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Response to *The Australian Parliament Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety*

Introduction

Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) welcomes the opportunity to provide this response to the Australian Parliament Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, on behalf of the 22 Catholic schooling authorities and 288 Catholic schools in Queensland. QCEC has consulted widely with Catholic schooling authorities in forming this response. This response has been drawn from these groups.

Structure of Response

This response from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission is provided under the headings of the Terms of Reference.

QCEC response to the Terms of Reference

for the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety

I. **The online environment in which Australian children currently engage including key physical points of access and stakeholders controlling or able to influence that engagement**
- For some stakeholders, there is a need for a clear definition of cyber-safety, at least for the adults involved, and an identification of the key issues which are likely to cause harm to children and young people in order to clarify some of the myths that surround this term.

II. **The nature, prevalence, implications of and level of risk associated with cyber-safety threats**
- The principles for cyber-safety should be drawn from those which govern the wider context of ensuring student safety in general.
- While this submission places a strong focus on risks to children and young people of school age, QCEC would also like to highlight the risk to the professional reputations of adults generally and specifically teachers from posting offensive material on social networking sites. The practice of students maliciously and vexatiously targeting teachers has become quite commonplace. Unless the posted messages are defamatory within the context of existing law or contravene media and communications regulations the perpetrators can continue operate in a protected cyberspace zone and inflict significant harm by damaging the reputation of individual teachers and school communities. This problem will require some careful thought and creative action.
- As suggested elsewhere in this submission, much work has already been done on the issue of cyber-safety and there is a danger adding to the array of organisations, processes and resources which are on offer to teachers, parents and school authorities.
- It is considered that the production of another report by the Joint Select Committee will be of little benefit if it does not incorporate as a central feature the coordination and dissemination of the research and practical work already being done.
- It is suggested this could be actioned through a single e-portal, incorporating not only 'cyber-safety', but the wider framework of being 'e-smart' in a rapidly changing world.

III. Australian and international responses to current cyber-safety threats, their effectiveness and costs to stakeholders, including business

- Much work has been done in the area of Student Protection in many jurisdictions, including the Queensland Catholic sector.
- A report in this area, commissioned by the Queensland Government, has recently been released (February 2010). Entitled "Enhancing Responses to Bullying in Queensland Schools" by Dr Ken Rigby, it has resulted in the formation of a cross-sectoral taskforce entitled 'Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence' (QSAAV) and has two subcommittees currently operating: "Best Practice" and "Implementation".
- Dr Ken Rigby's resources were endorsed at a recent meeting of QSAAV. The resources include 6 vodcasts and supporting materials that may be useful for schools to use in staff meetings and professional development sessions. These can be found at http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/protection/community/bullying.html and by checking at Department of Education and Training (2010) *Addressing Bullying in Queensland Schools: Vodcasts and Support Materials* by Dr Ken Rigby. Several recent exemplars of good practice have been provided by individual schools to QSAAV.

IV. Opportunities for cooperation across Australian stakeholders and with international stakeholders in dealing with cyber-safety issues

- Currently, a 2010 re-draft of 2004 National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) is being finalised. It incorporates much of the recent research into the area of cyber-bullying and cyber-safety. This framework is an excellent context in which to develop strategy for cyber-safety.
- The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has engaged with schools and other stakeholders throughout Australia in an ongoing series of workshops around cyber and e-smart issues. The work of the Australian Federal Police is also to be commended.
- There is wide use of Social Networking sites across the Catholic Church sector and work has been done on the development of policies regarding the use of such sites including guidelines established for the safe use of the "xt3" site which was developed by the Archdiocese of Sydney in concert with World Youth Day available at the following link http://www.xt3.com/smallprint/online-safety.php

  An important document developed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference which articulates appropriate protocols for the use of Social Networking sites is to be found at http://tinyurl.com/ACBC-Social-Networking-PDF

V. **Examining the need to ensure that the opportunities presented by and economic benefits of , new technologies are maximised**

- It is believed that the major focus should be on the development of positive e-security habits for children and adults (including parents) rather than over-reliance on technology solutions such as filtering or other systems that simply present a challenge to the computer savvy and are rapidly superseded as technology expertise advances. An emphasis on education rather than punitive action would seem to be a more enduring way to proceed in this complex area. This could be one of the focuses for the Australian Government's new ICT Innovations Fund (ICTIF).
- Some stakeholders view the development of 'e-ethics' as an extension of the ethics that guide schools at present.

VI. **Ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying**

- There is a need for attitudinal shifts and a focus on skill development for those working with young people
- There is a view among stakeholders within the Catholic education sector in Queensland that the way forward is fundamentally about working within the culture that already exists within the school and extending this e-culture to develop greater understanding within the wider community. It is an issue of addressing the underlying beliefs of society. Strategies that would assist teachers to deal with this would be beneficial.
- Much of the activity around this issue is currently reactive. There could be a place for a more proactive response. The concept of including the issue of cyber-safety within the larger framework of student wellbeing could be explored. Some excellent work on this approach has been produced by the South Australian Department of Education and Child Safety (DECS) which has also led to the establishment of a very successful Student Wellbeing Strategy for schools administered by the Melbourne Catholic Education Office. A student wellbeing approach recognises the reality of today's students as digital citizens in a 21st century world.
- The whole school approach of the *Allanah and Madeleine Foundation Cybersafety and Wellbeing Initiative* is an excellent model which has been the basis of a National Pilot Project worthy of further investigation. This pilot project tracked targeted schools' development of action plans in becoming 'e-smart'. This included three Catholic schools in Queensland.
- A critically important part of a whole school approach would be the involvement of parents through the provision of more effective

education programs on cyber-safety to enable them to better support their children in the home.

- Within the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program (AGQTP) in the Catholic sector, there has been work over recent years in activities such as 'Cyberia' involving volunteer schools developing annual action plans in the area of cyber-safety for use in their own schools, under the guidance of an expert in the field.

- The *Allanah and Madeleine Foundation* also incorporates the National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB). This organisation is a front-runner in its capacity to provide a 'clearing house' for those who seek processes and resources to address cyber-safety and is a significant contributor to the discourse on cyber-safety.

- Some stakeholders felt that teachers are still unclear about the legal requirements and implications of issues around cyber-safety. This includes issues of defamation, privacy and social networking. There is a view that many of these issues provide limited legal redress for teachers and students since the law, legal avenues, internet providers, websites and other bodies are unable or unwilling to respond in a timely manner to concerns from victims of cyber-bullying.

- It has been suggested that a short online course, similar to that for OHS, would be of benefit to teachers, students and parents.

- The 2010 NCAB Conference entitled Navigating the Maze gave schools evidence-based information and strategies about cyber-safety, how to use the new technologies to enhance learning, and ways to improve student wellbeing. Drawing upon the expertise of many hundreds of participants from a wide range of stakeholders, a 10-Point Action Plan for Cybersafety (See copy of media release attached) was formulated as a major outcome of this conference. This plan is a very comprehensive summary of Cyber-safety issues and, because it is the result of discussions from the significant community level. audience at the conference, it is a plan which the Joint Select Committee could weigh carefully when reaching its conclusions and recommendations.

  Since the elements in the 10-Point Plan are necessarily general, much work would have to be done to make it actionable at school
  The QCEC would be supportive of the key elements of such a plan.

VII. Analysing information on achieving and continuing world's best practice safeguards

- The development of guidelines/standards based on world's best practice would be of assistance to a number of stakeholders.

- Currently, there is a plethora of material and resources in the area of cyber-safety, including much from within Australia. In addition,

there are already a number of reports around the issue of cyber-safety.

- A fruitful response could be the mapping and scoping of the material that already exists as a starting point to provide a single portal to this work. Such a task would be enhanced by the inclusion of a search tool that would enable interested parties (researchers, business groups, school authorities, teachers, students, parents etc.) to access specific areas of interest/levels of harm/network groups/levels of knowledge that would target such inquiries.
- Because there are well established and effectively functioning 'one stop shop' agencies such as the Allanah and Madeleine Foundation, the National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB), Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and similar bodies, a further refinement of the 'one stop shop' approach which consolidates resources would provide children, parents, teachers and members of the wider community better access and provide solutions to complex problems.
- There was a suggestion that Singapore has highly regarded programs in this area.

Conclusion

The QCEC would like to thank the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety for the opportunity to respond and provide this written submission. The QCEC acknowledges that it is essential to have an ongoing dialogue around the rapidly-changing issue of cyber-safety with particular reference to cyber-bullying and that this is a significant problem for the community. All of the issues posed in the Terms of Reference are of vital importance.

However, it is suggested that the inquiry findings should clearly define cyber-safety and frame it within the larger issue of student protection in general which reaches out to the responsibility of students' peers, their teachers, parents and school authorities. This should be approached in a positive way, focused on the creation of mature habits in an online environment that envisage students as digital citizens in a contemporary world. This should build on the benefits of information and communication technologies in which inappropriate online behaviour is viewed as an aberration to be corrected rather than a growing problem to be dealt with by increasingly punitive or restrictive measures.

ATTACHMENT 1

Media Release
MEDIA RELEASE: 2010 NATIONAL CENTRE AGAINST BULLYING (NCAB) CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

The National Centre Against Bullying is an initiative of The Alannah and Madeline Foundation. The Centre is a peak body working to advise and inform the Australian community on childhood bullying and cyber-safety, and the creation of safe schools and communities. The Alannah and Madeline Foundation cares for children suffering the devastating impacts of violence, runs programs to prevent childhood violence and
advocates for the rights of children.

Media Conference Outcomes 10th April 2010

10-POINT ACTION PLAN FOR CYBERSAFETY

The National Centre Against Bullying Conference today called for a clarification of Australia's laws in relation to cyber-safety and wellbeing solutions.

It is one of a range of actions in a 10-point cyber-safety plan, covering early intervention, teacher training and an appropriate legal framework to create a national commitment to cyber-safety.

The actions follow NCAB's two-day conference on cyber-bullying and wellbeing solutions for schools which finished in Melbourne today.

The conference themed "Navigating the Maze" brought together more than 40 leading experts from Australia and around the world, together with more than 400 teachers and education specialists, to address the issue, which affects more than one in four students in Australian schools.

NCAB chair The Hon Alastair Nicholson announced ten actions at the end of the conference today. "Bullying affects everybody and, therefore, there is need for a national commitment to increase cybersafety and reduce bullying across the community," he said.

As a result of the conference, NCAB is calling for the following.

1. Early intervention
Need to identify early (at pre-school and early primary school) those who may have peer relationship issues, and implement appropriate programs.

Additional focus is needed on pre-school education to prevent bullying and promote wellbeing.

Need to raise awareness among schools and parents of the emerging evidence that children are using social networking sites at a young age.

2. Training teachers

Need for pre-service teacher education programs to include a mandatory component, which addresses awareness and skills for preventing and managing bullying situations.

Teachers must have ongoing access to training to develop the skills needed to respond effectively to bullying situations.

Need for general education programs for teachers and students as to the possible effects of the criminal and civil law on the use of communications technologies.

3. An appropriate legal framework

Need to legally define the rights and responsibilities of schools in responding to bullying and cyber-bullying situations, and cyber-defamation.

Legal remedies in themselves are not a solution to bullying, but are a necessary part of the solution. Need to clarify the role of the criminal and civil law in relation to cyber-bullying and bullying.

4. Increased focus on school transition

Bullying peaks at times of transition between pre-school and primary school, and primary school and high school, therefore, education institutions need to increase their focus on bullying, including cyber-bullying at these times.

5. A whole-school approach

Schools need to use evidence-informed strategies and include teachers, parents, students and the wider community to enhance cyber-safety and wellbeing, and reduce bullying.

6. A whole-community approach

Solutions need to go beyond the school gate, given that bullying in schools is often a reflection on community behaviours and attitudes to violence.

7. Young people to be part of the solution

Young people are essential to the solution and must be involved in policy development, parent education and development of multi-media education materials.

8. Technology to be part of the solution

Adults, including parents and teachers, need to break down the digital divide by becoming savvy about technology.

We all must recognise the creative use of technology as a powerful teaching and socialising tool.

The focus needs to be on behaviours and relationships; and it is counterproductive to ban access to technology.

9. Support for ongoing research in Australia

Research into cyber-safety and wellbeing, including effective strategies for engaging parents, keeping up-to-date with changes in technology, appropriate interventions in schools etc are all important.

10. Federal funding

Sufficient Federal funding for an Australia-wide system to implement these cyber-safety and wellbeing solutions for schools is essential.