their role in supporting those who are being bullied and their responsibility to discourage bullying behaviours when they observe them. Any member of the school community can be a bystander and can act successfully to prevent or stop bullying. Sometimes it is difficult to act at the time of the bullying incident but reporting bullying behaviour is also important. Bystanders are encouraged to report to someone who can help, such as a member of the school staff.

Research conducted by Ken Rigby (2007) suggests that while bystanders can play a powerful role in preventing and stopping bullying, peer intervention is more effective than teacher or parent intervention. It is therefore vital that schools and parents encourage student bystanders to become involved in appropriate ways.

5. Co-ordination and co-operation between relevant government agencies to address bullying.

The Department of Education and Training in Western Australia has worked, and continues to work closely with Edith Cowan University and the Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC) in research projects looking at the nature, effect and prevention of bullying (including cyber bullying). Some of this research culminated in the development of the Friendly Schools and Families Bullying Project materials. A large number of public primary schools in Western Australia are now implementing this approach successfully to reduce and prevent bullying.

The Department has also taken a key role in the coordination of the Cybersmart Detectives online activity developed and presented by Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). The Department liaises between ACMA, Catholic Education Office WA and Australian Independent Schools Western Australia to ensure all primary schools, public and private, are able to access the activity.

6. The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches.

The Department of Education and Training Western Australia recognises that the most effective anti-bullying approaches are those that are strongly evidence based. The evidence-base that underpins the Department's approach to the prevention and management of bullying has been brought together through the Friendly Schools and Families Program. Developed as the result of six years of comprehensive research and evaluation the program provides a set of evidence-based successful practice principles and exemplar case studies. A four year trial involving 2000 Western Australian students, their parents and teachers commenced in 2000 and concluded in 2003. The results of this trial showed that students who were involved in the program "were significantly less likely to experience bullying and to bully others and more likely to tell if they were bullied or saw others being bullied, than those who did not receive the program" (Friendly Schools and Families. 2004. p1).

This program encourages a whole school approach to bullying that recognises the part the whole community plays in this issue. It provides a framework based on six inter-related components – policy development, whole-school ethos, student support, classroom practice, family links and physical environment.

7. Approaches to address bullying in Australian and overseas jurisdictions.

The approaches to bullying encouraged and supported by the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia are informed by a close association with Professor Donna Cross. Professor Cross is a founding member of Core-Net", a network of the six leading research centres of Canada, the USA, Finland, Ireland, Norway and

Australia who meet annually to examine international perspectives in bullying. Professor Cross has conducted extensive research into bullying, including cyber bullying, in Western Australia.

The Child Health Promotion Research Council (CHPRC) and TNS Social Research have been contracted by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to conduct research into indirect or covert bullying in Australian schools. This project aimed to improve the understanding of covert bullying among school students to ultimately inform effective policy and practice development.

During 2007/8 Professor Cross and the CHPRC conducted a study to improve knowledge and understanding of the key aspects of bullying in relation to the effect of digital technology and aggression on teenage mental health. The aim of this research was to assess effective strategies for preventing and dealing with the problem of cyber bullying (as discussed previously in this submission).

8. Any other relevant matter.

Bullying must be seen as a societal issue, not just one to be solved through education systems. Widespread campaigns to raise awareness of the difference between bullying and violence will result in more effective responses being implemented which should encourage long term change being realised.

If the incidence of bullying behaviour is to be reduced in schools it is vital that an ethos most likely to discourage bullying behaviours is developed. To do this effectively it is important that all stakeholders are informed of current research into effective responses. Dissemination of key research findings in easily accessible forms needs to be readily available to schools and parents.

References

Child Health Promotion Research Unit. (2004). *Friendly Schools & Families Program*. Edith Cowan University. Western Australia.

Rigby, K., (2007). *Bullying in Schools: and what to do about it*. ACER Press. Victoria.