SUBMISSION TO THE

Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety

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NSW PARENTS' COUNCIL

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The NSW Parents' Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Select Committee inquiry on Cyber Safety. Our submission focuses on the role of parents and schools in addressing cyber safety issues in the current online environment.

The NSW Parent's Council (NSWPC) is the peak state body representing parents of children who are educated in non-government schools. The NSWPC was founded in 1962 and has, for almost half a century, represented the concerns of parents to State and Federal Ministers of Education and participated in numerous reference committees relating to curriculum development and student welfare. We currently have a parent representative on the Board of Studies and on various committees of the Board.

Our supporting principles are:

1. Children are entitled to an education which will enable them to attain their full potential.
2. Parents have the primary responsibility to educate their children. They are the first and foremost educators of their children, and the family is the first educative 'school' or 'community' to which children belong.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, clause 3, article 26).
4. As a result of the importance of the school in a child's education, parents have the right and duty to choose schools which they consider best suit their children's schooling requirements.
5. Parents are entitled to exercise their right of choice of schooling for their children without financial or other disability being imposed on them or on their children by any Government.
6. Schools exist to help parents discharge their educational responsibilities, and there should be harmony between the philosophy and values of the home and those of the school.
7. Governments, as protectors of the rights of citizens, should assist and encourage, not restrict, parents' exercise of their right to choose schools which they consider best suit their children's needs.
8. As a result of their fundamental obligation to protect and promote the rights of all citizens, Governments have responsibilities in relation to schooling for all children, not just for those attending government schools.
9. The child, not the school, should be the focus for the allocation of public funds for schooling.
10. A Basic Funding Entitlement, calculated as a percentage of the total per capita recurrent cost of schooling in government schools, is a real implementation of the parents' right of choice of school and the right of every child to an equitable share of public funds for schooling.
11. For students who are experiencing specified educational disadvantages, their schooling costs should be assessed and more public funds made available, in addition to their Basic Funding Entitlement.
12. Governments should acknowledge and support the valuable role of the family in society, and parents in the learning partnerships with schools.

NSW Parents' Council response to the initial focus of the inquiry:

- ***The online environment in which Australian children currently engage, including key physical points of access (schools, libraries, internet cafes, homes, mobiles);***

Without doubt the online environment within Australia and ICT in itself has had a remarkable impact on how we communicate. Students have embraced the fast pace of technological developments with apparent ease and familiarity however the majority of parents struggle with not only the hardware that is in use (and constantly been improved) but with how their children are using these skills on a daily basis. Parents often report to us that they feel disempowered and 'lost' especially within their own homes. Even though there are numerous websites full of advice to assist parents in ensuring safety along with the obvious benefits of ICT, this advice is often difficult to put into place and to continue to monitor. Children use the technology to access information for their school studies but also increasingly as a form of social networking and a form of staying connected to their peers. As access is readily available in our community to the internet, children are constantly in touch with their peers which has both negative and positive consequences.

- ***abuse of children online, particularly cyber-bullying;***

Unfortunately as mobile phones, internet and the social media networking become increasingly the 'norm' so has the misuse of these technologies. Mobile phones and the internet give children who are bullying a place to hide and for the victims a place where they are being ridiculed in a public forum in the safety of their own home. Due to the fact that children spend an enormous amount of time out of school hours using their mobile phones and the internet means that this is not only a school issue but a community one.
Young people need more information and understand about grooming on line and that the intent of grooming is to facilitated sexual contact. Young people need to be educated in how to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate behavior with someone they have met on line and what to do if that have suspicions. Many young people are unaware of the message they are sending out either through photos or written comments and that this may appeal to online child sex offenders.

- ***ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying; and***

Providing schools with the resources that allow them to develop on building relationships within the school, the local community and parents is a key point in addressing cyber- bullying. When parents feel they have a positive relationship with their school, when they feel their values related to ICT safety are reflected in the schools policies and procedures, and the school is supportive in providing information and education, it becomes a community effort in reducing incidences of cyber bullying. With schools providing proactive support and including the parents in the process, good relationships will grow and the important connection between schools and families will also develop. Young people will continue to communicate with their peers on line and by acknowledging this and integrating this into learning, they have the opportunity to develop positive on line behaviours. On line bullying is the same as face to face bullying- if a young person is bullying on line chances are they are bullying face to face which may indicate that not only does use of ICT be addressed but social relationships.

- *the **role of parents, families, carers and the community.***

Support received from within the family environment is a crucial factor in determining a young person's involvement in bully-victim situations. The dynamics of families and their ability to resolve conflicts through appropriate modelling are also of great importance (Kostelnik, Whiren, Soderman, Gregory, & Stein, 2002)

Parents, families and careers need the information and education in ICT to carve out a suitable culture that fits in with their family and the community's values. We want to ensure that young people's time spent on line is safe and positive. Empowering parents to set guidelines and rules related to internet and mobile phone use will support their children and allow them to make better judgments online. Raising awareness through media campaigns gives parents a starting point in understanding cyber bullying however it is vital that there are easy to use resources and support in place for them to access, programs in schools for them to attend and opportunities to talk to someone for further information. As parents, we need to help and guide our children through the ICT field, ensure they are prepared for the hazards they may encounter on the way and provide them with the tools and confidence to deal with them.

The NSW Parent's Council Inc. thanks the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety for the opportunity to make this submission.

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