



**South Australian Commission for
Catholic Schools**

**Response to the Inquiry into
Cyber-Safety**

JUNE 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS) is pleased to respond to the inquiry into cyber-safety.

The Commission affirms the many current initiatives in schools that provide child safe environments for all students including policies and practices that support cyber-safety.

The Catholic sector supports the provision of contemporary digital learning experiences and guidance regarding the safe and responsible use of technology for all students. The sector has undertaken initiatives under the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) and continues to promote research and effective practices in addressing cyber-safety. An important focus for our sector is the partnership that school communities develop and maintain with families, students and local community agencies, in addressing cyber-safety.

The *Coalition to Decrease Bullying, Harassment and Violence in South Australian Schools* was formed in 2005. The committee comprises representatives from the three schooling sectors and researchers from the University of Adelaide, University of SA and Flinders University. The coalition continues to provide a lead role in the dissemination of research, evidence informed professional learning, programs and information to the school sectors.

SACCS acknowledges the continuing lead role of the Australian Government in providing access to free, high quality cyber-safety training through the *Cyber-Safety Outreach Professional Development for Educators* program and the *Internet Safety Awareness Presentations* to students, teaching staff and parents in school communities through the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). Feedback from Catholic school communities is consistently favourable about the relevance and usefulness of the training and resources.

RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY INTO CYBER-SAFETY

INTRODUCTION

The Commission affirms the national, state and sector initiatives undertaken by schools in the Catholic sector in South Australia regarding cyber-safety, and the particular links schools have made with other programs that support student safety, mental health, positive relationships, building resilience and address bullying and harassment. SACCS is mindful of the complexities for school communities in addressing all kinds of bullying, including cyber bullying, which may not happen in school hours, but has significant impact on the relationships and culture within a school community. In responding to the inquiry, SACCS suggests two key documents for the attention of the select committee. The two documents are:

- the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study 2009 (ACBPS)¹; and

¹ Cross, D., Shaw, T., Hearn, L., Epstein, M., Monks, H., Lester, L., & Thomas, L., 2009. Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS). Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth.

- the revised National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) (currently in draft form).

The recommendations from the ACBPS, amended to specifically include cyber-safety, are included below for the consideration of the committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN COVERT BULLYING PREVALENCE STUDY 2009

1.0 Recommendations for national policy and practice

Short term

- 1.1 Establish an Australian Council for Bullying Prevention that reports to the Prime Minister, chaired by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, to lead the review of the National Safe Schools Framework and the concurrent development of a strategy that considers the following recommendations.
- 1.2 Facilitate sustainable joined-up-Government structures (including education, health, community development, and justice) and approaches to deliver key reforms.
- 1.3 Facilitate ongoing and active input from teachers, parents, and young people through linking with existing groups and organisations, such as the Safe and Supportive School Communities, the Consultative Working Group on cyber safety, and parent, teacher and student bodies.
- 1.4 Revise the National Safe Schools Framework and its implementation in schools to explicitly encourage schools to address covert and overt bullying, including cyber bullying, and provide the necessary resources to support schools to minimise bullying through their policy and practice.

Longer term

- 1.5 Establish ongoing and routine data collection systems with standardised methods for defining and measuring covert and overt forms of bullying.
- 1.6 Facilitate sustainable longitudinal research to investigate the developmental trajectory, causes, protective factors, social and economic costs, societal and cultural influences, and identify the windows of opportunity for bullying prevention and intervention.
- 1.7 Support applied intervention research to determine the impact of promising strategies to reduce bullying, including cyber bullying, that protect and support those involved, promote healthy relationships, reduce perpetration of bullying, and change the circumstances and conditions (individual, relationship, society, structural) that give rise to bullying.
- 1.8 Leverage the effectiveness of these interventions by establishing and evaluating linkages between these interventions with other programs such as those addressing domestic violence, aggression, harassment and child abuse.
- 1.9 Assess the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of bullying prevention and reduction interventions and determine the thresholds of level of implementation necessary to reduce both overt and covert bullying.
- 1.10 Work collaboratively with systems and sectors to support and monitor the implementation of the revised National Safe Schools Framework.

- 2.0 Recommendations for education systems and sectors
 - 2.1 Encourage school leadership and other staff to recognise in an ongoing manner that covert bullying is as important as overt bullying and forms part of the National Safe Schools Framework as a national priority for ongoing professional development.
 - 2.2 Promote and encourage greater awareness among schools about the National Safe Schools Framework and its implications for students' learning, achievements, health and well being.
 - 2.3 Assist sector/district/regional offices to establish links with schools and community structures and services to support students who are vulnerable to bullying and to help manage the behaviour of students engaged in all forms of bullying.
 - 2.4 Provide access to and support quality professional learning for school staff to help them understand the different forms and potential harms of bullying and school inaction, and develop staff attitudes and self-efficacy to take action to address bullying behaviour.
 - 2.5 Ensure new teachers entering the profession and other adults working with young people as part of their professional standards receive pre-service training and ongoing professional learning to help prevent and manage bullying, including cyber bullying behaviour.
- 3.0 Recommendations for schools
 - 3.1 Establish with the whole school clear definitions of bullying to ensure this behaviour is specifically and consistently addressed in the school and understood by the whole school.
 - 3.2 Establish clear policies, programs and procedures, developed in collaboration with staff, students and parents, which explicitly address cyber bullying as part of the school's response to all forms of bullying.
 - 3.3 Ensure procedural steps to manage bullying are developed by the whole school collaboratively and are clearly documented, and the roles and responsibilities of staff, students and parents are well understood.
 - 3.4 Survey students regularly to monitor and determine the forms of bullying behaviours they are experiencing and in what social contexts, to develop tailored universal and targeted programs to diminish this behaviour.
 - 3.5 Address covert and overt forms of bullying including cyber bullying throughout schooling to ameliorate their harms in concert with improvement in students' language skills and other social-cognitive abilities.
 - 3.6 Teach students about social skills, group mechanisms, motives for bullying, being effective bystanders and how they may be drawn into the bullying process, to help them feel more aware of pressures exerted on the group and their responsibility to deal with them.
 - 3.7 Examine the determinants of student cyber bullying behaviour as part of the whole school response to bullying, not the technology in which it is being manifest.
 - 3.8 Provide professional learning and resources to help primary and secondary school staff to enhance student transition and reduce the subsequent bullying, which continues to increase following transitions in school.
 - 3.9 Create physical environments in schools and staff supervision practices that limit the invisibility of bullying behaviour.
 - 3.10 Support families through systematic parent awareness raising and skill building, training and support.

- 3.11 Maintain regular, clear communication with parents about overt and covert bullying, including cyber bullying behaviour and effective ways to deal with it.

The Commission also strongly supports the adoption of the revised National Safe School Framework (NSSF). It is a well accepted national framework to develop specific school initiatives focused around student safety, addressing bullying and harassment and positive student behaviours.

The nine key elements of the framework:

- reflect feedback from representatives of all education authorities and practising educators who have used the previous framework;
- reflect existing research and evidence informed practice in the area of student safety and wellbeing;
- adopt a strength based perspective and encourage teachers to be proactive as well as responsive to emerging issues in relation to student wellbeing including cyber bullying; and
- reflect a view that responsibility for the development and maintenance of a safe and supportive school environment requires a partnership among students, teachers, parents/carers as well as the broader community and education authorities.

SUMMARY

In summary SACCS affirms the development of national, state, sector and local school policy and practices to support cyber-safety.

It is of prime importance to the Catholic sector in South Australia that children and young people are safe, and feel safe, at school and are able to access digital technology to enhance their learning opportunities. It is also important to the sector that effective teaching and learning programs include the development of ethical behaviours and respectful relationships as well as safe and responsible use of digital technology.

The Catholic sector affirms a whole of community approach that develops strategic partnerships with parents/carers, health and community development services, law enforcement and research communities to help prevent and address bullying behaviours, including cyber bullying.

The Catholic sector looks for support to:

- provide access to quality professional learning and a suite of resources for school communities to enhance existing programs in addressing bullying behaviours including cyber-bullying;
- facilitate sustainable joined-up-Government and community structures (including education, health, community development, and justice) and approaches to deliver cyber safety messages and services; and
- participate in sustainable, longitudinal research into the social determinants and prevalence of bullying behaviours and effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools recommends that the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Cyber-Safety supports:

- facilitation of national research into the prevalence, social determinants and strategies to prevent and address bullying of all kinds, including cyber bullying;
- maintenance of ongoing, equitable access to professional learning and educational resources for educators, parents and students;
- development of evidence informed policies and practices in school communities, focused on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, bullying and harassment and positive behaviour management through the revised National Safe School Framework (NSSF); and
- implementation of the recommendations of the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study of 2009.

The South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools thanks the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Cyber-Safety for the opportunity to make recommendations on this important matter.