

**INQUIRY INTO STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOLS**

Name: Name suppressed (PC)

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Partially
Confidential

Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales

Neglect and Bullying of ‘M’ and ‘N’ by their Public School Principal and staff

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Appendices PDF attachment: ‘Special needs Inquiry Appendices, case of ‘M’ and ‘N’

their Sydney Public School

Anonymity & Legal Notes:

Our family’s anonymity is essential in making this submission. Ongoing sensitive personal family information and events are detailed. Names of NSW Education Department (DoE) staff and other officials described and quoted are in the public domain. These are from DoE internal letters and e-mails subpoenaed by the Family Court and also released under FOI and GIPA applications. I ask the Parliament to respect our anonymity in public domain material.

From a reading our lawyers, Y, advises: “From the family law perspective, I see no issue with you recounting the facts as you have done. There is a limitation in the Family Law Act (s121) which prohibits publication of information identifying children and parties involved in disputes that are or have been before the Courts. However, as this is an official enquiry and the children and parties are not named, there cannot be said to be any breach of that section of the Act. Furthermore, s121 prohibits information being given to the public, and as you are making submissions to the enquiry, I do not believe that this involves any disclosure to the public.”

Neglect and Bullying of 'M' and 'N' by their Public School Principal and staff

Summary

My children 'M' and 'N' had special needs. Between 2009 and 2011 they were deliberately refused their prescribed care in a series of denials and abuses by the Principal and some staff at their Public School (the School) and by the NSW Department of Education (DoE).

The children required police, court and hospital interventions for their protection at school. In 2012 NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli ordered an Investigation into the abuses leading to reforms at the school. The DoE offered us compensation after Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Australian Centre for Disability Law (ACDL) negotiations.

The children and family were shattered by three years of a totally preventable hell and its psychological, educational and financial damage. Significantly, our complaints to the DoE made things worse in a series of increasingly aggressive reactions to cover-up the abuse and to silence us. Out of necessity we had to find ways to fight this vast government department.

Internal DoE letters and e-mails subpoenaed by the Family Court and from FOI and GIPA releases expose wilful harm to the children at the School mostly with DoE support and in disregard of my warnings up to the Director-General. The DoE protected itself at the children's expense.

Staff and managers, never thinking their private words would be read by outsiders, reveal a dysfunctional out of control DoE culture. They crushed a vulnerable family to hide abuses.

But the documents also give insights to change DoE culture and stop such abuses to benefit students, families and the DoE *itself* - and save a fortune in wasted public time and money.

To achieve this, the Committee is asked to examine under Inquiry **Point (a) equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs:**

- The school's obstruction of 'N's' psychological tests and care by denying X University his vital history of abduction trauma and by keeping these tests from me
- Exacerbating 'M's' and 'N's' trauma by facilitating their wrongful removal from school despite warnings up to the D-G to save the children from its psychological, educational and legal consequences, and prevent an unnecessary and ruinous court case
- The school's denial of 'M's' Y Hospital-prescribed migraine care, medication and record-keeping, refusal to contact parents in emergencies, and the Principal's lying and verbal bullying of 'M', exploiting his severe language disorder, to hide these abuses.
- Why, when every other agency protected them, did the DoE alone fail the children

Under Inquiry **Point (d) complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers:**

- DoE use of lies, misrepresentation, bullying, a school ban, threats of police and legal action, media spin to cover-up abuses and complaints, finally trying to buy our silence.

Under Inquiry **Point (e) any other related matters:**

The taking of sides by the Principal, some staff and senior DoE managers in the children's custody case with disastrous consequences after my requests to remain neutral were ignored.

This Submission gives evidence to understand and reform systemic problems in the DoE's culture of abuse towards children with special needs and its cover-up. At any point the DoE could have stopped the abuse of 'M' and 'N'. Why the DoE chose not is the key question only DoE staff in our case, from the Director-General to the School staff, can answer.

It would help us too to know that the NSW Parliament is pursuing solutions to include finding a way for the DoE to make full restitution for its actions to my children and me. The vast majority of teachers are not reflected in the abuse of very few staff and managers

Neglect and Bullying of 'M' and 'N' by their Public School Principal and staff

Report

If you knew that protecting your child from abuse would cause worse abuse what you do?

The School Principal went into denial about my children's needs the moment we met. She wrote in her diary, 24 June, 2009: "My impression is of a fanatical (*indecipherable*), a liar.... A man who has no understanding of the remedies (*indecipherable*) of his sons."

As a result my children 'M' and 'N', then 8 and 7 years, suffered serial medical neglect and bullying to hide this at the School on Sydney's North Shore. Three years of totally preventable hell did untold psychological, educational and financial damage.

The Principal's diary surfaced only later in 2012 in over 200 pages of confidential internal NSW Department of Education (DoE) documents subpoenaed by the Family Court. By then the NSW and Australian Federal Police, Family Court and NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli had moved to protect 'M' and 'N' from the School Principal, certain of her staff, and NSW Department of Education (DoE) managers. In 2013 the Australian Human Rights Commission and Australian Centre for Disability Law secured a DoE compensation offer.

Our submission reveals a dysfunctional DoE complaints service which crushes families to protect itself (**Inquiry Pts (a), (d), (e)**). The DoE did greater harm to the children by trying to silence us with bullying, isolation, police and legal threats, and finally a money offer. We

give Recommendations for urgently needed DoE reform. And offer advice on challenging the DoE - Australia's largest organisation, public or corporate - which can seem impossible.

Diagnoses

'M' and 'N' had migraine (**Apps Pg 10, 11**), 'M' a 'severe' language disorder (**Apps Pg 7**), 'N' behavioural problems (**Apps Pg 8, 9**), all diagnosed in Australia. This was after they suffered a 2007 parental abduction overseas and its profound psychological effects. 'M' was referred to a psychiatrist in Italy. 'M' had infant epilepsy, resolved, to be aware of given our family history of migraine and epilepsy.

The School and DoE Abuses

- * untreated migraine and discarded hospital diagnosis and treatment instructions
- * false accusations of 'inventing' illnesses
- * obstructing reporting of psychological and migraine information and therapies
- * wrongful removal from school resulting in police and court actions
- * public humiliation and isolation, lies and bullying to cover-up abuse

After complaining I was banned from the school, reported to the police and sent lawyers' threats of court action if I complained again. I did, repeatedly, until Minister Piccoli finally ordered an investigation. Even then a story ran in the *Sydney Morning Herald* lauding the School and 'M's' class as pioneers against bullying during the investigation (available). No one told the *SMH* the Principal was under investigation for bullying a class student.

The subpoenaed DoE emails and letters are written by DoE managers, lawyers and school staff never thinking their words (and cynicism) would be read by a parent. No one questions the children's safety or their own actions. They expose the anatomy of a vast government

machine whose sole aim is to protect itself in a culture of arrogance and hypocrisy. There is a chasm between what the DoE *says* publicly and what it *does* for children with special needs. Staff got *paid* to hurt us. The waste of public time and money is staggering.

After four years the DoE offered us financial compensation and a draft DoE letter stating: “I sincerely regret the distress this ongoing situation has caused you and your family.... I can assure you that the Department does not have any reason to believe that (M) or (N) have lied.... To be clear, the Department does not believe that your sons have been dishonest.”
(Apps Pg 23-24).

The Principal retired for family reasons. The School was reformed (**Apps Pg 22**). Pg ?). We don't know the full emotional and educational toll on ‘M’ and ‘N’. It left us financially broke. DoE cover-ups achieved the reverse - public examination - including this Parliamentary Inquiry. Yet, throughout the DoE D-G was informed of what was happening. There are serious questions to answer.

Why did the DoE *alone* abuse my children when other agencies protected them? Why did complaining worsen our abuse? Why did the DoE support an out of control Principal? Why did it pick on children at their most vulnerable when it was the main agent of recovery?

In 2009 I had tried to explain the effects of abduction. In 2007 ‘M’ and ‘N’ were taken by their mother who had left our Italian family home to live in London. They were recovered by the UK Ministry of Justice, Police and High Court (2007 Orders under UK and EU abduction laws **Apps Pg 1, 2**). Their Italian school teachers testified to the High Court to my good care children when we were alone and their “brilliant” yearly school graduation (**Apps Pg 3, 4**).

Why were they treated so differently in Sydney and when they were most vulnerable?

A corrupted 2009 Italian divorce case gave shared parental custody. In Italy 'M' was referred to a psychiatrist by his state school; his language disorder was diagnosed in Sydney. The children's traumatic history needed to be understood to help them. The Principal waved a dismissive finger to stop my account. The School's children's counsellor, supported her.

Deeply concerned, I wrote to DoE Director-General Michael Coutts-Trotter. He took no action. Australia has high parental child abduction (PCA) rates. DoE letters never referred to the abduction.

U.S. expert Dr Dorothy Huntingdon calls parental child abduction: "...child abuse of the most flagrant sort.... which leads to the brutalization of the children psychologically." The long-term psychological and educational damage is well- documented. (**Apps Pg 5, 6**) Crucially, UK judge Mr Justice Singer, wrote: "Abduction almost invariably fractures the lives of all concerned and their immediate families.... Greater and wider public and professional perception and understanding of the downside of abduction are a significant and maybe the best deterrent." (2006 Report for UK government "International Child Abduction")

The dangers and remedies were understood by the UK Government, Police, High Court and the Italian Education Department. Justice W ordered the children's recovery on 31/7/07. 'M' and 'N' needed care, stability and protection.

The DoE and the School did the opposite.

An opportunity to explore the children's psychological and educational decline from their abduction was deliberately sabotaged to 'N's' detriment.

'N', confused by family separation and a new country, at times got angry. He was punished at School for 'behavioural' problems. In May 2010, without my knowledge, 'N' was sent by his mother to X University (XU) for psychological tests with School participation. Both

withheld 'N's' abduction history from XU, obstructing reporting of this vital information for his welfare and medical records (an act I believe illegal even in the horse racing industry).

'N's' teacher and Deputy Principal 1 (DP 1) facilitated 'N's' XU tests in her class. She denied 'N's' testing and her role when asked, accusing 'N' of inventing them. It was especially cruel to an already confused child to be told his psychological were not happening. I do not know what damage this did to 'N'.

(V, DoE Regional Executive Director Public Schools later claimed, 15.11.13, that DP 1 "...did not facilitate psychological testing" for 'N'. It is untrue.)

XU's report refers to 'N's' "Rule breaking behaviour"; it omits any reference to 'N's' abduction and the serious rule-breaking of the adults who had and would continue to hurt 'N' and that could well be a cause of his own behaviour. XU was paid for its report (**Apps Pg 8, 9**).

Our trust in the School was broken. But what happened next is inexplicable.

In July the children's mother threatened to remove them from School to break our Federal Court parenting agreement without going to court. On 23/7/10 I wrote to the Principal and DoE D-G MC-T and U, DoE Regional Director [U RD], warning of the inevitable emotional and legal consequences of this. I appealed for the School not to facilitate their wrongful removal. Ignoring my appeals the Principal, DoE and their mother colluded in 'M's' and 'N's' wrongful removal from the School. This violated the court agreement and XU's recent advice for 'N': 'Given the ongoing difficulties with aggression and anger management, 'N' requires timely assistance.... (with)...structure, routine, boundaries and parental consistency.' (**Apps Pg 8, 9**) The DoE trashed this.

The Principal, the boys' teachers DP 1 and DP 2 allowed 'M' and 'N' to be taken from the School one hour before I was to collect them at the end of school.

Immediately NSW and Federal Police and the Family Court acted to put the children on the Airport Watch List and restored our parenting agreement. But the DoE triggered a wholly avoidable three-year court case repeating the children's traumas and doing us huge damage.

The DoE took sides in a family matter, the wrong side, when I asked only for its neutrality to let the courts to decide. The DoE was guilty of gross "oppositional behaviour" against the judges, health professionals and police. At any point since 2009 the DoE could have stopped this chain of abuse. Instead it encouraged, joined in and then covered it up.

Again, complaining was useless. The Principal was supported without question by Q, DoE Local Manager [Q LM], 13 other DoE managers including legal chief S, the DoE Safety and Security Directorate and later the Teachers Federation. On 29/7/10 Q LM e-mailed the DoE's 'T', 'U RD' and 'R': "I will manage the allegation of "appalling conduct of (the Principal)... I would like to use a legal unit-based statement in the response that will be signed-off by U RD. Thanks for your anticipated support."

Other organisations supported her without contacting us. The Family Court action hardened DoE responses. By 6/8/10 'S' e-mailed 'Q LM': "If things getting desperate from your end by all means call or e-mail me. I'll try to sort something out."

The time to 'sort something out' was before the abuse began. The DoE got it wrong. Its knee-jerk reaction excludes criticism and learning that would protect students *and* its staff.

The children's removal from school put the DoE in bad company. The mother's collaborator in the children's UK abduction was known to the UK High Court and Police for previously framing a police sergeant with false claims of sexual threats in a British tabloid newspaper headlined (available). It was all exposed as lies. The newspaper was successfully sued in the High Court (details on request).

That day (24.7.10.) changed our lives irrevocably. Regardless of legal arguments, the DoE betrayed its duty of care to 'M' and 'N'. By taking sides it repeated the children's removal trauma. It rebuffed judges, police and health professionals in our case and my warnings not to take sides. I had received e-mailed threats of "an early death". The Principal and her Deputies knew they were harming two vulnerable children. But why did senior DoE managers support their abuse and undo the work of those protecting the children?

Replying to my complaint 'U RD' wrote [12.8.10]: "I am sorry your custody arrangements are causing you distress."

But 'U RD' *herself* was a cause of the distress by failing to prevent the children's removal while knowing the consequences.

Playing on the children's disorders and fears was the tool, indeed the hallmark, of the Principal, 'DP 1' and DoE managers trying to silence us. The Principal taunted us about the children's abduction at the school gate: "Abandoned again, Mr (Father)?" She e-mailed the DoE, 29.7.10: "I don't honestly remember making the comment "Abandoned again..." It's possible I did. I often ask children left behind if their parents have left them and tell them they'll have to sleep at school."

Even at that point the DoE could have prevented what followed.

Above all the children needed stability and care to recover. The DoE made things worse. Lies of omission became blatant lies. I'm not sure it would have happened without the prior abuses.

After failing to defy the court the Principal obstructed 'M's' hospital migraine treatment and reporting of medical information vital to treat the condition. She discarded 'M's' health instructions and I was excluded from School records as the children's emergency contact.

In October 2010 'Y' Hospital specialist paediatrician Dr 'K' diagnosed 'M' with onset migraine which went untreated on an overnight School trip. The Principal denied 'M' was ill and ignored hospital instructions to give 'M' medication "at the first signs of visual disturbances or headache' to 'avoid the painful headache phase of migraine."

Dr 'K' warned 'M' was at a 'high risk of migraine....' She also noted '...a family history of migraine on both sides of the family and seizures in the paternal aunt (my sister) who died at age 23 due to complications of a seizure." Dr 'K' asked for "... a diary of his headaches and any possible trigger factors..." (**Apps Pg 10, 11; NB Addressee Dr 'L' is an error**)

The risk and instructions were clear. 'M's' symptoms included tiredness and seeing lights.

I submitted 'M's' hospital instructions and my contact details to the School on 5/11/10 and again on 21/2/11 in response to a school update request (**Apps Pg 12, 13, 14, 15**). The update request showed the Principal had omitted me from School medical records and also omitted the children's Italian school. Discarding these two submissions had serious adverse results.

On 8/4/11 running at a School sports event 'M' had a headache and visual disturbance. School teacher and race organiser, 'J', refused treatment.

Things came to head on 23/6/11. I found 'M' left alone, in pain and untreated for hours in the school sick bay and deeply distressed no one called me. School administrator Mrs 'P' denied having his hospital instructions I had twice given to her personally. When I asked to see 'M's' medical file she slammed the office door in my face. She claimed 'M' was not treated because no migraine instructions appeared on his computer file.

'M's' neglect was deliberate. He was bullied to cover it up.

Two frightening DoE documents revealed by the Family Court and GIPA confirm this. Claiming 'M' and 'N' invented illnesses, in her 24/6/11 e-mail to DoE Local Manager 'Q LM', the Principal wrote:

“She ('Mother') confirmed our thoughts that 'M' seeks attention from his father and stayed in sick bay deliberately.”

And:

“(‘Mother’) said 'N' is an opportunist and would invent feeling sick to stay home.”

(Dr 'K' wrote 'N' suffered “...frequent common migrainous headaches” with “nausea or vomiting”.)

The Principal added in her e-mail to 'Q LM': “Also next time 'M' feels tired he can stay in the classroom. No more tucking up in bed for a snooze.” (**Apps Pg 16, 17**).

Of that day 'M' records in his migraine diary: “When I said I had a headache (the Principal) said I hadn't said that. Then I got pretty fed up.... I felt really lonely and really sick and really tired.”

Recording 'M's' migraine triggers was vital; the cause of migraine is not well understood.

The Principal covered up for the mother. The mother now covered up for the Principal.

Every DoE alarm bell should have rung at the Principal's rejection of hospital instructions. Why didn't 'Q LM' immediately report the Principal and contact Dr 'K' or me to confirm 'M's' diagnosis and treatment? The Principal even acknowledges wrongdoing in her 24/6/11 e-mail to 'Q LM': “...no doubt I'll be called to account for something.” She never was. The Principal's behaviour questions her mental fitness to be responsible for children.

She played on our deepest family fears. I knew about ‘remedies’ for migraine and epilepsy. That ‘M’s’ aunt, my sister, become a much-loved primary school teacher before her sudden death was due to the cooperation between family, doctors, school and college. The children’s neglect by School and the DoE horrifies my family. It is alien to all we know.

Complaining to the DoE made things worse. At school on 27/6/11 ‘M’ was put in a closed room by the Principal and his teacher ‘F’. They verbally bullied ‘M’ to say he lied about being ill. No audio exists of their shocking exploitation of a frightened child diagnosed with a severe language disorder. The Principal sent a damning ‘Interview’ to the DoE, later subpoenaed, she claimed to be ‘M’s’ responses to her intimidating questioning:

“I asked ‘M’ if he had a headache or stomach ache and he said ‘no’.”

And

“I asked who was telling the truth, him or his father.”

And

‘He (‘M’) stated he had a headache in the car when his father was driving. **(Apps Pg 18)**.

Profoundly upset, ‘M’ said later, “I felt like nothing. Nothing at all.’ He says in his migraine diary: “She (the Principal) said that I did not have a headache at all. She said that I just had, I was just very tired. And I was so confused. Because I was very certain I did say that I had a headache. Even (his teacher) Mrs ‘F’ knew it.... It’s not really her fault. But I was having tears and I was saying “Ow! Ow! Ow!” because my headache was so painful.”

When I complained DoE Local Manager ‘Q LM’ denied the Principal’s bullying, writing (12/7/11): “(The Principal) informed me that the discussion she had with (‘M’) was based on

her commitment to providing pastoral care for all students to ensure that ('M') clearly understood that the school would provide to care and support to him required."

Care? Support? The "clearly understood" is DoE-speak for bullying. But the Principal was scared. Anyone's neck but her own. The DoE, for administrative purposes, went along with what it knew to be dangerous rubbish. It had the Principal's damning 27/7/11 "Interview" two weeks before 'Q LM' claimed she provided "pastoral care". He knew it was bullshit.

Just who had the "severe language disorder"?

'Q LM' was hiding a lot more.

The DoE acceptance of the Principal's actions as a normal school procedure disturbs most. She needed to be suspended. When I complained the Principal banned me from School for "hostility" - with DoE support. (The ban did great damage, ostracising us from many fine School teachers, school parents and friends. It prevented discussion.)

The Principal then reported me to the police. In a subpoenaed e-mail (7/7/11) she asks a police sergeant to pressure me: "I have now had 3 complaints about me sent to my boss ('Q LM') over the holidays. But he has not complained about any contact from you. I am very edgy."

Yet, while 'Q LM' supported my ban he also wrote us an apology (7/7/11): "I apologise for the distress that this matter has caused you and ('M')." He said the Principal would follow hospital instructions and 'M's' "...Health Care Plan will be updated accordingly."

But DoE Local Manager 'Q LM' had enough to seek the Principal's suspension. His subpoenaed 18/2/17 internal e-mail to the Principal confirms her abuse of 'M' and 'N', asks her to 'honour' court arrangements, and he describes my requests to her as "reasonable":

“...I think it worth noting the requests (I) made to you on the 21 February, 2011 to update ERN/OASIS Information (Medical addresses, Medicare etc) all appear reasonable requests. In anticipation, thanks for ensuring (‘M’s’) health care needs are updated on OASIS/ERN. I would also note “contact parents if children are ill” onto data base (OASIS/ERN).

“...I will also indicate that you, the Principal, will continue to honour Interim arrangements and ask him to provide Court papers once the matter has been heard. Chat soon. ‘Q LM’.”

(Apps Pg 19).

The Principal was wrong on every count. So, why was I banned for getting the care and protection she denied the children? (The Minister’s Investigations found the School ignored Dr ‘K’ for ‘M’s’ health care information, instead asking the ‘Mother’ who said her doctor “declined to do it.” The Mother’s paediatrician Dr ‘B’ wrote (27.9.11) that ‘M’s’ follow-up migraine appointment requested with him by Dr ‘K’ was cancelled **(Apps Pg 20, 21)**).

It was always about the DoE silencing our complaints and rewriting incriminating events.

On 21/7/11, the legal threats began. The Principal’s lawyers, ‘S, G & R’, put me ‘on notice’ of a defamation action in the Supreme Court if I repeated her neglect. Lawyer ‘G’s’ letter, incredibly, warned:

“Further, we put you on notice that your past behaviour and contact with our client (the Principal) could have a long term detrimental effect on our client’s health. Should our client’s health be compromised, as a consequence of your behaviour, our client reserves her position in relation to the recovery from you of any loss and damage suffered by her.”

Loss and damage suffered by the *Principal*? Harm to *her* health!? I had no funds for costly legal actions. But I continued to complain. The DoE legal office continued to support the

Principal (29/8/11 e-mail). Claims that ‘M’ fabricated illness continued, now supported by teacher ‘J’ (School/DoE meeting minutes 11/10/11).

Clearly, something was very wrong with the School and the DoE’s inability to rectify it.

In 2012 NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli ordered an Investigation into the DoE’s treatment of the children.

The DoE Investigation (of itself) was conducted by ex-DoE manager ‘Investigator C’. The tone was set when ‘Investigator C’ gave me just three days to answer 40 in-depth questions in writing before our interview. Intimidating, farcical, audio captures her raised voice – “I’ll ask questions!” – as she avoided awkward subjects. A gruelling two and half hour interrogation.

In 2011 a new DoE D-G took over. Dr Michelle Bruniges OA was listed in the ‘100 most influential Australian women’. But the same old DoE chicanery ruled, now with media spin. The *Sydney Morning Herald* story praising the School and ‘M’s’ class as pioneers against bullying ran during the Investigation (*SMH* available).

But, DoE Regional Director (‘U RD’), Concluded: “The Principal has not followed the directive of the School Education Director (‘Q LM’) to develop a health care plan for (‘M’)” and “The school is not the appropriate place for family disputes to be resolved.” (**Apps Pg 21**). ‘U RD’ recommended eight reforms to the School. (**Apps Pg 22**) yet the DoE somehow found the Principal had done nothing wrong. She retired by then.

What is really needed is the top-down reform of the DoE itself, starting with the D-G. Fault lies in a DoE culture of untouchable arrogance and automatic support for abusers. This must stop. Meanwhile, how can an individual fight the DoE, Australia’s biggest organisation with its awesome resources and moral vacuum? At first it seemed impossible.

With forensic detail DoE documents show a corporate structure using different departments and other agencies to block complaints. An expensive outside City law firm was hired to stop us. Complaints are ‘tantrums’ ‘managed’ with legal devices. The DoE has institutionalised cover-ups from the classroom to its D-Gs who were buffered by DoE Executive Directors ‘A’ and ‘V’. Individual staff responsibility and feelings are removed.

Would DoE staff do the same things if their own child was on the receiving end?

In 2013, via the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Australian Centre for Disability Law (ACDL), the DoE offered just \$3,000 compensation and importantly a draft DoE letter of “regret” confirming “...the Department does not believe that your sons have been dishonest.” But the DoE wanted to be indemnified against its abuses and it added a confidentiality clause to stop us relating these events. Hush money. We refused on medical grounds. The 60-day limit to then take the DoE to court stopped further action. I was drained in all respects. This time limit must be extended.

The DoE owes us for the children’s emotional and educational losses; the joys of school it stole; my lost work and income; halting a family’s recovery from a crisis it chose instead to exacerbate. Had D-G Coutts-Trotter listened in 2009 our lives could be so different today.

Recently I learned that DoE D-G Michael Coutts-Trotter was a heroin addict and hard drug dealer who went to prison. ‘Redeemed’ in 2007 to head the DoE, Mr Coutts-Trotter told the ABC, “I was a drug user and a drug seller and luckily and remarkably, in life I’ve been given a second chance.” We were not.

‘M’ and ‘N’ were completely innocent children crying out for help. Mr Coutts-Trotter had the power to give us a second chance. Instead, with his knowledge, his DoE piled one abuse on another to protect itself. Once it hid the first abuse it was committed to hide all the rest.

Other victims are decent teachers used, perhaps bullied, to lie for the Principal and the DoE.

But, the subpoenaed documents also reveal solutions to end this entrenched DoE culture of abuse and protect *all* children, families, teachers and the DoE itself - and save a fortune in wasted public time and funds. Urgently needed are:

- A powerful and independent regulatory body to investigate DoE child abuses. (The Federal Government's Administrative Appeals Tribunal is one model).
- Mandatory reporting of child neglect and bullying by DoE staff with penalties for failure
- A *reward* whistleblowers to protect children and end DoE resistance to complaints
- Curbing the individual powers of school principals and their greater accountability
- Education of all DoE staff in the advantages of openly dealing with its problems

Laws and DoE rules to protect children are already in place. What's needed is a change to DoE culture to implement these - the much harder challenge facing the NSW Parliament.

The disability of poverty was at work, too. A family crisis left me broke. I owned no home or car. I had no lawyer. The badges of "belonging" were gone. Were we an easy target? The base instinct of the gang rules the DoE, attacking the weak when they are down. But in its arrogance the DoE overlooked that most primal function of a parent to love and protect its children. And the intelligence and courage of 'M' and 'N' however afraid they were made to feel.

This is our story of survival: a family abused at its most vulnerable, a child who found his cool, a child who found his voice to speak up against the most articulate and powerful gang of bastards in NSW public life. I could weep going over these cruelties and humiliations for this submission, and out of pride in my children.

Thousands flock to Australia's musical version of Roald Dahl *Matilda*, the beloved child heroine of modern literature who fights a monstrous headmistress. The book is on school shelves. But what do we *really* do - as parents, teachers, public servants, police, lawyers and journalists - presented with a *real* headmistress like Miss Trunchbull who bullies vulnerable children?

Roald Dahl would have loved and hated this submission - even felt jealous of the wicked twists of cruelty dreamed up by the NSW Department of Education. The DoE, arguably the most crucial agency of care and development, failed the children.

Will the new DoE D-G Mark Scott, ex ABC chief, bring the values of *Background Briefing* to the DoE or continue in the old way?

End Redacted Report