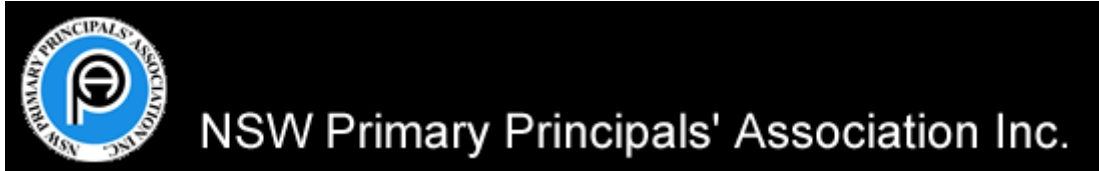


# SUBMISSION No. 69



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## *NSW Primary Principals' Association Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety*

### *Inquiry into Cyber-Safety*

#### AUTHORISED BY

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The NSW Primary Principals' Association (NSWPPA) is a professional association for Primary Principals of Public Schools throughout New South Wales with a membership of over 1800 Principals.

This submission reflects responses provided by members of the NSWPPA.

The NSWPPA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and offers the following in response to the terms of reference:

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

For children of primary school age the most common points of access to the online environment are school and home.

**School:**

- The online environment in schools is 'controlled' in that specific filters and systems are in place to reduce the chance of exposure to inappropriate content.
- Access to many sites is 'blocked' eg Facebook
- In primary schools children are directly supervised whilst using the internet, thus limiting the chance of exposure to inappropriate content.
- The teaching programs in primary schools include specific age-appropriate lessons to address protocols when using the internet/ online environment. Lessons also address etiquette and safety whilst online, including the need to protect one's privacy and not share personal information/ passwords etc.
- Students going online are required to sign an 'internet code of conduct' (co-signed by parents) which is explained as part of the teaching program. Information is also provided to parents requesting their support of the procedures in place at schools.
- In primary schools many children are given the opportunity to hear from Youth Liaison Officers attached to local police stations who address children regarding 'cyber-safety'.

**Home:**

- The home environment is often a cause for concern. Parents may not be aware of safeguards that can be put in place. These include computers being placed in areas where parents can provide direct supervision, filters such as Net Nanny being installed on home computers, time limits being set related to computer/ internet use, regular open communication between children and parents regarding inappropriate use of the internet and specific issues related to social networking sites.

**Mobile phones:**

- Mobile phones are also an online environment for an increasing number of primary school children.

- **Abuse of children online (cyber-bullying)**
  - In Primary schools, children's names are regularly reported in documents such as newsletters and Annual School Reports – this could potentially put them at risk of harm as these documents are now published on school websites. A child's name combined with knowledge of the suburb in which they live could potentially give a person sufficient details to contact a child via a social networking site at home. Schools are now considering ways to protect children's identities to avoid the possibility of being contacted online inappropriately.
  - This is an area regularly addressed in primary schools to minimise harm. General lessons regarding bullying, a component of each school's Student Welfare Policy, now cover this important area. Students need to be told explicitly about the law in relation to internet use and the punishment that can be imposed for this behaviour.
  
- **Inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment (e.g. technology addiction, online promotion of anorexia, drug usage, underage drinking and smoking);**
  - For children of primary school age the danger generally relates to health and social effects of spending too much time on line outside the school environment.
  
- **Identity theft**
  - This is an area regularly addressed in primary schools to minimise harm. General bullying lessons in schools now cover this important area. Students are told explicitly about the law in relation to internet use and the punishment that can be imposed for such behaviour. Cyber bullying is an offence and children need to know this as well as parents.
  - Students are required to sign an 'internet code of conduct' wherein they agree to use only their own email address for online access at school.
  
- **Breaches of privacy**
  - This is not generally an issue in primary schools – it is about education of children in not disclosing information and being aware of the possible breaches of privacy associated with providing too much information.
  
- **Australian and international responses to current cyber-safety threats;**
  - The federal government needs to address current cyber-safety threats through the media to ensure all citizens are informed about the dangers. Citizens also need to be made aware of the punishments associated with committing such offences.

- **Opportunities for cooperation across Australian stakeholders and with international stakeholders in dealing with cyber-safety issues;**
  - Peak education authorities should develop consistent strategies to deal with cyber-safety issues.
  - Peak parent groups, through their associations, should develop consistent strategies to deal with cyber-safety issues which can be promoted.
  
- **Ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying**
  - All schools need to provide a component in their Student Welfare Policies to address this important area. School Education Directors need to ensure that principals are addressing this area explicitly and ensure consultancy support is available if needed.
  
- **The role of parents, families, carers and the community**
  - The role of parents and the community is critical to ensuring the safety of children. All parents need to be provided with opportunities to learn about the risks and dangers for their children.
  - Schools need to be supported (and they are) through ACMA (Australian Communications & Media Authority) in providing trained educators to facilitate forums for parents in all schools. ACMA needs to ensure all schools are aware of the support available and ensure sufficient educators to provide the service for the community.